

Charles County • Task Force
**To Study School Bus Operator
Contracts and Wages**



September 1, 2023

The Honorable Arthur Ellis
Chair, Senate Select Committee No. 8, Charles, St. Mary's and Calvert Counties
301 James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Debra Davis
Chair, Charles County House Delegation
204 Lowe House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Final Report on the Charles County Task Force to Study School Operator Wages and Contracts

Dear Chairman Ellis and Davis:

In accordance with Chapter 790 of the 2023 Maryland General Assembly Session, the members of this Task Force are pleased to present this final report on the Task Forces efforts to examine issues related to student transportation, bus driver wages, and multi-year contracts for bus contractors in Charles County.

This final report offers research, analysis, best practices, and recommendations from the Task Force members for your examination and consideration. We look forward to your review of this final report and will be pleased to respond to any questions.

Sincerely,



Reuben Collins
Chair, Charles County Task Force to Study School Bus Operator Wages and Contracts

cc:

Members, Charles County Senate Delegation
Members, Charles County House Delegation
Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services, Mandated Reports Specialist

Task Force Membership

- *One member of the Senate of Maryland who represents Charles County, appointed by the President of the Senate;*
 - The Honorable Arthur Ellis
- *One member of the House of Delegates who represents Charles County, appointed by the Speaker of the House;*
 - The Honorable Edith J. Patterson
- *One Charles County Commissioner, designated by the President of the Commission Commissioner;*
 - Commissioner Reuben Collins, President, (*Chair of the Task Force)
- *The Chair of the Charles County Board of Education, or the Chair's designee;*
 - Michael K. Lukas, Chairperson
- *The Superintendent of Charles County Public Schools, or the Superintendent's designee;*
 - Maria V. Navarro, Ed.D, Superintendent
- *Three members of the Charles County Bus Contractors Association, designated by the President of the Association; and*
 - Mark Koch, President, Charles County School Bus Contractors Association
 - Paula Stone
 - Adam Dyson
- *Three members of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 689, designated by the President of the Union.*
 - Paul Tyler, General Counsel
 - Earl Beatty
 - Leah Anderson

Report Background

During the 2023 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly, the legislature enacted Senate Bill 491 (CH0790) entitled: [Charles County - Task Force to Study School Bus Operator Contracts and Wages](#).

As originally introduced, the legislation would have required that the Charles County Board of Education be considered a joint employer of certain school bus contractor employees. Further, the Board would have been required to include representatives who reflect the interests of school bus contractor employees in negotiations with school bus contractors over any master school bus service contract.

However, the legislation was amended by the General Assembly via a Sponsor proposed amendment that instead created a Task Force to review and study the issues. The Task Force was structured with the following membership:

- One member of the Senate of Maryland who represents Charles County, appointed by the President of the Senate;
- One member of the House of Delegates who represents Charles County, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- One Charles County Commissioner, designated by the President of the Commission Commissioner;
- The Chair of the Charles County Board of Education, or the Chair's designee;
- The Superintendent of Charles County Public Schools, or the Superintendent's designee;
- Three members of the Charles County Bus Contractors Association, designated by the President of the Association; and
- Three members of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 689, designated by the President of the Union.

The charge of the Task Force was to:

1. Study issues related to student transportation, bus driver wages, and multi-year contracts for bus contractors in Charles County, and
2. Research best practices in surrounding jurisdictions related to the facilitation of student transportation.
3. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Charles County Delegation to the General Assembly by September 1, 2023.

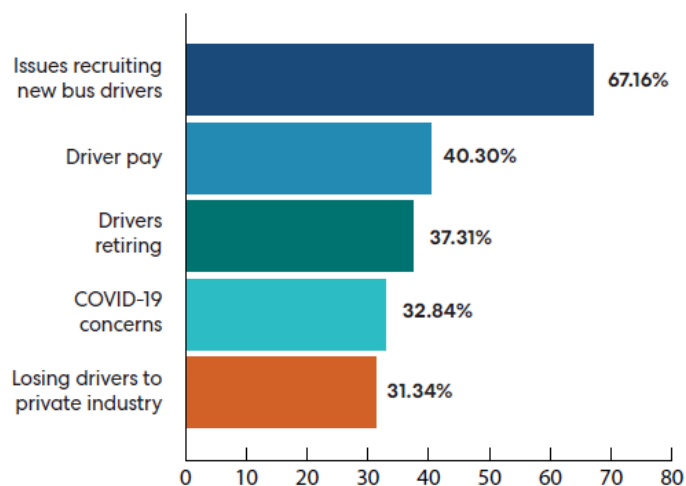
The legislation required that the Maryland Department of Labor provide staff for the Task Force. This final report will focus on the work of the Task Force, analyze some of the understood constraints on the bus operator workforce and review potential best practices and or recommendations to address the identified challenges.

