



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

House Education Committee
Public Hearing on School Transportation and Busing
October 30, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper, and distinguished members of the House Education Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) role in pupil transportation for school districts and intermediate units (IUs) across the Commonwealth. My name is Benjamin Hanft, and I am the Division Chief of PDE's Division of Subsidy Administration.

Transportation Responsibilities of PDE

The Department's role regarding student transportation is limited to the collection of transportation-related data and the calculation and payment of state subsidies. Additionally, as a technical assistance agency, PDE assists with directing LEAs to various statutory guidance and when necessary, refers LEAs to their solicitors for advice.

The authority for all aspects of student transportation falls on each school district's local board of directors. Regulations in Title 22, Chapter 23, of the Pennsylvania Code set forth the various responsibilities for school boards. These responsibilities include means of transportation and selection of appropriate vehicles; establishment of bus routes, schedules, and loading zones for student pickup and drop off; and the adoption of transportation policies and procedures governing items such as student eligibility and calculation of distances, discipline on vehicles, and field trips.

Section 1361 of the Public School Code of 1949 provides for school district transportation of resident students to nonpublic schools during regular school hours and on regular school days. However, a school district is only required to provide transportation to students of the same grade level that it transports to its own buildings. To be eligible for transportation services from a school district, students attending nonpublic schools must attend a nonpublic school located within 10 miles of the school district's boundary. A school district that transports students to nonpublic schools can include the related vehicles in its state transportation data collection and is eligible to receive the Nonpublic and Charter School Pupil Transportation Subsidy of \$385 for each nonpublic and charter school pupil transported.

Section 1726-A of the Public School Code requires that a school district provide transportation to all resident students that are enrolled in brick and mortar charter schools that are located within 10 miles of the school district's boundary. A school district that transports students to charter schools can include the related vehicles in its state transportation data collection and is eligible for receipt of the Nonpublic and Charter School Pupil Transportation Subsidy.

Pupil Transportation Subsidy

A school district receives state Pupil Transportation Subsidy for the transportation of its resident kindergarten through 12th-grade students to and from school in the fiscal year after the transportation was provided. School districts must provide PDE with detailed information regarding the vehicles used and the type of service provided. Data is collected electronically and includes:



Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials

Testimony to the House Education Committee

October 30, 2023

Good morning Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Topper, and distinguished members of the House Education Committee. My name is Jennifer Grove, and I am the Director of Transportation at York Suburban School District. I am also a member of the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO). Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the state's pupil transportation formula and the challenges school districts currently face when it comes to providing transportation for their students.

Categories of Students Transported

The pupil transportation subsidy recognizes different categories of students the district is responsible for transporting within its boundaries. The first category is public school pupils transported, which includes the total number of resident public school students. Within this category, it should be noted that school districts are not statutorily required to provide transportation to kindergarten and elementary school students residing within a 1.5-mile radius of the school building, or to secondary students residing within a 2-mile radius unless a walking route has been recognized as hazardous by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Additionally, federal and other guidelines require each school district to provide transportation for homeless students to ensure that there is continuity of educational services for that population of students. This can, in some cases, require school districts to transport students far outside of the district.

The second category is nonpublic school pupils transported. This includes the total number of resident nonpublic school students the district is responsible for transporting. Another category recognizes the number of resident students the district is responsible for transporting to charter schools within the district's boundaries. Transportation must be provided to these students on any dates and times that the charter school is in regular session, regardless of whether the district provides transportation for their resident students attending public schools in the district. A separate category incorporates the number of resident students the district transports to regional charter schools or charter schools located within a ten-mile radius of the district's boundaries.

The last category is non-reimbursable pupils transported to and from public and non-public schools on contracted vehicles. Additionally, if a school district transports kindergarten and elementary school students who reside within a 1.5-mile radius of their school or secondary school students who reside within a 2-mile radius of their school, they are non-reimbursable.

Funding for charter and non-public students is provided at a flat rate, at \$385 per student; this amount is not adjusted for inflation annually, and it has not been updated for decades. The cost of providing charter school and non-public transportation is significant, as to accommodate differing calendars and bell schedules, and to transport students to multiple schools each day, it is difficult for districts to achieve economies of scale; as a result, the costs of transporting charter school and non-public school students on an annual basis significantly exceeds the reimbursement amount in most districts.

Current Hardships

The challenges of student transportation are many, and the complexity of providing transportation services to all students across the Commonwealth continues to increase. The exponential growth in transportation costs, which is not considered through the existing formula, has impacted the efficacy and effectiveness of transportation services and continues to challenge budgets across the state. Costs of bus monitors, new vehicles, fuel, and other factors of school transportation are increasing at much higher rates than the current rate of inflation. Additionally, charter and nonpublic transportation costs are exceeding the current subsidy; many school districts lack the ability to obtain smaller vehicles, like vans, to transport students going to non-public and charter schools within a ten-mile radius of the district's boundaries making the provision of these mandated services more and more difficult each year.

The current workforce shortages in the Commonwealth also extend to school bus drivers. The school bus driver shortage has reached unprecedented and critical areas across the state, especially after the pandemic. Two overarching areas of concern for districts are driver recruitment and driver retention – while the current process to hire a bus driver can take up to twelve weeks and includes multiple time-consuming steps. Districts also lack the capacity to improve salary and benefits for drivers due to insufficient funding and reduced benefits. As a result, it has been difficult to meaningfully expand the pool of available bus drivers, and many districts continue to face ongoing shortages in their programs—stretching their programs thin, forcing them to think creatively in terms of schedules and options for education, and sometimes relying on parents to transport students to and from school. With limited salary and benefits capacity, however, schools will continue to struggle hiring drivers and retaining drivers, which will continue to impact school budgets and student education.

With so many significant challenges facing transportation programs, efforts to provide relief to schools are essential. The Joint State Government Commission's report, released in 2022, provides a helpful list of recommendations to meet increasing transportation costs and address the bus driver shortage, and PASBO along with our members focused on transportation would be happy to work with the Committee to begin to move forward on many of the recommendations highlighted in the report.

Overall, the state's pupil transportation formula would greatly benefit from an overhaul to ensure that the formula incentivizes efficiency and collaboration and minimizes burden at the local level. These revisions could also provide and distribute more sufficient funding to account for inflation, and an increased subsidy also allows for more competitive salaries and benefits for school bus drivers, addressing the workforce shortage.

TO: House Education Committee
FROM: Aaron Sepkowski,
PSBA 1st Vice President and Legislative Chair
DATE: October 30, 2023
RE: Testimony for House Education Committee



Testimony for House Education Committee

I wish to thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Aaron Sepkowski, and I am the Owner/Operator with Pocono Transportation in Lackawanna County. I am also the 1st Vice President and Legislative Chair with the Pennsylvania School Bus Association. We recognize our role in student education and the role we have in a child's education. Playing such an important role in a child's growth we realize that we must constantly break down barriers to education. I am here today to discuss the driver shortage that currently faces the School Bus Industry and can potentially cause interruptions to a child's education.

Before I begin, I would like to provide an introduction to the Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA). Established in 1980, the PSBA comprises approximately 300 school transportation contractors and industry partners. The majority of our membership consists of multi-generational family-run businesses. These dedicated members of the PSBA provide gainful employment to approximately 13,000 individuals within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and operate a fleet of over 11,000 vehicles each day. It is noteworthy that over 1.7 million students within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania commence their educational journey aboard our iconic yellow school buses. This figure includes over 300,000 special needs students, whom we refer to as "exceptional learners," attending schools and specialized programs throughout the Commonwealth. Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, over 80% of school districts rely on school bus contractors, such as those that form the PSBA.

Our Commonwealth entrusts small business owners with the vital responsibility of transporting our most precious resource to and from their educational institutions.

The primary mission of the PSBA is to provide comprehensive programs, education, and services aimed at promoting and nurturing the highest degree of safety in the transportation of school children. Furthermore, we are committed to enhancing the quality of student transportation through professional management. The PSBA collaborates closely with various Pennsylvania organizations and government agencies to advance its mission and achieve the objectives set forth by its membership.

