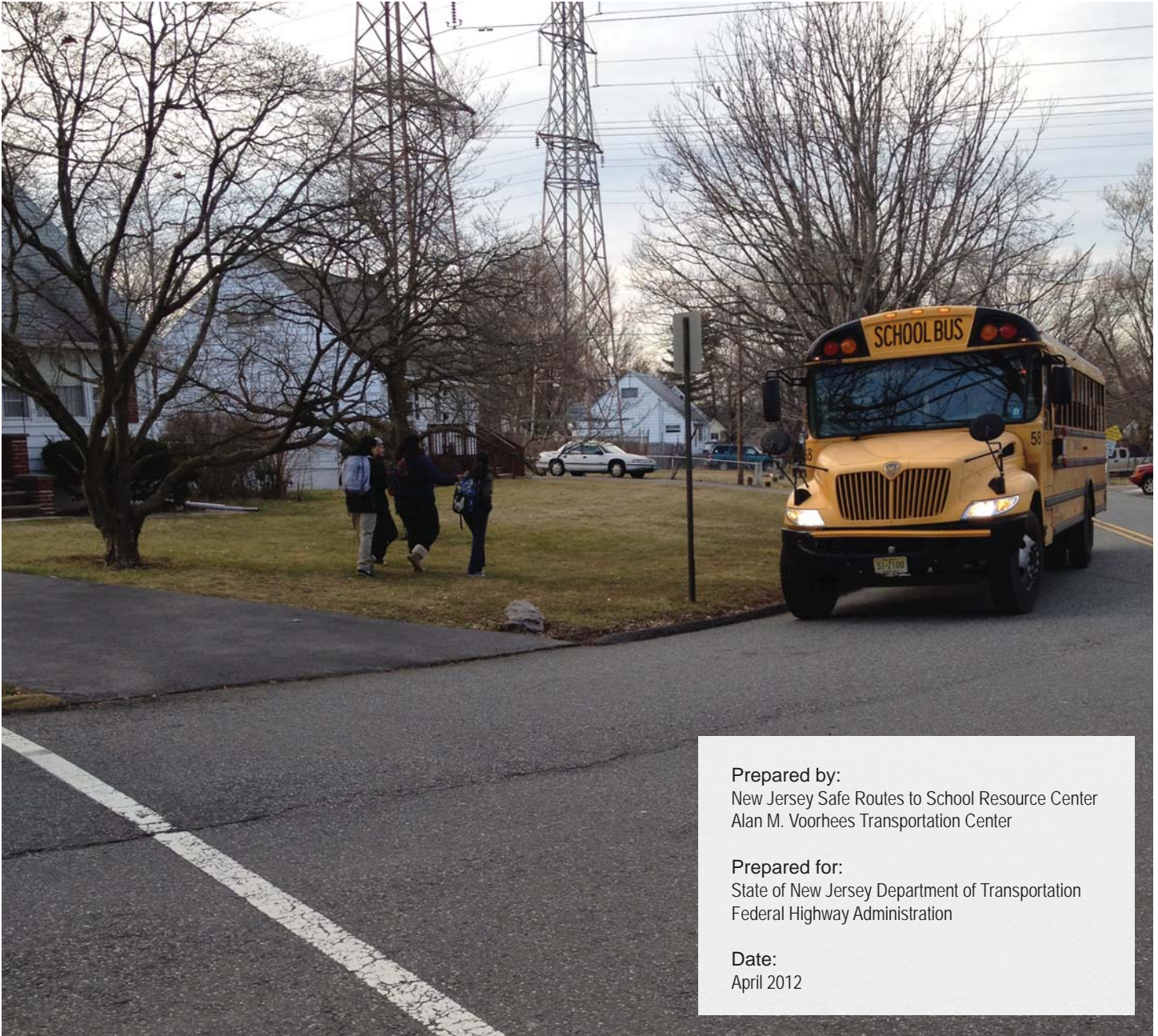


Dwindling Budgets Bring Busing Blues

Effective Practices to Confront School Busing Cuts



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

School districts throughout New Jersey have been forced to make significant budget cuts due to declining state aid. As a result, transportation costs are generally targeted rather than reductions which directly impact students' education like curriculum, teachers, sports and clubs. School transportation, particularly courtesy or non-mandatory busing, is evaluated and considered when budget cuts are required. School districts have been reaching out to the New Jersey Department of Transportation about Safe Routes to School for help with planning so students can safely walk and bike to and from school when busing is eliminated or reduced.

This research was conducted to collect information regarding cost reductions in school transportation, particularly courtesy busing. Transportation personnel or key administrators from school districts across New Jersey were interviewed to solicit feedback regarding: whether reductions, changes or eliminations to courtesy busing were made in the past five years, busing changes that were implemented, effects and reactions from the school community, and steps taken once busing was reduced. Based on the information gathered from the schools districts, strategies and recommendations are suggested for school districts when courtesy busing reductions or eliminations are required.

Methods

School districts were selected for interviews based on an analysis of data received from the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) Office of Student Transportation regarding decreases in the number of students transported via courtesy busing between 2005 and 2009. School districts were also chosen to interview as a result of press coverage about eliminating courtesy busing within the past five years. Sixty-seven school districts in New Jersey were identified, and 54 districts were interviewed resulting in a response rate of 81%.

Results

Of the 54 districts interviewed, 27 had made changes to courtesy busing while the other half of the districts made no changes to courtesy busing over the past five years. Of the 27 districts that made busing changes, three districts surprisingly increased courtesy bus service, seven districts modified service without reducing or increasing courtesy busing, and the remaining 17 districts decreased courtesy busing. Interviews and information collected from the 27 school districts that made busing changes, revealed courtesy busing modifications were made as a result of school budget cuts and the need to realize transportation cost savings.

Conclusions

Each school district is unique. Various factors, such as the amount of transportation costs required to be cut and the presence or absence of sidewalks and crossing guards, contribute to busing modifications. Based on the information gathered from the interviews with the school districts, there are both short term and long term strategies that schools can implement when reductions in courtesy busing are necessary.

Short term strategies when districts decide to reduce or eliminate courtesy busing include: planning ahead, communicating changes immediately to the school community, creating a transportation team, evaluating alternate means of transportation to school, assessing the safety of walking and bicycling to school, reviewing school district policies on walking and bicycling to school, making short term infrastructure improvements like adding crossing guards and painting crosswalks, starting a walking school bus,^a organizing walking and bicycling to school events, and reinforcement to students regarding pedestrian and bicycling safety education.

There are long term strategies for school districts when busing is reduced or eliminated such as: building a strong relationship with their municipality, partnering with their municipality to plan for major infrastructure improvements like installing sidewalks, traffic lights and pedestrian signals, and proposing and amending school district policies to encourage more walking and bicycling to school.

^a A walking school bus is a group of 10-12 students supervised by an adult; they pause at pre-determined stops along the route to school and pick up other walkers.

If there are any elimination or reductions in busing, school districts must assess walking and biking conditions so that students can safely walk and bike to school. School districts and municipalities can and should utilize valuable resources from New Jersey Safe Routes to School including: mapping out a School Travel Plan, applying for local, state and national funding, obtaining important information and reinforcement to students regarding knowledge and strategies on street crossing and personal safety skills so school districts and municipalities can be prepared when school busing cuts are required.

Based on the interviews the following recommendations for school districts are suggested when reductions or eliminations to busing are required:

1. Implement bus modifications to cut costs and increase efficiency without reducing or eliminating courtesy busing such as:
 - Performing a detailed transportation study to analyze efficiencies
 - Sharing transportations services with other districts
 - Changing the tiering of buses (buses have more than just one run)
 - Consolidating bus stops
 - Offering an opt out provision
2. Implement busing cuts in stages by:
 - Gradually increasing the mileage that a student must live from school until the state limit is reached
 - Eliminating busing for high school students initially
 - Eliminating or reducing late or extracurricular buses
3. Institute subscription busing or fee based busing
4. Expand transportation group responsibilities beyond busing
5. Ask the community to vote on a ballot regarding busing changes

II. BACKGROUND

Introduction



School districts throughout New Jersey have been forced to cut their budgets due to the decline in state aid. As a result, transportation costs are usually targeted rather than reductions which directly impact students' education such as teachers, instructional programs and extra-curricular activities like clubs and sports. School transportation, particularly courtesy busing, is an area within a school district's budget that seems to be evaluated and considered each year when Boards of Education are forced to make budget cuts.

Interviews and discussions with transportation personnel from school districts across New Jersey were performed generating key information including courtesy busing reductions and changes that were made within their districts, effects and reactions from the school community as well as steps that were implemented when busing reductions were made. Based on these interviews, a theoretical summary of the advantages and disadvantages of busing, an evaluation of what the school districts have done when busing reductions were made and recommendations and strategies school districts can implement, in addition to how Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs can assist districts, comprise this report. Also included is a literature review, an analysis of the data used to select school districts to interview and background information on school busing and funding in New Jersey.

As a result of cuts to transportation, school districts across the state have been reaching out to the New Jersey Department of Transportation about SRTS, a federal, state and local effort, to help students safely walk or bike to school. Typically, when bus services are cut or reduced, students are dropped off and picked up by family vehicles, leading to increased traffic, air pollution and costs to families in fuel expenses. In addition, students affected by busing reductions may find that they have to walk and bike along roads without sidewalks, cross busy highways or railroad tracks and traverse roads with steep inclines or blind curves. SRTS can help school districts address parents' and schools' concerns, such as reducing speeds in school zones and neighborhoods, addressing distracted driving and teaching children safe street crossing and personal safety skills when

busing is eliminated or reduced. Students need to be fully prepared to walk to school, particularly if they have never walked to school. Schools need to prioritize equipping students with knowledge and strategies to protect themselves including how to cross streets safely, how to ride and maintain a bicycle safely, and how to use self-protection skills to avoid and escape an assault both from strangers and people they know.

SRTS programs focus on planning and safety for children who walk and bike to and from school. These programs involve collaboration with key community stakeholders such as parents, school officials, municipal governments, police and city planners. The New Jersey SRTS program and resources are not only available in New Jersey but the National Center for Safe Routes to School can also assist school districts and municipalities across the United States with proper planning and federal funding. For more information and to find the nearest SRTS Coordinator to contact, visit the [New Jersey Safe Routes to School](#) website. SRTS is an essential resource for municipalities and school districts when changes to busing are necessary, and school districts and municipalities are encouraged to apply for SRTS funding.

The ABC's of School Transportation in New Jersey

School districts throughout New Jersey use different terms for the kinds of busing they offer. Defining the types of busing will help clarify any confusion and uncertainty regarding school transportation.

What is mandated transportation?

School districts must bus students under a legal mandate if they live remote from school or as required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act enacted in 1990. Pursuant to New Jersey Statute Annotated (NJSA) 18A:39-1, all public elementary school students (grades K-8) who live more than two miles from their school and all public secondary school students (grades 9-12) who live more than 2.5 miles from their school are entitled to transportation. These students are considered to be residing remote from school.¹ Whenever any school district is required to provide transportation to students attending regular public school programs, students attending

nonpublic schools who meet the distance requirements may also be entitled to transportation services. Also, any classified student or child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), who either meets these distance requirements or for whom transportation is required in the student's IEP, must be transported to school.² To determine whether a student is remote, measurement is made by the shortest distance along public roadways or walkways between the entrance to the student's home and the nearest public entrance to the school building. This measurement is for eligibility purposes and may not necessarily be the travel path to and from school.

When a school district is required to provide busing to public school students, it is also required to provide remote busing to certain non-public school students such as charters and private schools. A school district may decide to pay the parents of these non-public school students an amount of money established by the state in lieu of busing. The maximum expenditure per student cannot exceed \$884 for the 2009-2010 school year.³ If the cost of the transportation to be provided to the non-public school student exceeds the annual maximum expenditure, the school district cannot provide the transportation but may instead pay the student's parent or legal guardian the maximum expenditure allowed. Over the last ten years, around 40% of parents of non-public students have received aid in lieu of busing.⁴

In 2007 (the most recent year that data is available), the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) stated that 45% of total students enrolled in New Jersey received mandatory busing services. Two-thirds of this total was for mandatory public school students, and the remaining third was split between special education and non-public school students.

From 2000-2001 to 2008-2009, school districts received \$283.9 million in state aid to pay for mandatory busing. For the 2009-2010 school year, state aid for transportation was projected to increase to \$352 million because of a more generous school funding formula. Transportation aid represents 4.0% of the total state aid provided to school districts.⁵

What is non-mandated transportation?

Transporting students who do not live remote from school is implemented at the discretion and expense of the local Board of Education and is not state funded. Courtesy, hazardous and subscription buses are all forms of non-mandated transportation.⁶

What is courtesy busing?

Courtesy busing is transporting elementary school students (grades K-8) who live less than two miles from school and for secondary school students (grades 9-12) who live less than 2.5 miles from school. Courtesy busing is not eligible for state aid but can be available for students at both the discretion and expense of each Board of Education.⁶

What is hazardous busing?