The State of the School Bus Operator Workforce

School Bus operators often represent the first interaction for a student with the education system on a typical school day. Bus operators are responsible for the safe, reliable, and efficient transportation of students to and from their schools as well as facilitating transportation for field trips, sporting events, and other extracurricular activities.

School systems across the nation are grappling with a workforce shortage of bus operators. One national survey indicates a rise in this acute workforce challenge¹. The survey, conducted annually, targets school transportation professionals and educational leaders across the country. In 2021, 78% of respondents reported that the school bus operator shortage had constrained their transportation operations, in 2022 that number rose drastically to 88%, and in 2023 it rose again to 92%.

Top 5 reasons for districts' bus driver shortage



The reasons for the growing shortage of operators are variable and appear to differ regionally and sometimes vary based on the age of the worker. The chart to the left illustrates the disparate nature of the issues. Some of the responses from transportation professionals to the 2022 report, referenced previously, highlight the varying and complex nature of this challenge, to include the challenge of an aging workforce, which while it appears to more acutely affect this occupation, it is a challenge impacting the workforce nationally amongst all industries.²

¹[https://21880659.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/21880659/2022%20HopSkipDrive%20State%20of%20School%20Transportation%20Report%20\(3\).pdf](https://21880659.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/21880659/2022%20HopSkipDrive%20State%20of%20School%20Transportation%20Report%20(3).pdf)

² Nagarajan, N. Renuga, and Andrew Sixsmith. "Policy initiatives to address the challenges of an older population in the workforce." *Ageing International* 48.1 (2023): 41-77.

“

[The bus driver shortage] is a problem across the country that will force districts to increase walking distance, do group stops so they can cut times to do double routes, load buses to capacity and more.

Wayne Winters
Director of Transportation

“

Driver morale is a huge issue. Drivers are having to bend over backward to help cover routes or work longer hours. There is also a fear of COVID and other related illnesses that is causing older retired people who would have normally wanted to drive for us to withhold from applying. We also have a shortage of substitutes, which is causing myself, the supervisor/director and mechanics and other staff to cover routes almost daily.

Taylor Perrington Ashley
Supervisor of Transportation

“

Right now, the majority of the people driving our buses are older. Many are retired and doing this to supplement their retirement. This is fine but there is a certain amount of concern attached to it, as well. There are more health concerns with this generation and yet they are the ones transporting our younger generations. There need to be incentives for individuals in their 30s to 50s. We never know from one day to the next when we're simply not going to be able to transport on any given route. One regular driver sickness and no subs means we can't transport a group of students. This is not good because people depend on our service, and it's only a matter of when it will happen.

Angela Marshall
Transportation Director

Source: *The State of School Transportation 2022 Report, HopSkipDrive*

However, it is recognized that the link between educational outcomes and effective and reliable transportation is a critical one. Research suggests that students from vulnerable populations are more likely to be reliant on public transportation and often have the highest rate of absenteeism. Without reliable public transportation this correlation between transportation and school absenteeism could be compounded.

Bus Operator Workforce In Charles County

Charles County employs a hybrid model for its transportation workforce, whereby CCPS employs some system-owned drivers, but contracts a majority of its operations out to 24 privately owned school bus contractors. There are 295 route buses on the road each day. CCPS owns and operates 31 buses, constituting 11% of the routes. The 24 privately owned contractors make up the other 264 buses and 89% of the routes. The sum of this model transports over 23,000 students daily and covers 6.5 million miles during a school year.³

The chart below provides a FY 22 breakdown of system-owned vs. contractor-owned buses by County.

