



Pupil Transportation Service Levels
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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 \$400 to transport a student to school, a significant savings in expenses can potentially be realized through a reduction in transportation. However, this savings must be balanced with the fact that each school district in the state also receives state funding assistance for pupil transportation-including pupils transported at the district's discretion beyond state legal requirements. While the amount of funding that each district receives varies based on a complex formula, the average percentage of state funding for fiscal year 2003 was approximately 60 percent of local cost. This means that when reducing transportation service a district will lose some state funding, but will also save local funds.

Other alternatives are also commonly considered to reduce transportation costs, including rerouting and streamlining bus schedule 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 within walking distance of their schools. Transportation cost savings can also be realized by eliminating transportation services for educational and sports field trips, which are not 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 funding is provided to school districts based on a complex formula using a statewide analysis of costs. The net effect of this formula is that an amount of funding is supplied to each district based in part upon the number of students transported and the number of miles traveled. While the actual percent of cost reimbursed can vary greatly, the average reimbursement to districts statewide for FY02 was 54 percent.
- Reduction in service levels by a district will result in reduction in funding levels.
- Districts are prohibited from charging pupils for transportation service.

Issues

- Transportation service above state minimum is considered a discretionary spending item, although it is subsidized.
- Reduction in service without a significant reduction in spending may result in a net loss of funds to the district.
- Determination of 'safe walk zones' is a local district decision. There is no guidance or standard established in administrative code or revised code.
- Bus stop locations 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.