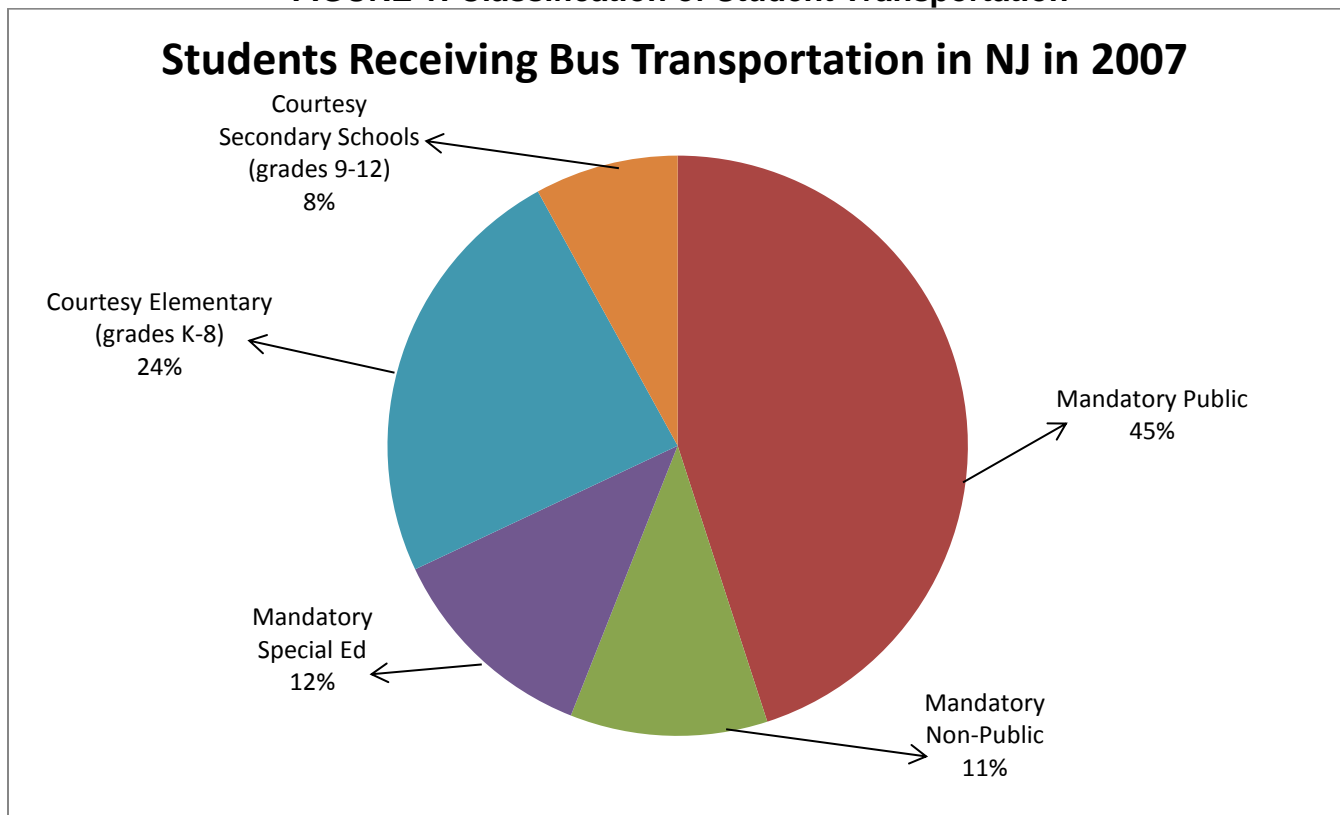
Courtesy busing may be provided for a variety of reasons, such as the existence of hazardous routes, which is one of the most common forms of courtesy busing. Hazardous busing or safety busing is viewed by the State in the same vein as courtesy busing and is not eligible for state aid. Boards of Education have the discretion in identifying criteria (i.e. traffic volume, existence or absence of sidewalks, vehicle velocity, etc.) for hazardous routes and must work with municipal officials and police officers for this determination.⁷ Pursuant to NJSA 18A:39-1.5, adoption of policy regarding transportation of students who walk along hazardous routes, school districts may consider but shall not be limited to the following criteria when designating hazardous routes:

1. Population density
2. Traffic volume
3. Average vehicle velocity
4. Existence or absence of sufficient sidewalk space
5. Roads and highways that are winding or have blind curves
6. Roads and highways with steep inclines and declines
7. Drop-offs that are in close proximity to a sidewalk
8. Bridges or overpasses that must be crossed to reach the school
9. Train tracks or trestles that must be crossed to reach the school
10. Busy roads or highways that must be crossed to reach the school.

According to the NJDOE Office of Student Transportation, courtesy and hazardous buses (non-mandated busing) account for transporting

32% of total enrolled students in 2007. Three quarters of the students who receive non-mandated busing are elementary students. Figure 1 shows the classification of all students receiving transportation by bus type in 2007.

FIGURE 1: Classification of Student Transportation



Source: NJDOE Office of Student Transportation, 2007

What is subscription busing?

Boards of Education at their discretion may charge parents a fee for courtesy busing to offset the transportation cost, and this is referred to as subscription busing. Boards are responsible for the pricing and collection of subscription busing fees. However, students who are unable to pay because of financial hardship may not be excluded from receiving these services. The criteria used to determine financial

hardship is the same as the New Jersey statewide eligibility standards established for free and reduced priced meals under the New Jersey State school lunch program. The subscription bus cost for these eligible students must be absorbed by the school district and/or passed on to the other bus riders.⁶

According to a study on statewide policies for fee-based transportation from the Florida Legislature Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, New Jersey is one of 13 states that allow school districts to charge fees to recoup transportation costs. New Jersey is also one of three states, including California and Iowa, which has established a maximum amount that school districts can charge parents for bus transportation. One state, Hawaii, which comprises one school district, has established a uniform amount that parents pay for transportation. In general, the 13 states that permit fee-based transportation allow local school districts to determine the amount to charge parents/students.

Nineteen states prohibit school districts from charging fees – most notably Indiana where the Attorney general ruled in 2010 that school bus fees violate the State Constitution. The remaining 18 states have no policies in place regarding charging transportation fees. Increasingly, states are examining ways to generate additional revenue to offset rising transportation costs and decreasing funds.⁸

What is the safest form of student transportation?

Busing is considered by many to be the safest mode of transporting a child to school. The school bus is 13 times safer than other non-commercial vehicles, including the family car.⁹ While school buses constituted 25% of all school trips by students, they accounted for only 4% of the injuries and 2% of the fatalities involving school travel. Although national statistics show that walking and bicycling to school can be less safe than school buses in terms of traffic-related fatalities and injuries, local conditions and facilities for walking and bicycling make a considerable difference in safety. According to the Transportation Research Board's Committee on School Transportation Safety, walking and bicycling constitute 12% and 2% of the school trips; however they constitute 16% and 6% of the crash injuries, respectively (and 6% and 5% of the fatalities). Despite the statistics of crashes during normal school hours, the risks for school-age children during non-school hours are approximately twice what they are during



normal school travel hours on a per trip basis. The risks are approximately 20% higher during non-school hours on a per-mile basis but vary slightly across age groups.¹⁰ Overall, the risks of injury and fatalities are minimal, and walking and bicycling are safe modes of travel to and from school.

In assessing the safety of various school travel modes, a broad range of factors must be considered. Risks are partly obvious (buses are larger than cars and bicycles) and partly resulting from local level conditions (bike paths may be safer than a road; presence of crossing guards helps younger children cross streets) and can be affected either positively or negatively by the local infrastructure and environment. Each school district has unique environmental and operational characteristics that can result in varying levels of risk with each travel mode.¹⁰

Walking and bicycling to school may be perceived as risky in some school neighborhoods, however, many risks that do exist can be reduced significantly through engineering, enforcement or operational efforts. Parents may limit walking or biking to school for their children even if they live not too far from school because of unfavorable physical environmental conditions and related concerns about traffic safety and neighborhood crime; however rewards of walking and bicycling to school, such as increasing physical activity and encouraging a healthy lifestyle, significantly outweigh the risks.

School Transportation Funding 101

Funding for school transportation varies widely from state to state. Some states do not provide any funding while other states provide a lump sum to a school district. In New Jersey, the state sets a “unit cost” for each student transported or mile driven and allocates funds to a local school district based on their numbers plus an adjustment for geographic disparities.¹⁰ Mandatory busing for students living remote from school is funded by the state.

From 2000-2001 to 2008-2009, school districts in New Jersey received \$283.9 million in state aid each year to pay for mandatory busing. For the 2009-2010 school year, state aid for transportation increased to \$352 million because of a more generous school funding formula.

Transportation aid represented 4.4% of total state school aid in New Jersey which was a one percent increase in transportation's share of the state's K-12 expenditures from 2008-2009. This was the first increase in state aid since the 2000-2001 school year.¹¹

This section clarifies the responsibilities, both financially and physically (local environment and infrastructure), for the school district and the municipality regarding student transportation.

What are the school district's responsibilities?

Non-mandatory or courtesy busing is not subsidized by the State of New Jersey; therefore, Boards of Education must allocate funds within their budget for the cost of transporting students who do not live remote from school. Board of Education budgets are funded through a tax levy from resident taxpayers and financial support from the State of New Jersey. Every year, the school budget is voted by residents in April. Budgets that are not passed are reviewed and modified by the local governments. On January 17, 2012, however, Governor Chris Christie signed into law that school board elections could be moved to November with the general election if voters passed a referendum or resolutions were passed by either the municipality or the Boards of Education. The new law allows school districts to avoid putting their budgets before voters if spending stays within the two percent cap on levy hikes that went into effect on January 1, 2011. School Board elections if moved to November must remain then for at least four years.

Each Board of Education also develops and adopts the policies for the district. Policies such as busing students who do not live remote from school, determining hazardous routes and whether the costs should be passed onto the parents and/or absorbed by the school district are the responsibility of the School Board.

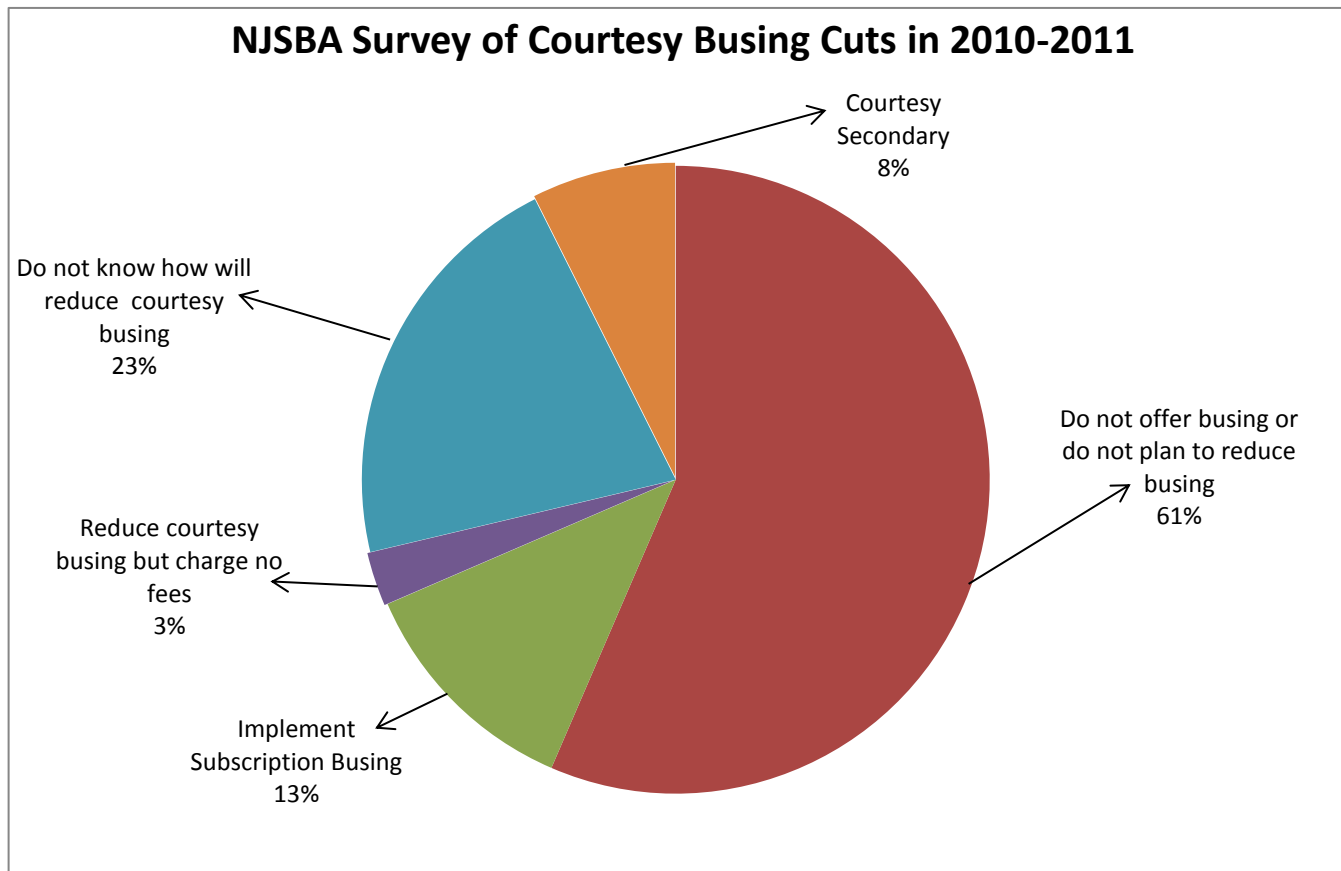
From discussions with school districts, the total cost of one bus in New Jersey ranges from \$70,000-\$100,000. This cost is substantial when compared to an average teacher's salary in New Jersey which ranges from \$33,770 per year for preschool teachers to \$65,420 for teachers at the secondary level (grades 6-12), according to May 2009 figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The cost of one bus can equate to

approximately 2-3 full time teachers. As a result, school districts may be more likely to cut transportation costs rather than teachers or staff.