³ CCPS Presentation to the Charles County Board of Education, Charles County Public Schools: *Bus Transportation Past, Current and Future*, (2023)

School System	Public Owned Buses	Contractor Owned Buses	Total Buses
Allegany	20	83	103
Anne Arundel	55	586	641
Baltimore City	34	180	214
Baltimore County	664	144	808
Calvert	0	134	134
Caroline	25	32	57
Carroll	0	256	256
Cecil	9	132	141
Charles FY 2022	11 (31 buses FY 23)	285 (264 buses FY 23)	296 (295 buses FY 23)
Dorchester	8	46	54
Frederick	341	0	341
Garrett	0	63	63
Harford	96	347	443
Howard	0	467	467
Kent	15	5	20
Montgomery	1278	0	1278
Prince George's	1028	0	1028
Queen Anne's	19	73	92
St. Mary's	9	193	202
Somerset	0	32	32
Talbot	36	0	36
Washington	137	46	183
Wicomico	27	89	116
Worcester	0	69	69
Total State	3812	3262	7074

Source: FY 2022 End-of-Year Pupil Transportation Report, Maryland State Department of Education

Factors Constraining the School Bus Operator Workforce in Charles County

This Task Force was charged with examining the challenges specifically represented by the Charles County system. Members spent a considerable amount of time and discussion reviewing the key challenges facing Charles County in an effort to be able to better identify the core issues the body should address through its various meetings.

The Task Force identified four (4) core factors that they felt needed to be examined in order for them to be successful in their charge. The factors were (1) Driver Compensation; (2) Contract Structure; (3) Charles County Public School (CCPS) Policy - as it related to driver safety and student discipline; and (4) Joint Employer Status.

The Task Force invited jurisdictions of similar scope and size to Charles County to present to the body on their school transportation operations. Along with the information from those presentations, the body would review and examine existing data and research to study the key factors identified.

Driver Compensation

Wages

Wages are a leading factor in the recruitment and retention of school bus operators. Typically, school bus operators employed by a contractor are paid an hourly rate based on their route schedule. The body reviewed wage data to examine how Charles County compared to surrounding jurisdictions and relative to the state. The chart below illustrates data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

Wages for Maryland School Bus Operators

Area	Median Wage			Entry Wage		Experienced Wage	
	Hourly	Annual	8-hr equiv.	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual
Maryland	\$18.44	\$38,347	\$147.52	\$15.54	\$32,323	\$22.65	\$47,106
Anne Arundel	\$18.44	\$38,347	\$147.52	\$16.76	\$34,866	\$20.97	\$43,624
Baltimore City	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Baltimore County	\$18.44	\$38,347	\$147.52	\$15.72	\$32,695	\$21.33	\$44,376
Carroll	\$18.21	\$37,885	\$145.68	\$16.48	\$34,271	\$20.37	\$42,370
Frederick	\$23.83	\$49,572	\$190.64	\$19.62	\$40,805	\$30.44	\$63,308
Howard	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lower Shore (Somerset, Wicomico, Worcester)	\$15.99	\$33,251	\$127.92	\$12.68	\$26,365	\$19.70	\$40,973
Montgomery	\$18.44	\$38,347	\$147.52	\$13.31	\$27,695	\$22.07	\$45,900
Prince George's	\$23.83	\$49,569	\$190.64	\$19.88	\$41,345	\$29.94	\$62,269
Southern MD (Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's)	\$22.03	\$45,820	\$176.24	\$16.80	\$34,952	\$23.62	\$49,122
Susquehanna (Cecil, Harford)	\$17.76	\$36,936	\$142.08	\$16.18	\$33,645	\$20.34	\$42,298
Upper Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot)	\$17.95	\$37,333	\$143.60	\$13.87	\$28,860	\$21.28	\$44,271
Western MD (Allegany, Garrett, Washington)	\$18.73	\$38,968	\$149.84	\$15.21	\$31,645	\$21.52	\$44,771

Source: Maryland Department of Labor; Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics; 2021 (latest available as of 6/17/23)

Wages represent wage and salary ONLY, and exclude benefits (e.g. retirement, healthcare, bonuses, etc.).

Wages in this table represent only drivers who are covered by UI benefits.

NA indicates Not Available. US Bureau of Labor Statistics did not release data for that area; typically because of low survey response.

Annual wages are calculated based on full-time, year-round work.

Median wages are the wage at which 50% of drivers earn more, and 50% of drivers earn less.

Median wages for some areas may match exactly due to data collection and processing methods.

The Task Force also surveyed the county's of similar scope, size, and of a regional proximity as it relates to their wage offerings. The chart below details those findings.

County	Lowest Driver Wages W/O Fixed Charges	Highest Driver Wages W/O Fixed Charges
Charles	CCPS \$17.61 Contractor \$24.15	CCPS \$32.53 Contractor \$34.65
Carroll	\$22.12	
Calvert	\$24.04	\$34.49
Harford	\$24.70	\$27.80
Howard	\$21.00	\$30.00
St. Mary's	\$27.27	\$27.27
Washington	Contracted \$21.42 WCPS \$20.22	Contracted \$21.42 WCPS \$32.33
Montgomery*	\$24.89	\$36.77
Prince Georges*	\$21.13	\$41.57

Source: Self reported data by jurisdiction transportation director.

