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**MAJOR REDUCTION IN STUDENTS DOWNTOWN WITH NEW BUS-PASS SYSTEM**

*Changes Taking Effect This Week Will Cut Number of Transfers,*

*Limit the Time Before Students Must Catch Their Next Bus*

Scolding a small number of students for unacceptable behavior, Superintendent Bolgen Vargas, Ed.D., today joined Mayor Thomas S. Richards, Board of Education President Malik Evans, and Regional Transit Service executives in announcing changes to bus passes that will restrict the ability of thousands of students to travel anywhere on RTS buses except directly to and from school.

The changes, which take effect this Friday, require more students who ride RTS buses to take express routes that travel directly from city neighborhoods to District schools. Students on routes that transfer downtown will receive a timed “connection pass” that requires them to catch the next bus in minutes.

Previously students could make transfers on later buses if they chose, and could use express bus passes to travel downtown. The changes are being made in response to students who have been lingering along Main Street and at the Liberty Pole recently, with some engaging in fights and unruly behavior.

Board of Education President Malik Evans joined Dr. Vargas in saying that recent events downtown highlight a behavior issue, not a transportation problem. “Policy changes will not alter the fact that young people must be held accountable for their actions,” Evans said. “To fully address this issue, parents must realize that at the end of the day they are ultimately responsible for their children.”

Dr. Vargas agreed, saying in a letter to families that the unacceptable behavior of a small number of students is penalizing a much larger group. “I want all of our students to have access to the same opportunities that middle-class families take for granted,” the letter said. “That includes the opportunity to travel easily, taking advantage of extra-curricular activities and community resources. With regret, I am forced take these steps until our students, as a group, earn more privileges through improved behavior.”

The changes include:

* Students with express passes can use them only on their assigned bus routes in the morning or at school dismissal. The orange express passes will not be valid at other bus stops or other times.
* Students on bus routes requiring a transfer can only use their gray passes in the morning and until 5 p.m. To transfer, students must request a connection Pass when they board their first bus, which will expire after 60 minutes.
* Any student who needs transportation for after-school activities must obtain a special pass from their school.

District transportation officials said they are reviewing route assignments and requiring more students to use express passes, working with schools to adjust some student arrival and departure times without affecting instructional time. Special passes for travel outside school hours are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

“Assigning more police officers and school safety personnel to downtown should not be necessary, and it’s not a sustainable solution,” Mayor Richards said. “The District and RTS have responded quickly to address the problems city students have been creating downtown, and we should allow time to see if these transportation changes work.”

About 9,900 city students in grades 7-12 ride RTS buses to and from school. Most students who live within 1.5 miles walk to their school, and students in grades K-6 ride “yellow buses” instead of public transportation.

Before the changes announced today, about 2,500 students—1,500 who attend city schools, and 1,000 who attend charter or private schools—had passes for non-express routes that require a bus transfer. The District said that several hundred of the transferring students will be shifted this week to express routes, and that it will continue to review pass and route assignments with RTS to reduce the number of students who need to transfer buses.

Bill Carpenter, CEO, Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority, said the RTS is educating its Bus Operators, Road Supervisors, and Customer Service employees so they are well-equipped to assist students and parents with understanding and using the bus passes.

“Our goal is to provide affordable, efficient transportation for all our customers, including students and their families,” Carpenter said. “My team will continue working closely with the school district to provide a high-quality service for students that serves them well and meets the needs of the entire community.”

See attached fact sheet or visit rgrta.com for more information on bus passes and routes.

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