Since fuel prices rose drastically in 2008, school districts all across the country have struggled to find ways to absorb the significant increases in transportation costs. Even though the rise in fuel prices has dropped since then, decreases in state aid and necessary cuts resulting from failed school budgets have forced schools to eliminate or reduce transportation expenses, largely with reductions to courtesy busing costs. Several reports support this, such as those that have been published in New Jersey media in recent times regarding reduction in courtesy busing and replacement of courtesy busing by subscription busing.¹² A plausible explanation for the reduction of courtesy busing service is that similar to the state government, local governments and school districts in New Jersey must also balance their budgets. The school district budget cap in New Jersey, instituted in 1995, includes automatic adjustments with regard to certain outlays, including courtesy busing.¹³

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) conducted a survey about fees for transportation services in September of 2010 in which 325 school districts throughout New Jersey responded.¹⁴ Of the school districts that responded to the NJSBA survey, 36.5% of school districts said that they anticipated cutting transportation expenditures as a result of state aid reductions in 2010-2011. This is a significant response because many of the districts that answered “no” to this question (63.5% of the respondents) did not provide any busing – mandatory or non-mandatory. Of the districts that anticipated the transportation cut-backs, 26% of them said that they would reduce or eliminate courtesy busing. NJSBA also noted that out of all the respondents to their survey, 13% plan to implement subscription busing, 61% either do not offer or do not plan to reduce courtesy busing, and 3% said they plan to reduce courtesy busing but do not intend to charge a fee. The remaining respondents did not know how they were going to reduce transportation costs. In times of tight budgets, courtesy busing becomes a focus for many school districts across New Jersey.¹⁶ Figure 2 below summarizes the breakdown of courtesy busing cuts for the school districts surveyed.

FIGURE 2: Breakdown of Courtesy Busing Cuts for New Jersey Schools



Source: New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) survey in September 2010

What are the municipality's responsibilities?

If busing is eliminated or reduced for students, school districts must work closely with their municipality to plan for the safe transportation to school or the bus stop. Case law has long held that safety along local public roadways, trails and sidewalks is a municipal responsibility. Municipalities are accountable for the infrastructure of the town including sidewalks, roads, bike lanes, traffic signals, crosswalks and signage.^b Schools should partner with the municipality to perform walkability assessments to identify any safety concerns and an action plan to address these issues. Also, the employment, placement, training and management of crossing guards are the responsibility of

^b Safety along county roads is the responsibility of the county; State roads and highways are the responsibility of the State. The municipality would be the first point of contact for any issues or concerns before contacting the county or State.

the municipality. In most cases, the municipal traffic safety office of the police department manages local crossing guards.¹⁵

School districts across New Jersey have wide-ranging levels of partnerships with their municipality. In some school districts, courtesy busing is included in the municipality's budget such as in Upper Freehold Township, where \$100,000 is allocated within the township's budget to pay for courtesy busing for about 400 students. However, the township is hesitant to make any infrastructure improvements to sidewalks if the students will not use them. Some school districts lack a strong partnership with the municipality such as in Upper Freehold where a new middle school opened in September 2010; yet, all students are bused to the school because there are no sidewalks leading to the school from the main road. Barnegat Township school district of Ocean County, in a different approach, reduced transportation costs and partnered with the municipal government to build sidewalks that enable many of the 1,000 students who live within the state limits to walk to school safely.

III. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF COURTESY BUSING

Fifty-four school districts were selected to interview regarding courtesy busing based on data from the NJDOE as well as press coverage about reductions in courtesy busing. Half of the districts interviewed made changes to courtesy busing within the past five years, while the other half made no changes. Interviews and evaluations of the responses from transportation personnel or key administrators from various school districts across New Jersey regarding courtesy busing revealed key information. School districts offer courtesy busing for a number of reasons and the level of service varies for each district. Participants in the study voiced opinions about the pros and cons of offering courtesy busing to students in their districts. These advantages and disadvantages were instrumental to the school districts when deciding whether or not to reduce or eliminate transportation services.

Benefits of Courtesy Busing

- Transporting students to school, particularly in hazardous areas where walking and biking to school is considered dangerous and unsafe, is essential. In many districts throughout the state, there are neighborhoods without sidewalks and major highways that students must cross in order to get to school.
- In theory, busing students to school takes more cars off the road since parents would otherwise drive their children to school. Therefore, busing alleviates traffic congestion, contributing to safer road conditions and decreasing air pollution.
- Subscription busing allows for the transportation costs to be passed directly to the parents/guardians of the students who use courtesy busing instead of the school district and the tax payers.

Disadvantages of Courtesy Busing

While there are benefits to courtesy busing within a school district, interviews with school districts suggest that there are some drawbacks to offering it as well.

- Since courtesy and hazardous busing are not mandated nor funded by the State, the cost must be absorbed by the school district's budget which must be passed each year during elections through local residents' vote in April. If the school district's election was moved to November as a result of the new law passed in January 2012, the non-mandatory busing costs must be included within the school's budget which is capped at a two percent increase.
- Subscription busing is arduous to administer (collections, management of bus passes, forecasting, and identifying students). The amount of time and effort involved in managing subscription busing may possibly outweigh the cost of the non-mandated busing.

- Students that qualify for free and reduced subsidies by law are not charged for subscription busing so these costs will need to be absorbed by the other students and/or the school district.
- Even though students may be eligible for busing, some parents may drive their children to school because of the convenience. For example, Little Falls School District in Passaic County provides busing for every child in the district, yet many parents drive their children causing traffic congestion and safety concerns for walkers near and around the schools.
- Students spend more time on the bus (rather than driven directly to and from school by parents), which means they have less time to spend with family, friends, on homework and participating in extra-curricular activities.
- Busing leads to missed opportunities for physical activity and exercise, potentially contributing to childhood obesity and increasing health care costs. Walking and bicycling to and from school encourages consistent exercise and fitness into students' daily lives instead of sitting on a school bus.



IV. REASEARCH ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA FOR THE SELECTION OF INTERVIEWS REGARDING COURTESY BUSING

In order to select the school districts throughout New Jersey for the purpose of collecting information regarding courtesy busing, a literature review and a data analysis were performed.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to examine how research studies have addressed courtesy busing. Sources used include Google, Google Scholar, Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS) of the Transportation Research Board, and Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting CD-ROMs. Unfortunately, no academic study

was found that specifically addressed courtesy busing in the context of decrease in service. In a few cases, studies have made reference to courtesy busing in the general context of school transportation, but no study was found that specifically identified issues relating to courtesy busing. A few studies were found that addressed school busing in general, but not specifically courtesy busing.

A study reveals that, the state of Florida has a provision for courtesy busing similar to New Jersey, in which students are eligible for state-funded busing only if they live beyond 3.2 km (two miles) from a school.¹⁶ Courtesy busing is provided within the two mile radius only when hazardous walking conditions exist. The study shows that the cost of courtesy busing has increased over time. For example, busing a student, on average, costs between \$200 and \$600 in 1992, but the cost increased to an average of \$734 by 2003. The study shows concerns about the increasing cost of courtesy busing and attributes the increase in the number of courtesy busing students toward school policies and practices. It appears from the study that as is the case with New Jersey, the cost of courtesy busing has become a serious concern in Florida.

Although studies on courtesy busing are extremely rare, a few studies have provided useful information on school busing in general. These studies show the importance of school busing. After private automobiles, school buses are the second most common mode of transportation for school trips by children. According to the 1995 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey data provided by the Transportation Research Board's Committee on School Transportation Safety,¹⁷ private vehicles driven by adult drivers constituted 10.5 billion trips annually, while school buses accounted for 5.8 billion trips. Because of a growing concern about childhood obesity, it has become customary for researchers to emphasize the importance of walking and bicycling to school. As McDonald¹⁸ points out, between 1969 and 2001, the proportion of students who walked or bicycled to school decreased from 41% to 13%. According to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency,¹⁹ only 31% of the children aged 5-15 who live within one mile of their schools currently walk or bicycle to school, compared to about 90% in 1969. Despite the growing concern about obesity and efforts to promote walking and bicycling for school

travel, the trend of declining walking and bicycling among school children has not reversed.

Studies have demonstrated some of the difficulties in promoting walking and bicycling for school travel by children. McDonald²⁰ mentions increasing distance between homes and schools as a reason for the decline in walking and bicycling trips by children. In another study, McDonald²⁰ argues that unless policies are adopted to locate schools closer to students' homes, walking and bicycling cannot be promoted. The Environmental Protection Agency²¹ mentions a survey by the Centers for Disease Control where parents identified distance to school as the most significant barrier to walking and bicycling to school by children. The same study also mentions that over time, schools have become fewer in number because of an emphasis on larger schools, thus increasing the distance between schools and homes of children. Crider and Hall²¹ cite many reasons for this trend, including school construction guidelines, minimum parcel size requirements, and renovation costs. The study mentions that due to these reasons, schools are increasingly being built in suburban and exurban^c locations, often on busy roads with no walking or bicycling infrastructure.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of the school location and presence of pedestrian and bicycling facilities on children's propensity to walk or bicycle to school.²² These studies have generally concluded that the physical environment, especially distance to school, availability of sidewalks, street connectivity, traffic safety, and neighborhood crime, influence children's propensity to walk and bicycle to school.

Data Analysis

The school districts selected for interviewing were based on data collected from the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). The NJDOE collects and maintains annual data sets related to school busing at the level of school districts. The data sets include the number of regular and special education students that use courtesy and state busing annually, as well as bus mileage by type of student.

^c Exurban is a region lying beyond the suburbs of a city.

Students are categorized by grade (e.g., elementary and secondary) as well as by school type: public, private, vocational and charter. The NJDOE also maintains data on the number of bus routes, however they informed the research team that the data on bus routes were not reliable. Upon request, the NJDOE provided data on the following variables for students eligible for busing in each school district:

- Regular Public Students
- AIL (aid in lieu)^d Non-Public Students
- Non-public Students
- Regular Special Education Students
- Regular Average Mileage
- Special Education Special Needs Students
- Special Education Average Mileage
- Courtesy Elementary Students
- Courtesy Secondary Students

The term “regular” is used to indicate students bused as per the state law of living remote from school. In order to be able to compare change over time of courtesy (non-mandated) and state (mandated) busing students, data were acquired for the latest five years: 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The 2010 data set was not complete at the time of the request. The 2005 data set included 573 school districts. Over time, the number of school districts decreased slightly as a result of redistricting and district consolidation. The 2009 data set included 561 school districts. The number of students served by state and courtesy buses was compared for two time periods: 2005-08 and 2005-09. Since the differences between these two data sets were minimal, only the data set for 2005-09 was used for further analysis. See Figure 3 for a map of New Jersey depicting by county the percent decrease in courtesy bused students between 2005-2009 and Figure 4 for a New Jersey map showing the percent decrease by county of state bused students between 2005-2009.

Comparisons were made separately for the state bus students and the courtesy bus students. For the analysis of state bus students, all categories except “Special Education Special Needs” students were combined. Because of their small number and different type of

^d Aid in lieu indicates parents/students are reimbursed for transportation expenses instead of receiving busing services for their children.

transportation need, Special Education Special Needs students were not included in the analysis. For courtesy bus students, analysis was conducted separately for elementary and secondary students.

The school district data set for 2005-09 was sorted so that the districts with the highest decreases in both state and courtesy busing students could be identified. Since the number of bused students for some school districts was very small, only those districts that had at least 100 bused students in 2005 were included in the analysis. This process reduced the number of districts from 561 to 278 for the purpose of comparison. Of the 278 districts, 180 (64%) experienced a decrease in state bus students and 148 (53%) experienced a decrease in courtesy bus students. Overall, 96 (35%) school districts experienced a decrease in both state and courtesy busing students between 2005 and 2009. A total of 135 (49%) districts experienced a decrease in courtesy bus elementary students.

The analysis showed that the number of students eligible for state and courtesy bus service decreased in many school districts between 2005 and 2009. The decrease was more significant for the number of students who qualified for state busing than courtesy busing. About half of the districts experienced a decrease in the number of courtesy busing students. A comparison of the geographic areas revealed that most school districts with the highest decrease in state and courtesy busing students were located in suburban areas.

Although comparisons were made for total state-bus students, total courtesy-bus students, and courtesy-elementary students, the selection of districts for case studies was heavily influenced by the decrease in the number of courtesy-elementary students. The districts with the highest decrease in courtesy-elementary students were given the highest priority in the selection since K-8 schools are eligible for Safe Routes to School funding and resources. Other considerations in the selection of districts to interview were geographic diversity, decrease in state-bus students and school districts that had news articles and press coverage over the past five years about potential reductions or eliminations in courtesy busing.