* School Systems own and operate the entire fleet. Operators are County employees.

Charles County, along with many jurisdictions across the country has sought to increase bus operator wages as a means of driver recruitment and retention. Operators who work for CCPS typically receive a lower wage than those who work for a privately owned contractor. This is because CCPS employees receive a more generous County retirement and benefits package and thus have a greater percentage of their direct wages deducted from their take home pay. However, the chart below details the wage increases for contract operators over the last three fiscal years.

Step	Contracted Driver Hourly Wages FY 21	Contracted Driver Hourly Wages FY 22	Contracted Driver Hourly Wages FY 23
1	\$19.53	\$20.12	\$23.00
2	\$19.95	\$20.55	\$25.00
3	\$20.41	\$21.02	\$27.00
4	\$21.33	\$21.97	\$29.00
5	NA	NA	\$31.00
6	NA	NA	\$33.00

Source: CCPS Presentation to the Charles County Board of Education, Charles County Public Schools: Bus Transportation Past, Current and Future, (2023)

Other Benefits

The Task Force also examined, aside from wages, what other benefits are available to school bus operators.

CCPS employees are part of the County system and are thereby eligible for the County benefits to include but not limited to a pension plan, sick and safe leave, health insurance, and others.

CCPS pays up to \$6,000 (60% of a \$10,000 maximum policy) toward the health insurance plan per contracted bus driver or attendant along with \$1,000 toward a retirement plan for participants. Charles County is one of only three counties that make contributions towards health and retirement plans for contracted bus drivers and attendants.

Benefit	Total Premium	CCPS Contribution	Contractor Contribution	Driver Contribution
Health Insurance	\$10,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Life Insurance	\$210.00	\$150.00	\$30.00	\$30.00
Retirement	\$1,162.50	\$1,000.00	\$81.25	\$81.25

Source: CCPS Presentation to the Charles County Board of Education, Charles County Public Schools: Bus Transportation Past, Current and Future, (2023)

Contract Structure

Length of the Contract

The Task Force examined how Charles County and other jurisdictions structure their master contracts with privately owned contractors. Charles County operates under single year contracts. Members from the Charles County School Bus Contractors Association (CCSBCA) expressed concern that the short duration of these contracts did not provide enough certainty to privately owned contractors and hindered their ability to invest in their business, plan for future operations, and provide reasonable assurances to employees about continued employment from year to year.

The Task Force asked other jurisdictions about the length of their contracts with contractors and the research indicated that the single year model is not common and that most jurisdictions offer multi year contracts.

County	Length of Contract (# of Years)
Charles	1
Carroll	NA
Calvert	12
Harford	5
Howard	3
St. Mary's	6
Washington	6
Montgomery	Not Applicable
Prince Georges	Not Applicable

*Source: Self reported data by jurisdiction transportation director.
* School Systems own and operate the entire fleet.
Operators are County employees.*

Bus Replacement Schedule

Another key component of the contract discussion was the required length of time a bus must be operational before it can be replaced under the contract. It was identified that Charles County is 1

of 15 counties that allows purchased buses to be in operation for 15 years.⁴ The other counties are Allegany, Anne Arundel, Calvert, Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Garrett, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester.

It was presented that the state standard, set by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is 12 years. However, a jurisdiction can apply for an exemption to that standard. The referenced standard, found in §7-804 of the State Education Article, maintains that unless a vehicle fails to meet the applicable school bus and motor vehicle safety standards, a school vehicle may be operated for 15 years and further directs that those vehicles be held to more strenuous maintenance and preventive care measures. Charles County applied for and was granted this exemption by MSDE. CCPS presented that they requested an exemption due to budgetary concerns and the savings by extending the life of the buses was used to address those budgetary issues. CCSBCA contended that there was an expectation the County would return to the 12 year standard once the budget issues were alleviated. The standard for Charles County has remained unchanged, at 15 years, since that time.

CCPS Policy

The Task Force identified student discipline and driver safety as two factors impacting the school bus operator workforce in Charles County. The Task Force heard from members of the public, who were active bus operators, detailing their issues with a drastic increase in student disciplinary issues. One of the problems examined by the group was whether there was adequate communication between the drivers, contractors and CCPS and whether the communication led to adequate follow through and action to address the reported instances. This issue of adequate communication is addressed by the Task Force in their best practices and recommendations.

