

Ohio Pupil Transportation Workgroup



Recommendations Report
June 2026



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Ohio Pupil Transportation Workgroup

Members

Leaders were invited to join the Workgroup according to Section 733.80 of House Bill 96 of the 136th General Assembly.

Tom Rhatican, Catholic Conference of Ohio

Shauna Murphy, Cincinnati Public Schools*

Robert Hlasko, ESC of Medina County

Todd Silverthorn, Kettering City School District

Darrin Beconder, Ohio Council of Community Schools

Lori Carter-Evans, Olentangy Local Schools

Josh Biederstedt, Patrick Henry Local Schools*

Jonathan Davis, Pickaway-Ross CTC

Robert Marino, Trumbull County ESC

Andy Boy, United Schools

Tony Huffman, Washington County Career Center

Rep. Sarah Fowler Arthur, Ohio House of Representatives

Rep. Sean Brennan, Ohio House of Representatives

Sen. Andrew Brenner, Ohio Senate

Sen. Catherine D. Ingram, Ohio Senate*

**Indicates Workgroup members who do not support the Recommendations Report.*

Workgroup members represented a variety of positions, perspectives, and experiences on the topic of transportation. They also participated with varying degrees of intensity in the meetings and recommendations development process. While every effort was made to reach agreement across all Workgroup members on current transportation challenges and systems improvement recommendations, members were unable to reach full consensus.

Ohio Pupil Transportation Workgroup

Charge and Process

The General Assembly charged the Transportation Workgroup, established in House Bill 96 of the 136th General Assembly, with exploring transportation issues. Specifically, legislation asked the Workgroup to:

- Monitor and review the student transportation system during the 2025–2026 school year
- Make recommendations for changes to pupil transportation in Ohio to better meet the transportation needs of Ohio students
- Conduct a study of and develop recommendations regarding the feasibility of each school district providing transportation to students enrolled in a community school or nonpublic school on days that the school district is not open for operation

The deadline for submitting recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly was set as June 30, 2026.

Prior to the initial convening, each member was offered the opportunity to share their perspectives in a one-on-one interview with facilitators, who then presented the synthesis of perspectives back to the group in the first meeting. This approach helped set the tone for productive interaction, allowing the fuller group to identify where common ground existed and better understand areas of divergence among members.

The Workgroup met six times between October 2025 and May 2026. Throughout that timeframe, the Workgroup reviewed data from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) to monitor and review the current student transportation system. For each meeting, members engaged in both pre-read materials to identify and define transportation requirements, challenges, and practices better, as well as participated in reviewing work output of the meetings. Throughout the process, additional data were gathered and shared, including surveys of district, community, and chartered nonpublic schools. These surveys helped the workgroup to monitor and review the existing transportation system for 2025–2026 better and enabled the members to conduct a study of transportation on days districts were not in session but the community/chartered nonpublic schools were.

To further monitor the current student transportation system, a constructivist approach was used to frame the challenges, identify priorities, develop solutions using a variety of data, and bring forward experiences from the field and expertise from within the group across all education systems within the state (i.e., traditional districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools).

Technical assistance, data, and research were provided by the DEW's transportation, school funding, and legal experts to support the group's understanding of the current system, policies, and existing legal requirements. In addition, members of the Workgroup and stakeholders also submitted briefs, case studies, and data for consideration. There were also panel discussions from transportation experts and leaders within districts, community and chartered nonpublic school personnel, and leadership who received transportation services.

Susan Bodary and Angela Hance from Battelle Education provided facilitation, supported recommendation development throughout the meetings and deliberations, and employed an iterative and interactive report drafting process.

Introduction

Since the Fair Bus Bill of 1966, Ohio has depended upon traditional school districts to provide student transportation to pupils residing within the district to their district schools and chartered nonpublic schools (with some guidelines and exceptions). This approach continued with the emergence of Ohio’s community schools, expanding districts’ responsibility for transportation to community school students as well, given the importance of supporting all eligible students with transportation to and from their school of choice.

School districts must transport students to school unless, after considering the Six Factors of Practicality, the district deems them “impractical to transport.” In this case, they may offer the student’s family “payment in lieu of” (PILO) transportation. This is the sole form of relief provided by statute for districts when transporting particular students presents onerous challenges based on the factors identified in legislation. The PILO process is imperfect, and for many families a payment does not solve the daily school transportation problem; this is particularly true for families experiencing poverty and those with inflexible work schedules.

For the 2025–2026 school year, there were more than 22,000 students deemed impractical to transport by their local school district. More than 21,000 of them are enrolled in community and chartered nonpublic schools. Only a very small number of district school students (618) are deemed impractical to transport by their home district where they are enrolled.

What is the root of this problem? Why are we leaving students without transportation to school? The situation is complicated, and even the members of the Transportation Workgroup do not agree on what all of the core challenges are. However, for Ohio to thrive, ALL our students must attend school on a regular basis and graduate high school with the skills and knowledge to take productive next steps. To reach this goal, transportation matters.

Workgroup members represent varying perspectives based on their roles and experiences, and not every workgroup member agrees with every item below. However, collectively, the following statements describe the challenges to providing safe and consistent school transportation in Ohio:

- Communities across the state are experiencing **persistent bus driver shortages** and the inability to retain talent over the long term. As of 2026, [Ohio’s districts employ 19,000 drivers](#) yet still report a shortage of qualified individuals. A [2026 DEW survey of public school districts](#) found that in fiscal year 2025 (FY25), on average 14.68% of vacant school bus driving jobs were filled. In some districts, however, shortages were severe. Thirty-four districts reported that 10% or less vacant positions were filled.
- There is a **lack of sufficient public transportation** connecting students to schools.
- **Overall costs for providing transportation are rising.** Laws and administrative rules governing transportation for students have not been modernized to reflect the reality

of student and family needs and the costs of services. **State budget allocations do not provide full reimbursement of transportation costs based on the prior years' statewide average**, but prorate reimbursement based on allocated state resources.

- While a significantly smaller portion of the school-going population, **a far greater percentage of community and chartered nonpublic students are being deemed impractical to transport** by the districts in which they reside, impacting families' decision-making on where their students will attend and the ability to get students to school regularly. **PILO transportation is the only statutory opportunity districts have in circumstances of impracticality, but it is often insufficient** for families to secure consistent transportation.
- **Transportation challenges in many areas of the state are compounded by a lack of consistent collaboration between public schools and schools of choice.** A 2026 survey from DEW found that [19% of chartered nonpublic and community school leaders](#) and [13% of traditional district leaders](#) rate communication between transporting districts and schools of choice as poor. These logistical hurdles can result in inconsistent service levels for students. We must ensure school transportation provides the same level of reliability and consideration for every student in Ohio.
- While **school calendars and union contracts** do not determine who gets transported, they do dictate how districts can “flex” employee hours and responsibilities and which days schools are open with staff scheduled to work. Calendars and contracts are approved by local boards of education only every few years and must be considered when identifying ongoing transportation needs and realities.
- **The growing number of special education students requiring specialized transportation as part of their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) is driving up overall costs.** While students who use regular transportation routes do not create additional expenses, those requiring specialized vehicles or support staff, such as aides, represent a significant financial commitment.

