



312 W. Maple Avenue
Byron, MI 48418
Phone: (810) 266-4881
cassiday@byron.k12.mi.us

Byron Area Schools

August 3, 2021

Dear Byron Area Schools Families,

With classes beginning in just a few short weeks there are plenty of preparations yet to do. The most visible is the paving of the driveway and parking lot at the high school and middle school which is ongoing and should be finished by the first day of school. Not so visible is the interviewing and hiring of employees; cleaning classrooms and buildings and repairing equipment; scheduling students; and the routing of buses.

Bus routes, and transporting students is what I need to talk to you about. You may or may not know that for quite a few years every school district throughout the state has been struggling to find qualified employees willing and able to drive school buses. Byron is no exception! We've found it very difficult to employ enough drivers to transport all of the students to school and home, as well as to all of the athletic events and fieldtrips.

This year will be particularly challenging as retirements and different job opportunities have caused us to lose a few really experienced and exceptional drivers. These staffing changes leave us with just 5 drivers available for transporting students to and from school! Just like every other school district in the state we've been advertising and trying to recruit drivers without finding any applicants!

This means that unless we get additional drivers between now and the first day of school on August 19 we'll only be able to have 5 routes to accommodate all of the 495 students in the district who are scheduled to ride. Without some creative thinking the 5 routes would result in an average of 99 elementary (grades Prek-6) and secondary (grades 7-12) students packed onto buses only large enough for 72. The average drive time would be about 1 hour and 45 minutes. I'm sure you'd agree that is way too many students and way too much time on a bus!

The only viable alternative at this time is to create split routes where drivers pick up secondary students earlier than elementary students. In essence the 5 drivers will travel the same routes twice in the mornings and twice in the afternoons for about 60 minutes each time. The early routes for secondary students will average about 45 students riding and the later routes for elementary students routes will average about 52 students riding.

Times won't change much for secondary students. They will begin school at 7:30am and end at 2:30pm. Elementary students will begin school at 9:00am and end at 4:00pm. The in-house Byron's Eagles Nest offers before and after school child care services.

I realize this may cause some families to reconsider how their morning and afternoon routines are structured. When my children were in school it would have affected my family too. Unfortunately there are very limited alternatives right now unless we acquire a few additional drivers in the next few weeks. And, it's totally possible that we begin the school year this way and eventually increase the number of bus routes when and if we are able to hire additional drivers.

We're not the only school district to have to use split routes; we're just one of the latest to succumb to the lack of qualified drivers. If you, or someone you know, has a current CDL-especially with a school bus endorsement – and you'd like to make a difference in this community, I'd really like to speak with you, or them.

Sincerely,

Bob Cassiday, Superintendent