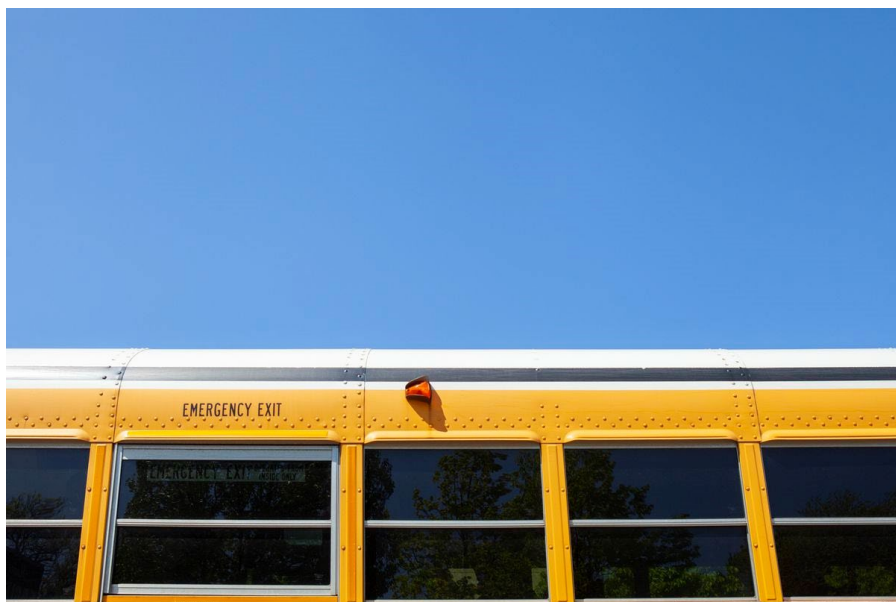


## Press Clippings 08/31/2021

---Chalkbeat Chicago--08/31/2021

### School bus driver shortage in Chicago prompts \$1,000 payments to families and calls to Uber, Lyft

by Cassie Walker Burke



Chicago is paying stranded families \$1,000 for the first two weeks of school, and \$500 a month after, as it contends with a school bus driver shortage. *Stacey Rupolo for Chalkbeat*

Chicago is giving stranded families \$1,000 to cover transportation for the first two weeks of school and reaching out to ride-sharing companies Uber and Lyft after a bus driver crunch left about 2,100 students without a ride on the first day of school.

“This is an all-hands-on-deck moment,” said Mayor Lori Lightfoot on Monday at an otherwise celebratory back-to-school event in which officials heralded the full-time reopening of schools after more than 500 days of remote and hybrid learning.

Even as Chicago sent messages all weekend reassuring families of its plans for a safe reopening amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, administrators were scrambling behind the scenes to reconfigure bus routes and notify about 2,100 students that they would not receive bus service on the first day. The district said that the combination of a national driver shortage and a flurry of late resignations among bus drivers caused the gap in services.

Chicago’s bus emergency comes as districts across Illinois, and across the country, report bus driver shortages. Superintendents in downstate and central Illinois have flagged the bus driver shortage on their list of concerns for reopening. Some are offering signing bonuses to aid in recruiting.

Chicago says the resignations were “likely driven” by the mid-August imposition of a vaccination mandate on all educators, vendors, and support staff. Chicago Public Schools has said all employees and vendors must be vaccinated by Oct. 15 with limited exceptions.

Pressed Monday at a reopening event about why the district was notifying families late in the game when a national shortage has been forecast for weeks, Lightfoot said the contractors had not notified the district until late in the week about the resignations and that she immediately directed her team to reach out to Uber and Lyft to see what could be done.

The mention of ride-sharing companies set off social media, with commenters pointing out the complications of enlisting private drivers who may or may not be vaccinated themselves. Commenters also said ride-share rules prevent anyone under the age of 18 from riding alone.

“CPS immediately sprung into action and put plans in place, and while we know there will be some issues for the first couple of days, there is a solid plan,” said Lightfoot. “What I can tell you is what I saw across the city (today) is that buses are running, CPS has offered financial compensation for parents to make sure that they have an opportunity to pay for transportation, and we’re going to work with the rideshare companies to backfill.”

She said the city is also working to help recruit vaccinated drivers to fill the open positions. After two weeks, families who still don’t have bus transportation can be eligible for another \$500 per month to assist with expenses, the district said.

Chicago Public Schools contracts bus service with multiple vendors for about 14,500 students. Not every family is eligible for bus service. Students at mostly selective enrollment and magnet schools outside of neighborhood attendance zones were impacted by the shortage, the district said.

Lightfoot said Monday that the district prioritized rerouting students with disabilities.

About 10% of the district’s drivers resigned between Aug. 23 and Aug. 27, leaving the nation’s third-largest school district short about 500 drivers.

