



January 21, 2022

Prairie Families:

Throughout the year, we have kept you apprised of the challenges we are having with bus driver shortages. These shortages are not just affecting CCSD but are also impacting our neighboring districts, state and nation. You might be aware of some Iowa districts canceling school due to bus driver shortages. This is a situation we want to avoid, but each day is a challenge.

To date, we have implemented several strategies to attempt to address this shortage with the least amount of disruption to regular operations. This has included reducing the number of routes by 2, restricting the ability to ride different buses for drop off and pick-up, active methods to recruit new drivers and pulling mechanics and office staff to drive routes. Since the start of the year, we have hired 5 new drivers but have lost 15.

To mitigate the potential of closures or extensive delays, we are making a very tough temporary decision which will allow us to reduce 3 more routes for the remainder of the year.

Effective Monday, February 7, 2022, school start times for elementary (including PK and AK), Prairie High School and Students in grades K-4 and 10-12 will be pushed 15 minutes later. This means all start times and dismissal times will be 15 minutes later than they have been this year. Bus riders will be impacted by some re-routing also.

We apologize for the inconvenience of this change. Please know that it was a last resort solution to ensure we do not fall into a situation where we need to cancel school because of driver shortages. We are hopeful that this change will be temporary and we can return to regular start and dismissal times next year.

Potential Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Aside from driving a bus, is there anything our families can do to help?

A: Three key items to assist us would be:

- A) Help us recruit drivers and/or sub-drivers, direct interested parties to the website, our transportation director or HR, when in doubt also feel free to direct them to the main District number.
- B) As we have learned throughout the pandemic, when services are impacted by worker shortages, the people still working sometimes shoulder the impact of the frustration over service impacts. We are thankful to our bus drivers, aides, office staff and mechanics that are still with us and providing this valuable and essential service.

Please help us by thanking them for their work as they are part of the solution and highly valued by our District.

- C) Be on the lookout for changing bus pickup and drop-off times in the Infinite Campus Portal, the goal is to have routes finalized by February 3.

Q: What are some other impacts of the shortage this year?

A: Two big areas have been impacted:

- A) In order to provide transportation to activities, we have had to contract charter buses. If no charters are available, we sometimes have to cancel events requiring travel, especially at the lower levels. While we have buses available for these routes, all drivers are driving regular routes at the end of the day and cannot take the activity routes.
- B) Availability of office staff at transportation to answer phones during routes has been impacted because many days these individuals are driving.

Q: How does this 15-minute change affect start times at various locations?

Prairie Point, Creek and Edge

Start and end times are not affected. Current start and end times remain.

Prairie High School

NEW start and end time: 9:15-4:00 (previously 9:00-3:45)

Elementary Schools (parents may drop off students after 8:50)

Crest, Ridge, View

NEW start and end time: 9:15-4:00 (previously 9:00-3:45)

Hill & Heights

NEW start and end time: 9:15 - 3:50 (previously 9:00-3:35)

Preschool (All Sites)

New start and end time: 8:55-11:45 AM preschool (previously 8:40-11:30)

New start and end time 1:00-3:50 PM preschool (previously 12:45-3:35)

Full Day Preschool will remain same time 8:30-3:30

Q: Why is it so hard to find bus drivers?

A: One great thing about driver requirements and background checks in Iowa is that they are very stringent. However, these requirements make it challenging to quickly onboard new drivers due to the nature of the licensing and training requirements.

Q: I heard another state contacted the National Guard. Why don't we contact them or another agency?

A: Certification for bus drivers varies across states. The certification is specialized beyond the commercial driver's license. Additionally, all sectors are facing driver shortages; therefore, securing drivers from another location has not been feasible due to worker availability.

Q: What other alternatives were considered to address this issue?

A: There is very little that can be done to reduce routes without significant impacts, but other options were explored and the 15-minute change was deemed to be the least impactful to the highest number of riders. Other options included hard surface roads for the remainder of the year (can save 1 route), which would be an ongoing hardship to those students and families. We also explored walking zones for students within the walking area allowed by Iowa law (2 miles) which we did not feel was a safe option to quickly implement at this time of year.

Q: Do we have more challenges than other districts?

A: NO, but each district has unique challenges. All area districts are facing similar shortages and are making changes, trying to keep those changes from significantly impacting families. Our unique challenges are related to our central campus, which usually is a benefit in so many areas. All routes have to go to the edge of our district and back to the center each day for two AM and two PM routes. This is why the extra time is needed to actually reduce routes. We also bus all students because of the sidewalk connectivity to campus at this time.