

Chatham Central School District
Chatham, New York 12037

One-Bell Questions and Answers

June 4, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As you may know, Chatham Schools will be implementing a one-bell transportation system beginning in September, 2009. A task force that includes staff and parents has been created to ensure that the transition from a two-bell program to a one-bell system is efficient and safe. The parent members of the one-bell task force are: Jeannean Cheney, Meg Everett, Mary-Noelle Fabiano, April Mountain, and Kristen Wogen. They have been most helpful in providing input from a parent's point of view. The safety of our students is the highest priority and task force members feel that the one-bell system will improve student safety and address long-standing concerns.

This question and answer format is designed to address questions that have been raised throughout the past several months. As we finalize procedures, there will be additional information mailed to parents prior to the beginning of the school year. However, please feel free to contact any of the parent members on the task force or the district office if you have questions or comments.

Lee A. Bordick,
Interim Superintendent

1. Since the adoption of the School Budget on May 19th, what is the status of the one-bell transportation system?

Several meetings have been held with district staff to ensure the one-bell system is implemented in an efficient manner, keeping safety as the highest priority. A parent task force has been created and continues to meet on a weekly basis. Additionally, the two new administrators who have recently been appointed by the Board of Education; Cheryl Nuciforo, Superintendent of Schools, and Kristen Reno, M.E.D. Elementary School Principal, are committed to making the implementation of the one-bell program their highest priority.

2. What measures are being implemented to address safety concerns?

During discussions with parents, administrators, bus drivers and staff members regarding the one-bell transportation system, several safety concerns emerged about the current two-bell system. It is the belief of the district that the educational process begins at bus pick-up and continues until students are dropped off.

- Student discipline policies have been reviewed and strengthened.
- An ongoing committee of administrators and bus personnel will meet regularly and review transportation issues to ensure consistency in the administration of our bus policies, both in the transportation department and at the school building level.
- Cameras will be installed on each bus to increase the level of safety and security.
- Transportation staff members will be assigned as a second adult on selected buses and rotate throughout the 19 bus fleet, based on availability.
- A select group of Middle and High School students has been identified to serve as student mentors. The goal of the student mentor program is to provide a community service opportunity for older students as they assist with the younger students. Elementary School parents will be given an opportunity to meet the student mentors before the first day of school.
- The bus seating plan will place M.E.D. students in the front of the bus while older students will be assigned toward the rear of the bus.
- Student management training programs for bus drivers have been implemented and will continue throughout the school year.

3. What are the consequences of inappropriate behavior on the school bus?

The standard for appropriate behavior for all students will be equivalent to the appropriate behavior expected in the classroom. Administrators, Board members and task force members will continue to monitor the one-bell transportation system throughout the school year and evaluate student referrals, as well as the system as a whole, to ensure consistency.

4. Is it true that students will have longer bus rides under the one-bell system?

The bus routes are carefully being designed so that the student riding times are comparable to current riding times.

5. What time will school begin and end?

Under the one-bell system, the school day at M.E.D. and CHS will begin at 8:00 a.m. and to conclude at 2:30 p.m. The CMS school day will remain the same as the current schedule.

6. How early will my child be picked up at the bus stop?

The range of times will be similar to, or in some cases later than, the current middle and high school student morning pick-up times. Because of the later starting time, the morning pick up times would range from 6:50 a.m. to 7:35 a.m.

7. How and when will my child be notified of his/her bus stop location and time under the new system?

In addition to a newspaper ad, parents of students will be notified by mail in late August about the approximate time and location of bus stops.

8. What will be the procedures for arrival and dismissal at M.E.D. and CHS?

The new system will be designed for added safety of students. Chatham Middle School dismissal and drop off procedures will not change from the current structure. However, the greatest changes will occur at the M.E.D. and High School. We believe the following procedures will improve the safety for our students.

At the time of student arrival at M.E.D./CHS, elementary school students will be the first to be discharged from the bus. Students will proceed up the walkway to M.E.D. as in the past, however, additional staff will be strategically deployed to ensure the students' safety. A new walkway will be created over the summer. The new walkway will conform to American Disability Act regulations and feature a more gradual slope, railings, and new pavement. The high school students will depart from the buses as in the past, after the elementary students have discharged.

The M.E.D. parent drop off area will be improved to permit parents to drop off children in the loop closest to the school. Staff supervision will increase around the loop allowing the drop off procedure to be more efficient and minimize backups, thus reducing potential congestion. At least one staff member will be deployed at the stop sign, controlling the traffic flow as parents exit from the M.E.D.