Through our collaborative efforts with our membership and in partnership with other key agencies, such as the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Pennsylvania State Police, and the Federal Motor Carriage Safety Administration (FMCSA), and others, we have succeeded in establishing and maintaining the safest mode of transportation for our students as they journey to and from their homes to places of education.

In the realm of student transportation, our contractors and drivers perceive their roles as more than just jobs. They recognize they are entrusted with transporting the future of our Commonwealth, and their responsibilities extend far beyond the simple act of pick-up and drop-off. Often, our contractors and drivers are engaged in transporting students to their athletic events, attending games, or participating in

- Prior to the pandemic the average hourly wage for drivers was \$15.27 an hour with the lowest starting hourly pay being \$12 an hour and the highest being \$23 an hour.
 - Currently the average hourly pay is \$22.13 an hour with \$15 an hour being the lowest and \$30 being the highest.
 - Since the pandemic we have on average increased wages approximately \$7 an hour.
- Additionally, since the pandemic there have been many incentive programs put in place including bonuses for: sign on, attendance, recruitment, and referrals.
- Directed districts and the Pennsylvania Department of Education should gather data on the number of homeless students and how many miles they are transported. The increased miles driven for these students (as well as charter and non-public students) increases the need the number of drivers a district must employ.
 - Homeless/transient students remain a major issue for contractors. We have done everything we can to ensure transportation. However, rising costs make it very difficult to continue.
- Directed districts to implement annual trainings for bus drivers to help them navigate behavioral issues on school buses.
 - PSBA holds a yearly seminar at our convention to help educate drivers bringing in industry experts on the issue. In addition we have held multiple webinars annually, have a tool kit online for our contractors and help guide contractors to increased cooperation with school districts to help with student discipline.

In conclusion, the Pennsylvania School Bus Association remains unwaveringly committed to its mission of ensuring the highest degree of safety in the transportation of school children and elevating the quality of student transportation through professional management. It is my fervent hope that today's testimony has underscored the pivotal role played by the Pennsylvania School Bus Association and its members in guaranteeing the safe and dependable transportation of over 1.7 million students daily, including exceptional learners, to and from their educational institutions each day. Our dedicated school bus contractors, many of whom represent local, multi-generational family-run businesses, have served as the cornerstone of student transportation for decades. Their dedication to safety and professionalism remains steadfast.

We eagerly anticipate collaborating with the House Education Committee to identify solutions that will not only benefit our industry but, most importantly, serve the students who rely on our services for their education. I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your time and consideration, and I stand ready to entertain any questions or engage in further discussions on these crucial matters, that we view as potential barriers to education.

Thank you.

POTTSVILLE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

HOWARD S. FERNSLER ACADEMIC CENTER

1501 West Laurel Boulevard

Pottsville, PA 17901-1419

Phone: 570-621-2900 · Fax: 570-621-2025

www.pottsville.k12.pa.us

Testimony Presented to the House
Education Committee Regarding
Challenges in School District Transportation

Informational Meeting
October 30, 2023
Irvis Office – Room 515

Dr. Sarah Yoder, Superintendent
Pottsville Area School District
Pottsville, PA 17901



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buildings located in close proximity in an urban setting. You may have visited our campus if you attended a District XI or PIAA playoff basketball game in our Martz Hall. We have had a unique tuition agreement with neighboring Saint Clair Area School District to educate their 9th – 12th grade students since 1990, and SCASD is a 48-square-mile rural school district. Both of our districts are along the Route 61 corridor on a well-travelled route between Interstates 78 and 81, which translates to being almost equidistant from Harrisburg, Allentown, Reading, and Hazleton. Due to our extremely low-cost housing market as well as several areas of public housing within the City of Pottsville Housing Authority and Schuylkill County Housing Authority, we have a significant proportion of families in poverty. Our current economically disadvantaged rate is 67%. Our direct certification rate of 62% has increased from last year's rate of 57%.

Pottsville Area School District Transportation Snapshot

Pottsville Area School District families rely heavily on our transportation department. We serve a diverse population of resident and non-resident students, which stretches our financial and staffing resources. We are currently transporting 2,029 students, which is an increase of almost 400 students from last year's 1,633. The primary reason for the 24% increase is due to submitting a request to PennDOT to identify State Route 209/West Market Street as a hazardous route. This extremely busy route is utilized by local community members and those traveling from Interstate 81 to State Route 61. As recently as last winter, Interstate 81 northbound was closed in Schuylkill County, and traffic was rerouted through Pottsville on this roadway. Previously, the District received no subsidy for providing transportation for students from K - 6th grade on the south side of the City who would have to cross State Route 209/West Market Street to walk to



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Transportation employees play a vital role in the successes of students and their access to growing into productive members of society. Our drivers and aides are likely the first PASD staff members to greet students to set the tone of their day, and they provide the last smile to students as they step out of our vehicles on their way home. In order to best support our students and staff, our transportation employees participate in professional development, including our opening in-service day in August. We know all employees positively impact our students and families with respect to building relationships and school culture. Transportation aides provide support for young students, new students, students with behavioral struggles, and students with IEPs. Our buses and vans are extensions of the classroom with peer interactions and academics since our district was fortunate to receive federal Emergency Connectivity Funds to use for wi-fi on our buses. With an increase of ridership, we must ensure our employees are able to resolve student behavior issues, so we are increasing the focus on the necessary training before circumstances escalate to needing administrative intervention.

Bus Driver Shortage

The intertwined urgent issues that need to be addressed are the bus driver shortage and insufficient transportation reimbursement. Due to the driver shortage that closely mirrors the educator shortage, we have gone beyond advertising in local and social media and are focused on “growing our own”. We currently have a part-time transportation staff of 10 bus drivers, 11 van drivers, 7 transportation aides, a mechanic, and a transportation supervisor. In addition to the drivers, the mechanic, supervisor, and two other employees in the district serve as substitute bus and/or van drivers. Two weeks ago, we were short one bus driver, and our



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requires urgent attention. Over the past 6 school years, the Pottsville Area School District has received approximately 40% of its transportation costs reimbursed through the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Pupil Transportation Subsidy. Compounding this issue, the PASD is unfortunately one of the identified 100 underfunded school districts in Pennsylvania, so the transportation reimbursement rate negatively impacts our students more than students attending districts with greater wealth. We have all experienced the increase in fuel cost, which is exacerbating the district's budgetary commitment to transportation. This circumstance places the burden on our local taxpayers. Insufficient reimbursement from the state results in lower pay and benefits for our transportation employees cascading the shortage of drivers leading to the turbulence our district is experiencing.

Due to complex competing priorities within school districts, potential consequences in the near future may be longer bus rides, which may negatively impact students' academic and extra-curricular performance and possibly their physical and mental health. We are currently implementing double bus runs for individual buses for single schools, and we have reached the ceiling for multiple runs. Exceeding this maximum limit would lead to contractual concerns with educators and support staff due to the necessity of supervising students in the school building beyond the school day, and/or prevent the District from meeting the PDE instructional time requirements.

Our School Board recently approved a new lease for buses, so we do not have current concerns for an aging fleet. However, the safety of students may be impacted if we are unable to continue to upkeep our fleet in the



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As discussed earlier, one of the difficulties our transportation department faces is driving students identified as McKinney Vento or living with foster families to other school districts within and periodically beyond Schuylkill County. Since this is a shared crisis, our team met with representatives from Schuylkill Transportation System (STS) and Children & Youth to collaborate. STS has routes throughout Schuylkill County with the potential capacity to support students in need. Unfortunately, it was shared that the funding streams and current regulations for STS are barriers to moving forward with this collaboration.

Conclusion

The aforementioned PennDOT approval of Route 209/West Market Street as a hazardous route underscores how access to transportation improves opportunities for students. The attendance rate thus far this school year has increased in each building when compared to 2022 through the same time period.