The challenges in Ohio's student transportation systems, however, do not exist in a vacuum, but within the larger education ecosystem of funding and regulations. While this situation is complicated, the system has been functioning with the same set of expectations for many years. When the student transportation systems fail, however, the consequences fall directly on students and their families—and with significant consequences. Students in our state are not “my students” or “your students”—they are all “Ohio students.” Ohio students belong to all of us in the education systems, regardless of where they attend school. To learn and succeed, all students must get to school consistently.

While the overall number of students attending school in Ohio has decreased due to a drop in the number of school-aged children, over the past 10 years **the percentage of community school and chartered nonpublic students determined to be impractical to transport has significantly outpaced the number of district students determined to be impractical to**

transport. The Workgroup recognizes the mechanism of declaring students impractical to transport and the PILO process can have a real hidden impact on school choice, and that it is the only statutory opportunity available to traditional public districts under current law. Again, while we do not have specific Ohio data, [research from New York City](#), where students have access to many schooling options that offer transportation, finds that school bus eligibility increases the likelihood a student attends that school by 12–30%.

We know families have decided not to enroll in their school of choice due to lack of transportation, then defaulted to the school where their students have transportation service. We do not know how much of this “default decision-making” is happening due to transportation or when (e.g., prior to enrollment in a community or chartered nonpublic school or after a district has deemed a student impractical to transport), but one of the Transportation Workgroup panelists cited experiencing multiple instances of families choosing a traditional public school due to the transportation factor, although their first choice would have been the chartered nonpublic school she leads. In addition, in a [spring 2026 survey of community and chartered nonpublic leaders](#), 34% report that at one or more students disenrolled from their school due to being denied transportation by his or her home district, and 49% had a least one potential student who chose not to enroll in their school due directly to a district communication that transportation would not be provided to the student.

Total number of students transported and total student enrollment from 2016 through 2026 disaggregated by school type (district, community school, chartered nonpublic school)

Fiscal Year	Number of District Students Transported	District Enrollment	Number of Community School Students Transported	Community School Enrollment	Number of Chartered Nonpublic Students Transported	Chartered Nonpublic School Enrollment
2016	752,266	1,561,184	26,491	118,311	55,747	172,974
2017	753,659	1,559,328	24,448	112,086	56,309	171,426
2018	750,432	1,558,877	20,431	104,856	54,838	168,809
2019	742,152	1,553,448	24,641	103,085	54,576	166,783
2020	733,102	1,548,012	23,608	103,175	53,226	166,189
2021	362,767	1,491,946	6,689	114,369	34,620	162,917
2022	662,930	1,498,628	13,541	111,754	50,959	167,395
2023	688,279	1,495,074	14,733	112,558	53,216	169,807
2024	684,174	1,481,732	18,458	117,257	51,607	173,156
2025	678,716	1,465,040	18,842	119,311	53,964	181,244
2026 ⁽¹⁾	652,540		24,859		56,985	

Total number of students declared impractical to transport, and the percentage of students declared impractical to transport based on the total transported for each entity from 2016 to 2026

Fiscal Year	District Students Declared Impractical To Transport	Percentage of District Students Declared Impractical To Transport	Community School Students Declared Impractical To Transport	Percentage of Community School Students Declared Impractical To Transport	Chartered Nonpublic Students Declared Impractical To Transport	Percentage of Chartered Nonpublic Students Declared Impractical To Transport
2016	762	0.1%	2,793	10.5%	13,333	23.9%
2017	75	0.01%	1,567	6.4%	14,966	26.6%
2018	463	0.06%	1,403	6.9%	17,073	31.1%
2019	574	0.08%	1,519	6.7%	16,297	30%
2020	663	0.09%	1,412	6%	15,397	28.9%
2021	749	0.2%	837	12.5%	12,193	35.2%
2022	1,249	0.2%	1,118	8.2%	14,702	28.8%
2023	584	0.08%	1,201	8.1%	17,330	32.6%
2024	489	0.07%	1,356	7.3%	16,861	32.7%
2025	592	0.09%	3,040	16.13%	19,764	36.6%
2026	618	0.09%	2,723	10.9%	19,153	33.6%

¹FY26 information is derived from the new DRIVES database, and final numbers may be slightly amended. DEW does not collect ridership by grade band. A survey could be conducted to gather this data.

There is a subset of districts across the state with extremely high percentages and/or numbers of student PILO determinations. One hundred and nineteen (119) districts declared every community and/or chartered nonpublic student impractical, while one hundred sixty-one (161) districts transported all students who requested it. To see a breakdown of each district’s total ridership by typology, school type, riders declared impractical, and the percentage of total ridership declared impractical, please see [FY23-26 PILO Summary with District Typology](#).

While the vast majority of Ohio students attend traditional public schools, only .09% or 618 of those students were deemed impractical in FY26. While the enrollment numbers are much smaller in community and chartered nonpublic schools, the percentage of students deemed

impractical in FY26 was 10.9% (2,723 students) and 33.6% (19,153 students) respectively. These percentages are significant for both types of schools, even though they are lower in 2026 than in 2025.

Being deemed impractical to transport and offered PILO makes it difficult—especially for families who struggle economically or have inflexible work commitments—to follow through with enrolling their students in their school of choice because they may not have alternative ways of transporting their children. **To fully support the school choice values Ohio embraces, the state must ensure all students eligible for transportation—to the greatest extent possible—receive it.**

There was much discussion about ensuring all students—regardless of the school they attend—are considered for transportation at the same time and in the same fashion. Again, we should be considering students as belonging to all of us for the purposes of transportation. For clarification purposes, Ohio Revised Code [R.C. 3327.01](#) states “*In all city, local, and exempted village school districts where resident school pupils in grades kindergarten through eight live more than two miles from the school for which the director of education and workforce prescribes minimum standards pursuant to division (D) of section 3301.07 of the Revised Code and to which they are assigned by the board of education of the district of residence or to and from the nonpublic or community school which they attend, the board of education shall provide transportation for such pupils to and from that school except as provided in section 3327.02 of the Revised Code.* Some districts may adopt a policy to go beyond that obligation, for example, transporting students who live only 1 mile away or transporting grades 9–12, etc. A long-standing Ohio Attorney General Opinion ([OAG 1974-040](#)) indicates that the same permissive transportation policies that a district applies toward district students shall be applied to community and chartered nonpublic students as well. **In other words, districts shall treat all students with the same standard when it comes to the distance and grade levels eligible for transportation.**

Note: The Workgroup’s position is that in Ohio, we should be committed to transporting as many students as possible to and from school, regardless of school type. However, while current law requires somewhat more of an equal standard for students in the *eligibility process* (i.e., determining whether a student is eligible for transportation), it does not provide for *ensuring students have the same transportation solution* (i.e., whether a student receives transportation or is deemed impractical to transport, or by which vehicle method they are transported). The recommendations in this report aim to bring the state closer to transporting all students.