At dismissal, M.E.D. students will be escorted to the M.E.D. gym and lined up by bus route number, at which time attendance will be taken. At approximately 2:25 pm, M.E.D. students will be escorted to the awaiting buses that will have already picked up the Middle School students and be parked in specific lanes, designated by route numbers. The high school parking lot will be resurfaced and restriped over the summer, displaying bus lanes that will be painted diagonally to the sidewalk, along with a new sidewalk extension along the fence. Staff will be placed along the sidewalk as students are escorted in an orderly manner to the buses by route numbers. At 2:30 pm, high school students will be dismissed from their classes and board buses in which elementary students will already be seated. At approximately 2:35 pm, the entire bus fleet will leave the high school campus. The buses will depart in a forward direction; no buses will be backing up in the parking lot. All other high school traffic will be held until the buses leave. High school student drivers will be permitted to enter the parking lot after the buses have left the campus. The new M.E.D. bus dismissal procedure is different from the current process and will ensure much greater safety and accountability of student bus riders.

9. Will my child's bus stop change under the one-bell system?

The primary goal is to keep the current system of bus stops. The District does not currently provide door-to-door transportation. As a result, it is not possible for all children to travel equal distances to and from their bus stops. A natural consequence of efficient and economical routing of buses is that some children will travel greater distances than others in traveling to and from the bus stop. During the summer, the District will employ two NYS Certified School Bus Driver Instructors and School Bus Driver Examiners to review the District's bus stops and turn-arounds from a safety perspective. Based on Pupil Transportation Safety Institute guidelines, as well as current and evolving Board policy, some bus stops may be added, some may be consolidated, and some may be adjusted.

- 10. Will there be a late bus or “second dismissal” bus for students who participate in extracurricular activities after school, such as sports, clubs, extra help?**
Yes, there will be a second dismissal bus. The District will provide six buses that will leave the schools approximately 45 minutes after the regular afternoon bus run. A specific time will be established before the school year begins.
- 11. How far in advance will my child need to sign up to ride the “second dismissal” bus on any given day?**
Parents may notify the school office by written note on the same day, but no later than a specific time, such as 11:00 a.m.
- 12. How will parents know what time the “second dismissal” bus is going to arrive, especially if there are only a few students signed up?**
A time range will be given for arrival of the second dismissal bus at the bus stop. The specific time will not be known, as it will depend on the number of students riding and the location of the bus stops for those students who are riding on any given day.
- 13. How will students who need to ride the bus to another household for emergency closings be handled?**
Unlike the current practice where the District’s youngest students must wait at least an hour before the secondary bus runs come back to transport M.E.D. home, under the one-bell system, all students will be dismissed and transported at the same time. Parents may designate an alternate location for their child to go in case of an early dismissal or emergency closing. If parents wish to pick up their child, that may also be designated in advance.
- 14. Will my child still be able to get breakfast at school? Will he/she have to arrive even earlier for the breakfast program at M.E.D.?**
Yes. Children will still be able to get breakfast at school. The only difference in the breakfast program is that breakfast will be available approximately one hour earlier for M.E.D. students.
- 15. Will my child be guaranteed a seat on a bus if he/she does not ride on a consistent basis?**
Yes. New York State law requires a seat for each eligible student.
- 16. Will my child be able to go home on a different bus route (i.e., separate households of divorced parents, care-giver, friend’s house)?**
The District is planning for 19 bus routes. To the extent we can accommodate these special circumstances; every effort will be made to do so. It is the Board of Education’s goal to allow some flexibility when changes are communicated in advance of the summer bus route planning. The law, however, does not require transportation to locations other than the child’s home address.
- 17. Will my child be able to get off at a different stop on his/her assigned bus route?**
Yes. If your child brings a note to the office in the morning that is signed by a parent or guardian, and presents that note to the bus driver, your child may get off his/her assigned bus route at another stop.
- 18. Will the bus driver be letting younger children off bus without a parent present?**
At this point, the District will continue its current policy and practice whereby responsible individuals are required to take kindergarten children to and from the bus. An advantage of the one-bell system is that older siblings will be getting on and off the bus at the same time as their younger siblings, adding another layer of safety.
- 19. Will my child be able to bring his/her music instrument on the bus?**
Yes, if it is not a large instrument. Items may be brought on the bus that are able to fit in the child’s lap. State Department of Transportation regulations provide that the main aisle and the aisle to the door of a school bus must not be obstructed.
- 20. Will the District practice the new dismissal procedures before the start of the school year?**
Yes. The District will conduct a practice student dismissal at M.E.D. the morning of Tuesday, June 23rd, shortly after students arrive, and will dismiss M.E.D. students on Wednesday, June 24th and Thursday, June 25th using the new dismissal procedure.