The district said it had heeded national warnings of a bus driver shortage and previously assigned routes to all eligible families. Because it had to combine some routes, some families were given pick-up times of 15 to 30 minutes earlier than normal.

Prior to last week, Chicago Public Schools said it was short 420 drivers but that arrangements had been made for all students.

But the late notice from bus companies of the contractor exodus made things worse.

“We are committed to ongoing engagement and dialogue with families and will be working diligently with them to solve this problem moving forward,” district spokeswoman Emily Bolton said in a statement.

Beth Lapa, the assistant director for transportation at **Elgin’s U-46** and an Illinois affiliate for the United Association of Pupil Transportation, said that a combination of factors, including vaccine mandates, is sending existing workers into early retirement and prompting fewer drivers to sign up for open positions. “Every district is struggling,” she said.

---Aurora Beacon-News--08/31/2021

## The word on junior outside hitter Alyssa Worden? She's back and better than ever for South Elgin after playing club only in the spring

by Rick Armstrong; Note: This article also ran at [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com)

AUG 31, 2021 AT 2:00 PM



South Elgin's Alyssa Worden (7) receives serve while Maggie McGough (4) and Madeleine Shaner, right, look on during a match against Schaumburg in South Elgin on Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

Alyssa Worden had a choice to make in March, and it was a bit of a dilemma.

Should she play with her Sports Performance club team or play high school volleyball at **South Elgin** during its delayed season?

A talented 5-foot-10 outside hitter, Worden posted a team-high 315 kills as a freshman in 2019 to lead the Storm to a 28-8 record and the program's first conference title.

"It was really a tough decision," Worden said. "It was a weird time with COVID pushing back the high school season."

Suddenly, though, it wasn't so tough.

“I was originally going to go with my school team,” Worden said. “But my club coach gave me the opportunity to play up with the 18-year-olds.”

How did that work out?

Well, Worden started for the Sports Performance 18 Elite team that finished 43-3 and took second at the AAU Junior National Tournament.



South Elgin's Madeleine Shaner (12), Maggie McGough (4), Alyssa Worden (7) and Arielle Martin (19) , left to right, huddle during a break in the action in a match against Schaumburg in South Elgin on Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

“I took that opportunity and it improved me, individually, as a player,” she said.

Joni Plach has coached South Elgin since the school opened in 2005. She understood Worden’s decision, especially since high school teams could not play in tournaments and did not have a postseason.

Emma Hunter, a defensive specialist, also opted to play club. The Storm went 6-4 but has everyone back for this season.

“I’ve seen Alyssa grow tremendously mentally,” Plach said. “She knows what it takes for us to win, and (Thursday) was proof it can’t be ‘The Alyssa Show’ for us to win matches.”

Plach spoke after her team rallied to take a 22-25, 25-20, 25-23 win over nonconference rival Schaumburg in the season opener.

The Storm then went 3-1 over the weekend at the U-46 Invitational, dropping a 25-18, 21-25, 15-13 decision to Bartlett in the championship match.

Adjustments are being made.

“It’s out that Alyssa Worden is back for South Elgin,” Plach said. “Other teams know and they’re camping on her. We’ve talked about it.

“Yes, we know we have Alyssa and she can hit hard, but volleyball is a team effort and it takes everybody to get kills.”

It did against Schaumburg, a team that had a taller front row and put up a solid block.

A trio of juniors led the way for the Storm in the opener, with Worden and 5-8 Madeleine Shaner each recording 10 kills and 5-9 junior Lily Slowinski adding five.

Plach also received solid play from Hunter, a senior the coach moved to setter, where she split duties with junior Arielle Martin. It was the first varsity match at the position for both players.

“Emma has never set before but she plays a lot of beach volleyball and gets a lot of touches,” Plach said. “Her defense is amazing and her volleyball knowledge is good. We know we can’t just set Alyssa outside because she’s going to get blocked.

“We were able to run middles, and we have right sides who can put the ball down. Obviously, Alyssa is a big player for us, but it’s definitely the whole team.”

Worden knows that as well.

“We have a couple team goals,” she said. “We definitely want to win conference and maybe the regional and improve on that record from my freshman year.

“Honestly, I don’t think I did too well, hitting wise (against Schaumburg). I’ve done much better, but the team stepped up. I feel like I contributed pretty well in the back row and my serving was pretty good.”

Her 14 digs and three aces bear that out. And when it became crunchtime, Worden was very much at the forefront.

The Storm trailed 17-13 in Game 3 when Worden reeled off five straight service points, capped by back-to-back aces.

The teams seesawed to a 23-23 tie, with the right-handed Worden putting down a pair of kills to decide it. One was on a blast, the other with a well-placed hit with her left hand to an open spot on the court.

“That was pretty much from experience,” Worden said. “The more you play, the more you learn what’s best to do with the ball, especially in midair.

“If the set is not in the perfect place you want, you have to figure out what to do and think of the best way to score.”