Implementation of the New Student Transportation Funding System

Summary

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is required to provide the Washington State Legislature with quarterly updates on the progress of the implementation of the new student transportation funding system referred to as STARS (Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System). Prior status reports are available on OSPI’s website at: http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/Reports.aspx.

Background

The 2010 Washington State Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 2776, which set the implementation date for STARS as September 1, 2011. The General Instructions for Data Collection and the Detailed Guidance for Data Collection are available on the OSPI website, under “STARS Reference Material” at: http://www.k12.wa.us/transportation/STARS/default.aspx. The STARS system requires three reports per school year with the first due at the end of October, the second due February 1 and the third due May 1. The results of the reports are available on OSPI’s website on the STARS page referenced above, under “Quarterly Reports.”

Status Update

STARS was implemented in September 2011 as required by the Legislature for the 2011–12 school year. The year’s final student count and route data report period ended on May 1. The regional transportation coordinators and OPSI staff are continuing their review of submitted data and are contacting district staff to resolve identified concerns. When school districts did not submit data in accordance with instructions, their data was corrected. School districts are required to submit their annual total mileage for the motor pool vehicles used in to-and-from school transportation no later than July 15 of each year.

At the end of June 2012, an additional distribution of funding will take place. Many districts that were funded in excess of expenditures under the previous system saw a reduction in their allocation for this year. The statewide total for this reduction in allocation was $929,238. In
addition, many districts submitted corrections to their data for the fall and winter reporting periods. These corrections changed the identified underfunding (the difference between the full STARS allocation and the minimum transition allocation) by $1,089,070. The total of these two amounts plus some other minor reporting adjustments will be distributed on a pro-rated basis at the end of June to districts with exhibited underfunding (the same methodology used to allocate supplemental funding in February 2012).

RCW 28A.160.180(2) requires that each district's annual student transportation allocation shall be “based on a regression analysis of the number of basic and special students transported and as many other site characteristics that are identified as being statistically significant.” Two additional site characteristics have been identified as significant: (1) the total number of students transported per mile of roadway within the district and (2) the number of miles of roadway within the district per district land area. OSPI will evaluate these factors in the 2012–13 data and if they remain statistically significant, will include them in the calculation of the transportation allocation in the 2013–14 school year. Including these two additional factors in the allocation calculation would not require any additional reporting by school districts and would require only relatively routine adjustments to the STARS computer infrastructure.

RCW 28A.160.117 requires that the regional transportation coordinators review the transportation operations of all school districts with a calculated efficiency rating less than 90 percent, with a report to the Legislature required in December of each year. A full set of data collected through STARS with corresponding expenditure data will be available in the middle of January 2013. Any other data set would not reflect accurate efficiency ratings.

In May 2012, the regional transportation coordinators received training in the evaluation of school district transportation operations. This training was provided by Management Partnership Services, the company that developed the STARS methodology. This training will ensure that all evaluations will be conducted in a standardized manner that focuses on the identification of methods to reduce transportation system expenditures.

For more information about the new funding system for student transportation, please contact Allan J. Jones, Director, Student Transportation at 360-725-6120, or at allan.jones@k12.wa.us.