Attendance Through October 20th

Year	Elementary School (K – 4th)	Middle School (5th – 8th)	High School (9th – 12th)
2022	94.6%	94.1%	91.4%
2023	95.4%	96.0%	95.1%
Increase in attendance	+0.8%	+1.9%	+3.7%
Change in transportation	No change	Additional 7 th and 8 th graders transported	Additional 9 th - 12 th graders transported

These data indicate that the additional transportation provided to the 7th – 12th grade students aided them in their school attendance. We anticipate the impact on attendance will be intensified once the winter weather arrives



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FRAZIER SCHOOL DISTRICT

William R. Henderson III, Ed. D., Superintendent

bhenderson@fraziersd.org

Testimony- PA House Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the issues that our district is experiencing regarding school transportation and the driver shortage. My name is William Henderson, and I am the Superintendent of the Frazier School District. I have 26 years of experience in the public school system, 14 as a Superintendent.

District Demographics

The Frazier School District is a rural public school district located in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, about 35 miles south of Pittsburgh. It serves the boroughs of Perryopolis and Newell, and the townships of Perry, Jefferson and Lower Tyrone. Frazier School District encompasses approximately 83 square miles. The district serves approximately 1100 students, 46% of which are considered economically disadvantaged.

School Budget

The Frazier School District operates on a \$21,000,000-million-dollar budget. The district has a 92% collection rate. Our current millage rate is 22.2283. One mil provides \$300,000 in revenue. We have 79 teachers, 7 school administrators, and approximately 60 support staff.

Budget Crisis

Our district is operated with no frivolous spending. In the last 5 years we have not replaced 4 teachers, cut clerical staff, increased employee insurance contributions, reduced spending, limited field trips, as well as travel for professional development. However, the amount that we can produce through our funding system does not cover our basic needs due to unfunded mandates, rising health care, PSERS, cyber costs, increased transportation costs, and special education costs. **This year alone, our health care increase of approximately \$300,000 consumed our entire tax increase.** Below is an example of two unfunded, mandated services, which impedes our district from providing our students with the educational opportunities and learning environment that they deserve.

Student Tuition Cost	SY 2021-2022	# of Students	SY 2022-2023	# of Students
Cyber	\$922,000	Reg. Ed. - 43 Spec. Ed.-17	\$994,000	Reg. Ed. - 43 Spec. Ed.- 17
Outplaced Students	\$495,000	29 students	\$485,574	27

Outplaced students are students who cannot be serviced in the regular school setting and require special services due to a disability, court placement, mental health crisis, or homeless designation. We are mandated to provide these services and receive no additional funding for providing them.

Transportation Costs

One of the major issues that we are faced with is providing transportation to outside placements for students with special educational needs. We are mandated by law to provide appropriate placements for students based on their IEP's and sometimes these needs are not able to be met within the regular school setting. The district is then required to pay for the outside placement which could range anywhere from \$30,000-\$100,000 depending on the level of care needed, plus transportation costs, which could cost an additional \$25,000-\$75,000. For a district like Frazier, which only receives around \$300,000 per tax increase, this one placement can consume half of the districts revenue generated without notice.

Another mandate that causes a strain financially, as well as on the transportation companies, is number of students who are being identified as "homeless". We are mandated to transport the homeless student to their district of origin if requested. This could be 20 minutes away, or further, and normally requires an additional van/driver.

Frazier School District Transportation Costs							
School Year	Daily Bus Run (includes CTC)	Van & Out of District Placement	Athletics Activities	Total transportation cost	Budgeted Transportation Cost	(Over) Under Budget	State Reimbursement
2022-2023	636,794	852,089	52,089	1,541,079	1,195,544	(345,535)	Not received as of 10/27/23
2021-2022	621,455	646,950	43,312	1,311,717	1,156,996	(154,721)	1,108,374.63

Transportation Issues

The Frazier School District has contracted with T.A. Nelson Bus Lines Inc. for over 20 years. Over the last few years, the company has struggled to cover the day to day transportation, especially after school activities due to a lack of drivers. This school year, in order to fulfill our daily runs, we had to sub-contract with another bus company, Rittenhouse Bus Lines Inc.

Over the last two years, we have struggled to find drivers. We have been forced to double-up on some runs, cancel others, and rearrange extracurricular activities due to the lack of drivers. We also try and share services with other districts that have students in the same outside placements. In order to provide educational opportunities to our secondary students that may extend past their regular school day, we have made arrangements for them to ride home on the elementary bus run due to not having the staff to cover the field trip.

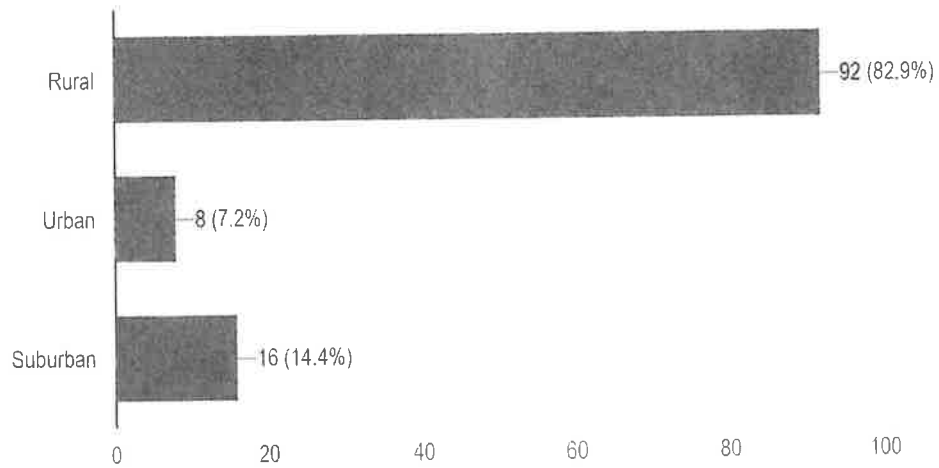
Transportation Survey

As part of my testimony, I wanted to include the input from other superintendents that may be dealing with the same issues. The survey includes input from 111 school districts throughout the state. It provides information on the driver shortages and ways districts have tried to address the issue, other transportation issues that are impacting schools, and finally possible solutions to the problem. **(Survey responses attached)**

Below are the results from the transportation survey I created and distributed to school districts who belong to the following organizations: The Forum for Western Pennsylvania Superintendents, Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, along with schools that are located within Intermediate Unit 1.

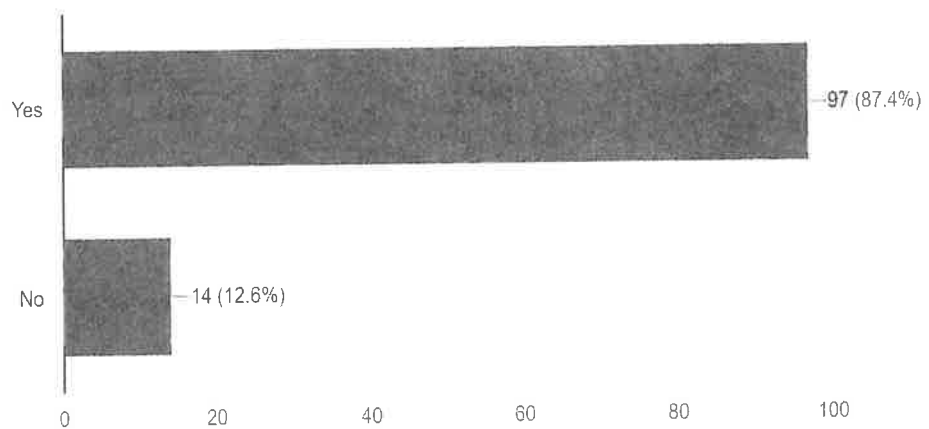
Please indicate which best describes your school district.