The Task Force also surveyed local jurisdictions to identify the means in which each locality addresses these two factors. The general feedback from those jurisdictions who provided responses was that they utilized annual training to emphasize tactics and procedures for drivers to best handle dangerous situations and non-complaint occupants. All respondents cited the county's Student Code of Conduct as the policy that governed student behavior while riding buses.

Joint Employment Status

Although not directly specified within the final legislative language, the issue of joint employer status was identified by ATU Local 689 as the main issue to be addressed by the Task Force and the impetus for the legislation that created the Task Force.

Currently, CCPS holds discussions on a yearly basis with the Charles County School Bus Contractors Association (CCSBCA) and based on those engagements CCPS develops a master contract operating agreement for that particular school year. CCPS also negotiates with union representatives (AFSCME & EACC) regarding the contract terms for their internal CCPS bus operators.

⁴ Education Article §7-804 (b)(2)(i)

In 2021, 43% of contracted school bus operators voted to unionize and be represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689. Since that time, ATU Local 689 has not been included in the discussions held between CCPS and CCSBCA concerning the development of the master operating contract. ATU Local 689 contends that Charles County is different from other counties because none display the same level of control over the contracted workforce that CCPS does. “Due to this control, the process of collective bargaining and laws safeguarding democratic representation have been wrecked havoc upon.”⁵

WHO IS THE REAL EMPLOYER?

Who Determines and Provides Pay, Hires, Trains, Certifies, Sets Work Standards
Disciplines and Terminates

MANAGEMENT Areas of Responsibility for Contracted Drivers & Attendants	ITEMS controlled by CCPS TRANSPORTATION	ITEMS controlled by CONTRACTORS
Recruit Personnel	✓	✓
Training & Testing	✓	
Provides Certification	✓	
Set Work Standards	✓	
Determines & Provides Compensation	✓	
Evaluates Performance	✓	
Institutes Disciplinary Actions	✓	
Terminates / Decertifies	✓	
Processes Employee Payroll		✓

JOINT EMPLOYER RULE – Courts have found that being hired by an intermediary labor contractor, but another entity determines your qualifications to work, determines and provides your pay, sets work standards and determines disciplinary actions, that the other entity can be considered a “joint employer”.

Source: Table Presented to the Task Force by ATU Local 689

The table above was presented to the Task Force by members of ATU Local 689 to highlight why they contend joint employer status should and does apply to CCPS.

⁵ *Safe and Effective Ways to Run Charles County Schools’ Bus Services*, Presentation by ATU 689 to the Task Force, 8/03/2023

This information presented in the above table was contested by CCPS and CCSBCA for several reasons. Specifically, CCPS presented that the training and certification requirements were largely determined by the state of Maryland through COMAR and by the federal government via the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Furthermore, it was presented that Contractors have discretion as an employer over some of the other items listed in the table to include the setting of work standards, providing of training and testing, disciplinary action, the ability to terminate employment, employee performance evaluation, and direct compensation to the employee.

What strategies and best practices can be implemented to address these challenges?

Driver Compensation

Increase Bus Operators Minimum Hours

To increase the compensations for school bus operators some jurisdictions have instituted higher minimum hours paid for operators. The one model reviewed in greater detail by the Task Force was that of Calvert County who moved to pay their operators an 8-hour work day, regardless of the actual driving hours their routes represented. The Director of Transportation for Calvert County indicated that this change has produced positive results and that Calvert County had no operator vacancies at that time, whether that was a direct correlation to the change in pay was not clearly identified.

Charles County has also moved to adjust their minimum hours paid for contract bus operators. Last year they instituted a 6-hour minimum for contract operators. This year they originally proposed a tiered minimum whereby drivers with less than 4 hours would receive 6 hours in pay, and drivers with between 4-6 hours would receive a minimum of 7 hours paid, as indicated by the table below.