FIGURE 3: Decreases in Courtesy Busing (Non-Mandated) from 2005-2009 by County

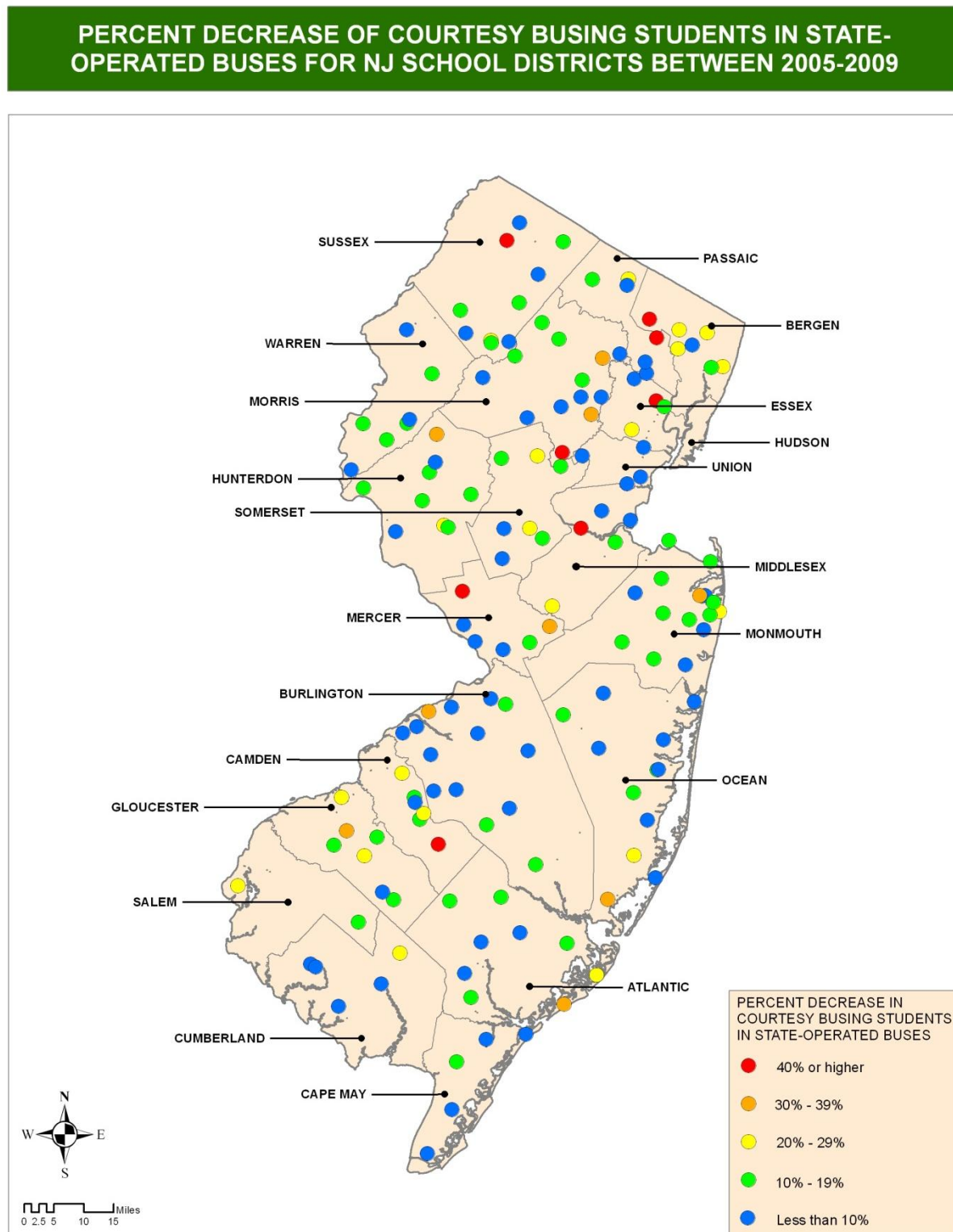
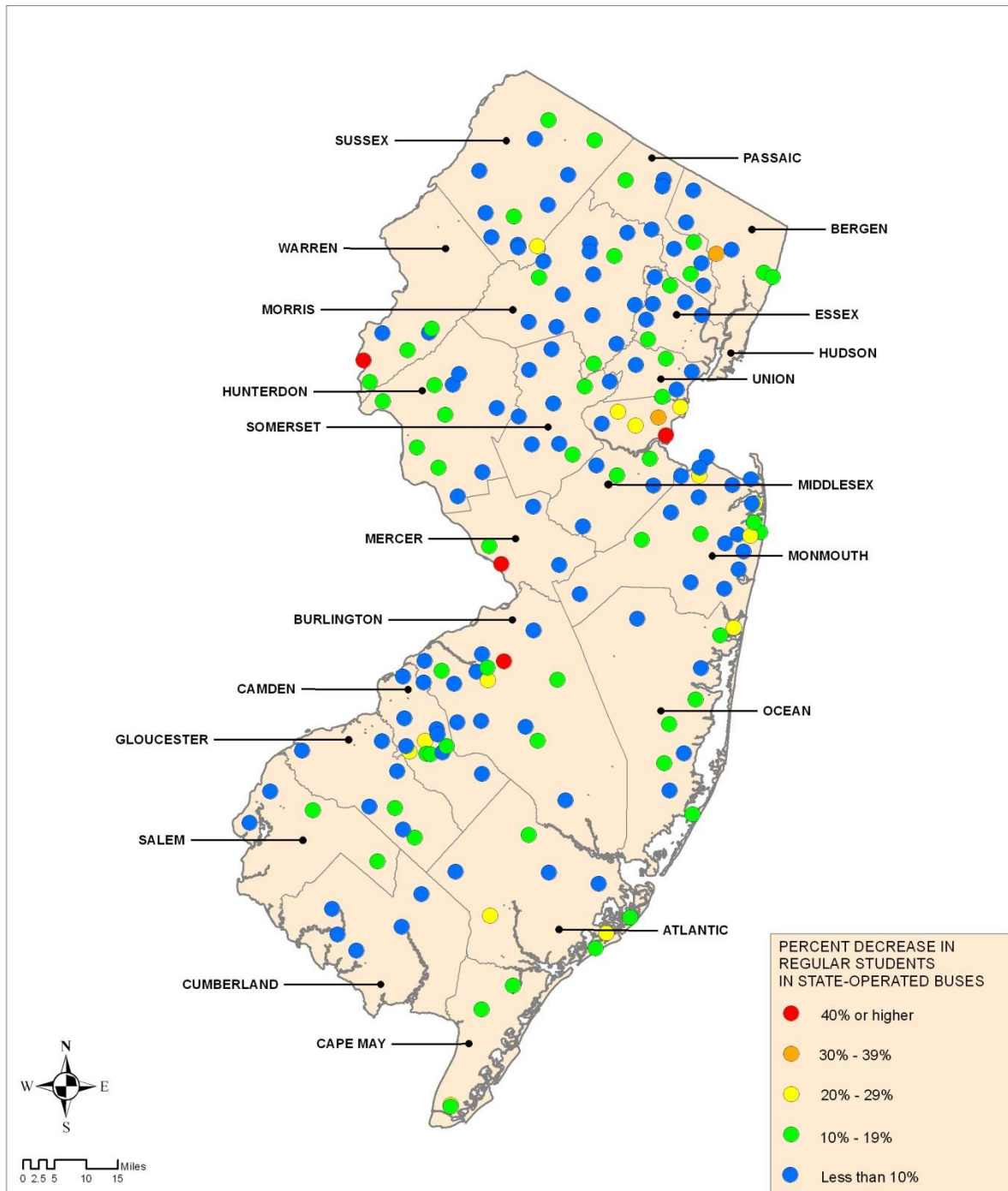


FIGURE 4: Decreases in State Busing (Mandated) from 2005-2009 by County

PERCENT DECREASE OF REGULAR STUDENTS IN STATE-OPERATED BUSES FOR NJ SCHOOL DISTRICTS BETWEEN 2005-2009



School Districts Selected for Interviews

Sixty-seven school districts across New Jersey were identified and contacted for interviews, and 54 districts were interviewed resulting in a response rate of 81%. The school districts interviewed for this report are shown in Table 1 for those districts that had reduced their courtesy busing between 2005 and 2009 as per the data reviewed from the NJDOE. However, interviews with these school districts revealed that three of them had surprisingly increased their bus service while some districts had not made any busing changes at all over the past several years. According to these districts, the decrease in the number of students courtesy bused during the period from 2005 to 2009 could be attributed to lower student enrollments in the district and/or students aging out of courtesy busing services (for example, former elementary school students attending a middle or high school for which they do not live remote) not necessarily because of reductions or eliminations in courtesy busing.

Table 2 shows those districts that had news and publicity concerning possible eliminations or reductions in courtesy busing within the past five years. Subsequent to the news coverage, some of these districts had made no changes to their courtesy busing services. Additionally, some districts indicated through interviews that they had not made any changes in busing while news press indicated some busing changes were made. (For a listing of news articles reviewed, see Appendix A for bibliography).

TABLE 1: New Jersey School Districts Interviewed with Decreased Courtesy Busing^e

County	School District	County	School District
Bergen	Englewood City	Mercer	W.Windsor-Plainsboro*
Bergen	Franklin Lakes Borough	Middlesex	Highland Park
Bergen	Paramus Borough	Middlesex	Sayreville
Burlington	Burlington Township	Monmouth	Freehold Township
Burlington	Cinnaminson*	Monmouth	Howell Township*
Burlington	Evesham Township*	Monmouth	Long Branch City
Burlington	Mount Laurel Township	Monmouth	Marlboro Township*
Camden	Berlin Township*	Monmouth	Ocean Township
Camden	Cherry Hill*	Morris	Jefferson Township*
Camden	Chesilhurst*	Morris	Montville Township
Camden	Vorhees Township*	Morris	Parsippany-Troy Hills
Cumberland	Millville City	Morris	Rockaway Township*
Cumberland	Vineland City	Ocean	Barnegat Township
Gloucester	Glassboro*	Ocean	Jackson Township
Gloucester	Mantula Township*	Ocean	Stafford Township
Gloucester	Washington Township*	Passaic	Ringwood Borough*
Hunterdon	Flemington-Raritan*	Passaic	West Milford Township*
Mercer	East Windsor Regional*	Salem	Pennsville*
Mercer	Hamilton Township		

Source: New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Student Transportation.

*After interviewing school district, no changes were made to courtesy busing within the past 5 years.

TABLE 2: New Jersey School Districts Interviewed with News about Eliminating or Reducing Courtesy Busing

County	School District	County	School District
Bergen	Edgewater*	Somerset	Bedminster
Essex	Millburn	Somerset	Bernards Township
Hunterdon	Lebanon Township*	Somerset	Branchburg
Middlesex	Woodbridge	Somerset	Franklin Township*
Monmouth	Upper Freehold	Somerset	Hillsborough Township*
Morris	Boonton*	Somerset	Montgomery Township*
Morris	Mount Olive	Somerset	Millstone*
Morris	West Morris	Sussex	Sparta
Passaic	Little Falls*		

Source: See Appendix A for listing of news articles and press coverage about school districts.

*After interviewing school district, no changes were made to courtesy busing within the past 5 years.

^e Courtesy busing decreases from 2005-2009 calculated as per the statistics from the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Student Transportation.

The school districts were interviewed and asked to answer a survey (See Appendix B for the full survey) either via a phone call or, in a few cases, by email or fax. Interviews were held with personnel from each district's transportation department, primarily the transportation coordinators, supervisors or assistant transportation coordinators/supervisors. In a few districts where the transportation department was eliminated or had outsourced the duties, the superintendent, business administrator or transportation consultant was interviewed.

While in general, transportation coordinators, supervisors and assistant coordinators/supervisors are highly knowledgeable about busing and transportation costs and budgets, they lack familiarity with and understanding about the individual schools that were affected and the consequences to students and parents when busing was reduced or eliminated. Also, their responsibilities and duties do not include awareness and expertise about modes of transportation other than busing. Superintendents and business administrators that were interviewed seemed more familiar with affected schools. However, most interviewees mentioned that principals would have been the most well-informed regarding the direct impacts to the schools, students and parents regarding any modifications to courtesy busing.

Case Study: Highland Park

One school district, Highland Park in Middlesex County was highlighted in a separate case study because of its uniqueness and for the key lessons and strategies that worked particularly well for them when courtesy busing was eliminated in the district. See Appendix C for How Courtesy Busing was Effectively Eliminated in Highland Park.

V. RESULTS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT INTERVIEWS

School districts throughout New Jersey were selected for this report based on the highest decreases in courtesy bused students, decreases in state bused students, and geographic diversity, as well as news or press coverage about bus eliminations. Out of the 54 New

Jersey school districts that were interviewed for this study, half (or 27) of the districts did not make any changes to courtesy busing, and the other 27 districts interviewed did have some modification(s) to their courtesy busing service over the past five years. Interviewees included administrative members of the school district's transportation department such as the Transportation Coordinator, Supervisor or Manager. In districts where there was no transportation department or manager, the Business Administrator, Superintendent or transportation consultant was interviewed.

Of the 27 districts that indicated courtesy busing modifications, three increased service, 14 decreased service and nine modified service in some other way. The modifications to busing service included implementing subscription busing, condensing bus routes and stops, shifting school times and changing bus tiers (buses make several runs each day). The three districts increased bus service due to higher student enrollments, removal of crossing guards and relocation of a pre-school where more children had to be bused. The districts that decreased service initiated subscription busing, eliminated or reduced late buses or extracurricular buses, eliminated courtesy busing for middle and/or high schools, and/or increased the mileage requirement for students bused.

Overall information from the 27 school districts that instituted busing changes within the past five years included the following:

- 19 out of 27 districts have hazardous bus routes while the other seven districts do not have any hazardous routes.
- The 27 districts stated that budget cuts, cost savings and lower enrollments were the primary reasons for service modifications.
- The schools that were most affected within the districts were the middle and high schools in which service was eliminated or reduced for students living within the state limits.
- Reactions from the community where busing was reduced or eliminated included anger, outrage, concern for safety, and in some districts, an understanding of the need for cost savings.
- Almost all of the districts stated that most parents were driving their children to school more often as a result of busing eliminations with some districts seeing minor increases in walking but very little bicycling to school.

- Schools experienced heavier traffic flow and congestion within and around the schools due to cars dropping off students as a result of busing reductions.
- Steps schools have taken in response to bus reductions include: adding more crossing guards and traffic police officers, designating specific drop off and pick up locations away from pedestrian crossings and bus lanes, implementing some sidewalk improvements, installing bike racks, increasing signage, encouraging car pools and creating walking school buses.^f
- If more funding was made available, school districts indicated they would use the additional funding or resources to restore busing, build and improve sidewalks, hire more crossing guards and traffic police officers, and install more traffic lights, signals and signage.

