Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Transportation Efficiency Review of 2023–2024 School Year Transportation Operations

for Lake Stevens School District

6/01/2025

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Executive Summary

For school districts with a relative efficiency rating less than 90%, a review by the Regional Transportation Coordinator (RTC) is required per RCW 28A.160.117. The RTC review was conducted by Mark Dennis.

Lake Stevens School District had a full-time equivalent enrollment for the 2023–2024 school year of 9,197.97 students. Of those enrolled, Lake Stevens provided home-to-school transportation service for an average of 8,486.63 basic program riders and 651.88 special program riders per day (combined AM and PM student counts). The district operated 72.12 school buses to provide this service, at a cost of $8,787,596.94.

The efficiency system target for Lake Stevens School District would be to operate 64.61 school buses at a cost of $7,872,315.81. The district's relative efficiency rating based on data from the 2023–2024 school year is 89.58%.

Report Process and Review Methodology

A detailed description of the STARS efficiency rating process is available online at Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System web page under Efficiency Ratings. That webpage also provides descriptions of the rating calculation.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) material is included in this document, but for an explanation of each indicator and the methodology, please see the Key Performance Indicators Technical Assistance Paper available online at the website referenced above.

The approach used for the 2025 review of a school district's transportation program involves four sections:

1. Review of the district's STARS relative efficiency rating.
2. Review of the district's Key Performance Indicators (KPI).
3. Review of the school district's operational details, including identifying constraints and changes from prior years (if any), and
4. Comments on the material provided by the regional coordinator and school district staff.

Using this process, the district's transportation program is evaluated for the efficient use of state fiscal resources. The goal of this process is to attempt to identify best practices that districts can apply to minimize the costs of operating their transportation service.

Section One: STARS Relative Efficiency Rating

For Lake Stevens School District, the March 2025 relative efficiency score (based on data from the 2023–2024 school year) was 89.58%. The Efficiency Detail Report including the cohort districts and predicted resource requirements is provided in Appendix I.

> In the 2023–2024 school year, Lake Stevens School District reported operating 72.13 buses to transport a ridership count (combined AM plus PM) of 9138.5 students with expenditures of $8,787,596.94. The efficiency rating calculation identified target expenditures of $7,872,315.81 while operating 64.61 buses.

Lake Stevens's March 2023 relative efficiency rating (based on data from the 2021-2022 school year) was 100.00% and the March 2024 relative efficiency rating (based on data from the 2022–2023 school year) was 100.00%.

Section Two: Key Performance Indicators

This section of the efficiency review process uses three Key Performance Indicators (KPI): the average number of basic program riders per basic program bus; the average number of special education riders per special education bus; and the average cost per rider. These three KPI are helpful in translating efficiency into "ground level" concepts. In addition to each district's KPI, a KPI cohort is developed. The KPI cohort is comprised of the 20 most similar districts based on total ridership.

Basic Rider KPI

Basic Program Riders per Basic Program Bus KPI by School Year

2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024	Change 2022–2023 to 2023–2024
85.25	86.18	86.60	.49%

This KPI attempts to measure the efficiency of the district's basic program transportation by calculating the average number of students carried on basic program school buses.

General comment: independent of other factors, an **increase** in the number of basic riders per basic school bus from year to year reflects an **increase** in efficiency.

Regional Transportation Coordinator Analysis:

In the 2022–2023 school year, Lake Stevens transported an average of 86.18 basic program students per basic program bus. In the 2023–2024 school year, this changed to an average of 86.6 basic program students per bus. This was an increase of .49%.

The district ranks 9th in the Basic Riders KPI within their 21 district KPI cohort.

Special Education Rider KPI

Special Education Riders per Special Education Bus KPI by School Year

2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024	Change 2022–2023 to 2023–2024
6.77	5.99	12.58	110.02%

Regional Transportation Coordinator Analysis:

This KPI attempts to measure the efficiency of the district's special education transportation by calculating the average number of students carried on special education school buses. It is important to note that special education students may require specialized transportation that limits a district's ability to maximize bus utilization. In special education transportation, student needs preempt efficiency concerns.

General comment: independent of other factors, an **increase** in the number of special education riders per basic school bus from year to year reflects an **increase** in efficiency.

In the 2022–2023 school year, Lake Stevens transported an average of 5.99 special education students per special education bus. In the 2023–2024 school year, the district transported an average of 12.58 special education students per bus. This was an increase of 110.02% .

The district ranks 3rd in the Special Education Riders KPI within their 21-district cohort.

For school districts with few or no students requiring special education transportation services, this KPI is of minimal value except for confirming year to year service requirements.

Cost per Rider KPI

Cost per Student KPI by School Year

2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024	Change 2022–2023 to 2023–2024
$ 1,359.79	$ 1,391.79	$ 1,923.20	38.18%

Regional Transportation Coordinator Analysis:

This KPI attempts to measure the overall efficiency of the district's transportation operation by calculating the average cost of transporting a student.

General comment: independent of other factors, a **decrease** in the average cost of transporting a student from year to year reflects an **increase** in efficiency.

In the 2022–2023 school year, Lake Stevens's average cost per rider was $1,391.79. In the 2023–2024 school year, the district's average cost per rider was $1,923.2. This was an increase of 38.18%.