111 responses



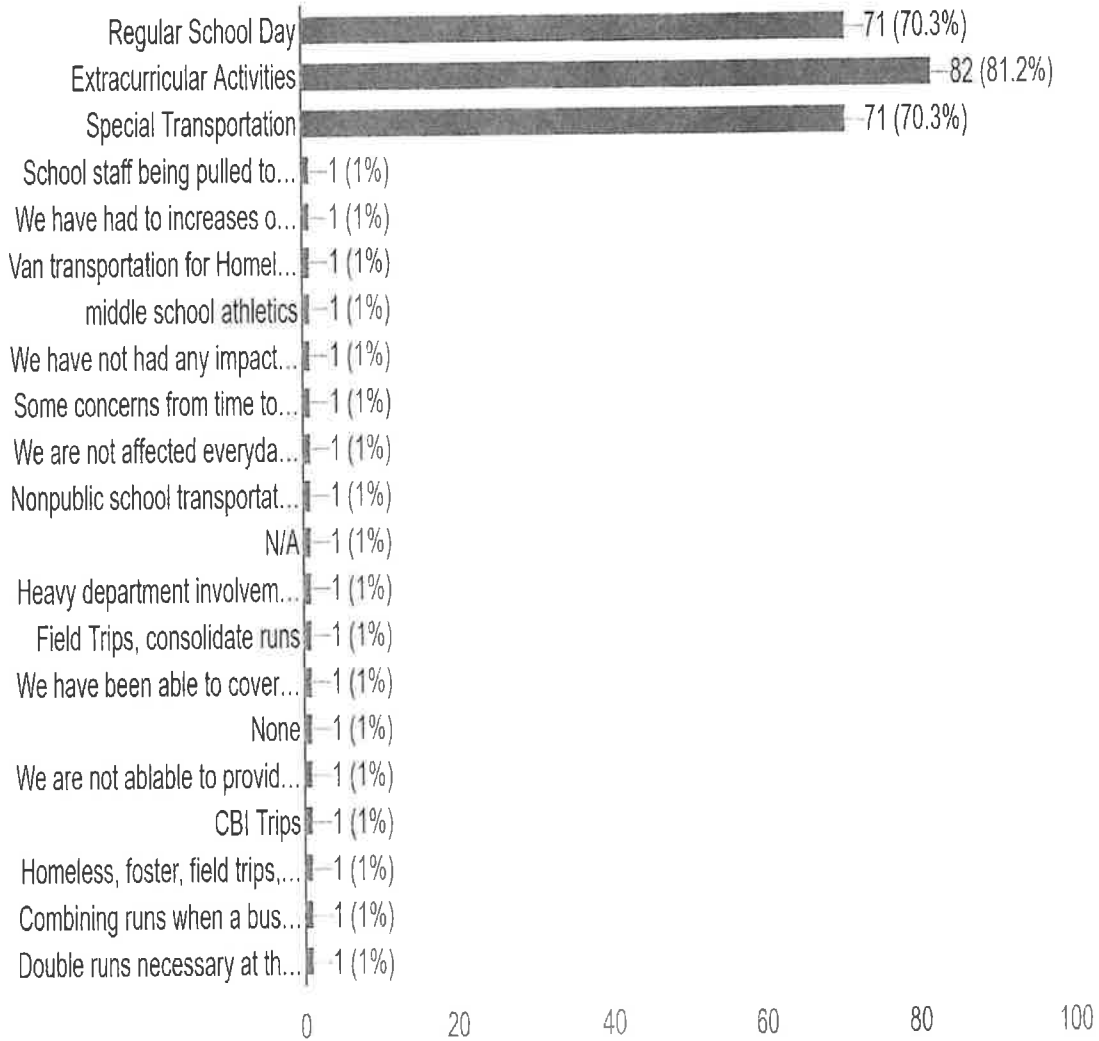
Has your district experienced a bus driver shortage?

111 responses



What has been affected by the shortage?

101 responses



Question 1: If your district has experienced a bus driver shortage, what has your district done to address the issue? 100 responses

- We contract and the contractor has raised wages and advertisement has increased.
- Adjusted trip times. Shared service with neighboring districts. Worked with bus contractor to help recruit additional drivers.
- Advertised, provided incentives, double runs
- Not running certain runs, and doubling up
- Advertise & utilize community networking resources
- Combined routes, encouraged other district employees to become driver certified
- We increased driver pay mid-contract to try and retain drivers. A lot of advertising, searching and hiring. Adjustments to after school activities because of a lack of drivers.
- Changed bus routes and eliminated two buses
- Combined bus routes / reroute buses
- Combined bus runs
- We have engaged in adverting in partnership with our contractors, spoke publicly about the impact during a board meeting(s), had press coverage of that board meeting.
- Contacted retired drivers to ask them to return to driving buses and vans. Reaching out to those who have a CDL for a different profession.
- Incentives for Staff, coaches, and advisors to drive. Plus payment for CDL,
- Increases in compensation, recruit candidates, provide trainings.
- Cancel bus runs, parents transported student athletes to sporting events, cancelled away sporting events, combined bus runs thus making transportation time much longer
- Increase wages, use administration to drive that had their CDL, hired retirees, outsourced bus mechanic services, etc.
- Contracted employees, we are limited
- Contractor has increased wages and has had to use every person in the bus garage to drive and be very creative as to how runs are completed
- The district has reduced field trip opportunities, our mechanics drive many days during the week and for extracurricular activities, our payroll person drives at least two days per week, and four out of six administrators have now completed the CDL training and are working to preparing for the test.
- We have recruited parents as drivers. In addition, we have recruited extensively on social media as well as traditional media. Furthermore, we have increased pay.
- Increased pay to the contractors to attract more drivers
- Pull maintenance staff to run buses.
- Maximize bus space by collapsing routes; advertising for bus drivers within and outside of the school community; increasing pay rate for contracted bus drivers
- We've had to address time schedules to free drivers to take special routes. We've had to use other providers.
- Increased wages, consolidated bus runs, implement double runs
- We continue to get the word out for drivers needed. Contact individuals to try to recruit.
- Double runs

Question 1: If your district has experienced a bus driver shortage, what has your district done to address the issue?

- Increased pay and advertising
- Our transportation vendor has increased advertisement efforts; consolidated bus runs; consolidated sports trips to allow for multiple teams to utilize the same bus
- Our bus contractor has advertised extensively for new drivers and offers a new training class as often as needed regardless of the number of participants. As a district we have teachers and coaches who have become certified CDL drivers to transport students. We have combined bus runs where we could and have some busses doing double runs.
- Teacher/coaches have obtained CDL in order to drive sports buses. In emergency situations, administrators (including the superintendent) have driven vans for specialized transportation.
- Hired a contractor of last resort
- not at this time
- Created second runs - Increased ride times
- Subcontracting with other transportation entities.
- created sign on bonuses and retention stipends
- Advertised
- Attempted to double up two runs on one bus or have after school activities share buses (i.e., softball and baseball teams travel on one bus)
- Unfortunately doubling up bus runs is common place. On two occasions we actually dismissed High School Students early in order to accommodate the provider. Extra-Curricular times have been adjusted.
- signing bonus, local CDL courses
- Advertise extensively. Alter routes. Minimize extra trips.
- Helped the Bus Company with coverage
- Doubled up runs, adjusted schedules, asked coaches/sponsors to drive for extracurricular activities, asked parents to drive their own students to/from extracurriculars, worked collaboratively with the transportation company to advertise, flexed employee schedules
- N/A
- Collaborate with our transportation vendors to assist in recruitment.
- Our bus company, W. L. Roenigk, has been excellent in meeting our needs. We often rent their vans and have our coaches drive for smaller teams. In addition, we will alter pick ups and drop offs to share the same driver with a neighboring district. We have also re-routed some runs to eliminate the total number of buses. Roenigk also encourages to combine special transportation runs when possible and appropriate.
- We have contacted local employers who utilize drivers with CDLs and asked them to send letters to retirees and current employees who might be available during evenings and weekends. We have raised the rate of pay for drivers. We have added a paraprofessional to a bus with some special education students with behavioral difficulties to help reduce the stress that the driver feels.
- Increase utilization of school-owned vans to the extent possible.
- Double runs, dismiss students early from school to ensure buses are not overcrowded which impacts instructional time.

Question 1: If your district has experienced a bus driver shortage, what has your district done to address the issue?

