

**March Media Roundtable Notes**

The Indianapolis Public Schools Board of School Commissioners will convene its Board Review Session Tuesday, March 23, and its Board Action Session Thursday, March 25. Topics will include a transportation planning proposal, a racial equity audit review by Promise 54 and a resolution in support of Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

What follows is a deeper look at some of those agenda items.

**Transportation Planning Proposals**

**What Audiences Need to Know:**

**Transportation Costs**

* IPS spends 1.5x to 2x the amount per pupil in transportation costs than similarly situated urban school districts.
* Key drivers for high transportation costs include:
* School choice model
* School autonomy
* Transportation for students within existing walk zones
* Commitment to high degree of service.

**Cost Reduction Efforts (2015–2020 school years)**

* May 2016 – Leased more than 100 new fuel-efficient propane buses to reduce fuel costs.
* 2017-18 – Modified bell structure to reduce daily routes and buses.
* 2018-19 – Consolidated and reduced after school and extracurricular busing to be more aligned with peer districts and decrease overall transportation costs.
* July 2020 – Outsourced transportation services to First Student in order to reduce transportation spending.

**Current Cost-Saving Proposal**

* The proposal includes:
* Transition of selected high school students who meet board-approved eligibility criteria from yellow bus service to IndyGo.
* Full execution of school walk zones at all schools.
* Optimize school bus routes.
* In total, the district estimates projected savings of $5 to $7 million through various transportation initiatives, depending on the scale and coordination of the various initiatives.
* Estimated potential savings of $3 to $4 million from implementation of IndyGo partnerships and Walk Zones.
* Estimated potential savings of $1 to $2 million through route optimization, stop consolidation and pairing efficiencies.
* Given current budget constraints and consistently high transportation costs, IPS cannot continue to provide universal IndyGo passes to all high school students while duplicating yellow bus service.
* Cultivating the partnership with IndyGo and building on the success of the IndyGo pilot should be a strategic priority that could support ongoing, annual transportation savings into the future.

**IPS/IndyGo 2019-20SY Pilot Partnership Overview**

* IPS implemented a three-year pilot program at six high school programs that started in 2019-20 school year at the following schools:
* Arsenal Tech
* Crispus Attucks
* George Washington
* Shortridge
* Graduation Academy
* KIPP Legacy
* Currently, all high school students receive an annual IndyGo pass in their student ID that provides them universal access (evenings, weekends, holidays, summer) to IndyGo’s network at no cost to the student.
* The district continues to also provide yellow bus service.
* IPS student ridership data for the 2019–20 school year includes:
* 115,000 total individual rides.
* 4,000 rides/monthly *(ridership has declined since March 2020 due to COVID-19).*

**Key Messages:**

**IPS Long-Term IndyGo Proposal**

* IPS will provide free IndyGo passes for students who opt-in to IndyGo in place of yellow bus service and for students deemed a high-quality IndyGo rider.
* The potential to transition more students to IndyGo is a part of future planning considerations. We want to be sure that IPS and IndyGo execute a strong Year 1 transition and deliver a positive experience for students and families.
* The goal is to expand the number of students in IndyGo over the next 1-2 years to potentially more than half of the district’s current high school students.

**IndyGo Goals/IPS Partnership**

Short-term, the goal of the IPS/IndyGo partnership is to preserve the IndyGo/IPS relationship for the 2021-22 school year before the current MOU expires in July 2021.

IPS and IndyGo have been in contact to begin negotiations for the next potential MOU. IndyGo leadership has indicated that final decisions on the cost of passes for IPS will not be made until decisions regarding Senate Bill 141 are made in the state legislature.

* **This bill would have the following impact on IndyGo’s financial future:**
* Would withhold 10% of local income tax revenue that was approved by Marion County voters in 2014.
* Could also prevent IndyGo from moving forward with planned transit network expansion projects - the Blue and Purple Lines - unless it is able to secure private funding equal to 10% of the annual income tax revenue.
* Scale of revenue loss could disrupt or decrease existing routes outside core, high-frequency and high-volume routes, such as the red line.

Additionally, given the high-stakes nature of this transition for both IndyGo and IPS, both leadership teams agreed that a smaller scale implementation in Year 1 in order to ensure high-quality execution and create positive experiences and narratives will be critical to the long-term success of the partnership.

* Maintaining a relationship with IndyGo, however limited, is crucial because this supports the district’s longer-term goals of:
* Reducing the cost of IPS’s transportation system.
* Allowing us to push more dollars to the classroom.
* Promote increased student mobility in service of enriched academic, extracurricular and job opportunities that will promote IPS student success in high school and beyond.

**SB141 and the Future of IPS/IndyGo Partnership**

* IndyGo leadership has indicated that they cannot finalize the terms of agreement for the IPS/IndyGo transportation partnership until the status of SB 141 is known, and that they may not be able to extend the existing discounted participation fee for SY 2021-22.
* Still, IPS continues to engage with our IndyGo partners to track the impact of legislation on planning and transit network access. In the first year of transition, approximately 605 students would move to IndyGo. The district’s intent is to have more students served by IndyGo in the near term over the next 1–2 years.
* The IPS Board of School Commissioners is committed to reviewing all opportunities to best serve the transportation needs of all students and committed to working with our IndyGo partners to effectively meet these needs*.*

**Walk Zone Enforcement**

* IPS implemented walk zones at schools in 1998 to include:
* Elementary students who live within 1 mile of their assigned school.
* Middle school students who live within 1.25 miles of their assigned school.
* High school students who live within 1.5 miles of their assigned school.
* Students with special needs and those receiving McKinney-Vento services will continue to receive transportation services per their Individualized Education Plan or their McKinney-Vento status, respectively.
* Since then, actual execution of the policy has been inconsistent; sometimes due to safety concerns and a reduction in the number of crossing guards utilized at schools as well as a desire to provide a high degree of service.
* Last year, in an effort to move 3,000+ students off yellow buses given COVID concerns, IPS executed our policy as written at 13 schools at the start of the 2020-21 school year and leveraged crossing guards at those schools where there were safety hazard concerns.
  + The district will review each school’s walk zone boundary to determine if and where crossing guards are needed to support student walkers.
* The district will consider whether schools have hazards such as busy intersections.
  + The execution of this existing policy could lead to an additional 2,000+ students being transitioned to their actual ‘walker’ status and a reduction in the number of bus routes needed, generating a potential savings of more than $2 million.