Appendix D shows a summary of the school district interviews for those districts that had increased, decreased or modified courtesy busing in the past five years. Appendix E shows the detailed results of each question asked from the school district interviews.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS WHEN BUSING IS REDUCED



The following recommendations are made based on the interviews with the school districts across New Jersey. They consist of alternate approaches to eliminating courtesy busing including making modifications without eliminating busing, short and long term strategies when busing is reduced or eliminated, as well as utilizing valuable funding and resources from Safe Routes to School.

Alternate Approaches to Eliminating Courtesy Busing

When school districts are required to make busing reductions or eliminations, enabling students to walk and bicycle safely to school is an important consideration. However, parents will often choose to

^f A walking school bus is a group of 10-12 students supervised by an adult; they pause at pre-determined stops along the route to school and pick up other walkers.

drive their children to school, thus generating more traffic and congestion in and around the schools and causing pedestrian and bicycling conditions to become more dangerous.

Interviews with school districts throughout New Jersey regarding courtesy busing changes revealed strategies that schools can implement relatively quickly and easily without eliminating all courtesy busing service when inevitable cuts in transportation expenditures and/or cost savings may need to be realized.

1. Modify busing to save time and money without eliminating or reducing courtesy busing service.

1.1. *Perform a detailed transportation study* or hire a consultant to analyze efficiencies (fleet, costs, and fuel emissions) such as stops, routes, and load times. The study should include a review of the walking and biking conditions for pedestrians in anticipation of possible bus reductions and recommendations to the municipality for improvements to ensure safe walking and biking to school. Paramus and [Parsippany-Troy Hills](#) school districts enlisted the help of a consultant and developed a traffic safety committee report with recommendations for cost saving strategies and a full analysis of hazardous routes. [Montclair](#) and [Jackson](#) school districts each formed a Transportation Study group to assess transportation inefficiencies and alternatives as well as walking routes based on the presence of crossing guards and other variables.

1.2. *Share transportation services with other school districts.*

Special education transportation can be expensive because some specific programs that are not available within the district are located at a distance far from the home district. Sharing transportation services with other districts can provide substantial savings. Highland Park shares bus services with Edison, Piscataway and New Brunswick for some of their special education students and after school activities (sports). Readington and Branchburg school districts share transportation personnel, school bus facilities and maintenance costs.

1.3. *Change or increase tiering of buses.* One bus could have three tiers or runs: (1) a 7am-2pm run, (2) 7:45am-2:45pm run and (3) a 8:30-3:30pm run instead of three separate buses each with one run thereby reducing operating costs and increasing efficiency. Start and dismissal times at the affected schools would likely need to be reconfigured. Paramus school district has increased the tiering of buses and shifted school start and dismissal times to accommodate the new tiering. This has resulted in transportation cost savings for the district.

1.4. *Consolidate bus stops.* Students may have to walk farther to reach the bus stop; however consolidating bus stops may result in time savings for students and bus drivers as well as increased efficiency (less idle time) for the buses. Mount Laurel and Stafford school districts each have established centralized and community bus stops to cut down on multiple stops and travel time. In Jackson, the district eliminated 170 bus stops mostly in situations where buses were stopping at intervals of 300 feet or less. Walking routes to the bus stops must be assessed to ensure the safety of the students.



1.5. *Offer an opt out provision.* Parents who waive their child's busing right can give districts the opportunity to reduce busing. Perhaps offering a small financial incentive to the parents of the students who do not use the district's bus service will save overall transportation costs. Little Falls school district is considering this option since all students are bused, however many of the parents still drive their children to school. Driving students who are eligible for busing can affect the district's efficiency rating from the State for bus transportation. Montclair considered this option but benefits were unclear.

The New Jersey Department of Education has identified best practices which districts could adopt to achieve 120% vehicle capacity²³ (buses would have to be used for more than just one run) such as:

- Coordinating school calendars (Public and Nonpublic)

- Providing out-of-district transportation through a consolidated transportation services agency
- Optimizing route design
- Designing routes with multiple destinations
- Mixing public and nonpublic school students on the same routes
- Standardizing ride-time policies for all districts participating in consolidated services
- Packaging bids with tiered routes

2. **Implement courtesy busing changes in stages.**

School districts can make gradual busing changes each year to allow parents, students and local municipalities to make essential adjustments, particularly in districts where all or a majority of the students are bused. This process allows parents and students to make adjustments to their commute and an opportunity for the borough and school to plan for improvements to the town such as sidewalks, traffic lights and crossing guards. Most importantly, any reductions or eliminations in busing should not be made until assessments are verified that students can safely walk or bike to and from school or the bus stop. Students, particularly those who have never walked to school, need to be educated about how to handle and avoid dangerous situations.

2.1. *Gradually increase the mileage that students must live from school until the state limit is reached.* In Vineland, middle school students (grades 6-8) were bused if they lived a 0.5 miles from school and high school students were bused if they lived a mile from their school. Now, grade 6-8 students must live 1.5 miles from school, and high school students must live two miles from school in order to receive busing. In Long Branch City school district, elementary school students (K-5) bused were increased to a mile from school instead of a half mile. Also, in Freehold Township where all students were bused, now only K-5 students residing further than a mile and students in grades 6-12 residing further than 1.5 miles are bused. All of these changes were made over the past five years. Some of these districts may plan to gradually

increase mileage to the state mandate if more cuts are required.

2.2. *Eliminate courtesy busing for secondary school students (grades 6-12) initially* and then possibly for primary school students (grades K-5) in subsequent years. In Hamilton Township, Sayreville and Woodbridge school districts, courtesy busing was eliminated for middle and high school students yet maintained for elementary school students. In Woodbridge, courtesy busing for elementary students was eliminated but reinstated after one month because of unsafe walking conditions.

2.3. *Eliminate or reduce late buses or extracurricular buses.* Since late buses only service a portion of the students (mainly middle and high school) who participate in after school activities such as sports and clubs, consider reductions for late busing. In Bedminster school district, late buses for middle and high school clubs were eliminated. Some districts have gradually eliminated late bus service by decreasing the number of days the bus runs instead of operating every day of the week. Mount Laurel school district only runs late buses twice a week for secondary schools and one day a week for elementary schools. Some districts such as Mount Laurel have eliminated busing for field trips. Buses for field trips can either be subsidized by the parents and/or PTAs. Another option is to eliminate separate bus routes for kindergarten and/or pre-kindergarten such as in Burlington Township. Parents are responsible for either picking their child up after the morning session or dropping their child off for the beginning of the afternoon session and utilizing only the morning and afternoon regular bus runs.

3. Institute Subscription Busing.

In order to offset the cost of the courtesy buses, school districts may pass onto the parents/guardians all or part of the transportation cost. This is called subscription busing. The collection and management of the subscription fees is the responsibility of the school district. Many districts such as

Franklin Lakes, Sparta, Mount Olive, Upper Freehold, Millburn, Montville, West Morris, and Bernards Township have utilized subscription busing over the past several years with varying degrees of success.

For some parents/guardians, subscribing to a transportation service may be too expensive, and they will instead opt to drive their children or encourage their children to walk or bike to and from school. Therefore, it is imperative that school administrators finalize walking and bicycling safety assessments and pick up and drop off procedures for all of the affected schools before initiating any busing changes.

Table 3 shows some subscription busing costs in New Jersey school districts for the 2010-2011 school year. Costs vary by district depending upon whether the parents/guardians or the school district absorb the costs for student bus riders who qualify for free and reduced lunch. New Jersey school districts were permitted to charge parents/guardians a maximum amount of \$884 per student for transportation for the 2010-11 school year.

TABLE 3: Subscription Bus Costs per School Year

County	School District	Subscription Bus Fee per Student for 2010-2011 School Year
Bergen	Franklin Lakes Borough	\$600
Essex	Millburn	\$580 with a family cap of \$1,160
Monmouth	Upper Freehold	\$300
Morris	Montville	\$250 for grades K-5, \$350 for grades 6-12
Morris	Mount Olive	\$200
Morris	West Morris	\$500
Somerset	Bernards Township	\$690
Sussex	Sparta	\$450

Other Considerations for Reducing Courtesy Busing

The following strategies should be considered regardless of whether courtesy busing cuts are necessary.

1. **Expand school district's transportation group responsibilities beyond busing.**

After discussions with transportation supervisors and coordinators, it was evident that they are all highly knowledgeable about busing and transportation costs. However, most lack information on the impact of busing reductions on students and schools, and lack awareness of modes of transportation other than busing. The school district transportation group's responsibilities should expand beyond busing to include walking and bicycling as well as familiarity with potential impacts near the affected schools like traffic congestion, flow, drop off and pick up procedures and pedestrian safety.

2. **Community vote.**

Sayreville School District's decision to eliminate busing for middle and high school students was determined by putting the question on the ballot at election time. A community vote allows residents' voices to be heard and enables districts to make decisions based on community input and formulate appropriate plans, budget the necessary transportation costs and/or make necessary cuts. However, a community vote regarding busing eliminations often does not include addressing issues and costs the municipality would have to incur -- such as improvements to sidewalks and bike trails, adding more crossing guards, traffic calming features and signage -- to ensure students can walk and bike safely to school. These are crucial factors that the community, school and local government need to understand, consider and implement before a vote can be made to eliminate or reduce any busing.



Short Term Strategies when School Districts Decide to Reduce or Eliminate Courtesy Busing

When budget cuts require school districts to reduce or eliminate courtesy busing, it is crucial that walking and bicycling conditions be assessed for safety. There are a number of short term strategies that should be used to make the transition for parents, students and schools easier.

1. Plan ahead.

School Districts need as much time as possible to implement busing changes. Three months is too short of a time frame to prepare for eliminating or reducing busing. At least a year is preferable, although the more lead time, the better. Branchburg reinstated busing after one year of eliminating courtesy buses primarily because it was determined that students were not safe walking to school due to high speeds along narrow roads, lack of sidewalks and no crossing guards. When the Branchburg school district eliminated busing, the municipality did not hire crossing guards, and students could not walk and bicycle safely to school because of the dangerous conditions. Conversely, Barnegat Township spent a year preparing for changes, giving parents time to prepare for the new plan. The district realigned the schools so students could attend those schools that were closer, easier and safer for them to walk and bike.

2. Inform parents and students immediately.

Communicating to the school community about changes to courtesy busing as soon as decisions are made is crucial. Parents and students need time to process the change, convey concerns and plan for how they will get to school. In Barnegat Township, when they conveyed the busing cuts a year in advance, parents and students may not have liked the decision, but they knew it was coming and began to plan for it.²⁴

3. Create a transportation study team.

Parsippany-Troy Hills, Montclair and Highland Park created Transportation Study Teams consisting of school board officials, school administrators, council members, police and parents to

address safety concerns, make recommendations and formulate an implementation plan.

4. **Assess alternate means of transportation.**

In some communities, students can walk, bike, or drive to school, and perhaps parents can form car pools and walking school buses to safely get children to school. Principals and parents are most familiar with the daily effects of courtesy busing changes at each school, and they are crucial to instituting and encouraging alternate means of getting safely to school.

Ventnor School District eliminated courtesy busing in the fall of 2011 for students who live within two miles of school. The school district and the traffic safety police department worked together to ensure the safety of the student walkers. Safety of the approximately 1,000 children that attend the schools is their biggest concern.²⁵ Buses are only allowed to use the front entrance and cars must pass the front entrance and park on the side of the school. Parents/guardians are required to walk their children from the parking lot to the sidewalk leading to the school. The inconvenience of the new procedures for the parents outweighs the safety. Officers are also stationed at the schools each morning to direct parents and students.

5. **Conduct walkability/bikeability assessments and document safety issues and parental concerns.**

Milburn School District has walking maps to the schools posted on their website for [Milburn high school students](#) and for [Milburn middle school students](#). Parsippany-Troy Hills has developed a grid in conjunction with the Traffic Safety Committee to determine hazardous areas and neighborhoods that receive busing (See Appendix F). The Superintendent of Ventnor School District walked various routes to school prior to eliminating busing to assess how long it would take to walk to school and whether walking conditions were safe. In Barnegat Township, the district's website lists streets with sidewalks and crossing guard locations. Ensuring students can safely walk and bike to school is critical when busing is reduced or eliminated.

6. **Make short term infrastructure improvements.**

Minor improvements such as adding crossing guards, painting crosswalks and bike lanes, adding “Stop for Pedestrians in Crosswalk” signage, striping bike lanes, removing debris and trimming bushes along sidewalks can be inexpensive and will make a huge difference to student walkers and bicyclists. Galloway Township School District has been working closely with the municipality to increase the number of crossing guards. The Highland Park School District and the borough added signage and painted a crosswalk in the middle of the block where many students were cutting to cross the street.

7. **Start a walking school bus.**

For elementary school students, Highland Park, Freehold Township, and Parsippany-Troy Hills school districts have implemented walking school buses that run every day or most school days. A walking school bus consists of a group of 10-12 children who walk to school with the assistance of a parent/guardian, pausing at designated stops along the route to school to pick up other students. Walking school buses are a great way to start the day with exercise and a boost of energy; they build a sense of community and encourage parental involvement as well as building and fostering relationships. Safe Routes to School programs can provide communities with the tools to plan and start a walking school bus in their neighborhood.

