

Student busing accord reached

Busing

\$45.4M deal needs school board's OK

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The Rochester School District has reached a tentative agreement with the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority to bus its high school students for the next four years, but still needs to convince the school board there is no better deal to be had.

The four-year agreement would begin in September 2016 and last through June 2020 for a total cost of \$45.4 million. It would provide direct routes to school for most students, meaning few transfers at the downtown Transit Center.

In the first year, it would represent a savings of \$1.2 million compared to the

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Passengers arrive at the downtown Transit Center.

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widely-panned agreement currently in place. That was negotiated in haste this summer after RGRTA first said it would stop transporting city students all together, then relented.

The cost would begin at about \$1,300 per student and rise to \$1,400 per student by the fourth year. By comparison, the current cost per secondary student is \$1,549 and the cost for a student on a yellow bus is about \$1,800, district CFO William Ansbro told the school board's finance committee Thursday.

It does not include summer school — that has been a separate contract traditionally — but does provide flexibility for students with various after-school activities. It would require some adjustment of school start and release times at both the elementary and secondary levels.

While the board members had no specific complaints about the proposal, they were bothered that the district hadn't conducted a new bidding process to be sure it was getting the best deal. After some sharp criticism of RGRTA's negotiating techniques this summer, the board vowed to explore all its options for 2016-17. "What disappoints me is that the board so clearly articulated its point of view (this summer), and yet you persisted in going down the same path," board member Jose Cruz said. Ansbrow responded that the responses to the district's 2014 request for bids was "very strong" and pointed out the advantages RGRTA has over any other prospective contractors, particularly its flexibility for students with afterschool activities and lack of ramp-up costs. The finance committee asked for more detailed information before making a decision and likely will call a special meeting to discuss the proposal further before a full board vote. The next board meeting is Dec. 17.

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