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Dear Student Athletes and Families,

As the fall season is fully underway and all of our teams are practicing and beginning competitions, I would like to address some challenges that we are facing in securing transportation for away games/meets. I'd like to begin by saying that as a school district, we work to secure transportation for every athletic competition that is scheduled and we work to provide the opportunity for our student athletes to compete against other area schools. As a part of this process, we are bound by state guidelines and District policy in securing busing service.

The Cherry Hill School District does not own or operate any buses. All busing service is provided through contracted service agreements with appropriately licensed companies who have buses registered in New Jersey. The guidelines that all school districts must follow regarding transporting students are in the New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A:27 – Student Transportation). The Cherry Hill School District Policy 8600 governs bus transportation at the local level. Currently, our district contracts for approximately 739 bus runs to transport approximately 8,500 students to and from our 19 schools. The district also contracts for the transporting of student athletes throughout each of the seasons. Whether securing contracts for the daily bus runs or for athletic competitions, the same bid process is used:

- bus runs are identified by the school district,
- bid specifications are developed for the bus runs,
- the bid specifications are posted/shared with busing contractors,
- the busing contractors respond to the bid indicating the runs for which they are bidding,
- bus runs are awarded to the lowest responsible bidder,
- bus runs that are not bid on/not awarded are reposted for additional bids,
- if no bids are secured, companies are contacted by the school district in an attempt to secure buses.

Our purchasing department and the staff in our buildings begin the bidding process well ahead of the start of each season to secure transportation for all athletic competitions. When bids are repeatedly posted and not secured, however, sometimes a season will begin without all runs filled. The district already has completed the bid process for all of our winter and spring athletic competitions. We are now in the second stage of preparing new bids for all of the events that were not bid upon by the transportation providers.

The district does not choose which events are provided a bus and which events are not. Securing busing for events is a matter of which runs receive bids, from more than 15 bus companies. Contracted transportation in the state of New Jersey is experiencing great challenges, and Cherry Hill is not the only school district facing this reality. The challenge of securing bus service has been the topic of an ongoing conversation I have been having with the building principals, the Zone PTA, the Board of Education, and my colleagues throughout South Jersey. The district has been dealing with this problem for a number of years and the bus companies continue to state that there is a critical shortage of drivers – they have buses but do not have licensed drivers. The process for new bus drivers to be licensed has changed, becoming longer and more challenging. We routinely solicit bids from 17 different bus companies.

The Board of Education and the district administration believe in the value of the student athlete experience. Our staff will continue to work to secure transportation for away competitions. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Joseph N. Meloche, Ed.D.