Proposed Bus Driver Wages with 2% COLA and 7-Hour Minimum



Certified Bus Driver Step	Years of Experience	Current Hourly Wages	Less than 4 hours	4 hours to 6 hours	6.5 hours to 7 hours	6 hours to 7 hours	Greater than 8 hours
1	0 - 4	\$23.00 \$23.46	Paid for 6 hours	Paid for 7 hours	\$2,111.40	\$4,222.80	Time and a Half
2	5 - 9	\$25.00 \$25.50	Paid for 6 hours	Paid for 7 hours	\$2,295.00	\$4,590.00	Time and a Half
3	10 - 14	\$27.00 \$27.54	Paid for 6 hours	Paid for 7 hours	\$2,478.60	\$4,957.20	Time and a Half
4	15 - 19	\$29.00 \$29.58	Paid for 6 hours	Paid for 7 hours	\$2,662.20	\$5,324.40	Time and a Half
5	20 - 24	\$31.00 \$31.62	Paid for 6 hours	Paid for 7 hours	\$2,845.80	\$5,691.60	Time and a Half
6	25 +	\$33.00 \$33.66	Paid for 6 hours	Paid for 7 hours	\$3,029.40	\$6,058.80	Time and a Half
282 Bus Drivers			11 bus drivers	65 bus drivers	181 bus drivers between 6 - 8 hours		25 bus drivers
% of Bus Drivers			4% of drivers	23% of drivers	64% bus drivers between 6 - 8 hours		9% of drivers

Source: CCPS Presentation to the Charles County Board of Education, Charles County Public Schools: Bus Transportation Past, Current and Future, (2023)

However, since the original proposal highlighted above, CCPS and the Charles County Board of Education (CCBOE) have agreed to two further enhancements to the original proposal. First, on August 18, 2023 CCBOE agreed to support a CCPS proposal to increase the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) from 2% to 5%. All bus drivers and attendants who are employed by independent bus contractors in Charles County will receive a 5% COLA for the 2023-2024 school year.⁶

Secondly, on August 22, 2023 CCPS and CCBOE approved an eight-hour minimum workday for contracted bus operators or attendants working four or more hours per day. CCPS cited a press release issued by the CCSBCA that may have indicated “...CCPS was facing a possible disruption to transportation services over bus contract concerns...” as the impetus for their decision to approve the eight hour minimum.⁷ ⁸ CCPS indicated that this adjustment to the COLA and pay rates would represent a combined \$2 million dollar impact, of which about \$400,000 would come from the current transportation budget and the other \$1.6 million would be directed away from pre-budgeted funds for instructional programs and staffing. .

⁶<https://www.ccboc.com/about/public-info-media/details/~board/press-releases/post/board-supports-superintendent-change-in-cola-for-contracted-bus-drivers-and-attendants>

⁷<https://www.ccboc.com/about/public-info-media/details/~board/press-releases/post/ccps-board-approve-eight-hour-minimum-workday-for-contracted-bus-drivers-and-attendants-agree-to-work-toward-implementing-a-multi-year-bus-contract>

⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/mr3kfp7z>

Bus Driver and Bus Attendant Salary Increases Based on a 8-hour Minimum and 5% COLA

Certified Bus Driver Step	Years of Experience	Current Hourly Wages	Less than 4 hours	4 hours to 6 hours	6 hours to 7 hours	7 hours to 8 hours	Greater than 8 hours
1	0 - 4	\$23.00 \$24.15	Paid for 6 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Time and a Half 5% COLA
2	5 - 9	\$25.00 \$26.25	Paid for 6 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Time and a Half 5% COLA
3	10 - 14	\$27.00 \$28.35	Paid for 6 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Time and a Half 5% COLA
4	15 - 19	\$29.00 \$30.45	Paid for 6 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Time and a Half 5% COLA
5	20 - 24	\$31.00 \$32.55	Paid for 6 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Time and a Half 5% COLA
6	25 +	\$33.00 \$34.65	Paid for 6 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Paid for 8 hours 5% COLA	Time and a Half 5% COLA
282 Bus Drivers			11 bus drivers	65 bus drivers	113 bus drivers	68 bus drivers	25 bus drivers
% of Bus Drivers			4% of drivers	23% of drivers	40% of drivers	24% of drivers	9% of drivers

Source: CCPS Press Release, August 22, 2023

Offer Signing and Retention Bonuses

Other counties, including St. Mary's, presented that they utilized bonuses to both maintain and recruit their workforce. They had utilized federal dollars through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and found the strategy to be effective in its means and thus planned to request permanent budgetary funding for the program.

Other Benefits

The research by the Task Force suggests that Charles County is a leader in the state in its offering of other benefits to contract bus operators. Many jurisdictions surveyed either did not offer additional benefits directly or contributed to a benefits trust managed by the local contractors association. For example, St. Mary's County government has a benefits trust that allows their route drivers and route attendants to access a medical plan, dental plan and life insurance at a discounted rate. Contractor owners/managers that don't drive a daily route, along with their non route drivers, can also access the medical plan but they must bear the full cost of the plan. There is no retirement component in the benefit trust.