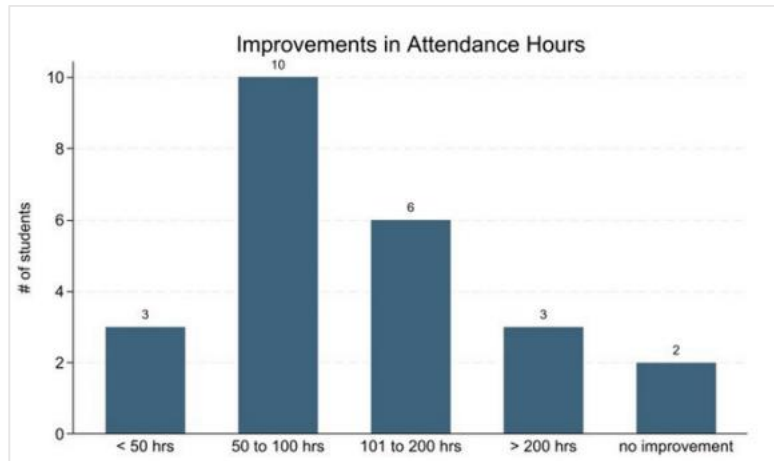
Transportation matters for school attendance. [Ohio currently has a chronic absence rate of 25.1%](#), with some district and school rates over 50%. While Ohio does not have statewide impact data on the relationship between transportation and school attendance data, a [50-district study in Michigan](#) conducted by Danielle Sanderson Edwards at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform Brown University indicated that “...transportation eligibility decreases the probability of being chronically absent for economically disadvantaged

students by 2 to 4 percentage points.” A second [study out of Miami-Dade County \(Florida\)](#) cites that targeting additional transportation services to chronically absent students as an attendance intervention may be more efficient than increasing bus services for all students.

In fall 2025, the [ESC of Central Ohio Transportation Pilot Program report](#) indicated that consistent regionally managed transportation significantly increased attendance during the year of the pilot.

Change in Student Attendance Hours from 2023–2024 to 2024–2025

For the 24 students who participated in the pilot program and had year-to-year comparison data available



Ohio can and should do better when it comes to transporting students to school. Our goal should be to safely and consistently transport every student who qualifies to the school of their choice. Transportation policy should remain sector-neutral and student-centered. Eligibility for transportation services or transportation funding should not be reduced or denied based solely upon a student’s lawful choice of educational provider.

REVIEW OF EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Required Transportation

Ohio law requires districts to transport K–8 students who live 2 miles or more from the school they attend. They may or may not choose to transport high school students. The responsibility of transporting students to traditional districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools resides with the school district where the student resides. As to community school and chartered nonpublic students, with the exception of certain students with IEPs, districts are required to provide transportation if the student resides within a 30-minute drive time of their school of attendance. **Students residing within the district must be treated by the same standard regardless of whether they attend a district, community, or chartered nonpublic school.**

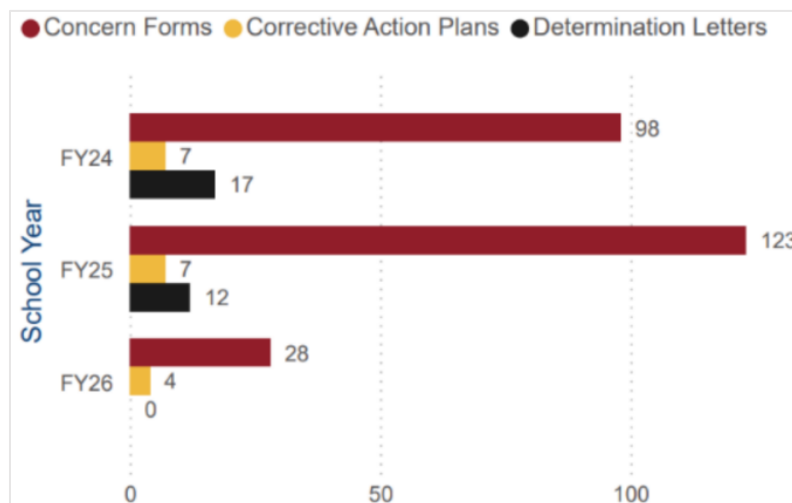
According to DEW data, over the last 10 years, **88–90% of districts have chosen to transport students who live less than 2 miles from their school** of attendance, going beyond what the law requires. For FY26, that number stands at 88%.

Similarly, most districts provide the vast majority of eligible high school students with transportation. Currently, 98% of public districts transport students in grades 9–12, according to DEW data. That number has fluctuated between 96% and 98% over the last 10 years, except for 2021 when the number dropped to 94%. The data are collected whether or not the service is provided for students and are not broken down by type of student (i.e., district, chartered nonpublic, or community school). The expectation is that district service policies are the same for all riders (although this is not expressly stated in Ohio R.C. 3327.01), as reflected in [Transportation-Services-for-Chartered-Nonpublic-and-Community-School-Students-Handbook.pdf](#) (p. 3) and as discussed in an Ohio Attorney General Opinion (AGO 1974-040). **Whatever the district provides for students attending district schools must be provided to those who reside in their districts and attend community and chartered nonpublic schools** (with the exception of individual students who may be deemed impractical to transport).

Transportation Compliance

The Department investigates concerns submitted under Ohio R.C. 3327.021 regarding school district buses that are more than 30 minutes late, do not show up, or involve another student transportation law violation under R.C. Chapter 3327. The following chart shows the total number of concern forms submitted in FY24 through the end of March in FY26:

Concern Forms, Corrective Action Plans, and Determination Letters by School Year



Financial Analysis

The statewide average cost per pupil amounts rose from FY25 at \$1,214.29 to \$1,273.50 in FY26. The statewide average is based on the previous fiscal year's actual costs. The statewide average cost has gone up 4.87% over that period. It is expected that costs will rise again this school year due to rising fuel costs and other pressures.