- We have had to combine bus routes, and this creates clear safety concerns. Our transportation provider's dispatcher and mechanic are being called to drive nearly every day. Obviously, there is maintenance not being done on the fleet because of this, and with the dispatcher driving, additional safety issues occur. For example, if an elementary student were to get onto the wrong bus, it is much more difficult to track the student down. Our concerns have been heard by our vendor. They have increased salaries significantly, but there are still too few drivers.
- Combined routes for the day as needed, eliminated routes due to shortage thus resulting in longer ride times, offered perfect attendance bonuses to contractors for individual drivers, contractors have offered sign on bonuses, revamped after school athletic trips by taking teams early to contests in order to get back for departure.
- Worked with Contractor to adjust runs as needed
- Double up runs happens sporadically but none this year
- Move athletic departure times to significantly earlier times to allow for buses to return for afternoon dismissal, merge regular education routes, survey other bus companies for availability, cancel trips
- Combined routes and move dismissal times for extra-curricular events to ensure regular run bus drivers could return
- We have several staff who have obtained CDLs to assist when need, particularly for extracurricular activities.
- As Transportation Coordinator, I drive a bus
- Our bus contractor has increased their starting wage and implemented new advertising methods.
- When drivers are ill, the contractors double-up the routes which results in students arriving after the school start time.
- We had to eliminate a bus route, which added time to other routes.
- We have paid to certify two custodial employees to be emergency drivers
- combined routes, taking students many hours before an event to have the bus back on time , etc.
- Rescheduled events
- Cancel routes, combine busses, cancel trips, internal staff to drive busses and vans including the Business Manager and Superintendent
- We have approved additional providers to cover the shortage.
- Expanded transportation providers for extracurricular activities.
- Often times we have two school vans and will try and pick up or take home the students. Buses have had to do double runs so the kids are getting home later and staff is staying later and I have to pay them.
- We have adjusted time to accommodate busing.
- Unfortunately, lower standards and increase pay from our contractor.
- Partnered with the IU, advertise, placed a bus at the County fair with advertisement, purchased yard signs for vacancies.

Question 1: If your district has experienced a bus driver shortage, what has your district done to address the issue?

- We are contracted out for services and do not own our own buses. But contractors have had to increase hourly rates.
- Advertise, personally reach out to potential drivers, increase starting wages, incentives.
- Transportation Coordinator/contractors driving routes
- Increased wages and marketing strategies to attract new drivers.
- Double runs, longer runs, filled seating to max capacity, adjusted departure times of extracurricular trips
- Reschedule trips; share drivers between contractors; conduct multiple runs
- We contract with a bus transportation company. We have had them come to open houses, parent engagements to provide job opportunities. We called those individuals on the list the state put together a couple years ago; however, did not have any takers. We have placed employment opportunities on correspondence with our families, on our website, and on our electronic sign. We also have a teacher, that we created their teaching schedule so they can drive bus for us.
- Merging of bus routes is a common solution utilized
- NA
- Adjusted routes and utilized van transportation
- We have had to combine routes in order to get students to and from school. There have been times we had pick students up late or not at all due to not having drivers for a bus.
- PASD utilized district staff members to drive school vans to provide the necessary transportation needed.
- Consolidated routes
- Combine runs.
- Utilization of extra personnel (owners of contracted business).
- We have increased salaries and benefits for Transportation positions.
- We contract out so we have tried to work with the contractor to consolidate routes providing more drivers.
- Contract change - more \$ and sign on bonuses, increased advertising, benefits on day 1
- Our shortages have been intermittent and we are able to consolidate routes on a short term basis as the need presents.
- We increased compensation for our contractors and also reduced the number and time for field trips.
- We have increased our advertising, increased our pay rates in our collective bargaining agreement, and contacted those on the list of CDL drivers who may be interested in driving as provided to us by the IU.
- Administrators getting CDL/Combine Bus Runs/Late to and from school
- signing bonuses, increased wages, billboards and expanded advertising all with limited success. combined/longer routes, parents and coaches
- Increased wages and benefits / increased advertisement
- We contract our bus services, but those contractors have increased recruitment efforts and offer to pay for the training necessary to become a bus driver.

Question 1: If your district has experienced a bus driver shortage, what has your district done to address the issue?

- Add more regular contractors and ride-share type drivers
- We have combined runs, increased bus ride times, and moved routes to different contractors who could handle the work.
- Double runs. This is a luxury we can do being a smaller district.
- We have begged people with a lapsed bus driver license to go get newly certified. We have also had to double-up on our extra-curricular runs and in some cases are paying parents to take their children to games. We are also paying coaches to drive the school van or personal vehicles.
- Reevaluated the entire routing system as well as specific routes. Trips were prolonged and combined, increasing assigned ridership, and reducing the total number of vehicles utilized. 2. We continue to collaborate with our contractors and provide direction to all parties to meet the district's daily demands. 3. Sports and extracurricular activities have been accommodating with rescheduling event starts and departure times so that buses can be used for daily student transportation. 4. In order to transport a group on a trip with an unassigned school bus driver, athletics and extracurricular activities have also started transporting small groups in school vans or numerous small vehicles. 5. Students are put on the first qualified available vehicle or vehicles after they have finished their scheduled trips when there are simply not enough drivers. Families typically have waits of 20 to 30 minutes, although they have occasionally approached an hour. 6. Our transportation suppliers offer sign-on, referral, and safety bonuses, and the district further provides incentive and loyalty compensation to all transportation staff. 7. The district's communications office keeps its regular distributions and social media channels updated with driving and monitoring possibilities. 8. In order to attract attention and possible qualified people, our contractors continue to advertise employment openings and support neighborhood events. 9. To further explain our needs and attract more candidates, the district has held job recruitment fairs. 10. The district has been active in recognizing and organizing activities to honor our transportation staff, including breakfasts for drivers at schools with school staff and administrators, and celebrating our school bus driver appreciation day with significant gifts, as well as the SV All-Star Club for distinguished individuals who exhibit true kindness, compassion, and are our unsung heroes. 11. Our superintendents have spoken with the local religious leaders to let them know how desperately our driving and paraprofessional teams need their support and assistance. 12. We've contributed to raising awareness of the significance and beneficial effects school bus drivers may have on the kids they transport, even decades after they've graduated. 13. We have urged our parents and other stakeholders to join the transportation team in several communications, recruiting events, emails, and podcasts. We also offer scheduling flexibility and additional district-wide supplemental work beyond transportation.

Question 2: Are there any other transportation issues impacting your school district? If yes, please explain.

79 responses

- No
- N/A
- specialized van transportation and special needs transportation
- Homeless situations where special transportation is needed is almost impossible. We need to be creative with after school runs. Sometimes routes are late coming in when there are sick drivers.
- The reimbursement subsidy is not keeping pace with increases in transportation costs.
- PIAA athletics reclassified our region so it we have long drives for our contests, which makes regular runs difficult because we are a driver down.
- Bus aides are even in greater demand.
- Extra-curricular trips being delayed until regular p.m. runs are completed due to lack of drivers.
- Yes, increased lost instructional time because extracurricular runs have to start earlier (during school hours) so single drivers can do multiple runs. Cancelled events because of a lack of drivers. Forced to hire drivers with less than ideal references and reputations because of a lack of applicants.
- our contractors are facing major driver shortages
- We are a 75 square mile rural community with numerous, unpaved back roads- this becomes problematic in the winter and spring.
- None...Driver shortage is the big issue.
- Special transportation for students
- In addition to the shortage of drivers, we operate our own transportation department. The price of busses is expected in increase over 20%.
- Two bus contractor companies deciding not to transport after school hours due to their perspective of "low pay" from the district with the current bus contracts. High fuel prices are one major issue
- Increasing cost of fuel
- Van services for our Special Education students are currently covered but has been a day-by-day situation due to available vans/drivers. Between increased costs for drivers, fuel and insurance rate increases, several of our van providers are just making it.
- The requirement to provide transportation to private/charter schools is an issue when they do not waiver on the arrival and departure times. Another issue are our students identified as homeless. For example, CYS has a student that is staying with two different relatives neither of which are in our school district. The two relatives can only keep the child three and four days each. CYS wants the Bentworth School District to transport this student to and from Waynesburg to Bentworth three days (in a different county) and Washington to Bentworth two days. We do not have a contract driver or vehicle that could transport to one of the locations let alone two locations. Last year CYS had us transport a student from Uniontown to Bentworth and the cost of the contract driver was in excess of \$500.00 per day.
- NA
- Van runs to private, alternative, and placements.
- Fuel costs
- no

Question 2: Are there any other transportation issues impacting your school district? If yes, please explain.