The district ranks 4th in the Cost per Rider within their 21 district KPI cohort.

For districts able to break out the average cost per student between the basic program and the special education program, the year-to-year change in these values can assist the district in evaluating their transportation operations. However, the workload to break out these costs by program can be substantial.

Section Three: Review of District Transportation Operations

The review of district transportation operations is grouped in three areas:

- Policies and Procedures
- Transportation Operations
- Geographic and Other Constraints

The goal of the district review process is to identify changes that the district has made that impact the cost of providing transportation service. The identification of constraints the district faces can help in identifying solutions so that these solutions can be shared with other districts.

Policies and Procedures

Policies are the desired high-level outcomes as articulated by the school district board of directors. The school district administration and transportation staff develop procedures to accomplish the policy objectives. Examples may include providing transportation for out-of-district 'choice' students or establishing a two-mile walk area for high school students.

Regional Transportation Coordinator Observations:

Lake Stevens is part of the only operational cooperative in the region, providing services to the Granite Falls School District. Specifically, all operational functions are coordinated by Lake Stevens for both participating districts.

The district has a historical practice of offering door-to-door service in many residential areas, in lieu of common gathering bus stop locations, when it is safe to do so. The director is evaluating this practice to ensure efficient and safe bus operations.

The district has a variety of bell schedules that may be influencing optimum bus routing services. For example, there are seven different bell times for twelve schools. Since buses service multiple schools in one routing sequence/tier, the tight time gaps between schools start/end times influence potential routing efficiencies.

Transportation Operations

Transportation operations include all the organizational processes used to manage and run the transportation program on a daily basis from routing to payroll. The age of the fleet impacts maintenance costs, as does a good preventative maintenance program. Any district changes in operations that could significantly impact the efficiency or cost of operations should be noted. Examples include combining routes to reduce the number of buses or increasing buses to reduce student ride times.

Regional Transportation Coordinator Observations:

Transportation Expenditures (STARS Prior Year Expenditures) by School Year

2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024
$5,545,050.46	$6,123,455.34	$8,787,596.94

Lake Stevens saw an increase in overall transportation expenditures of 43% as compared to the prior year. However, the increase was only 10% in the prior evaluation cycle.

Geographic and Other Constraints

Geographic constraints can impact the ability of a school district to maximize efficiency. Identifying methods to minimize the impacts of constraints can assist other districts facing similar challenges. Examples of constraints include geographic constraints such as large bodies of water, minimal student density or urban traffic congestion.

Regional Transportation Coordinator Observations:

As noted earlier, Lake Stevens is involved in an operational cooperative with the Granite Falls School District. Additionally, the district has a major lake (Lake Stevens) within its boundaries, as well as two major state highways…State Routes 2 and 9. Due to continued growth in the region, routing and bus operations are influenced by these factors.

Section Four: Comments

Comments Regarding the STARS Efficiency Rating

Regional Transportation Coordinator Comments:

Many factors influence a districts data and their subsequent efficiency scores. Some of these elements are external and others internal. Subsequently, when considering efficiency scores, districts may have influence over some components of their transportation departments, but little control over factors like ridership. Therefore, districts should evaluate the data relative to their individual district characteristics, needs and policies, while seeking information that may assist in their unique transportation operations.

This year Lake Stevens obtained an Efficiency Rating of 89%. With regards to their efficiency data, as compared to identified cohort districts, more buses were used, and overall expenditures elevated above the efficiency report “targets.” However, when assessing these “targets,” it’s important to remember that these ideals are derived from various districts using mathematical weighted values and thus absent the realistic context facing Lake Stevens.

School District Comments

The district reviewed the document and does not have any additional comments.

Comments Regarding the KPI

Regional Transportation Coordinator Comments:

The primary elements assessed in the KPI report involve ridership and expenditures. Specifically, the report calculates Basic Riders per Bus, Special Education Riders per Bus, and Cost per Rider. This data is then compared to self, as well as 20 cohort districts.

In this review, Lake Stevens remained consistent with the previous year, averaging 86 Basic Riders per Bus. In this category, the district was 9th when compared to their 20 cohort districts. Additionally, the district saw a significant increase in Special Education Riders per Bus, up 110%, or an additional 6.5 students. They also scored very high compared to their cohorts in this category, ranking 3rd overall. Similar to the increase in overall expenditures noted earlier, Lake Stevens saw an increase of 38% in Cost per Rider. But like the other two categories, the district ranked very high compared to the comparative districts, placing 4th against their cohorts.

School District Comments

The district reviewed the document and does not have any additional comments.

Comments Regarding the District Transportation Operations Review

Regional Transportation Coordinator Comments:

The district's overall operations, when compared to identified cohort districts, used more buses, and had expenditures in excess of the efficiency report "targets." However, when assessing these "targets," it's important to remember these ideals are derived from various districts using mathematical weighted values and thus absent the realistic context facing Lake Stevens.

In summary, even though expenditures have risen, and their efficiency score decreased to 89%, Lake Stevens was considered 100% efficient in the previous two years.

School District Comments

The district reviewed the document and does not have any additional comments.

District Comments Regarding the RTC Efficiency Review Process

The district reviewed the document and does not have any additional comments.

Appendices

Appendix I: Efficiency Detail Report
Appendix II: Key Performance Indicators