8. **Reinforce education programs regarding pedestrian and bicycle safety.**

Vineland, Highland Park, and Barnegat Township have utilized Safe Routes to School funds⁶ to educate students and parents on the safety of walking and bicycling to school. In Ventnor, the South Jersey Traffic Safety Alliance provided a pedestrian and safety assembly for students in grades 5-8 which stressed helmet requirements, bike traffic laws, bike maintenance, and

⁶ Federal funds are available through the New Jersey Department of Education.

tips to become a safe pedestrian such as crossing at intersections and making eye contact with motorists.²⁷

To be most effective, safety education programs must be reinforced and practiced in every grade. It cannot be assumed that students, especially those that have never walked to school, will have the knowledge of safety both when crossing streets while walking or biking as well as personal safety skills. Safe Routes to School programs can help with providing safety education on best practices to teachers and students.

Long Term Strategies When Busing is Reduced or Eliminated

When school districts reduce or eliminate courtesy busing, most changes cannot be made overnight. Time is needed to plan for and make improvements to the town so students can walk safely to and from school or the bus stop.

1. **Build a strong relationship between the schools and the municipality.**

Of vital importance is the development of a strong relationship between the school district and the municipality. Since funds for both the school and municipality are sourced from tax levies from the residents, their goals for improvements to the town must be coordinated. By aligning the school's and municipality's goals, students and residents will be able to walk and bike safely to school, the bus stop and around town. In Barnegat Township and Upper Freehold, the school districts worked closely with their municipality to offset some of the transportation costs and were able to install new sidewalks and hire more crossing guards.

In Highland Park, the goals of the school and borough, supported by the [Mayor's Wellness Campaign](#) were aligned to improve and encourage safe walking and bicycling conditions throughout the town and around the schools. Highland Park's commitment for advancing as a green and sustainable community supported important changes to the town's infrastructure. By encouraging more walking and biking within the town, the borough is hoping to take more vehicles off the road thereby saving energy and decreasing carbon footprints. In addition, any new construction



and development must include pedestrian and bike traffic safety in the plans.

2. **Schools and municipalities must develop a plan for major infrastructure improvements.**

Infrastructure improvements such as installation of new sidewalks, installation of traffic lights and signals, and building traffic calming devices like islands cost money but the improvements can help create safer walking and bicycling conditions for all residents. Ocean Township has worked closely with their municipality to develop and implement a long term infrastructure improvement plan to install sidewalks and traffic signals. In Highland Park, long term improvements such as new sidewalks, installing traffic calming devices and speed bumps, new traffic signals with pedestrian commands as well as raising and repainting crosswalks were completed to make pedestrian crossings safe.

3. **Amend school district policies** and encourage change to allow more walking and bicycling to school. Schools can have barrier policies which discourage or prohibit walking or bicycling to school. Whether out of fear of liability issues, concerns for security of bicycles on school property or due to a previous safety incident, school districts may have policies that prohibit or discourage students from walking and bicycling to school, either entirely or until a student reaches a certain age or grade – regardless of whether they are supervised by a parent or an adult. The school board can remove the barrier policy or ultimately convert it to a supportive policy that promotes walking and bicycling but requires students to wear helmets when using bikes, scooters, skateboards and rollerblades and urges students to use locks and bike racks. School Boards can play an instrumental role in encouraging more students to walk, bike, scooter and/or skateboard to and from school. For an example of a supportive policy and tips on how to remove barrier policies about walking and bicycling to school, visit SRTS at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/school-bicycling-and-walking-policies-addressing-policies-hinder-and-implementing-poli>.

School Districts and Municipalities can receive “aid” from Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School programs can assist school districts with this challenging transition of eliminating or reducing busing by focusing on safe alternatives for getting students to school. Safe Routes to School programs are not anti-busing; they are pro-safety. Improving children’s safety while walking and bicycling is a central mission of Safe Routes to School, and the program’s benefits stretch beyond the school day. School Transportation Supervisors, Managers and Coordinators can and should get involved with Safe Routes to School before busing is cut or eliminated.

Safe Routes to School resources and activities help communities:

- Build sidewalks, bicycle paths and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure
- Reduce speeds in school zones and neighborhoods
- Address distracted driving among drivers of all ages
- Educate generations on pedestrian and bicycle safety²⁶

Also, the benefits to communities who work toward a safe route to school include:

- Building a sense of neighborhood
- Encouraging increased parental involvement at school and beyond
- Promoting driving safely in school zones and the larger community
- Gaining economic benefits of improved infrastructure, like sidewalks
- Improving student test scores/academics²⁸

Funding is available through the New Jersey Department of Transportation for infrastructure improvements such as the planning, designing and construction of sidewalks, crosswalks, signals, traffic-calming devices and bicycle facilities. Mini-grants from health, transportation and environmental fields are other possible funding sources.^h

^h For information on federal funds, mini-grants and local and private funds, please visit the National Center for Safe Routes to School Funding Portal at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/funding-portal>.

Safe Routes to School can help communities create a School Travel Plan which maps out how to improve the safety of pedestrian and bike travel to and from school for the purpose of increasing the number of students and parents who bike or walk to school. A School Travel Plan will help you to identify: (1) where students currently walk and/or bike, (2) where students would walk or bike if they could, and (3) what changes need to be made so that students can and will walk and bike safely to school.

Completing a basic School Travel Plan will pinpoint issues and potential solutions and implement some short term solutions and long term ones as well. This plan will demonstrate commitment to Safe Routes to School and provide a blueprint from which a more comprehensive School Travel Plan can be created.

School districts across New Jersey will continue to face the challenges of tighter school budgets, leading to streamlined transportation costs as well as possible and eventual reductions and eliminations in courtesy busing. It is imperative that alternate means of transportation are explored, daily pick up and drop off procedures are analyzed and surrounding pedestrian and bicycling environments are assessed to ensuring walking and bicycling conditions to and from school and bus stops are safe. Furthermore, students who have never walked to school must be taught how to handle and avoid dangerous situations.

New Jersey Safe Routes to School can help schools reach these goals. Safe Routes to School Regional Coordinators from eight Transportation Management Associations throughout New Jersey are available to offer advice and assistance with running programs and events in communities from all 21 counties. Regional Coordinators can help with: walk and bike to school events, walking school buses, youth bicycle and pedestrian safety education, school travel plans and surveys which provide evaluation and feedback on local programs. Implementing Safe Routes to School programs prior to eliminating or reducing busing can help ease parental concerns by ensuring that students will be able to walk and bike safely to school, and convince parents that they do not have to drive their children to school. For more information and to contact the nearest Safe Routes to School Regional Coordinator, please visit New Jersey Safe Routes to School's website at www.saferoutesnj.org.

Contact Information:

New Jersey Safe Routes to School Resource Center
Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
33 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901
www.saferoutesnj.org
Safe Routes to School Help Desk at 1-848-932-7901
email: srts@ejb.rutgers.edu

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APPENDIX B: School District Interview Script

School District Official Assent Letter & Interview Instrument

Good (Morning/Afternoon),

My name is _____ I work at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University. I would like to ask you a few questions about school busing in New Jersey, with emphasis on courtesy busing in your school district. Your answers will be shared with New Jersey Department of Transportation staff in order to better understand existing practices and policies used regarding school busing programs throughout New Jersey. Although you will not receive any direct benefit from participating in this conversation, your insights will help the research team understand better the issues pertaining to school busing in New Jersey.

Participation should last no longer than one half hour. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering. If at any time during our conversation you wish to stop participating, you are completely free to do so.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. This research is confidential; meaning that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, the agency where you work and your contact information. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. If the research team wants to directly attribute a remark made by you during these interviews, we will contact you first to seek permission.

If you have any questions about this survey or the NJ Safe Routes to School Program, please contact Leigh Ann Von Hagen of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University at: Tel: 732-932-6812 ext. 613 or lavh@rci.rutgers.edu If you have any questions about research procedures at the University, you may contact the Rutgers University Sponsored Programs Administrator at: Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104 or humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Do you have any questions? By participating in this study, you agree to be a study subject.

(Potentially redirected)
Name of School Official:
Position:
When (date):
When (time):
Address:
Phone number:
E-mail:

Is this person the designated liaison or for the school district official responsible for making busing decisions?

Yes/No

If not who is?

Address:

Phone number:

E-mail:

Questions:

1. If you consider all the different types of needs of your school district, how important is courtesy busing?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not very important
 - d. Not at all important
2. If you consider the students' transportation needs in your school district, how important is courtesy busing?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not very important
 - d. Not at all important
3. During the past years, many school districts have re-organized or modified their courtesy busing service for school children. Have you modified service in your school district?
 - a. Yes [**Go to Q5**]
 - b. No [**Go to Q4**]
 - c. Don't know [**Go to Q4**]
4. Do you have any plans to modify service within the next year or two?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If Yes, what kind of modifications have you planned?
[**GO TO Q25**]

5. Would you say you have:
- a. Increased service? [**Go to Q6**]
 - b. Decreased service? [**Go to Q6**]
 - c. Modified service in some other way [**Go to Q8**]
6. You said you have increased/decreased service in your district. Is that in terms of:
- a. Number of routes?
 - b. Number of buses?
 - c. Both routes and buses?
7. How many routes and buses were added/eliminated?
- a. Routes=
 - b. Buses=

[SKIP Q8, GO TO Q9]

8. Can you please describe how you modified service?
9. Do you have any hazardous routes designated by local law enforcement?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If yes, Did any hazardous route get affected by service modification?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know

If Yes, which route or routes?

10. What were the primary reasons for service modification?
11. As a result of service modification, has there been an increase/decrease in the number of students served by courtesy busing?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If Yes, how many students have been affected?

_____ Number of students affected

_____ Percent of total students using courtesy busing

12. Has the modification of service affected all schools in your district equally?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If No, which schools got affected most?

13. What criteria did you use to decide how you would modify service?
14. What reaction did you get from the students regarding service modification?
15. What reaction did you get from the parents regarding service modification?
16. What reaction did you get from the school administrators at affected schools?

ASK Q17 THROUGH Q25 ONLY TO THOSE WHO SAID THEY REDUCED SERVICE IN Q5. FOR OTHERS, GO TO Q25.

17. Has service reduction affected all schools equally?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If No, what type of schools was affected most?

18. How have the students adjusted to the reduced service? (**Note all that apply**)
- a. Students are walking more often
 - b. Students are bicycling more often
 - c. Parents are driving their children more often
 - d. Using any other method (specify)_____

19. Have you or the affected schools taken any steps to provide alternatives to courtesy busing to the students who are deprived of service because of the service reduction?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If Yes, what steps have you or the schools taken?

If No, why not?

20. Have you and/or the affected schools taken any steps to enhance pedestrian/bicyclist safety around schools to protect the students from traffic accidents?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

If Yes, what steps have you or the schools taken?

If No, why not?

21. How important was funding in your decision to reduce service?
- a. The only reason for modification
 - b. Very important
 - c. Somewhat important
 - d. Not very important
 - e. Not at all important

22. If additional resources were available, what steps would you take to enhance safety of walking/bicycling students from traffic accidents around schools?
23. What steps can schools or municipalities take to enhance safety of walking/bicycling students from traffic accidents around schools?
24. What can the state government do to address the issue of reduced service?

SAY THANK YOU AND GOODBYE

25. Recently there have been many reports in the media about reduction in courtesy busing for students in different parts of New Jersey. Are you aware of any of these reductions?
- a. Yes [Continue with Q24]
 - b. No [**SAY THANK YOU AND GOODBYE**]
26. What are the primary reasons for service reduction?
27. How important is funding in these decisions to reduce service?
- a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not very important
 - d. Not at all important
28. How have the reductions in service affected the students?
29. How have the reductions affected the schools?
30. How have the reductions affected the traffic around the schools?
31. Have the reductions made some students vulnerable to traffic accidents because they are now walking or bicycling to school instead of taking the bus?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
32. What steps can school districts take to further enhance the safety of students who walk or bicycle to school?
33. What steps can schools take to further enhance the safety of students who walk or bicycle to school?
34. What steps can school districts take to address the overall issue of reduced courtesy busing?
35. What steps can schools take to address the overall issue of reduced courtesy busing?
36. What steps can the state government take to address the overall issue of reduced courtesy busing?

SAY THANK YOU AND GOODBYE.

APPENDIX C: How Courtesy Busing was Effectively Eliminated in Highland Park

Transportation is targeted for cuts before other areas which directly impact education such as curriculum, teachers, or extracurricular activities. Consequently, courtesy busing which transports students who do not meet the state law for residing remote from school, is usually the first area within a school district's transportation budget to be cut. Highland Park is a school district which eliminated courtesy busing when budget reductions were required and is highlighted for the seemingly effective transition for the school and community due to its strong partnership with the municipality.

Why was Courtesy Busing Eliminated in Highland Park?

Known for its tree lined streets and quaint downtown, Highland Park is a small community of about 14,500 residents in Middlesex County, New Jersey. The town is only 1.9 square miles, and therefore is considered a "walking town." Highland Park is situated close to Rutgers University and has a small school district comprised of approximately 1,300 students attending its four public schools – Irving Primary School, Bartle Elementary School, Highland Park Middle School and Highland Park High School. Many residents who work or study at Rutgers walk or bike to campus, and most middle and high school students also walk or bike to school.

Since 1994, the Highland Park Board of Education had been providing courtesy busing to its primary and elementary school students if they resided more than one mile from the schools. High school and middle school students were bused only if they lived in areas where walking was unsafe and deemed hazardous. There are only a few neighborhoods affected by the absence of a sidewalk under a train overpass to safely walk or bike to school.

New Jersey state law, NJSA 18A:39-1, requires that each school district must provide bus transportation to all public elementary school students (grades K-8 and Pre K if the district offers it) who reside more than two miles from their school and all public secondary school students (grades 9-12) who live more than 2.5 miles from their schools. These students are considered living remote from school. Boards of Education are not required by law to provide busing for students who are less than remote from school even for safety reasons. At their own discretion and expense, School Boards are permitted to provide transportation for students who live in areas where walking or bicycling to school is dangerous and unsafe, commonly referred to as hazardous busing. As a result of this state law, ***any*** busing in Highland Park is

considered courtesy busing since the town is only 1.9 square miles. The school district is not required by the State of New Jersey to bus students to school, and therefore receives no financial assistance from the State for any transportation costs.