- The vast number of placements and the number of students that qualify as homeless is straining our capacity.
- No, the main concern is having enough drivers from day to day for all needs
- New director of transportation
- n/a
- Drivers do not want to take on any other driving beyond the normal day. It is difficult to find people who are willing to drive for extracurricular activities.
- We have difficulty finding van drivers to transport students that are deemed homeless. We are able to get them to school but this type of van run is not desirable to all.
- We need to find a way to pay drivers more. Our drivers make \$100 per day.
- They need more money in contracts which is effecting the bottom line.
- Lack of availability of new vans.
- construction in the region exacerbates the driver shortage delays
- None
- Due to the shortage of drivers, our vendors are aggressively competing with each other to procure drivers, causing challenges with teamwork.
- We have had to release students from class time by a few minutes sometimes in order to accommodate the need for drivers to complete multiple runs. We have combined bus/van routes to reduce the number of drivers needed, but that has created situations where students are on the bus longer (up to one hour and 15 minutes or so). The transportation formula for reimbursement punishes us since we are a district with a large geography and a small population. We cannot seek reimbursement for buses that leave the garage until they pick up their first student which in some cases involves almost 25 miles of travel. The reverse is true in the evening. Despite having an economically disadvantaged population of over 60% and about 31% of our students living in poverty, we only receive about 50% reimbursement for our transportation costs.
- High costs for transportation contractors. Extreme student behaviors to be dealt with by drivers/the district.
- Field trips, transportation for students with special needs,
- Obviously, athletics is impacted. Participation in athletics is essential to maintain student engagement and to build positive school culture.
- 1.Private school numbers increasing post Covid because of public schools mandated response/shut down of schools. 2.We pay on formula to contractors and the CPI increased 13% over two years and our tax increases have not kept up. 3. Fuel has remained higher and trips have not decreased. 4. Special needs routes increasing in number as more students identified (IEP).
- We contract services and they have asked for additional money outside of the contracted amounts to increase driver compensation and retention
- We are always on the precipice of having a virtual day if drivers are ill or decide to retire. Each day is a new adventure.
- Students that are placed over an hour from the district.
- We have been dealing with long waits for new school busses from the manufacturers.

Question 2: Are there any other transportation issues impacting your school district? If yes, please explain.

- Transportation costs continue to rise including compensation for bus drivers and the cost of fuel and bus maintenance. Also, as fewer contractors remain in business there is less competition which results in increased costs. In our most recent RFP we only had 1 contractor submit a bid which only covered four of the seven buses we needed. I convinced our van driver to buy buses but had no negotiating power as I needed both contractors.
- We have also decided to add another van, but there have been difficulties finding new vehicles.
- Quickly rising costs of all transportation due mainly to the wages contractors need to pay in order to attract and retain drivers.
- Mainly our issue is sports and activities busing. We have had to scale back our events for our students.
- While we haven't had a "shortage" where events had to be canceled or rearranged, our contractor has had to adjust several schedules including her own to accommodate. To further adjust some routes were eliminated altogether to ensure that there were enough drivers. In doing so we had to make sure that there weren't overloaded buses and length of time on the buses was not extended by too much.
- Fuel prices are taking its toll on contractors.
- At times it is difficult to find enough vans to cover specialized transportation. This is usually later in the school year as students are identified as needing services.
- Increase in special education transportation.
- We have a really hard time getting special transportation for students who are in foster care or fall under McKinney-Vento. We have to cut field trips short because the bus company doesn't have enough drivers so we have to come back early so that the bus driver can do a normal evening run.
- More experienced drivers are needed.
- We own our transportation, have our own certified trainers, it is tough to find people to work the bus schedule.
- The cost
- Age of buses due to lack of availability and cost
- The majority of drivers we do have are older, retired individuals, who unfortunately experience health issues. When they are off, we simply don't have replacements for them and are forced to notify parents we cannot provide that bus run for the day.
- The number of limited bus drivers has a ripple effect regarding their preparedness and working with those who do not have experience working with children to ensure they have the interpersonal qualities and responsible behavior needed.
- Length of time between Element and JR/Sr High starting times
- Not really
- Non reimbursable funding for extra curriculums, forcing us to combine JH and Varsity sports transportations when feasible
- Sub drivers don't manage student behavior well.
- No-We are a small district and many of our students walk to school.
- Significant behavior issues (drivers not trained to handle such issues), especially when anyone is being hired that can provide acceptable documents (clearances, etc.).

Question 2: Are there any other transportation issues impacting your school district? If yes, please explain.

- Equipment delays due to supply chain issues (I.E., long wait times to purchase new buses and vans)
- None at this time
- Funding and overall supply chain issues getting new vehicles or even parts
- We are fortunate to have local busing contractors but they do struggle to find drivers.
- The difficulty in obtaining 10-passenger vans has been extremely challenging, with only one bidder for the last 3 requests. Additionally, the cost for 10-passenger vans has doubled (100%) since 2021.
- The rising costs of replacement buses and fuel costs.
- staffing is biggest issue
- Pennsylvania's school bus driver training course is a relic of the 1980s. The state needs to implement a modern online alternative to reading the course from a book.
- Increasing amounts of special education placements outside of the district.
- I believe transporting students to New York State Non-public schools that are within 10 miles of our district border is a poor use Pennsylvania tax payers money. I personally would like to see the 10 miles reduces which would help the driver shortage issue. If legislators will not reduce the 10 miles, have it state "within the state of Pennsylvania." I think most PA tax payers would rather see their money spent on improving PA education versus spending money transporting students to New York State Non-public schools.
- A notable rise in students who are eligible for McKinney-Vento Education Act homeless services.
- Neighborhoods' and the quantity of newly constructed dwellings' exponential expansion.
- Travel times are getting longer due to greater congestion within the current transportation infrastructure.
- In order to reduce safety concerns, previous locations where we would have a student cross the street are being reevaluated due to an increase in traffic volume and vehicle velocity that is placing additional strain on a restricted transportation system.
- An increase of motorist indifference to school bus safety and more reported school bus red lights violations.
- We have seen a rise in student behaviors and an escalation of negative effects while riding the school bus especially on trips with inconsistent drivers and high student assignments.
- Unintended consequence of longer commute times for many pupils who are attending a new physical school that is farther away from their old, more nearby school.
- Wait times for administrative actions have increased potentially as a result of the contractor awarded more local school transportation contracts.
- Finding ways to fill open trips is overwhelming the daily operations teams of contractors. Team is no longer available to help with routine daily inquiries, collaborating projects, sharing requested bus videos, or informing drivers of impending changes.
- During transportation hours, contractors' operations are frequently vacant; dispatchers, office managers, and mechanics are all driving. School District is frequently the contractors call center and dispatcher.
- School buses and other school vehicles' production and distribution supply chains are disrupted.
- Budgets are being impacted by an increase in costs and prices.
- School bus driver's refusal to adapt to changes and threats to resign.
- Underdeveloped - inadequate driver training.
- Contractors are slow to implement new technologies.

