

NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SURVEY

100 Walnut Street, Newtonville, MA 02460

AREA CODE (617) 559-9025

Office of Business, Finance and Planning

Memorandum

TO: Dr. Jeffrey Young, Superintendent
School Committee

FROM: Sandra Guryan, Assistant Superintendent for Business, Finance and Planning

DATE: April 7, 2004

RE: Transportation Survey Results

During March 2004, three surveys were conducted as a part of the review of the current bus fee system including:

- Newton Public Schools Bus Fee Survey
- Newton Principals' Safety Survey
- Newton Police Traffic Safety Survey

Detailed in this memo are explanations of each of the three surveys, followed by a bulleted summary of each survey's key data findings. Also included is a recent survey of bus fees from area school districts.

Newton Public Schools Bus Fee Survey: Explanation

The Newton Public Schools Bus Fee Survey was launched on March 8, 2004 and closed on March 19, 2004. The survey was publicized through a press release and notices sent home with all students. A total of 1,006 surveys were completed, including 1,002 via the internet and 4 by mail. The survey was administered by *Zoomerang*, and because Newton is a subscribing member, there was no additional cost to the district for the survey. All 1,006 responses were included in the final *Zoomerang* results. The survey allowed for quick responses and automatic tabulation of multiple choice questions. The survey was internet-based and located on the School Committee's website at newtonpublicschools.com. As a built in safeguard, only one survey was accepted from any one computer. The survey consisted of 16 closed response questions and 1 open response question.

Principals' Safety Survey: Explanation

The Principals' Safety Survey was e-mailed to the 21 principals of the Newton Public Schools. All 21 principals responded to the survey. The survey consisted of three closed response questions each with an open response option to elaborate on the topics. The survey was designed, administered and tabulated by internal staff.

Police Traffic Safety Survey: Explanation

The Police Traffic Safety Survey was completed by the Traffic Bureau of the Newton Police Department. The survey was compiled from official records and observations of the officers assigned to school neighborhoods. The observation period described by the survey was from September 4, 2003 through March 31, 2004. The survey consisted of six questions, four allowing individual answers tailored to each school, and two requiring written answers.

Newton Public Schools Bus Fee Survey: Results of Questions 1-16, closed response questions

- 51% of survey respondents purchased bus passes in 2003-04.
- Of respondents, 14% had children who walked to school instead of taking the bus, 37% chose to drive their children, and 9% used some combination of the previous two options.
- Of respondents, 33% of elementary school students, 71% of middle school students and 48% of high school students rode the bus round-trip to school three or more days per week.
- 14% of respondents had children who rode the bus to an after school program.
- 27% of survey respondents were interested in purchasing one-way tickets.
- 36% of survey respondents were interested in purchasing one-use tickets.
- 33% of respondents would expect to pay no more and no less than the average fee from surrounding districts.
- 47% of respondents would expect to pay less than the average fee from surrounding districts.
- 60% of respondents did not agree with the statement, "...the bus fee is a good way to help bridge the school district's budget gap." 29% of respondents agreed with the statement, 9% were unsure and 2% did not respond to the question.
- 71% of respondents were aware of the fee waiver process.
- 58% of respondents were aware of the distance calculation process.
- 34% of respondents were aware of the installment payment option.

Newton Public Schools Bus Fee Survey: Results of Question 17, written commentary

- 60% (608) of survey respondents wrote a comment.
- 73 comments expressed support for bus fees in various ways.
- The most frequent comment (71) was that one-way tickets or pay per ride would be helpful.
- The second most frequent comment (63) was that the bus fee is not a good budget solution.
- 42 commented that the bus fee was not charged equitably across the system.
- 42 commented that redistricted families should not pay a fee.

Principals' Safety Survey: Results of Questions 1-3, closed response questions

- 3 of 21 schools do not have Newton school buses.
- 16 of 18 principals from schools with busing have not seen a noticeable change this year versus last in the amount of automobile traffic around school or in the number of walkers to and from school.
- 16 of 18 principals from schools with busing said that the school bus fee does not seem to have impacted student safety.

Principals' Safety Survey: Results of Questions 1-3, written commentary

- Ten comments expressed concerns with on-going violations of school traffic safety procedures in bus drop off zones, blue zones, driveways, illegal double-parking areas, and construction sites.
- Two comments expressed concern about students walking to school via the Massachusetts Turnpike crosswalk.
- One comment stressed the importance of encouraging students to walk.
- One comment said that the school teaches and practices bus safety procedures.

Police Traffic Safety Survey: Results of Questions 1-6

- Police noted changes in traffic patterns around blue zones (parent drop off areas) in nine schools: Bowen, Burr, Countryside, Franklin, Horace Mann, Mason-Rice, Memorial-Spaulding, Ward, and Zervas.
- Police noted illegal parking at five schools: Williams, Brown, Oak Hill, North, and South.
- Police have received more calls from principals regarding blue zone enforcement.
- Police have received calls from parents with concerns about safety issues in front of schools.
- There are 61 crossing guards this year as compared to 62 last year.
- Police note no major problems on buses.
- There have been fewer traffic or pedestrian accidents this year as compared to recent years.
- Police will conduct a count of all walkers by traffic supervisors in April.