



## CSIS California School Information Services

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November 20, 2009

Joseph A. Ovick, Ed.D., Superintendent  
Contra Costa County Office of Education  
77 Santa Barbara Road  
Pleasant Hill, California 94523

Dear Superintendent Ovick:

The purpose of this management letter is to provide you with the findings and recommendations developed by the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) for the Contra Costa County Office of Education.

In August 2009, the county office entered into a study agreement with FCMAT to perform the following:

1. Review contracts with Durham Transportation and make recommendations for improving cost effectiveness.
2. Review IEP process and assure appropriate services are provided to students that require related services, such as transportation.

FCMAT visited the county office and the Contra Costa SELPA on November 9-10, 2009 to review documents and interview providers and special education transportation clients. This management letter is the result of that effort.

## Findings and Recommendations

### Transportation Contract

The Contra Costa County Office of Education recently signed a three-year contract with Durham School Services effective on September 1, 2009 for special education transportation. This contract has stipulated prices for year one and two and an inflator for the third year. This index is based on the Consumer Price Index increase for the cities of San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose from July 1 to June 30 and must be between 2% and 3.5%. The contract can be extended for a maximum of two additional years giving the Contra Costa County Office of Education five years maximum on this contract.

#### FCMAT

Joel D. Montero, Chief Executive Officer

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The contract includes the customary protections for the county office, including a limit on the age of buses. The contractor cannot use buses manufactured before 1995. This is a reasonable age because it allows the contractor to bid a lower price than a contract requiring newer buses. The document also requires a spare bus factor of 10%, which is a standard feature of transportation contracts. The county office can inspect the buses, and the contract requires these vehicles to be maintained in excellent condition.

The contract requires drivers to maintain the appropriate licenses and receive all the training necessary to properly and professionally perform their duties. Drivers must be evaluated annually, and the county office has the right to inspect evaluations. The contractor must have a 10% substitute driver factor. Durham is required to provide the mandatory school bus evacuation drills and perform routing. The established routing parameters for ride times generally fall within the norms used by educational agencies across the state.

Another provision allows the county office to charge the contractor liquidated damages for poor performance. The county office can charge \$100 per day for each child that is not transported as required and \$50 for every bus route that is 15 minutes early or late. The previous contract included a provision to charge a set amount of liquidated damages each month based on a formula established several years ago. The new contract requires the contractor to notify the county office staff when service lapses meet the established criteria.

The contract requires every bus to have functioning two-way radio; however, the county office does not monitor radio transmissions. The county office staff should have a two-way radio to monitor the contractor's transmissions and identify liquidated damages. This will also prepare the staff to respond to school and parent concerns.

The new contract was bid on a per-student basis at a cost of \$48.95 per day for ambulatory students and \$70.54 for students using wheelchairs. Because the previous contract provided for the county office to be billed based on the number of buses and the hours that buses were in service each day, there was no incentive for the contractor to route efficiently. The new contract provides this incentive.

Participating school districts sign a contract with the county office to receive special education transportation service under the Durham contract. The participating school districts perceive the transportation service as safe and timely. Problems are quickly resolved.

In the 2008-09 school year, Durham operated 47 routes for the county office and 10 for the John Swett Unified School District. In the 2009-10 school year, that number decreased to 44 routes combined, demonstrating the benefits of the new pricing structure.

The Annual Report of Pupil Transportation, or Form TRAN, is a document submitted annually to the California Department of Education. This report indicates that in the 2007-08 school year, 394 county office students were transported on 44 routes at a cost of \$1.23 per mile and \$3,239

per student. The 2008-09 report indicates that 341 students were transported on 47 routes at a cost \$1.52 per mile and \$3,734 per student. The TRAN report indicates that the county office operates a comparatively efficient service at a relatively low cost.

Special education school transportation costs can be mitigated by managing bell times and program locations. Although this is always a challenge, the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) and participating school districts should locate classes as close as possible to where most students live, minimizing traveling distances and costs. In this county, programs should be regionally distributed to minimize long commutes on busy freeways. Bell-time coordination also can result in more efficient routing and bus use.

## Recommendations

*The county office should:*

1. Purchase a two way-radio to monitor the bus communication of the contractor.
2. Closely monitor lapses of service to charge for liquidated damages when appropriate.
3. Explore modifications in special education program placement and bell time coordination to increase efficiency and minimize cost.

## IEP Process

The county office receives transportation request forms from participating school districts and forwards them to the contractor, which routes the students.

The county office has developed a number of forms to help school district personnel determine eligibility for school transportation as a related service in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process and forward pertinent information to the Transportation Department and the contractor.

The county office also developed a transportation eligibility criteria form to help the special education program staff determine eligibility for transportation. Other forms include emergency and medical information as well as emergency contact information.

School district staff members who routinely participate in IEP meetings realize that transportation is not a right but a related service that must be appropriately determined. The staff closely monitors eligibility for school transportation service and appropriately assigns school bus service.

This concludes FCMAT's work for the Contra Costa County Office of Education regarding special education transportation. As you know, FCMAT has entered into a separate study agreement to review several aspects of the Contra Costa County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). You should receive the exit letter for that facet of our work shortly and the complete report within several weeks.

We trust that the information in this management letter will be beneficial to all concerned. Please let us know if there is anything else we can do for your county office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William P. Gillaspie".

William P. Gillaspie, Ed.D.  
Chief Management Analyst