Please provide possible solutions to address transportation issues that are affecting school districts throughout our state. 82 responses

- I wish I knew
- I am not sure what is able to be done to improve this issue unless drivers are or can be paid more. Even then, I believe we will have a shortage.
- State Incentives for retirees...no longer have public schools transport private school students
- Proactive / ongoing support training & communication sessions
- Bus driver certification requirements are cumbersome for the amount of pay they receive
- No easy solutions that I'm aware of. Efforts to increase the flexibility of who can drive buses (without sacrificing safety) and increase the number of qualified drivers willing to work.
- Incentives for coaches/other personnel to become licensed bus drivers?
- We could have less bus runs if there was flexibility of not requiring a seat for every student at the secondary level. We have to have 10 runs based on our total enrollment/seats, but most of the HS runs arrive and depart with less than 10 students on them because of private transportation and after school activities.
 - have statewide bus driver training classes for free for interested persons 2) increase transportation reimbursements to allow more funds to go to contractors who in turn can pay drivers more and therefore, attract more drivers
- Assistance with bus training and potentially state subsidized bus driver salaries to effectively increase wages to attract more drivers.
- We are looking to have CDL courses for our Para Educators and Custodians to assist our contractors with the driver's shortage.
- We are in the process of inquiring if any paraprofessionals or other staff would be interested in driving/obtaining a CDL, we will reevaluate our routes to see if we can condense routes.
- State paying for CDL training. Funding to support higher wages for bus drivers.
- An increase in the transportation subsidy and lesson Pre-trip inspection requirements.
- As part of the basic education formula add to the formula, daily mileage. Some districts may operate 3,000 miles per day, some over 5,000. Geography impacts transportation. A per student account for transportation does not do rural districts any justice.
- Have the state look at updating the State Formula/Reimbursement for districts for bussing, reduce the length of training for drivers
- Our providers are challenged with wage increases, fuel increases, interest rate impacts on borrowing for new equipment, and now insurance carriers exiting the transportation business. As a result, the costs are increasing beyond our contract prices and their profitability. Without additional revenue, they may make decisions that leave us without carriers. If the daily rate and reimbursements are not increased, the smaller operators will be forced to close, and then we will be at the mercy of whatever amount is charged by whoever is left.
- I would rather see our drivers have an increase in pay opposed to a lessening of requirements.
- Assistance from the state to contribute to pay. For example, the state could provide \$1,000 bonuses for all bus drivers or waive PA income tax.
- Increase reimbursement

Solutions to address transportation issues that are affecting school districts throughout our state.

- We have a lot of private/parochial runs. It would help if the 10-mile radius was reduced to 5 miles.
- Asking parents to carpool
- remove the mandate for required busing for secondary students or allow students to opt out permanently from transportation.
- Regionalize school transportation. Particularly for out of district transportation.
- Recruiting, lessening hurdles/roadblocks to getting certificated, partnering with certain post-secondary institutions to get people certificated....
- I don't know if there is an easy fix.
- Better pay for bus and van drivers which would require an increase in transportation subsidy payments.
- Greater state support with subsidy to attract and retain drivers.
- Better pay, improved support from administration regarding disciplinary issues and better scheduling of field trips and extracurricular activities on the school district's part.
- Requesting parents transport students in a similar fashion that we did during Covid??
- Ask parents to organize combined car pools to get students to school.
- Paying parents to transport students?
- not assigning a seat to student drop offs or student drivers. More financial incentive for bus drivers
- Develop a program through which teachers and other school employees, who already have clearances and relevant trainings, can become licensed bus drivers. For example, we have coaches and advisors who are full-time teachers and would be interested in driving the bus to their own events, thus limiting the number of times we are short afternoon bus drivers because there are too many events at other locations starting after school.
- Good luck!
- Reduce the requirements (specifically the mechanical knowledge) to become a bus driver. Apparently, those requirements are newer and did not exist several years ago. Just like reducing the requirements to become a teacher or law enforcement officer, reduce the requirements to attract more drivers.
- Double up runs, change the 180 day, 990 hrs. format.
- Subsidizing training, advertising opportunities within the military/other populations who often have CDLs
- Increased pay, better benefits, etc..
- Equitable funding for all schools, if the State mandates transportation for students, then subsidize the payment.
- Possible solutions would be to work toward decreasing the expense to new drivers to become certificated. New Federal Regulations from February 2022 increased costs for new drivers from \$1000 - \$2500 for everything needed to become a driver.

Solutions to address transportation issues that are affecting school districts throughout our state.

- Provide an increase in state subsidy so that drivers can be paid more or an option to buy into group benefits at a reduced rate. Currently our drivers are making about \$10.00 - \$11.00 per hour and since they are all part time, the contractor does not offer them an insurance plan and they have a hard time affording insurance through the Marketplace.
- Consider enacting adding flexibility to the hours required for instruction so that we can make alterations to the school day to accommodate the need for multiple bus runs.
- Streamlined drug testing requirements for substitute drivers working for multiple contractors (currently are in test pool for every contractor they sub for).
- Wish I had some solutions.
- On a macro scale, I believe that comprehensive immigration reform may help with low wage worker recruitment and retention. Obviously, compensation is the largest factor.
- 10-mile rule beyond the attendance borders eliminate. Homeless identification and the unfunded mandates involved. Mandated reporter accusations and subsequent 30-60 days of "review" time before clearing a driver. The unintended consequence is that people are not willing to become drivers if all it takes is for someone unhappy to childline them and the aftermath of dealing with it. Student behaviors, parent behaviors, and the expectation that the schools will give you whatever you want.
- Work with the contractor as best as you can.
- More training sites, increased pay
- Review CDL qualifications as school buses may not need the same as tractor-trailer CDL certifications
- We try to market earning CDLs to members of the community who might not know of this opportunity. We work with a contractor to collaboratively address issues but we have no good solutions to the problem at this time.
- Pay bus drivers more money? Offer some benefits. Administration leaning on students and their behavior, making it easier on the drivers.
- Unknown
- I wish I had answers to the issues. The job market, wages, and inflation are creating the issues we are now facing. Unfortunately, these are not local or PA-specific issues.
- Require families that opt to attend private schools to handle their own transportation.
- State contracted transportation rates possibly and unfortunately just more money. They can't stay in business if we don't pay them more and we can't stay in business if we pay them more. :(
- Allow parents to opt out of busing for the school year by signing a opt out form so bus routes can be combined. Maybe even offer an incentive for people to opt out of transportation from the school if they transport their own child.
- Further incentives to attract new drivers would be helpful. This can be improvements in technology where it makes navigating routes easy even for drivers who are new to the route or district. If this technology exists, perhaps state funding could be distributed to districts to cover the costs of this technology. Further funding could be provided to schools to provide each bus with an extra adult to monitor behaviors. A draw-back I often hear is that people would do it but they don't want the hassle of managing the children as well as focusing on the road.

Solutions to address transportation issues that are affecting school districts throughout our state.

- Finish and open the pipelines to make USA self-reliant on oil and gas again...
- N/A
- School district consolidation for smaller schools with additional funding from the State to allow for operation of nearly all programs needed to meet students' needs, thereby greatly reducing the need for transportation to provide providers.
- Increase in funding for transportation so that districts can better compete for drivers.
- Not ideal - because I don't know where the money would come from - but higher pay could be an enticing solution. Encourage school districts to alter their start times and end times so that the bus drivers who may have another job could do both jobs.
- More state funding for higher pay or bus monitors, more parent support and accountability with student behaviors.
- Faster timeline on obtaining a CDL with the bus certification. State incentives for potential bus drivers.
- Recommend that the McKinney-Vento have a reasonable time limit that schools need to transport students.
- Consolidation of routes for public and Amish schools, which will increase ride times.
- I believe the issues are around compensation. It's really not a full time job; however, they do need to be available. CDL drivers in other industries are making considerably more money. This is difficult for schools as our costs continue to rise.
- Some form of increased subsidy to be able to pay contractors for increased expectations and to increase their workforce.
- A longer period of time between starting times to allow for longer routes (contract issue)
- Provide additional funding specific for transportation, in order to attract drivers for education transportation.
- Incentives for school bus driver (only) CDL training programs for districts, providers or individuals
- NA
- Flexible training concepts, additional state subsidy for driver salary.
- At a loss... sorry!
- Streamline and expedite the training process to get certified CDL bus drivers quicker.
- Is there an easier way to get a CDL license for drivers? Pre-trip, etc.
- Streamline CDL School Bus driver process to make it easier to get drivers
- Eliminating the requirement to transport to nonpublic schools in Maryland would allow us to use the limited transportation resources we have for public school transportation within Pennsylvania.
- I have been told by my Director of Transportation, who is certified driver instructor, that the rules and regulations pertaining to licensure need to revert back to what they were years ago. This is to say that the elements of instruction related to commercial driver licensure which school bus drivers must be proficient in, are prohibited. Though there have been changes recently, they are not substantial and do not hit at the heart of the difficulty in training those who may be interested. In her estimation, it keeps many people from expressing interest.