Partnerships for Free Training & Workforce Development Pipelines

One of the issues identified by the Task Force was that new hires can often be lost during the onboarding process due to the length of time it can take to complete the necessary training and certification as well as the cost associated with such certifications. Oftentimes, the new hires are unpaid while completing training and can be required to cover the expense of the required certifications out-of-pocket.

Some states, like Alabama, have partnered with their local community college system to develop a training pipeline for school bus operators that covers the expenses associated with the training and streamlines the learning processes to more quickly onboard workers.⁹ Alabama utilized

⁹<https://www.accs.edu/blog/2022/11/23/skills-for-success-training-from-alabama-community-college-system-ai>

grant funding from their state legislature to partner with the state school system. The coursework is conducted online and front-loaded, the trainees then complete the behind-the-wheel training, and graduate with the required certifications at no cost to the student. Maryland's Community College system, including the College of Southern Maryland, frequently has workforce training dollars available to interested candidates and partners with local employers to address their workforce needs. This is an option that could be further explored to increase the workforce pipeline.

Maryland also has other existing workforce development programs like the EARN Maryland Program. EARN is unique because it is industry driven, organizes strategic industry partnerships, and is state funded which allows it to be flexible and nimble to meet industry demand. EARN aims to address the demands of businesses by focusing intensively on the workforce needs of a specific industry sector over a sustained period. EARN addresses the needs of workers by creating formal career paths to good jobs, reducing barriers to employment, and sustaining or growing middle class jobs. Lastly, EARN encourages mobility for Maryland's most hard to serve jobseekers through job readiness training which may include GED® preparation, occupational skills development, literacy advancement, and transportation and child care components.

The County could look to existing EARN partnerships for a model, such as those in Anne Arundel County (Anne Arundel County Transportation Industry Collaborative), Montgomery County (Mid-Maryland MOVE), and Western Maryland (Western Maryland MOVE), each of which offer training and resources to support the bus operator workforce.

Contract Structure

Lengthen Contract Periods

Research and feedback reviewed by the Task Force suggests that increasing the length of the county contracts from 1 year to a multi-year contract could provide additional benefits. CCSBCA representatives on the Task Force suggested that longer contracts allow for greater long term business planning and investment. Longer contract periods also provide a greater level of certainty for both the contractors and their employees. It was also noted that some contractors experienced difficulty securing capital from banking institutions given the shortened contract periods and uncertainty they represented.

At the final meeting of the Task Force, held on August 22, 2023, CCPS and CCSBCA agreed to a 45-day window where the two sides would commit to continuing discussion on the multi-year master operating contract for the 2023-2024 school year, and future school years. These discussions include the incorporation of the agreed upon 5% COLA, eight-hour minimum workday, and further talks on the incorporation of a multi-year contract structure. *(Of Note: Representatives of ATU Local 689 strongly asserted that any discussion surrounding these topics must include ATU Local 689)*

ms-to-solve-school-bus-driver-shortage/#:~:text=Trainees%20must%20pass%20a%2015,the%20participant%20is%20job%2Dready.

CCPS Policy

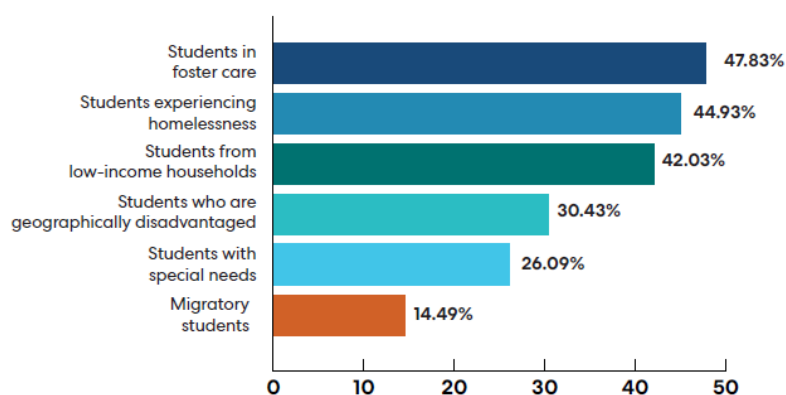
Enforcement of Existing Regulations

Generally, the Task Force identified enforcement of existing policies and procedures as critical to ensuring the safety of bus operators. The Task Force heard from several current bus operators who described what they believed was a lack of follow-through by the school system in disciplining bad actors and ensuring accountability when complaints were filed.

