

Freire Charter School

WILMINGTON

June 29, 2015

Jennifer M. Nagourney, J.D.
Executive Director
Charter School Office
Delaware Department of Education
The Townsend Building
401 Federal Street, Suite 2
Dover, DE 19901-3639

Via email to: infocso@doe.k12.de.us

Dear Ms. Nagourney:

I am writing in response to the Department of Education's requirement that Freire Charter School Wilmington submit a report on its transportation plan by June 30, 2015. Per our email correspondence, this letter constitutes this report.

Presently, Freire Charter School Wilmington has 235 students enrolled from all over New Castle County as follows: Wilmington (38.72%), Newark (25.96%), New Castle (22.13%), Bear (13.19%), and Claymont (0.43%). As the school prepares for its August 2015 opening, developing a comprehensive transportation plan for this geographically diverse student body is of paramount importance. This plan must both ensure the safety of our students and also minimize disruption to the neighborhood in which we are located.

At the time of our application, we had anticipated using DART First State as our primary mode of student transportation to and from our charter school. Based on the geographic diversity, parental feedback, and discussions with city agencies, we have revised our transportation plan into a three pronged approach:

1. **DART Public Transportation** – For many of our students, using DART buses remains the best transportation option. Freire Charter School Wilmington is committed to partnering with DART for several reasons. First, using public transportation at our Philadelphia charter school has been a successful experience for these students, offering them an opportunity to learn real-world commuting skills. In Wilmington, our campus is located in close proximity (within a 5-10 minute walk) to several major bus stops. Additionally, we have been in conversation with a Wilmington private school who has used DART effectively to transport students to and from school from all over New Castle County for over 20 years. So, while a novel approach to charter

school transportation, it is a model that has been tested successfully in Wilmington. Freire Charter School Wilmington will provide DART passes to students free of charge.

2. **Commercial School Bus Transportation with Bus Hub Stops** – While many parents were really excited about the use of DART for student transportation, during the student recruitment process we quickly learned that others preferred a school bus option or simply did not live in close proximity to a DART stop. We wanted to accommodate parent needs and preferences, so we are in the process of negotiating a commercial bus contract that will provide three routes of transportation primarily using hub stops. As we are located in the Red Clay School District, students who reside within this district but more than two miles from the school are being provided with hub stops that are within ½ mile of their residences per statute. It is also important to note that the drop off locations at Freire Charter School Wilmington are not directly in front of the school in response to neighborhood concerns about buses traversing the narrow streets of Midtown Brandywine.
3. **Personal Transportation** – We also have some families who prefer to transport their students to and from school in their personal vehicles or live quite close to the school and their students will walk to and from the building each day. To be responsive to this preference while also respecting the neighborhood's expressed desire to avoid traffic congestion in the area immediately in front of the school, we are prohibiting parents from dropping their students off directly in front of the school. Just as with the school buses, drop off locations will be stationed outside of the neighborhood within a short walking distance to the school. Students will be prohibited from driving themselves to school.

When we collected enrollment paperwork, we conducted a preliminary transportation survey indicating the various options that will be available to students according to their district of residence and their distance from school. Parents were able to indicate DART (with the school providing the pass), school provided transportation using hub stops, or personal transportation. Over 70% of our students responded to this survey, with 40% of respondents choosing DART, 40% of respondents choosing hub stops, and 20% selecting personal transportation. From these results we were able to decide upon hub stops and the estimated number of bus routes needed (estimated presently at 3).

We are now moving beyond the surveying stage to the actual assignment of students to their selected transportation option. As such, each enrolled student has been sent a detailed listing of their transportation options (including routes, travel time, pick up locations) according to their home address, and the private options of walking, biking, or being driven by a parent. The response to our transportation assignment communication was due on Friday, June 26, 2015 and, to date, 54% of responses are in. School staff is currently following up with any family that missed the deadline, so our transportation plan will be as accurate as possible.

Some additional details of our transportation plan include:

- We have been in frequent communication with DART officials to discuss logistics, including purchasing DART pass cards in large quantities.
- We have completed a public bid process for our bus transportation on June 15, which did not yield a viable vendor. However, we are currently negotiating with bus companies and expect to award a contract within the next two weeks for three bus routes.
- Bus drop off/pick up locations have been coordinated with the Public Works Department of the City of Wilmington, pending final approval by the Wilmington Police Department (anticipated in

early July). These locations are outside the residential neighborhood to alleviate some neighborhood concerns. We are also coordinating signage with the City.

- For personal transportation, we have identified a loading zone area on Market Street for parent pick up and drop off, so students can cross through the park to get to school while avoiding excess traffic in the residential neighborhood.
- We will be reaching out to the Wilmington Police Department to identify places where crossing guards may be beneficial, but our contact at the Department is on military leave until July 29th.
- We worked with an experienced traffic engineer who has coordinated city, neighborhood association leadership, and school leadership with the aim of minimizing extra traffic within the neighborhood and identifying safe and close locations for both bus and parent drop off outside the residential neighborhood.
- While not presently the case, some students due to special education related services needs or disability may require door-to-door transportation. These situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis, likely via contracted paratransport or private shuttle services.

We believe we have addressed the transportation matter in a manner that is both convenient and safe for our students and respectful to neighborhood resident concerns. We look forward to providing you with an update to this report once the school year is underway by October 31st. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 302-521-0432 or felicia.wenell@freirecharterschool.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Felicia K. Wenell".

Felicia K. Wenell
Head of Academic Supports