



The Waukee Community School District faces a lack of school bus drivers as Covid-19 numbers rise and staff numbers fall short during the 2021-2022 school year.

Driving buses full of students, some of whom do not respect COVID safety rules, can easily spread the virus. According to district transportation general manager, Gwen Brettman, "15% [of bus drivers] are at higher risk." Being at a higher risk to COVID, due to age or otherwise, is an incentive for the drivers to stay home.

According to Brettman, there are 80 bus routes and only 82 bus drivers for the entire Waukee district. This leaves no room for sick days, vacations or any other type of leave. When there are drivers missing, Durham School Services staff will often step up and drive some routes themselves. Brettman explained, "The office staff and myself, we've been driving because people still get sick and people are out on leave for medical reasons so my office staff is pretty much driving every day." While Durham staff typically assists with driving, WSCD District Office staff assist with communication to parents and community members.

Due to the lack of staff, bus routes have been combined and therefore some kids are spending more time on the bus. Brettman stated, "[The average bus route] is about 35 minutes because we've had to combine routes." The combination of routes has only added about ten minutes to the average bus ride compared to previous years.

The lack of bus driving staff has most impacted the students of WSCD. Eighth grade student, William Andersen, revealed, "Before Covid, there were more people on buses and it was more social, but after Covid it is a lot less social and less people on buses." Andersen spends 45 minutes on the bus each day and is also required to wear a mask on his bus.

Some students spend almost two hours on the bus each day, which causes various issues and annoyances. Waukee Community parent Ginger Kronk explained, "That's kind of wasted time for [my high schooler], he can't connect his school computer to a hotspot on his phone so he can't even get school work done." This unproductive time is what truly aggravates Kronk.

Brettman assured parents, "We're getting students to school and home safely, always safely, it just may take a little bit more time and a little bit of planning." However, the Facebook chat, 'Waukee School District Parents,' have not hidden their feelings on the issue. Chats shoot back and forth discussing the long bus routes and concerns for their children.

While it may aggravate some students and parents, the district does not anticipate the problem getting better in the near future. "COVID-19 numbers are rising... so I think this is going to get worse," Brettman predicted.

Eason Elementary, Waukee High School and Maple Grove elementary are the three schools in WSCD that have started picking up one group of students, taking them to school, and turning

around to pick up another group. Brettman informed that there was about eight to ten minutes of return time in this process. This will become a more frequent procedure throughout the district according to Brettman. "It's going to happen in some of the other schools eventually," she revealed.

As the problems continue and WSCD works to find solutions, the transportation department would like to assure every parent and thank them for their patience. "I would like to thank the parents for being so patient with us and understanding... The parents have been really good at understanding what is happening."