Districts do not report the cost per route and comparative cost across transportation modes (e.g., bus, van) to DEW. Because transportation is a local responsibility, these data are not currently required.

Per the [FY 2026 School Finance Payment Report Line by Line Explanation](#):

“Funding is provided for school districts who transport students (public, community schools, STEM school, and nonpublic) to and from school each day. The funding formula includes preschool students who ride the bus as well as students who live less than a mile from their school building who ride the bus. The largest part of state funding for transportation is for students who ride a school bus (type 1 and 2 riders). This funding relies on statewide rider, mileage and expenditure data applied against current year rider and mileage data. The formula uses two simultaneous calculations, with each district receiving the higher of the two. This dual funding approach acknowledges that the student population and geographical makeup of each district vary. Some school districts are densely populated, while other districts have students dispersed across large rural areas. Student populations concentrated in a small area allows a district to fill up a school bus more quickly with fewer miles traveled, while low student concentration over a large area means buses travel many miles with fewer students. The dual funding approach addresses these scenarios.

First, statewide average cost per-rider and cost per-mile amounts are calculated. The FY26 calculation relies on FY25 riders, mileage, and expenditure data. The steps involved in this process are as follows:

1. Calculate the statewide average annual per-rider expenditure for each district, removing the top 10 and bottom 10 districts in terms of per-rider expenditures (type 1 and 2 riders).
2. Calculate the statewide average annual per-mile expenditure for each district based on 180 days of service, removing the top 10 and bottom 10 districts in terms of annual per-mile expenditure (type 1 and 2 riders).

After calculating statewide averages, the current year rider counts and mileage counts are applied against the statewide averages. The rider counts include all resident preschool to grade 12 students transported on a school bus. Open enrollment students transported by the educating district are not counted. The count occurs during the first full week of October and is the larger of the morning or afternoon conveyance. Community school, STEM school, and nonpublic riders are weighted to reflect the typically higher costs that districts incur to

transport these students. The mileage is based on the average number of miles traveled during the rider count week.

For each district, funding is calculated:

1. On a per-rider basis, using the weighted student count applied against the statewide per-rider amount, and
2. On a per-mile basis, using the mileage amount applied against the statewide per-rider amount and 180 days.
3. The larger amount is multiplied by the larger of the State Share Percentage or 45.83%.

Unlike other categorical elements, transportation funding has a minimum state share. In addition to funding for students who ride a school bus, funding is also provided for students who take mass transit or other transportation to school (e.g., school van). Students who take mass transit to school (type 3) generate 35% of the statewide per-rider. Other transportation riders (type 5 and 6) generate 50% of the statewide per-rider amount. Transportation Efficiency encourages districts to serve more students in a more efficient manner. Up to 15% in additional school bus funding is provided to school districts that transport more students than would otherwise be expected for the size of the district. The calculation of [each district's rider capacity target is detailed on this spreadsheet on the department's website](#).

The transportation Supplement is targeted to provide additional funding to low-density school districts. Districts with fewer than 28 school bus riders per square mile generate additional funding. Funding is scaled based on rider density and applied against 55% of the total per-mile amount calculated for the district. This funding is prorated to remain within amounts provided in the biennial budget.

$$\text{Supplement Percentage} = (28 - \text{District Rider Density}) / 100$$

$$\text{if Supplement Percentage} < 0 \text{ then Supplement Percentage} = 0$$

$$\text{Transportation Supplement} = \text{Supplement Percentage} * \text{Per-Mile Amount} * 0.55 * \text{Proration}$$

Finally, Temporary Transitional Aid Guarantee for Transportation ensures the district does not receive less in FY26 than what it received in FY20. This guarantee is the positive difference between the Capped Transportation Funding a district has received in FY19 less community/STEM school transportation and the FY26 Total Transportation Funding.”

Temporary Transitional Aid Guarantee = (FY19 Capped Transportation – Community/STEM School Transportation) – FY26 Total Transportation Funding if Transportation Transitional Guarantee < 0 then Transportation Transitional Guarantee = 0

Statewide Factors			
s1	Transportation Cost Per-Rider		\$1,214.29
s2	Transportation Cost Per-Mile		\$6.72
s3	Regular Transportation Proration Percentage		100.000000%
s4	Special Education Transportation Proration Percentage		100.000000%
District Factors			
a	School Bus (Type 1 and 2) Riders [a1+a2+a3]		4,176
a1	Public Riders	2,842	
a2	Non-Public Riders	580	
a3	Community/STEM School Riders	754	
b	Weighted School Bus Ridership [a1+(a2*2.0)+(a3*1.5)]		5,133.0
c	Mass Transit (Type 3) Riders		1,840
d	Other (Type 5 and 6) Riders		193
e	Weighted School Bus (Type 1 and 2) Miles [e1+(e2*2.0)+(e3*1.5)]		7,293.5
e1	Public Miles	2,655	
e2	Non-Public Miles	1,225	
e3	Community/STEM School Miles	1,459	
f	Assigned School Buses		93
g	Rider Capacity Target		57.40
h	Square Miles		55
i	State Share Percentage		66.119720%
j	Reported Special Education Transportation Cost		\$7,450,450.00
Detailed Calculations			
A	School Bus (Type 1 and 2) [(greater of A1 and A2)*(greater of i and 0.4583)]		\$5,833,225.57
A1	Per-Rider Based [b*s1]	\$6,232,950.57	
A2	Per-Mile Based [e*s2*180]	\$8,822,217.60	
B	Mass Transit (Type 3) [c*s1*0.35]		\$782,002.76
C	Other (Type 5 and 6) [d*s1*0.50]		\$117,178.99
D	Transportation Efficiency [D3]		\$0.00
D1	Riders per Bus [a/f]	44.9032	
D2	Efficiency Index [D1/g]	0.7823	
D3	If D2 >= 1.5 then (A*0.15)	\$0.00	
	If D2 >= 1 but D2 < 1.5 then (((D2-1)*0.15/0.5)*A)		
	If D2 < 1 then [0]		
E	Transportation Supplement [E1*A2*0.55]		\$0.00
E1	Supplement Percentage [greater of 0 and ((28-E2)/100)]	0.00000	
E2	District Rider Density [a/h]	75.92727	
F	Temporary Transitional Aid Guarantee [greater of [F1-(A+B+C+D+E)] and 0]		\$0.00
F1	Funding Base [FY19 SFPR Line G - CS Transportation]	\$4,130,820.03	
G	Regular Transportation Funding [(A+B+C+D+E+F)*s3]		\$6,732,407.32

Payment in Lieu of Transportation (PILO)

Traditional districts have the authority to declare a student ineligible for transportation as “impractical to transport” and offer PILO to the parent or guardian. [R.C. 3327.02](#) establishes the minimum and maximum payment amount for PILO for each school year and states that the payment “may be prorated.” Districts do not report the individual amounts paid or the dates of the payment(s) to DEW. These determinations are made locally and approved by local school boards. The minimum amount of PILO payment is 50% of the average cost of



pupil transportation for the previous school year. The maximum amount of PILO payment is the average cost of pupil transportation for the previous school year.

