

SUPPORT SB2299 (Senator Gillespie)

Flexibility for Student Transportation during COVID-19

Transportation Issues Emerging from COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted the transportation needs of school districts and the students they serve (i.e. varying start/end times, students attending on alternating days and prioritizing in-person instruction for high need students). Unfortunately, the Illinois School Code and Illinois Vehicle Code do not allow school districts the needed flexibility to transport students to and from school in this COVID-19 environment. Issue Specific to Maine School District 207 and other Districts that rely on Public Transportation

An additional issue for Maine School District 207 (and others that rely on public transportation) is that the PACE bus company has eliminated its routes to/from the high school this year. In some districts, public transportation is no longer an option for these students. We need to find alternatives.

Two Needed Legislative Changes

1) Allow School Districts to Use MFSABs on Routes to/from School During COVID-19

Currently, school districts can transport students in Multifunction School Activity Buses (MFSABs) in only two situations: 1) for all grades, non-curriculum related activities *after* the regular school day (i.e. student sports and activities); and 2) for grades 9-12 only, curriculum related activities *during* the regular school day (with the exception of routes to or from school). Many Illinois districts have invested in the purchase of these MFSABs vehicles as a safe, reliable, and cost-effective form of transportation.

Expanding the use of MFSABs for transporting K-12 students to/from school in the short-term (January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022) would help all districts, including Maine District 207, accommodate students during this COVID-19 public health crisis by:

- a) **Increasing Equitable Access to Education** – Districts Need options for getting smaller groups of students (including at-risk students) to school.
- b) **Providing Flexibility** – Districts could use utilize current employees as MFSAB drivers, as well as facilitate in-person learning for cohorts of students.
- c) **Providing Cost-Effective Alternatives** – Districts could limit costs transport for transporting small groups of students.

2) Permanently Expand Allowable Uses of MFSABs to College and Career Readiness Experiences

Use of MFSABs *during* the school day is currently limited to 1) grades 9-12; and 2) "curriculum-related" activities. This legislation:

- a) Adds "college and career readiness" activities, which provide students with rich and meaningful exposure to post-secondary options, an allowable use for MFSABs during the school day.
- b) Extends use of MFSABs to grades 7-12 (from 9-12) since many districts now provide these meaningful "college and career readiness" experiences to middle-school students.

Additionally, SB2299 maintains the safety requirements currently in the School Code (including the school valid bus driver permit) for MFSABs.

Support SB2299 so that Districts have transportation flexibility during the pandemic to get their students to school.