

The Worcester Public Schools owns and operates 41 special education vehicles (including spares) to provide door-to-door transportation for those students requiring such transportation in their individualized education plans. The district contracts an additional 31 mid-size and 20 wheelchair buses for in-district services through Durham School Services.

The current capital budget funding allocation from the City of Worcester generally allows for up to three school bus replacements annually, while also allowing for district Information Technology investments and Facilities Department equipment and vehicle replacements as well. These district owned buses typically operate for 10 hours per day and work throughout the summer for many of the summer programming within the district resulting in 25,000 miles per year per bus. Based on this usage and resulting mileage, under the state's annual state school bus inspection cycle (three times annually), the actual practical usual life of these school buses is around 8 years.

However, the capital equipment budget creates a fourteen-year replacement cycle and results in vehicles with mileage well in excess of 200,000 miles; well beyond the practical useful life and cost effectiveness for these buses. The sustainability of the fleet has been expensive and before the start of this new replacement process, routes were often consolidated to accommodate when vehicles were out of service for repair. This capital equipment replacement cycle previously required the district to move four routes to Durham School Services in FY17 because of the loss of vehicles through safety inspections. The first-year implementation of the fleet replacement cycle through the lease program allowed the district return the four contracted routes from Durham School Services this year.

The district began the replacement of special education vehicles through a five-year lease-purchase cycle program last year. Under this plan, the district will replace the worst condition vehicles (age, mileage, condition) over the next five years. This next lease-purchase allotment will replace vehicles ranging between 9-14 years of age. FY20 will be the second year of this replacement cycle. It is expected that these leased vehicles will be partially offset through a reduction in maintenance cost of existing vehicles.

This recommendation is consistent with the implementation plan for leasing of special education school buses as that was described in the FY17 budget book (pages 53 and 133-134).

The Administration recommends that the School Committee authorize the Administration to enter into a lease-purchase contracts for 10 mid-size school buses for a term of 5 years.