	FY25	FY26
Minimum PILO Amount	\$583.86	\$607.15
Maximum PILO Amount	\$1,167.72	\$1,214.29

Districts are not required to report PILO payments in comparison to actual district costs to DEW.

Declarations of Impracticality are made by districts and approved by local school boards. The law states that districts must “consider” each of the six statutory factors when identifying whether particular students who are eligible for transportation may be declared impractical.

R.C. Section 3327.02 Factors for Consideration Regarding Declarations of Impracticality:

- (1) Time and distance required to provide transportation
- (2) Number of pupils to be transported
- (3) Cost of providing transportation in terms of equipment, maintenance, personnel, and administration
- (4) Whether similar or equivalent service is provided to other pupils eligible for transportation
- (5) Whether and to what extent additional service unavoidably disrupts current transportation schedules
- (6) Whether other reimbursable types of transportation are available

Typical evidence submitted by districts in impracticality cases in FY23-FY26 included:

- District board of education resolution declaring a student impractical
- Student’s form of rejecting PILO and requesting mediation
- Cost analysis

If a student is declared impractical by the district and local board of education, they are offered PILO. Families may negotiate with districts on the amount of payment if the offer does not meet family needs. And, as mentioned previously, for families who struggle with transportation due to lack of funds, vehicle, or other reasons, PILO alone may not solve their student’s daily school transportation issue.

Families may request mediation to dispute a PILO determination. If mediation fails to resolve the matter, a hearing with a hearing examiner may be requested, and ultimately the DEW Director approves or disapproves of the district’s PILO determination. In doing so, the Director

primarily reviews whether the district adhered to PILO statutory process and not the merits of the district’s PILO determination (i.e., the weight of the factors).

In analyzing cases that did make it to the Director, where detailed information was available (a subset of overall cases during that time), DEW was able to identify which factors were used by over the last few years.

Identification of the use of the six statutory factors used in the Declarations of Impracticality (FY23–FY26)

Total PILO Cases ⁴	Factor (1)	Factor (2)	Factor (3)	Factor (4)	Factor (5)	Factor (6)
50	43	45	49	23	44	35
Percentage	86%	90%	98%	46%	88%	70%

Results are provided below for all of the mediation requests. Keep in mind that FY26 final numbers are not available until after the school year closes.

Number of Director orders that were affirmed or denied, including a brief note on the reasoning

	FY24	FY25	FY26 (to date)
Mediation Requests	22	43	45
Hearings	9	13	0 (17 pending)
No Hearing Requested	1	10	4
PILO Director Orders	10	24	5
Orders Approving PILO	8	19	3
Orders Disapproving PILO	2	5	2
Director Order Appeals	1	0	0

PILOs were primarily disapproved due to the traditional district not following the procedural requirements and/or the local Board resolutions not being timely. PILOs were primarily approved when all the elements in the Revised Code were compliant.

Fleet and Utilization

Fleet and utilization refer to the total number of vehicles, as well as their type and use. Districts report current school bus inventory to DEW for Ohio State Highway Patrol registration purposes. Historical information on numbers of school buses is not available, as the bus inventory is a “live” or current number. As of April 1, 2026, there were 59,328 registered school buses and 18,563 active bus drivers in the state.

DEW does not collect information on numbers of alternative vehicles. Alternative transportation modes include public transit and vehicles that have no larger than 12 passenger capacity (not including the driver) (e.g., vans, sedans, SUVs, taxicabs). As of April 2026, Ohio had 18,458 motor van drivers, which include drivers of sedans, trucks, SUVs, and



vans. In FY25, public transit was used for 4.1% of riders, and other vehicles were used for 0.19% of riders.

Capacity utilization rates are not reported to DEW, as this is part of the districts' local responsibility. However, such data could potentially be gathered from districts across the state through a survey, which would be helpful but have some margin for error.

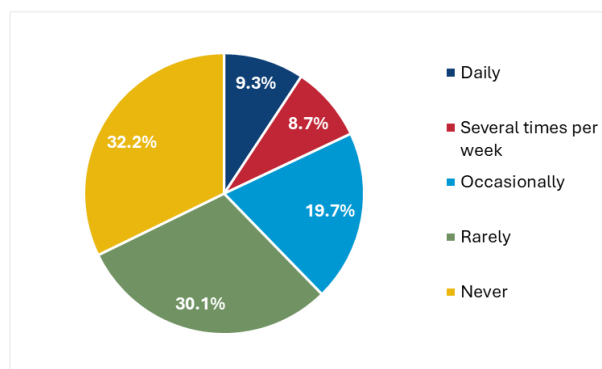
Workforce and Route Coverage

Comprehensive district transportation workforce numbers, route coverages, and other related information are not reported to DEW. Through a [2026 survey](#) with 225 district respondents, DEW gathered the following information:

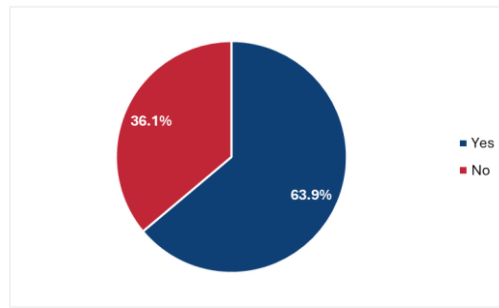
- Districts report a mean of 1.45 bus driver positions listed as open and accepting applications for hire.
- The number of full-time bus drivers employed by responding districts ranges from zero to 170, with a mean of 19.57.
- In FY25, an average of 14.68% of vacant school bus driving jobs were filled.

Additionally, the [Ohio Association of Pupil Transportation conducted a survey](#) with 183 districts responding. Collectively, these districts employed 4,083 drivers and 183 substitute drivers. They reported that **18% of their routes were being uncovered or doubled-up daily or several times per week, and another 19.7% were occasionally uncovered or doubled-up.** This situation is the practical result of driver absences. Districts reported a very wide range of driver absences. On any given day, at least 9% of drivers were out, and on some days in some districts that number was as high as 58%.