In 2005, due to the substantial decrease in the amount of overall financial aid received from the State of New Jersey, Highland Park was faced with the difficult decision of making reductions to the school budget. However, at the time, the community was not in favor of any cuts in transportation, and instead, reductions were made in other areas such as facilities maintenance, supplies and support staffing. In 2006, the Highland Park Board of Education considered eliminating its courtesy buses to meet yet another budget gap, and cuts were made in areas other than transportation with the understanding that if further reductions were needed the following year, courtesy busing would be eliminated. Given the history of declining state aid each year since 2004, the School Board asked the community to prepare for the inevitable elimination of courtesy busing in 2007. In September of 2008, all courtesy buses, with the exception of one hazardous bus, were eliminated, saving the district over \$100,000 and affecting roughly 110 students. In a school district as small as Highland Park, with a total budget of approximately \$23 million, this amount represents a significant annual savings.

Getting the Highland Park Community on Board

Beginning in 2005, the Highland Park Board of Education started discussions with the community about eliminating courtesy busing that resulted from required cuts to the school budget. The Pedestrian Safety Task Force (PSTF), a standing public safety sub-committee from the Safe Walking and Cycling Committee, was formed as a result of primary and elementary schools' transportation challenges. There were multiple School Board meetings about the school budget discussing where costs including transportation fell in terms of priority. At that time, the PSTF recommended to the Board that the loss of courtesy busing would increase traffic in Highland Park and exacerbate safety issues for the children during drop off and pick up times at the schools. While the PSTF's recommendation and the parents' concerns influenced the decision to preserve courtesy busing in 2006, their continued research and apprehension could not stave off cuts the following year.

Once the School Board made the decision in 2007 to prepare for the courtesy busing cuts in 2008, communication was essential. Many meetings which included members of the Administration, School Board, parents, Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and representatives from the Highland Park borough – the PSTF, mayor, council and police -- were conducted. Flyers, emails and notices were posted and sent publicizing the meetings with the interested and affected groups. Important feedback on issues such

as sidewalks, traffic lights, crossing guards, bicycle racks, walking routes, and safety concerns were collected from all the parties and documented by the administration. A voluntary team of parents and staff formed a committee called the Transportation Study Group to investigate the cost of a parent-paid bus service. A survey was sent home soliciting interest from parents.

The mayor and borough council were enthusiastic participants since Highland Park joined the state wide Mayors Wellness Campaign designed to assist municipal mayors in implementing programs that help citizens remain active and healthy. The town's commitment to becoming a green community supports a healthy and sustainable environment, economy and society. These goals for the town reinforced the efforts to encourage and assist students in walking and bicycling to school.

The health and safety of the students were at the forefront of every discussion. When the Highland Park school district eliminated courtesy busing in September of 2008, parents were not pleased with the decision, and they were not surprised. The Highland Park community worked together to ensure a smooth transition for the parents, students and affected schools.

In an effort to assist those students who were no longer bused to school, walking school buses for Bartle School students only (grades 2-5) were established by the parents with the help of the borough police. A walking school bus consists of a group of 10-12 students, supervised by an adult, pausing at predetermined stops along the walking route to pick up walkers. Keep Middlesex Moving, a non-profit transportation management agency supporting Middlesex County, along with the Highland Park borough police and the PSTF drew walking routes by dividing the town into four sections, with a route beginning on the outskirts of each section. After comprehensive research, interviews and observations, the PSTF proposed a series of "people-friendly streets" designated as safe walking and bicycling routes for students. Parent volunteers conducted walkability studies to assess the safety of each route and evaluated variables such as student and parent absences, inclement weather, parent volunteer to child ratio and the need for liability insurance. The walking maps and routes were drawn and completed taking into account all of the studies that were performed as well as the presence of sidewalks, traffic lights and crossing guards that were already in existence. The borough police were instrumental in conducting background checks for walking parent volunteers as well as facilitating safety sessions for the parents and volunteers to hammer out the logistics and resolve any issues.

The PTO organized neighborhood routes and contacted families in the areas to solicit interest in participating in the walking school bus. Walking school bus runs and practices were made a few days before school started to iron out any kinks and to confirm the timing of each stop and the final destination at the school. Crossing guards

were positioned in various areas throughout the town, across the street from the primary and elementary schools and at the two major intersections on Route 27. Through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School program and money donated from the PTO, reflective vests and hand held stop signs were purchased. Lastly, procedures were put in place to handle absences and adverse weather conditions.

Other forms of transportation were also encouraged by all of the schools including the use of bicycles, scooters, skateboards and rollerblades. More bike racks were installed at all four schools, and scooters, skateboards, roller skates and blades were permitted to be kept in lockers or in the front office if they could not fit in the lockers.

Discovering Bumps along the Road

Although planning and collaboration were crucial to the successful transition of the elimination of courtesy busing, there were some concerns along the way. Parents were concerned that the children were too young to walk to school particularly at Irving Primary School (grades pre-K through grade 1) even if they walked with a parent or a supervised adult. The private bus that the Transportation Study Group researched was too costly for the parents, and there were not enough kids to fill the bus. As a result, many parents began driving their children to school causing traffic congestion and safety concerns for pedestrians near and around the schools. Particularly when the weather conditions were adverse, traffic became even more difficult to navigate near and around the schools.

Walking school buses to service afternoon runs were attempted but proved to be too difficult to implement because of various after school activities. Due to parents' work schedules, it was problematic to obtain parental commitment to afternoon walking school bus runs. Additionally, inclement weather conditions caused parent volunteers to make last minute decisions impacting the walking bus and ultimately driving their children contributing toward the traffic congestion near and around the schools. Parents also found it difficult to walk their children to school and pick them up if they attended two or more different schools as it was impossible to get from one to school to another in time unless they drove. Lastly, usage of bicycles, skateboards and scooters had increased; however, kids utilized the sidewalks causing congestion with the walkers and creating potential safety hazards.

Rules of the Road: Some Essential Lessons Learned

Highland Park was able to transition most of the students from busing to walking when courtesy busing was eliminated. While time, patience and planning from the schools, borough, parents and students supported the change, there are some key strategies that school districts could implement to prepare the community for bus reductions and eliminations.

Proper planning and communication. Decisions were made well in advance which gave parents and schools time to prepare for the elimination of the buses. The Highland Park Board of Education began discussions publicly in 2005 at School Board meetings and conveyed to the school community in April of 2007 that courtesy busing would be eliminated in September of 2008. Principals held a series of meetings to gather and address parent concerns and suggestions. The process was transparent affording the opportunity for feedback and input resulting in less confusion and anger among the school community members.

A strong partnership with the municipality/local officials. Improvements to the infrastructure of the town such as sidewalks and roads are the responsibility of the borough. These are instrumental to the safety of the student walkers. If the borough and schools work together with the same goals, more can be accomplished. In this case, Highland Park's stated commitment for advancing as a green and sustainable community supported important changes to the town's infrastructure. By encouraging more walking and biking within the town, the borough is hoping to take more vehicles off the road thereby saving energy and decreasing carbon footprints. In order to ensure safe walking and biking pathways, a combination of traffic calming devices, such as constructing curb extensions, center islands and plantings, were planned and installed in Highland Park over several years. Physical improvements including new sidewalks, installation of pedestrian crossing signals and traffic lights, as well as raising and repainting crosswalks at priority locations near schools, high-density commercial areas and at transit stops, were also implemented to make crossing the streets easier and safer. More aggressive enforcement of existing laws such as anti-littering, anti-idling, anti-noise and sidewalk and alley maintenance ordinances improved the environment for pedestrians.

Highland Park also enacted a policy requiring that all future development and planning – both commercial and residential -- prioritize pedestrian and bike traffic. Walking and biking can be a central element of the planning process from the outset if it is codified into municipal planning policies and procedures. Several years ago, the borough secured a partnership with a local masonry company to offer low cost pricing and interest free payments for those residents to replace or repair their sidewalks. Furthermore, solar pedestrian activated crosswalk signals were installed to aid

pedestrians and since they are powered by the sun, Highland Park's reliance upon fossil fuels is reduced. All of these efforts not only improve the safety of walkers and bicyclists but also complement Highland Park's commitment to a greener, more sustainable community.

As the walking buses ran throughout the course of the school year in Highland Park, various issues were identified and solutions were implemented by both the school and the borough. More crossing guards were situated right across the street from the schools at the primary and elementary schools so that children could cross safely. At the middle school, a crossing guard was placed on the busy street near the school. The borough also painted a mid-block cross walk along the side of Bartle Elementary School with a warning sign to stop for pedestrians. All of these initiatives were implemented through a successful partnership with the schools and the borough for the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Calming the increased traffic near and around the schools. As a result of the elimination of the courtesy buses, more parents drive their children to school causing traffic congestion and safety concerns. The Highland Park traffic police department worked in conjunction with each school principal to address these concerns. At Irving Primary School, traffic patterns were altered permanently so that one way streets ran in front of and behind the school assisting the flow of traffic. Walkers and bus riders are dismissed behind the school and a curb side car pick up and drop off service operates in the front of the school. A portion of the street in front of the school is temporarily closed during school opening and dismissal times, and a lane is designated to accommodate the car service so that parents can easily drop off and collect their children without having to get out of the car. A registration process is necessary at the beginning of the school year gathering information such as students' names, other students that may be picked up (car pools), car models and days of the week that the service will be used with flexibility and variations allowed for certain days of the week and names of children included in the service. Once all of the information is confirmed and verified, passes are issued which must be clearly displayed in the vehicle upon pick up. Children are waiting near the exit and staff members escort the students into and out of the vehicles. The PTO purchased traffic signs, cones and reflective vests for the staff to assist with this service and has been well received by the parents.

At Bartle Elementary School, temporary traffic patterns are altered only during school start and dismissal times. A portion of the street in front of the school is temporarily closed and traffic is one way and diverted away from the school alleviating congestion and making it easier for parents to drop off students from their vehicles. Walkers are dismissed through doors that open to the playgrounds and side yards rather than directly through doors along streets for safety purposes.

Lastly, many parents who had multiple children attending different schools within the district found it impossible to walk from one school to the other in time and ultimately decided to drive their children to school. As a result, start and departure times between the schools were staggered with enough time so that parents could pick up their child at Bartle Elementary School and walk to Irving Primary School in time to get their younger child. This change also allows older siblings to walk to the other schools and pick up and walk home with their younger siblings.

Variations to Walking School Buses. Morning walking school buses became so successful that variations in after school walking buses were informally formed by the parents. Several kids from the same neighborhood bicycle to school together. Children in grades 4-5 are independently dismissed and most of them tend to walk home in groups depending on the neighborhoods in which they live. Students in grades 2 and 3 may be dismissed in walking groups if given written permission from their parents/guardians – with the presence of an elder sibling or designated older student.

Benefits and Potential Challenges

The Highland Park School district has been able to recognize annual savings by eliminating courtesy buses, and most of the school community seems to have adjusted to the change by either walking, bicycling or driving to school.

Walking is already common for most of the residents and students in Highland Park. Walking schools buses not only encourage healthy lifestyles and start the school day off with a boost of energy, but it also creates a stronger sense of community. The kids can get to know each other, foster relationships and build new ones. Parental involvement leads to happy and engaged kids. Walking enables kids to explore their own neighborhood, familiarize themselves with other neighborhoods, and discover the nature around them. As Colleen McKay Wharton, parent and organizer of the Highland Park walking school bus stated, “There are so many good things that can come out of a ridiculously simple idea of just walking to school!”

Although many of the students are walking to and from school in Highland Park, some parents are still driving their children to school, particularly for their primary and elementary school students. Although annual savings are realized for the school district by eliminating courtesy buses, these costs may be passed onto the parents who are driving their children to school thus increasing fuel costs, putting more cars on the road, creating traffic congestion and potential safety issues, and contributing to poorer air quality. Steps should be instituted to discourage driving and encourage walking and bicycling to school. Also, the school district should continue to work closely with the

borough to establish a long term plan to address and fix the hazardous areas so that all students may safely walk to school.

Highland Park is a small, unique town that can easily embrace walking because of its close proximity to the schools and Rutgers University, but challenges for the community still exist. As school budgets get tighter and leaner and transportation costs are whittled away each year, fewer students will be bused to school. Larger school districts throughout New Jersey certainly face greater challenges to getting their students to walk safely to school. However, they can learn from the positive results of Highland Park and make a plan with their community and municipality to get their students “on board” with walking and bicycling to school.

APPENDIX D: Summary of School District Interviews

County	School District	Increased/ Decreased/ Modified* Courtesy Busing	Subscription Busing?	Hazardous Routes?	Busing Outcomes	Other Info	Interview Date
Bergen	Englewood City	Modified	N	Y	Changed bus tiering		11/10/2011
Bergen	Franklin Lakes	Decreased	Y	Y	Initiated subscription busing.	As subscription costs increase, usage seems to decrease.	11/2/2011
Bergen	Paramus	Modified	N	Y	Modified service by tiering buses.	A load study identified some transportation cost savings through tiering and shifting school times.	11/10/2011
Burlington	Burlington Township	Increased	N	Y	Added a bus and a few stops due to higher elementary school enrollments and elimination of crossing guards.	Too many major roadways for kids to walk to school, crossing guards were eliminated.	11/3/2011
Burlington	Mount Laurel	Decreased	N	Y	Late buses no longer run every day, only once a week for elementary and twice a week for secondary schools.	PTAs and Education Foundation pay for courtesy buses.	10/30/2011
Cumberland	Millville	Increased	N	Y	Changed hazardous route boundaries & added courtesy busing for elementary school students.	Moved location for pre-K so more busing was needed.	11/14/2011
Cumberland	Vineland	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated some busing my increasing mileage for secondary schools	Grades 6-8 increased mileage from half mile to 1.5 mile, HS increased from a mile to 2 miles.	11/14/2011
Essex	Millburn	Increased	Y	N	Higher enrollments	May need to eliminate some buses if subscriptions do not cover costs.	11/6/2011
Mercer	Hamilton Township	Decreased	Y	Y	Eliminated courtesy for MS & HS students only.	MS students must live more than 2 miles from school, HS students more than 2.5 miles.	11/4/2011

* Modified busing indicates a change in services that did not result in increasing or decreasing bus services.