Solutions to address transportation issues that are affecting school districts throughout our state.

- Review process to become bus driver. Not easy to pass multiple steps. Also, supplant funding to school districts to increase bus driver wages to entice more drivers.
- evaluating parent ride sharing and reimbursements
- Offer an Online School Bus Driver Training Course
- I have been told repeatedly that drivers should not need to be mechanics. It should be enough for each bus company to have someone who can inspect the bus prior to operation but it shouldn't have to be the driver.
- Remove requirements that School Districts provide transportation for nonpublic and charter students.
- Reduce the 10-mile radius of transporting students to Non-public schools.
- Amend the McKinney Vento homeless law that homeless students can only attend school of origin if school of origin is less than 1-hour transportation time or less than 30 miles away. The McKinney Vento law could be tightened up by removing the doubled up clause as many students that are doubled up are by choice and not circumstance.
- Make a School Bus CDL license separate from the regular CDL license. You can then remove sections like the under the hood requirement.
- I wish I had an answer for this but I do not. The only think I can think of is making it easier to obtain a bus driver certificate.
- Evaluate the district's responsibility to transport pupils up to ten miles beyond the district's boundaries for non-public schools.
- Evaluate implementation of an opt-in system for public school pupils similar to what has been imbedded for non-public school families.
- Evaluate school bell schedules.
- Evaluate school days and weekly structure. Potential four-day week and the fifth for remote options, athletics, and activities...having the four-day specific to academics.
- Evaluate the school year, potential year-round school calendar.
- Consider new operations structure, roles, and responsibilities between district and contractor of transportation contracts.



**Testimony of Advanced Energy United
Pennsylvania House of Representatives Education Committee
Public Hearing on School District Transportation Issues and Innovative Solutions
October 30, 2023**

**Nicholas Bibby
Principal and Pennsylvania State Lead
Advanced Energy United**

On behalf of Advanced Energy United, I want to thank Chairman Schweyer, Republican Chairman Topper, members of the Committee and staff for inviting testimony on the issue of school district transportation issues and House Bill 1542. Advanced Energy United ("United") is a national business association that represents a wide range of advanced energy companies, seeking to make the energy systems of both Pennsylvania and the United States more clean, reliable, affordable, and secure. United's clean energy businesses provide a broad array of products and services to meet energy needs, including energy efficiency, energy storage, demand response, solar, wind, hydro, nuclear, electric vehicles (EVs), and EV charging equipment. We and our members work to educate, engage, and advocate for policies that grow robust markets for advanced energy technologies. The spectrum of businesses that we represent are lowering consumer costs, creating thousands of new jobs, and expanding clean, reliable, and efficient energy options for individuals and businesses alike.

United endorses HB 1542, sponsored by Representative Brandon Markosek, which would help school districts across the Commonwealth adopt electric school buses. In Pennsylvania, we have seen a high amount of interest from school districts that are interested in electrifying their bus fleets, as evident by the dozens of Pennsylvania school districts that applied for the EPA's Clean School Bus Program, passed as part of the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Unfortunately, the majority of districts that

applied for this funding were either waitlisted, or in some cases, deprioritized completely, and have been left with nowhere to turn. These districts *want* to purchase cleaner buses, both to help protect the health of kids riding those buses, but also to help the districts financially, as electric buses have been shown to have lower fuel and maintenance costs compared to their diesel counterparts. Many districts have also heard about the successful use of electric school buses in Philadelphia and Pine-Richland as well as in other states across the country, including New York, Massachusetts, Florida, Texas, Michigan, and Maryland. Right now, however, there are many barriers that districts face in electrifying their bus fleets, including a lack of upfront capital to finance ESB purchases, needed facility electrical upgrades for charging infrastructure, institutional inertia, and a lack of staff capacity for grant writing, utility engagement, and procurement of vehicles.

To address some of these issues that Pennsylvania's school districts are facing, HB 1542 proposes creating a new electric school bus grant program, housed within the Department of Education. HB 1542 and this proposed grant program do not include any mandates or requirements, but rather would simply aid those districts that are interested in making the shift to electric school buses. Funded through a state appropriation, school districts would be able to apply for and receive grants for costs relating to procurement of electric buses, depot and facility upgrades, charging infrastructure and installation and staff training. Additionally, HB 1542 would set aside a portion of funds appropriated to the program for ongoing technical assistance to be provided to school districts. This assistance will not only help districts seize on federal funding opportunities, like the EPA's Clean School Bus Program, but will also work to help districts understand certain fleet transition considerations, based on the district's specific situation. Finally, to further realize the full range of benefits that electric school buses can provide to districts, this bill would allow for lease terms of up to 15 years. This will both help districts attain the full range of benefits that electrification can provide, while reducing annual payments for buses and providing more flexibility to school districts.

Electric school buses have the potential to provide a wide range of benefits to the school districts procuring them, the kids they will be transporting, and the economies supporting them. As mentioned above, electric buses provide substantial cost savings for schools, as they have lower fuel and maintenance costs compared to diesel buses. Research by the Electric School Bus Initiative suggests that districts could save an



average of \$6,000 annually on operational expenditures with the purchase of a new electric school bus.¹ Additionally, electric buses provide districts with cleaner forms of transportation for pupils, when compared to diesel buses. These electric buses significantly reduce emissions, leading to improved air quality for the district and public health for the children. According to research from the Environmental Defense Fund, compared to diesel buses, electric school buses can reduce nitrous oxide emissions by up to 95%, particulate matter by up to 99%, and carbon dioxide by up to 60%.²

When discussing the benefits of electric buses, it's also important to highlight the economic and electric grid benefits that buses can provide. In addition to cleaning up our air, improving public health, and providing financial assistance to school districts, further electric school bus adoption has the potential to boost local economies across the Commonwealth and create good, well-paying jobs. Nationally, research by United shows that as a result of the passage of the EPA's Clean School Bus Program, electric school buses have the potential to add \$6 billion to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), bring in \$1.25 billion in additional tax revenue for state and local governments, and create 46,000 jobs.³ Finally, it's worth noting that electric buses actually have the ability to improve Pennsylvania's electric grid resiliency and reliability. Electric buses, in some circumstances, can offer the ability to implement new vehicle-to-grid (V2G) and vehicle-to-everything (V2X) technologies that support reliable electric grids and benefit Pennsylvania's school districts.⁴

HB 1542 is a critical piece of legislation that would promote the use of electric school buses in Pennsylvania's schools. Ultimately, this program will help to break down some of the barriers that districts currently face in transitioning from diesel-powered buses to cleaner, cheaper, and more efficient vehicles. Through the reductions of air

¹ World Resources Institute. "Recommended Total Cost of Ownership Parameters for Electric School Buses: Summary of Methods and Data." January 2023. <https://www.wri.org/research/recommended-total-cost-ownership-parameters-electric-school-buses-methods-data>.

² Environmental Defense Fund. "Clean Rides for Kids: Benefits of Electrifying School Buses in America." 2018. <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/clean-rides-for-kids-electrifying-school-buses.pdf>.

³ Advanced Energy United. "Infrastructure Act Funding for School Bus Electrification Will Have Economic Impact." December 2021. <https://blog.advancedenergyunited.org/infrastructure-act-funding-for-school-bus-electrification-will-have-economic-impact/>.

⁴ Electric School Bus Initiative. "Why We Need to Transition to Electric School Buses." October 2022. <https://electricschoolbusinitiative.org/why-we-need-transition-electric-school-buses/>.



pollution, the financial savings for school districts, and promoting economic growth, this bill is a win-win for the Commonwealth. United strongly supports HB 1542 and urges the House Education Committee to support this bill.

