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Lamorinda School Bus program suspended

By Pippa Fisher

On top of the many stresses and uncertainties parents are facing during this coming school year, the news that the Lamorinda School Bus program is being suspended, is yet another challenge.

In a letter to parents, Lamorinda School Bus Program Manager Whitney Simon said it was with heavy heart that the bus service would be suspended until further notice; a decision Simon says was not made lightly. Specific state guidelines for school buses during the pandemic require the need for reduced seating capacity in order to practice safe social distancing, and that an aide be assigned to all buses to ensure students abide by the distancing and to conduct symptom screenings. Typically there are 36 students per route with some of the middle school routes at 58 students per bus. The new regulations would reduce that number to a maximum of 14 students per bus, which says Simon, is financially unfeasible.

Furthermore Contra Costa Transportation Authority has notified the program, which is funded by 60% from the county's Measure J sales tax revenue, and by 40% from parents' fees, that it will receive a 16.5% reduction in funding due to a loss in sales tax revenues. This combined with reduction in ridership and the cost of paying for additional aides makes providing the service impracticable until health orders allow such guidelines to be removed.

While local schools will likely begin with remote learning, they may return to a hybrid model offering some in-person classes, and Simon says she is working to explore the availability of online resources for families to connect with other families in their class cohorts to develop carpools and hopes to reach out to parents soon with a survey.

Reach the reporter at: pippa@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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