

December 1, 2005

TO: District Superintendents

FROM: Inez M. Tenenbaum
State Superintendent of Education

SUBJECT: July 2006: Required Centralized Overnight Parking Of School Buses

Effective July 1, 2006, the State Department of Education (SDE) will require all school districts to utilize centralized parking overnight and during the school day for state-owned school buses. Parking facilities must be hard surfaced and should be secured with lockable fencing and lighting. Bus drivers' use of the fleet for personal transportation to and from work can no longer be justified economically. Although our primary reasons are to reduce the burden on our maintenance professionals and budget, districts using centralized parking have also experienced significant management benefits.

To insure the operating safety of each vehicle, our aging state school bus fleet continues to require more preventive maintenance, major component replacement, and inspections. Accomplishing these tasks requires more and more work time from an already over-burdened staff. The SDE has tried to handle these additional demands by having shop personnel work overtime. Not only is overtime labor a problem for the SDE's under-funded budget, but the strain also creates personnel and safety issues. The SDE has also encouraged districts to centralize school bus parking. Centralized parking has proven to be very effective in maximizing productivity and service management for both the SDE and the districts. In addition, in some districts utilizing centralized parking, we have documented a significant decrease in mileage.

The SDE has analyzed the situation and concluded that the SDE policy of allowing school bus drivers to park the state bus that they drive at their residence overnight must end. In addition, drivers will no longer be allowed to use state buses as personal transport during the school day. In districts where the buses are parked in a central location overnight and during the school day, the mechanics are able to accomplish substantially more work than those that are parked overnight and during the day at non-centralized locations. Centralized parking allows mechanics to spend more of their time repairing and inspecting buses.

Better use of state maintenance personnel and improved maintenance services are not the only reasons for the centralized parking; districts can greatly improve service management and security. Districts should consider the following list of management improvements that are possible when all buses are in one or a few central locations.

- ◆ Supervisory staff offices can more easily be placed at these locations to oversee and manage the bus drivers and vehicles.
- ◆ Supervisors can directly monitor when buses leave and return from their routes. This will allow driver work time to be better monitored, leading to more accurate control of payroll costs.
- ◆ When a regular driver does not show for work on time, a substitute driver can be immediately assigned. Substitute drivers can be stationed at the parking facility.

- ◆ Districts with centralized parking experience quicker response when regular route buses have mechanical problems. This faster response results in more on-time student transportation.
- ◆ When available, spare buses can be parked nearby in the central lot.
- ◆ Buses will be more secure:
 - The area can more easily be fenced, locked, and lighted.
 - Secure locations offer better protection from possible terrorist threats.
 - Many situations resulting in damages to or by buses arise from parking at private homes.
 - District liability can decrease because children are not being allowed to play on buses or around them.
- ◆ Districts using centralized parking have more flexibility in assigning drivers to routes; route assignments do not need to be made based on where the drivers live. Greater flexibility is important when districts want to reassign drivers to deal with personnel, student behavior, or other issues.
- ◆ Buses may be better ready for route and permit service because the SDE can service, fuel, and repair buses even when school is not in session (district holidays).
- ◆ The district can verify possession of each bus at least twice each day, avoiding the possibility of a bus being missing for hours without the knowledge of the transportation supervisor.
- ◆ Should a sleeping student be left on a bus, the bus will end its route in a central secure parking facility; the parking may be in the same area as a district transportation office.
- ◆ Bus drivers have a personal source of transport for the home-to-work trip. Having their own transportation makes it less likely the driver would use a school bus for unauthorized trips/stops.
- ◆ Centralized parking allows the district to institute better management of pre- and post-trip inspection processes and records.
- ◆ District supervisory personnel may be able to quickly identify the existence of a major maintenance failure before the bus leaves the parking lot.
- ◆ Centralized parking reduces the opportunity for bus damage and lost operation time that may occur with parking in private property (nails in tires, hitting limbs and other objects, and lights and other battery dependent systems being left on).
- ◆ The opportunity for damage to the private property on which a bus is parked (e.g., bus fluid leaks, weight of bus cracks driveways and culverts, bus hits an object) is reduced.
- ◆ One location allows the district to institute better management of cameras and other district equipment used on the buses.

To better utilize personnel and take advantage of the above opportunities, the SDE is requiring all school districts to centrally park state school buses overnight and during the school day effective July 1, 2006. We are providing this notice at this time to allow school districts to take this requirement into account during the budget preparation process for next fiscal year. To assist in this requirement, the SDE is offering unused parking areas at existing shop facilities to districts for use as a district parking facility. The no-cost lease of SDE property will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The district will be required to secure the leased area and meet all related regulations. A number of school districts are already taking

advantage of this lease option (Berkeley, Charleston, Greenville, Lexington One, Richland One, and Orangeburg Four districts).

There may be unusual situations in which the benefits to the SDE of permitting at-home parking or midday use will outweigh the benefits of centralized parking. The Office of Transportation may consider case-by-case requests pursuant to State Board of Education Regulation 43-80-L. Such requests must include economic justification and how the district intends to ensure proper servicing of buses. The SDE is, however, considering whether to request changes to this regulation to further limit these uses.

My staff will be available to assist in your planning for this requirement and to answer any questions you might have.

F:\USERS\TRN\Correspondence\From Tudor\Districts\Central Parking Memo Draft.doc