Uncovered or Doubled Up Routes



Experienced route consolidations, terminations, or delayed start/end times?



Responding districts also reported that more than two-thirds of them had experienced route consolidations, terminations, or delayed start/end times due to a shortage of drivers.

Increasingly, transportation directors and other staff are filling in for bus drivers, with **49% of directors reporting spending up to 10 hours per week, and 32.8% reporting more than 10 hours per week driving routes** to/from school and for other school purposes.

Districts reported the strategies they are using to mitigate the bus driver shortage locally but are still experiencing ongoing transportation challenges. At least one-third of districts are implementing both pay incentives and guaranteed hours in tandem.

Mitigation Measure	Percentage of Total Responses	Description
Pay incentives	59.02%	The most popular measure, implemented by over half of the districts, recognizing the need for competitive compensation to attract and retain drivers.
Guaranteed hours	50.27%	Used by half of the districts to provide drivers with assurance of a steady minimum income, addressing concerns about part-time school bus driving roles.
Training programs	38.80%	Focuses on increasing the supply of qualified drivers by easing the barrier to entry.
Scheduling changes	28.96%	Involves operational adjustments to routes and times to better manage the limited driver pool.
Partnerships with other districts	4.92%	The least common strategy, suggesting that sharing services is not yet a widespread tactic.

We do know the collective impact of each of the above items and the cost of transportation services combined with state reimbursement limits all contribute to systemic challenges getting our students to school.

FEASIBILITY STUDY: SCHOOL DISTRICTS PROVIDING TRANSPORTATION TO STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A COMMUNITY SCHOOL OR NONPUBLIC SCHOOL ON DAYS THAT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS NOT OPEN FOR OPERATION

The Workgroup explored the feasibility of school districts providing transportation to students enrolled in public community and chartered nonpublic schools on days when school calendars do not align.

It is important to note that:

- Ohio law requires transportation on non-aligned school days.
- Non-aligned days represent a minimal number of days throughout the year.
- Districts report it is easier to provide transportation services on non-aligned days, as there are fewer routes to staff, even though drivers must volunteer for the routes.
- Any additional costs due to overtime or work on scheduled driver days off is a reasonable expense.
- A recent survey of community and chartered nonpublic schools conducted by DEW in spring 2025 indicated that receiving district transportation on non-aligned days is not an issue; however, in [a 2026 survey](#), 24% of chartered nonpublic and community school leaders indicated issues receiving transportation on non-aligned days.
- The same survey of districts conducted by DEW in spring 2025 indicated providing transportation on non-aligned days is not an issue; in 2026, 34% of district survey respondents reported having issues providing transportation on non-aligned days.
- Districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools do not report the following to DEW:
 - Number of days where community/nonpublic schools are in session and district schools are not
 - Staffing, routing, and contractual constraints on those days
 - Incremental cost estimates for compliance.

Community and chartered nonpublic school leaders were invited to the December 4th meeting for a panel discussion about the issue of transportation services—what makes them run well and what challenges they experienced. Additionally, transportation directors from several systems were also invited to the panel discussion at that meeting to talk about the issue.

While there is a shortage of bus drivers in some communities across the state, the transportation directors identified that “non-aligned days” are the easiest to staff. Because district students are not in session, transportation directors reported that there are fewer routes overall to staff on those days, and drivers are asked in advance whether they would like to work instead of having the day off. Since this is an opportunity for their drivers to earn additional wages, it is easier for transportation directors to fill the routes with willing drivers.

The chartered nonpublic principal, Lisa Eberhardt from Saints Philip and James Catholic School, reported that non-aligned days were not a challenge for them either, as districts were able to provide transportation services on those days. Participants also indicated that where

there are strong relationships with the serving districts, transportation runs much more smoothly overall than where relationships are not well-developed. Where there are no strong relationships and collaboration, the challenges on non-aligned days are an exceedingly small part of a much larger challenge.

Panel members included:

- Kathryn Anstaett, United Schools
- Andy Boy, United Schools
- Lisa Eberhardt, Saints Philip and James Catholic School
- Mike Maxwell, North Fork Local Schools
- Justin Miller, Akron Public Schools

Recommendations

The Transportation Workgroup respectfully submits the following recommendations for consideration by the Governor and the General Assembly. Materials presented to and shared by the Workgroup are linked in [Appendix A](#).

This Transportation Workgroup envisions a new comprehensive approach to school transportation that combines maximizing existing flexibility, rethinking how resources flow, and engaging across school systems to serve every child and family effectively and efficiently, regardless of the school they choose to attend.

Ohio's goal: Every student who qualifies for transportation gets to school safely and reliably.

- **Our shared goal is to transport as many students as possible to and from their school of choice safely and consistently—regardless of where they are enrolled.** Each student deserves thoughtful and equitable consideration in school transportation planning and implementation. Students are Ohio's most precious resource, and our collective future depends upon them being ready to learn and succeed.
- **The safety of Ohio's students is the most important consideration in any potential solution set.**
- **Attendance is critical to learning.** Transportation—when inconsistent and unreliable—is not just a logistics issue; it is a potential barrier to student attendance and outcomes.
- **A one-size-fits-all approach is not feasible.** Ohio's communities have diverse populations, geographies, and challenges that require tailored solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS APPROACH

Our traditional district, community, and chartered nonpublic school systems have unique approaches, histories, experiences, and resource bases. Family school choice is a valued principle in Ohio and is respected by all Workgroup members. However, not all stakeholders fully agree on *how* best to accomplish safe and reliable transportation *across* education systems for more students. Therefore, the recommendations identify where divergence of opinion exists while seeking to inform policymakers of viable options for moving forward.

It was our hope that exploring other states could uncover existing exemplary systems or frameworks. However, after considerable review with assistance from the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) ([Fall 2025 survey results](#)) and Education Commission of the States ([ECS policy brief](#)), it is clear that Ohio has a unique transportation policy set that does not match other states, making it difficult to translate others' best practices. For example:

- From the 31 states responding to NASDPTS survey in fall 2025:
 - 56.25% of states do not financially support transportation for charter or private schools.
 - Of those that do, **Oregon** and **Iowa** indicated a solution Ohio does not have. Districts may file a claim with the state department of education for Nonpublic Transportation and have three ways of meeting their transportation obligation: (1) transport students directly; (2) pay parents through a “PILO-like” process; or (3) contract with a third party or nonpublic school to transport students. In the \$9 million Oregon Nonpublic School Transportation fund last year, claims exceeded the allocation. The state prorated reimbursements at 58% of total claims.
- The ECS policy analysis cited some examples that are instructive but not sufficiently similar to Ohio’s policy framework:
 - **Connecticut:** Local or regional board may also provide transportation to student attending charter schools outside of the district with state reimbursement for reasonable transportation costs.
 - **Massachusetts:** Districts are only responsible for providing transportation to charters within the school district boundaries.
 - **New Jersey:** The same terms and conditions applied to district students are applied to community and private school students.
 - **New York:** Districts transport charter school students who reside within a 3–15 mile radius of school they are enrolled in with centralized pick-up points.

