



NEW HAMPSHIRE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
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School Districts Facing Difficult Transportation Decisions In Wake of Rising Fuels Costs

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A recent article in the Concord Monitor highlighted the predicaments school districts are facing as a result of rising fuel costs and related operation expenses. Some districts are considering eliminating bus routes, consolidating bus routes, and reducing their schedule to a four-day school week in the winter months. Also in response to these concerns, many school boards are reviewing and researching energy conservation policies.

These concerns are likely shared throughout the state. With the beginning of another school year approaching, these issues offer a timely opportunity for school board members and administrators to review the pertinent state statutes and NHSBA Sample Policies relative to transportation, school building maintenance, and energy conservation.

Student Transportation

School districts are required to provide transportation for all students in grade one through grade eight who live more than two miles from the school to which they are assigned. RSA 189:6. Though the statute does not specifically require it, it is presumed that if your district offers kindergarten, then kindergarten students are also entitled to district-provided transportation to and from school. RSA 189:8 states that school districts may require students to walk a distance not to exceed one mile to a designated bus stop. Students living in areas inaccessible by the district's established transportation routes may be required to walk 1.5 miles to a designated bus stop.

Any change to existing bus routes or schedules is likely to cause concern and hesitation throughout the district, especially among parents whose children will be affected by possible changes. In order to lessen this understandable parental concern, it is recommended that school boards consider these simple suggestions.

First, hold a public meeting and solicit public comments regarding the potential changes. Second, create a committee or study group to analyze the transportation routes, students affected, potential costs and savings, and other pertinent factors. Third, schedule a meeting with a representative of the bus company which your district contracts with. Discuss what limitations may be met by a change in routes. Fourth, consult with your local police department or the New Hampshire Department of Safety to analyze which routes can safely be changed and which routes pose potential safety issues.

Last, consult your local board policy relative to providing transportation services. This is covered under NHSBA Sample Policy EEA. An important provision of this policy allows parents to request a change in the existing bus

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route by filing a request with the district's Transportation Coordinator or similar school district employee. The NHSBA Sample Policy also includes a provision for parents to request a hearing before the school board to bring forth their grievance before the school board.

As always, school boards must balance student safety and significant fiscal concerns when seeking to change or amend existing bus routes.

Energy Conservation

NHSBA has received many requests recently regarding sample policies relative to energy conservation. NHSBA will introduce a new sample policy on this topic in September 2008 – available to all NHSBA Policy Subscription members

There is some incongruity among existing energy conservation policies found among school districts across the country. Others set aspiration goals with simple guidelines, while others are significantly specific in regulating indoor temperature, allowable use of certain electrical equipment, and specific tasks to be complete by school district staff. The challenge is to construct a policy that meets the goals and objectives of energy conservation, while at the same time establishing practical and feasible individual action.

Many of the provisions found in current policies, at first glance, seem to be a matter of common sense – turning off lights when a room is not in use; not allowing school buses to idle; ensuring thermostats are providing accurate readings; and so forth. However, many of the suggestions take a step further, for example, consulting lighting experts to determine if any lights can be eliminated.

And as recent newspaper articles have stated, many schools, not only in New Hampshire, but across the nation, are considering moving to a four-day work week in the winter months in an effort to reduce fuel and energy consumption. The belief is that by cutting back during these months, school districts will save in transportation costs, heating oil costs, and electricity costs, while at the same time still meeting the state requirements for total number of hours and days.

What ever actions your school board may take, it is important for any policies to reflect the view that both students and staff are responsible for assisting in the implementation of energy conservation measures. Additionally, advising parents of potential changes and hosting public meetings to address parental concerns and questions can often prevent problems and complaints when such changes are implemented.

For more information on these topics, please contact NHSBA Staff Attorney Barrett M. Christina at (603) 228-2061 or via e-mail at bchristina@nhsba.org.