County	School District	Increased/ Decreased/ Modified* Courtesy Busing	Subscription Busing?	Hazardous Routes?	Busing Outcomes	Other Info	Interview date
Middlesex	Highland Park	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated all courtesy busing except for one hazardous bus.		10/4/2011
Middlesex	Sayreville	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated MS & HS courtesy busing .		11/17/2011
Middlesex	Woodbridge	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated MS & HS courtesy busing.	Tried to eliminate elementary courtesy busing but reinstated after one month due to unsafe walking conditions.	11/9/2011
Monmouth	Freehold Township	Decreased	N	Y	All students were bused but instituted state mileage requirement.	K-5 are bused if live more than a mile from school and 6-8 are bused if more than 1.5 miles from school.	11/15/2011
Monmouth	Long Branch City	Decreased	N	N	Changed mileage requirement for elementary students from half mile to a mile.	May increase mileage if more cuts needed. MS and HS students' mileage is the same as state requirement.	11/15/2011
Monmouth	Ocean Township	Modified	N	Y	Gradually increasing mileage for students, eliminated some bus stops.	Not purchasing any new buses. MS and HS students increased half mile to a mile and 1.5 miles, respectively.	11/15/2011
Monmouth	Upper Freehold	Decreased	Y	N	Initiated subscription busing.	Only half of the affected students signed up for subscription busing , more traffic at schools.	11/10/2011
Morris	Montville	Decreased	Y	Y	Initiated subscription busing.	May eliminate late busing if more cuts needed.	11/6/2011

* **Modified busing indicates a change in services that did not result in increasing or decreasing bus services.**

County	School District	Increased/ Decreased/ Modified* Courtesy Busing	Subscription Busing?	Hazardous Routes?	Busing Outcomes	Other Info	Interview date
Morris	Mount Olive	Modified	Y	N	Initiated subscription busing, condensed bus routes & stops.	Transportation cost savings by condensing bus stops and routes, fewer student enrollments.	11/3/2011
Morris	Parsippany-Troy Hills	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated courtesy busing for non hazardous students.	May consider subscription if more cost savings needed.	11/15/2011
Morris	West Morris	Decreased	Y	N	Replaced courtesy busing with subscription busing.	Fewer students paying for the service.	11/6/2011
Ocean	Barnegat Township	Decreased	N	Y	Only hazardous students are bused to school if students are less than remote from school.	Sold 10 buses.	11/2/2011
Ocean	Jackson	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated some courtesy busing for non hazardous students, consolidated bus stops.	identified other hazardous route eliminations contingent upon help from borough (guards, paths, etc.)	11/14/2011
Ocean	Stafford	Modified	N	Y	Condensed bus stops and developed community bus stops.	Eliminated one route.	11/15/2011
Somerset	Bedminster	Decreased	N	Y	Eliminated late buses.	All students are bused in the district.	11/6/2011
Somerset	Bernards Township	Modified	Y	N	Eliminated courtesy busing and instituted subscription busing, some late buses cut.		11/7/2011
Somerset	Branchburg	Modified	N	Y	Eliminated courtesy busing & instituted subscription last year but reinstated this year.	Parents were angry and not enough signed up for subscription busing.	11/4/2011
Sussex	Sparta	Decreased	Y	N	Instituted subscription busing 2 years ago but late buses still run for free.	Staggered starts times for schools to alleviate traffic congestion since not all subscribe.	11/4/2011

* **Modified busing indicates a change in services that did not result in increasing or decreasing bus services.**

APPENDIX E: Detailed Results of School District Interviews

Name of Official:

Position:

Interviewees included administrative members of the school district's transportation department such as Transportation Coordinator, Supervisor or Manager. In some of the districts where they no longer had a transportation administrator, the Business Administrator, Superintendent or Transportation Consultant was interviewed.

Are you the designated official for the school district responsible for making busing decisions?

Yes/No ***Yes, for all but five districts***

If not, who is? ***All five districts stated the Board of Education was responsible for making busing decisions.***

Questions:

1. If you consider all the different types of needs for your school district, how important is courtesy busing?

a. Very important	49
b. Somewhat important	3
c. Not very important	0
d. Not at all important	1
Not applicable	2

2. If you consider the students' transportation needs in your school district, how important is courtesy busing?

a. Very important	51
b. Somewhat important	3
c. Not very important	0
d. Not at all important	1

3. During the past years, many school districts have re-organized or modified their courtesy busing service for school children. Have you modified service in your school district?

a. Yes [Go to Question 5]	27
b. No [Go to Question 4]	27
c. Don't know [Go to Question 4]	0

4. Do you have any plans to modify service within the next year or two?
 - a. Yes **2**
 - b. No **43**
 - c. Don't know **10**

If Yes, what kind of modifications have you planned? ***Both hope to decrease service or modify services over time depending on budget constraints.***

[Go to Question 25]

5. Would you say you have:
 - a. Increased service? **[Go to Question 6] 3**
 - b. Decreased service? **[Go to Question 6] 14**
 - c. Modified service in some other way **[Go to Question 8] 9**
6. You said you have increased/decreased service in your district. Is that in terms of:
 - a. Number of routes? **3**
 - b. Number of buses? **9**
 - c. Both routes and buses? **7**
7. How many routes and buses were added/eliminated?
 - a. Routes= **1-10 routes**
 - b. Buses= **1-10 routes**

[SKIP Question 8, Go to Question 9]

8. Can you please describe how you modified service? ***Changed courtesy busing to subscription busing, condensed routes and bus stops, shifted school times, bus tiering.***
9. Do you have any hazardous routes designated by local law enforcement?
 - a. Yes **19**
 - b. No **7**
 - c. Don't know **0**

If YES, did any hazardous route get affected by service modification?

- a. Yes **2**
- b. No **24**
- c. Don't know **0**

If YES, which route or routes? ***Routes where courtesy busing was eliminated or reduced.***

10. What were the primary reasons for service modification? ***Budget not passing, cost savings, budget cuts, lower enrollments, less state aid.***
11. As a result of service modification, has there been an increase/decrease in the number of students served by courtesy busing?
- a. Yes **19**
 - b. No **2**
 - c. Don't know **5**

If YES, how many students have been affected? ***See chart below***

<u>School District</u>	<u># Students Affected</u>	<u>% students using Courtesy Busing</u>
Bedminster	50	25%
Bernards Township	300	20%
Branchburg	300	33%
Burlington Township	10	10%
Freehold	1000	36%
Hamilton Township	1000	36%
Jackson	30	60%
Long Branch City	1000	18%
Millburn	1200	50%
Millville City	300	67%
Montville	1100	52%
Mount Olive	1500	16%
Ocean Township	2500	45%
Parsippany	300	37%
Sayreville	200	10%
Sparta	300	7%
Upper Freehold	200	28%
Vineland	900	25%
West Morris	56	16%
Woodbridge	1500	22%

12. Has the modification of service affected all schools in your district equally?
- a. Yes **9**
 - b. No **10**
 - c. Don't know **7**

If No, which schools got affected most? ***Schools where most cuts were made, mostly the middle and high schools with fewer impact to elementary schools.***

13. What criteria did you use to decide how you would modify service? **State law mileage for remote students, age and grade level, hazardous/safety conditions, cost savings, budget cuts**
14. What reaction did you get from the students regarding service modification? **Confusion, concern**
15. What reaction did you get from the parents regarding service modification? **Outrage, anger, concern for safety, not happy but understood need for cuts, vote through ballot,**
16. What reaction did you get from the school administrators at affected schools? **Concern for student safety**

ANSWER QUESTIONS 17 THROUGH 25 ONLY IF YOU HAVE REDUCED SERVICE IN QUESTION 5. OTHERWISE, GO TO QUESTION 25.

17. Has service reduction affected all schools equally?
 - a. Yes **5**
 - b. No **6**
 - c. Don't know **3**

If No, what type of schools was affected most? **Middle and high schools, certain neighborhood schools**

18. How have the students adjusted to the reduced service?(Check all that apply)
 - a. Students are walking more often **5**
 - b. Students are bicycling more often **3**
 - c. Parents are driving their children more often **14**
 - d. Using any other method (specify)_____
19. Have you or the affected schools taken any steps to provide alternatives to courtesy busing to the students who are deprived of service because of the service reduction?
 - a. Yes **3**
 - b. No **9**
 - c. Don't know **2**

If YES, what steps have you or the schools taken? **Encourage car pools, walking school buses**

If NO, why not? **Not sure, wasn't asked to do so, wasn't a priority**

20. Have you and/or the affected schools taken any steps to enhance pedestrian/bicyclist safety around schools to protect the students from traffic accidents?
- a. Yes **6**
 - b. No **7**
 - c. Don't know **1**

If YES, what steps have you or the schools taken? **More crossing guards, designated drop off and pick up parking lots away from schools, some sidewalk improvements, bike racks installed, more traffic police during school starts and dismissals, paved a pathway to school.**
If NO, why not? **Lack of funding, lack of resources, no involvement from municipality.**

21. How important was funding in your decision to reduce service?
- a. The only reason for modification **12**
 - b. Very important **2**
 - c. Somewhat important **0**
 - d. Not very important **0**
 - e. Not at all important **0**
22. If additional resources were available, what steps would you take to enhance safety of walking/bicycling students from traffic accidents around schools? **More courtesy buses, more crossing guards, more sidewalks, traffic lights, flashing signals at crosswalks.**
23. What steps can schools or municipalities take to enhance safety of walking/bicycling students from traffic accidents around schools? **Build more sidewalks, improve sidewalks, add more crossing guards, traffic lights and signals, signs**
24. What can the state government do to address the issue of reduced service? **More funding, more state aid, decrease mileage for remote students, reimburse for hazardous buses.**

THANK YOU!

25. Recently there have been many reports in the media about reduction in courtesy busing for students in different parts of New Jersey. Are you aware of any of these reductions?
- a. Yes [Continue with Q26] **26**
 - b. No [THANK YOU!] **2**
26. What are the primary reasons for service reduction? **Budget cuts, cost savings, transportation budget is always considered first.**

27. How important is funding in these decisions to reduce service?
- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| a. Very important | 28 |
| b. Somewhat important | 0 |
| c. Not very important | 0 |
| d. Not at all important | 0 |
28. How have the reductions in service affected the students? ***Parents are probably driving their kids to school, parents are paying for the busing or being charged a fee for courtesy busing.***
29. How have the reductions affected the schools? ***Lots of traffic in and around the schools and on the nearby roads, parents are most likely not happy with the reductions – no one likes services being taken away after receiving them for so long.***
30. How have the reductions affected the traffic around the schools? ***Lots of traffic***
31. Have the reductions made some students vulnerable to traffic accidents because they are now walking or bicycling to school instead of taking the bus?
- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| a. Yes | 20 |
| b. No | 0 |
| c. Don't know | 8 |
32. What steps can school districts take to further enhance the safety of students who walk or bicycle to school? ***More crossing guards, walking buses, more police around the schools, address traffic around schools.***
33. What steps can schools take to further enhance the safety of students who walk or bicycle to school? ***More crossing guards, walking buses, more police around the schools, address traffic around schools.***
34. What steps can school districts take to address the overall issue of reduced courtesy busing? ***Take a look at all aspects of busing to see if there are other areas they can make cuts.***
35. What steps can schools take to address the overall issue of reduced courtesy busing? ***Not much is under their control.***
36. What steps can the state government take to address the overall issue of reduced courtesy busing? ***Hazardous busing should be funded by the state.***

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

APPENDIX F: Parsippany-Troy Hills Grid to Determine Hazardous Roadways (with and without walkways)

Grid to determine hazardous roadways

Grid to apply to roads with walkways only										Grid A	
	See Chart	See Chart	Add 25	Add 5	Add 5	Add 5	Add 5	Add 5	A total of 40 plus is hazardous		
Road or road section description	Speed	Volume	*Specific	W/LSD	Drop off	W/O ASL	Total	Determination/ Date			
							0.00				
							0.00				
							0.00				
							0.00				
							0.00				
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							0.00				
							0.00				
							0.00				
							0.00				

Summary explanations should be included.

AM Peak Hr. Volume
Up to 500 = 0
501 to 1000 = 5
1001 to 1500 = 10
1501 to 2000 = 15
2001 to 2500 = 20
2501 to 3000 = 25
3001 to 3500 = 30
3501 to 4000 = 35
4001 to 4500 = 40
4501 and up = 45

Speed Limit
25 mph = 0
30 mph = 5
35 mph = 10
40 mph = 15
45 mph = 25
50 mph = 40
55mph+ =45

*** Specific :** Any item such as an unguarded dangerous crossing, highway crossing, etc.

W/LSD - with limited sight distance
W/O ASL - without adequate street lighting

Please consult the glossary for definition of terms

Grid to determine hazardous roadways

[illegible]