While it is helpful to see the similarities and differences with other state solutions and the accompanying policy sets, there are no solutions that can be fully replicated and adopted within the policy framework in Ohio. There is also not sufficient information about their effectiveness and efficiency to determine whether other states’ solutions would significantly improve Ohio’s current state of transportation. However, some of the ideas above, with appropriate revisions, have been the subject of discussion in the Workgroup.

The Workgroup was hungry for data that simply does not exist and/or cannot be easily collected at the state level. While DEW worked in good faith to produce all requested data sets, there are many questions and details that remain. Because transportation is a local responsibility, districts have the most relevant detailed information and are currently not required to report many items that could be helpful in monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of pupil transportation or identifying when actors may not be implementing in good faith.

Workgroup members did agree to rely on recent work to inform some aspects of this report, instead of starting from scratch. For example, [The Governor's School Bus Safety Workgroup Report](#) is the seminal document the Workgroup relied on for safety aspects of transportation, with some specific enhancements in Recommendation 6, as it does not address some issues

related to van transportation and training the Workgroup believes are important should those vehicles play a greater role going forward.

The Workgroup offers two kinds of recommendations for consideration:

- **Comprehensive Systems Change:** Systemic changes to transportation that require refinements to existing law and a year or more to establish.
- **Immediate Actions to Ease Current System Challenges and Build the New System Foundation:** Actions that can be applied to the existing system to ease pain points while Comprehensive Systems Change is considered, legislated, and implemented.

COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Workgroup suggests the comprehensive system change recommendations in this section be considered as a set of recommendations to allow for better transporting all eligible students safely and reliably to school on a regular basis. Implementing some, but not all, of the following recommendations may not solve the variety of current transportation challenges students, families, and schools currently experience.

Recommendation 1:

Guarantee transportation for all eligible Ohio students to their school of choice.

Ohio should establish a clear statewide policy that every transportation-eligible student receives safe and reliable transportation to the public, community, chartered nonpublic, STEM, career-technical, or open enrollment schools they lawfully attend. This policy could include phasing out “impractical to transport” determinations as a new system takes hold over time.

Recommendation 2:

Fully fund transportation mandate to support the statewide guarantee for all eligible students to their school of choice, while continuing to honor local control. Full funding would mean allocating the full statewide transportation supplement (identified in the law cited previously in this report) of the Full Student Funding Formula amount per student and distributing it for use at the local level. Currently, allocated funds fall far short of the identified supplement, with only a percentage of the transportation supplement being available at the local level.

- a) Fully fund the transportation portion of the Full Student Funding Formula amount per student, and have those funds follow the student and be useable by districts, educational service center (ESC) consortia, community schools, chartered nonpublic schools, or parents.** Fully fund the level identified by DEW, which is the state average transportation cost from the previous year, and include amending the formula to account for alternative transportation (i.e., non-yellow school buses with

maximum passenger capacity of—under current law—12 passengers, not including the driver). Community school and chartered nonpublic school students would receive the following weighted funding as currently defined in law: 1.5x (for community school students) and 2.0x (for chartered nonpublic students). This recommendation is similar to the one cited in the [final report from the ESC of Central Ohio Transportation Pilot](#).

- i. Districts would have the option of providing their own transportation, contracting a third-party transportation provider, or participating in a Regional Transportation Consortium for all or part of their transportation solution.** If a regional transportation option is chosen, some or all students residing within the district would be serviced by this option (with some exceptions). Any changes at the district level should ensure access to Career-Technical Education remains strong and viable in the Joint Vocational School District and Compact models.
- ii. Community and chartered nonpublic schools would have the option of continuing to work with students' districts of residence, providing their own transportation, contracting out to a third-party provider, or participating in a Regional Transportation Consortium. Community and chartered nonpublic schools may choose to keep transportation service with the home district of their students (as is current law).** However, if the district in question chooses to participate in a Regional Transportation Consortium, the community and chartered nonpublic students residing in that district will be served through the Regional Transportation Consortium chosen by the district.

b) Revise the count week process to reach a more accurate ridership number.

Consider full funding for actual ridership—including part-time riders who may have been missed in the current count process—and a lesser percentage (50–75%) for eligible ridership. Currently, miles traveled to transport eligible pupils participating in an open enrollment program may be reported for payment purposes by the resident district from home to the designated border pick-up point and by the educating school district from the border pick-up point to the building of attendance in the educating district. If the educating district or the resident district provides all the open enrollment of transportation for a student, the miles may be reported by the district providing the service. The Workgroup recommends that open enrollment students transported by the district that they attend—not their residential district—should be able to be counted during count week. Involve the State Auditor's Office to determine exact costs.

c) Work with the State Auditor's Office to produce a transportation cost report

identifying the actual costs of student transportation to include both bus and van transportation, for all student populations, including special education students, to determine whether allocation adjustments should be made. Based on report findings, consider adjustments to [Type III, V, and VI funding](#) (and others as needed) to allow for partial or full reimbursement.

Recommendation 3:

Expand transportation flexibility within districts and establish Regional Transportation Authorities through ESCs, district consortia, or other appropriate third-party entities to manage transportation collectively at the regional level. Refer to Recommendation 2 for details on districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic choice-making on transportation providers.

- a) **With transportation funding following the student, expand the law around the use of hubs (collection points)** to allow an option for traditional district, community, and nonpublic school students to have their bus stop at a centralized location when it can be used to reduce ride times and can be accessed by most students. Thoughtful use of hubs will be applied for all students, whether enrolled in district, community, and chartered nonpublic schools. Due to differences in bell times and school locations, not all use of hubs will be the same, but districts should make every effort to treat students similarly and with as many direct routes as possible.
- b) **Allow the option for transporting districts to coordinate with families of community and chartered nonpublic school students to identify centralized locations to serve as initial collection and drop-off points (e.g., school buildings, churches, libraries, shopping centers).** Transporting districts should discuss bus stop locations with community and chartered nonpublic schools and families prior to the district Board of Education approving the stops. In cases where the location is on private property, the transporting district would be responsible for entering into agreements with property owners to ensure the location is safe and warm for students. All the schools involved would collaborate to ensure reasonable transportation times for students.
- c) **Add Regional Transportation Consortia for traditional districts, community, and chartered nonpublic schools to use.** A group of districts/schools of all types within a regional area could work together with a primary district, ESC, or other third-party transportation provider to accomplish transportation for all students in the area. This collaboration would be accomplished on an optional basis at the discretion of district/school leadership and could support all students or specific subgroups based on the specified geographic area. A principle of the work would be to use the same standard when treating all students—considering them all “regional students” and not segmenting or treating them differently based on their school type—to transport the greatest number of pupils to their schools of choice.

