

The Worcester Public Schools owns and operates 45 special education vehicles (including spares) to provide curb-to-curb student transportation for those students requiring such transportation in accordance with their individualized education plans. The district contracts an additional 31 mid-size and 21 wheelchair buses (total of 52 contracted 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 an excess of 200,000 miles with excessive wear and tear on vehicles; 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.

The district began the replacement of all district-operated special education vehicles through a five-year lease-purchase cycle program in FY19. Under the plan, the district is replacing the worst condition vehicles (age, mileage, condition) over the next five years. To date, 20 vehicles have been replaced through this lease-purchase plan (ten in FY19 and ten in FY20). FY21 will be the third year of this five-year 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 for delivery and payment to begin in FY21. Approval is needed at this time to allow for the bid, contract award, vehicle construction, and vehicle delivery by end of July 2020.