Case Management

The Task Force discussed the unique challenges with student discipline in the context of bus operations. The circumstances surrounding instances of misconduct are unique to the individual and their own personal set of circumstances. To that end, it is difficult to address misconduct in broad stroke policies. It was strongly encouraged by CCPS Superintendent Navarro that a case management model be utilized to address instances of student misconduct while on buses. Removing students from transportation services often exacerbates the root cause of the behavior and could be detrimental to the students educational outcomes. Furthermore, the rate of absenteeism is highest in the same populations that experience the higher volumes of disciplinary actions.¹⁰

Compared to the general student body, which of the following student populations experience higher rates of absenteeism? Select all that apply.



Accountability & Communication

While members supported the concept of utilizing a case management model to address student misconduct on buses, it was strongly recognized by members that without adequate accountability and follow through any method of addressing misconduct would prove ineffective. A greater cadence of communication between CCPS, contractors, and drivers was cited as a best practice to improve accountability and generally improve the ability of the transportation system to more efficiently address issues or adjust to challenges as necessary.

During the final Task Force meeting on August 22, 2023, CCPS Superintendent Navarro committed to a greater cadence of communication to address both transportation issues and issues related to student misconduct and driver safety. This would be accomplished through scheduled regular meetings with all pertinent stakeholders to ensure better lines of communication and accountability by affected parties.

¹⁰ *The State of School Transportation 2022 Report, HopSkipDrive*

Joint Employment Negotiating Status

ATU Local 689 presented to the Task Force on this topic and pointed to the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), passed in 1935, as the justification for their status. The NLRA, also known as the Wagner Act, is a foundational statute of United States labor law that guarantees the right of private sector employees to organize into trade unions, engage in collective bargaining, and take collective action such as strikes.

ATU Local 689 contends that CCPS effectively sets the wages, hours, qualifications, and policy that governs the contract employees and therefore should be considered, for the purpose of collective bargaining and contract negotiations, a joint employer. ATU Local 689 proposed a Labor Peace Agreement, similar to that authorized by HB 443 (2020) and subsequently signed by the Charles County Board of Commissioners in April 2020.^{11 12}

Both, CCPS and CCSBCA, disagreed with the position of ATU Local 689.

Recommendations and Findings of the Task Force

Note: No formal vote was held by the Task Force on these recommendations. The body agreed to include all recommendations discussed and presented by its members. The entity that offered the recommendation is indicated in parentheses.

Compensation

- 1. CCPS should move to an eight-hour minimum workday for all bus operators.** *(Offered by CCSBCA) (Accomplished on August 22, 2023)*
- 2. The State should examine ways to provide low-cost health insurance to part-time workers, possibly via the MD Health Exchange, and other low-cost benefit services to better support part-time workers.** *(Offered by School Superintendent)*

Contracts

- 1. CCPS should utilize multi-year contracts for privately owned local bus contractors.** *(Offered by CCSBCA) (CCPS and CCSBCA agreed to work towards this goal within 45 days effective August 22, 2023)*
- 2. CCPS should consider utilizing dual 3-year contracts for both collective bargaining and bus contracting.** *(Offered by ATU Local 689)*
- 3. CCPS should reduce the allowable lifespan of buses, from 15 years to 12 years, to align with the state standard by rescinding its request for that exemption from MSDE.** *(Offered by CCSBCA)*

¹¹ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Legislation/Details/hb0443/?ys=2020rs>

¹² <https://www.charlescountymd.gov/government/charles-county-commissioners/neutrality-agreement>

4. **Monthly meetings should be held between Charles County bus contractors and the CCPS Transportation Director to increase communication and address transportation related issues in a more efficient and timely manner. Oversight of these meetings, such as monthly reports for accountability was recommended by CCSBCA. (Offered by CCSBCA) (CCPS Superintendent Navarro committed to ensuring these meetings occur regardless of Task Force recommendations)**

CCPS Policy

1. **Monthly meetings should be held between Charles County bus contractors, drivers, CCPS and a discipline committee to have greater communication on these issues and ensure accountability. (Offered by CCSBCA) (CCPS Superintendent Navarro committed to this occurring regardless of Task Force recommendations)**
2. **CCPS should ensure existing state regulations related to driver safety and rider misconduct are enforced. (Offered by ATU Local 689) (CCPS Superintendent Navarro committed that this is occurring and will continue to be moving forward.)**

Joint Employer Status

1. **Enact a Labor Peace Agreement to allow ATU Local 698 to collectively bargain for its members. (Offered by ATU Local 689) (CCPS and CCSBCA were in opposition to this recommendation.)**