



Transportation Service Levels
Published by the Pupil Transportation Office,
Ohio Department of Education
August 24, 2011

This document is intended to provide information that clarifies the responsibilities and obligations of school districts with respect to pupil transportation service levels.

Pupil transportation service must be provided in Ohio for students in grades K-8 who live more than two miles from their school. Many school districts also transport students in high school, as well as students who live closer than two miles from their school, but these services are optional at the discretion of the district and are not required by state law.

Transportation plans are designed and implemented by each district. This plan includes the designation of walk-in areas to school, identification of hazardous areas, the location of bus stops and the actual routing and planning of routes. Other issues, such as the ability of a school district to accommodate day care arrangements, alternative bus stops and length of time a student rides on a bus are also determined by the local school district. There are no administrative regulations or laws that limit these.

School transportation is a form of public transportation that is designed to be safe and efficient while serving as many students as possible. It is not an individualized transportation service. As in other forms of public transportation, there is little opportunity to alter or change schedules and routes to meet individual family circumstances.

When school systems face financial shortages they are required to identify areas where expenses can be reduced, since they cannot operate on a deficit budget. In many cases, local staff will seek to identify non-classroom related areas where expenses can be reduced. Since the majority of districts provide transportation that exceeds the required state minimum, transportation consequently becomes an identified cost savings.

With an average annual cost of \$789 to transport a student to school, a significant reduction in expenses can be realized through a reduction in transportation. While there is state funding provided to assist districts with transportation expenses, during the current budget cycle the state budget does not restrict the use of this funding to pupil transportation. Consequently, districts who reduce their costs in pupil transportation are able to use those funds to help support other needs at the local school district.

Other alternatives are also commonly considered to reduce transportation costs, including rerouting and streamlining bus schedules to increase efficiency, changing school attendance times to better utilize a smaller bus fleet, and reduction of extra bus stops and service to students who live close to their schools. Transportation cost savings can also be realized by eliminating transportation services for educational and sports field trips, which are neither funded by the state nor required to be provided by law or administrative rule.

Fact sheet regarding pupil transportation service levels

Legal basis: (references from RC 3327.01 and OAC 3301-83-01 G1a)

- Transportation shall be provided for all resident school pupils in grades K-8 who live more than two miles from the school to which they are assigned by the board of education of the district of residence. Pupils attending community or nonpublic schools for which the state board of education prescribes minimum standards are also entitled to the same transportation services (further limited under law by a 30 minute eligibility rule).
- City, local, and exempted village school districts may provide transportation for resident school pupils in grades 9 through 12. They may also provide transportation for students who live less than two miles from school.
- Measurement of distance originates at a point on the traveled portion of the roadway nearest the primary entrance to the place of residence and then along the most direct route traversable by motor vehicle to the bus loading area nearest and opposite the entrance door used by pupils transported.

Funding

- Funding is provided for all eligible students transported over 1 mile from school.
- Pupil transportation is supported by the state education budget, and is allocated to districts based upon an analysis of costs from previous years. In the last fiscal year, that funding represented approximately 52% of the reported costs by districts. This year, the transportation funding provided to districts is not limited to pupil transportation expenses – and can be used for other purposes at each district. This means that districts who can reduce their transportation expenses can use the funds for other purposes in the district
- All schools – public, nonpublic, and charter schools are prohibited from charging pupils for transportation service on school days.

Issues

- Transportation service above state minimum is considered a discretionary spending item, although it is subsidized.
- Determination of 'eligibility distance' is a local district decision. There is no guidance or standard established in administrative code or revised code.
- The 'eligibility distance' from school is not the same as saying that it is safe to walk that distance – parents must make that assessment for their own students.
- Bus stop locations for children in grades K-8 (when transportation is provided) are determined by local school districts, but must be provided within ½ mile of the child's residence.

Parental Issues

- Parents have a legal responsibility for compliance with compulsory education laws regardless of the provision of pupil transportation services.
- While transportation is provided for some students, parental responsibility is still continued until the child is under the district's supervision (on the bus).
- When transportation is not provided by a school because it is not required, parents may be able to find other sources of transportation within the community independent of the public school system. Although parents will incur the cost of this service, by grouping together with other families it may be possible to make more economical arrangements.