As described above in Recommendation 1, districts would continue to have the option to serve their own students, but if they opt for a Regional Transportation Consortium, all services for which they are responsible (including those to the community and chartered nonpublic schools) would be served through that mechanism.

Community and chartered nonpublic schools would still have the option of providing their own transportation or contracting with a third party. If they chose to stay with their students' district of residence providing transportation, the choice to provide service directly, through a third-party provider or a Regional Transportation Consortium, would be at the district's discretion.

Research into pupil transportation systems has not uncovered ideal models with data to support replication. However, regional innovation could uncover strong cross-system options not currently in play in Ohio. To date, Ohio has implemented the following two very small regional transportation pilots: the ESC of Central Ohio and the Montgomery County ESC. The [final report from the ESC of Central Ohio Transportation Pilot](#) indicates:

- Families and community school partners were extremely satisfied with the pilot program.
- On average, student riders increased school attendance by an average of 13 days.
- Families that responded indicated that the transportation was improved from what they previously experienced, helped with school attendance, had a positive impact on their students' academic performance, and had an impact on their decision to stay at the school their student currently attends.
- Non-school bus transportation proved effective and highly reliable but was costly and not supported on a larger scale by the current state funding model.

Montgomery County ESC's pilot program was extended through the current budget cycle. Their final report is not due until September 2027, but the program has produced significant results in its first two years of implementation. The pilot cites a 44% cost reduction of more than 44% transportation of students to the Ohio School for the Deaf and Blind than what home districts were experiencing on their own.

Because the programs were able to place the routes with multiple students from the Dayton area to and from Columbus and were transported safely and reliably, CDL drivers who previously had to drive those routes were returned to service at their home districts, and drivers were recruited and retained at the ESC over the course of the first two-year pilot and now into the third year of funding for the work. [Details can be found in written testimony](#) presented to the Senate Finance Committee in spring 2025. Current work within the pilot is attracting additional requests from individual families, as well as districts, to support a variety of student transportation needs.

Both ESCs with transportation pilots agree on a variety of recommendations like those the Workgroup has discussed, including:

- Establish and fund a regional support system leveraging Ohio's educational service centers. This system could initially be at smaller scale, focused on non-district populations, and be supplemented with the use of third-party contracted services.

As ESCs invest in vehicles and drivers, the use of contractors could be phased out.

Recommendation 4:

Designate or develop a statewide transportation database that allows for access to basic student data (e.g., name, address, assigned public school, selected school of choice) that is useful to all parties in transportation planning, decision-making, and implementation so each student may be equally considered for transportation support. The system would ensure all schools (i.e., districts, community schools, chartered nonpublic schools) and recognized Regional Transportation Authorities and Consortia have accurate, timely data on transportation needs to aid in considering all students. The system must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Ohio privacy laws, and cybersecurity standards using encrypted data, role-based access, and audit logging.

- a) **This database could be the Education Management Information System (EMIS) or some other existing tool** that allows the addition of select data only (e.g., name, address, chosen school, district of residence) from those students who request transportation to their chartered nonpublic schools. Given that chartered nonpublic schools do not participate in EMIS, this limitation could be a straightforward one. A priority on potential interoperability with or portability to existing district transportation systems will be critical for full system adoption.
- b) **Implement a Statewide Transportation Enrollment Calendar** for all student transportation requests, registration, and related information (e.g., student address, school enrolled). This single system for gathering information on all interested riders would include statewide deadlines for registration, transportation routing, and consequences for not meeting timelines. It would also dramatically simplify communication with families and schools about how to access transportation, when to request it, and how to ensure address updates and other changes are entered to maintain consistent school transportation for their students.
- c) **Require community and chartered nonpublic schools to support their families in registering for transportation via a statewide system.** This support would include asking families to indicate their need for transportation when they enroll in school, as well as sharing the calendar for transportation enrollment and helping families enter
- d) **the deadlines for transportation planning in law to create a more efficient, regional timeline.**
 - **January:** Establish a new deadline requiring traditional districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools to declare their transportation method for the upcoming year (e.g., continuing current operations, joining a consortium, using a third-party provider). This information enables timely, regional decision-making.

- **April 1:** Community and chartered nonpublic schools must submit their bell times. Traditional districts will provide feedback on these times to optimize routing and better serve students across overlapping schedules.
- **June:** Preliminary transportation plans must be submitted.
- **July 15:** Final transportation plans are due.

This shifting of deadlines ensures routing is built on the most accurate enrollment data possible. By securing final plans by mid-July, families of students who are declared impractical to transport will have sufficient time to arrange alternative transportation before the school year begins (prior to the potential phase-out of the impracticality declaration when a new system takes hold). In July, however, families may not yet know full details on bus stop locations and route times.

Recommendation 5:

Establish strong, collaborative relationships between traditional districts, community schools, chartered nonpublic schools, and families.

- Encourage two consultations (e.g., in-person or virtual meetings, emails) per year** between public districts and the community and chartered nonpublic schools they transport to share information on calendars, bell schedules, enrollment, and a list of students who will need transportation. [R.C. 3313.48 \(E\) and \(F\)](#) requires districts to consult with community schools and chartered nonpublic schools, respectively, regarding the compatibility of any proposed change in schedule and effect on transportation services.
- Encourage traditional districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools to work in good faith to coordinate scheduled days off and bell schedules, where possible.** When developing collective bargaining agreements, contracts, and approved annual school calendars, districts should consider the potential implications for transportation planning (e.g., hour requirements or bell schedules for teachers, driver availability, staggered school start times). To that end, when a minor adjustment of up to 15 minutes in a bell schedule could successfully accommodate student transportation needs, schools should make every reasonable effort to implement that flexibility.

Recommendation 6:

Implement successful bus driver recruitment, training, and retention strategies for districts and schools with additional state support. Districts and schools across the state have implemented models to recruit and retain bus drivers, many of which are documented in DEW's [Driver Recruitment and Retention Playbook 2026](#). This resource serves as a support for districts to consider emerging/best practices to solve the bus driver challenge. In addition, [The Governor's School Bus Safety Workgroup Report](#) lays out foundational considerations for student safety and remains critical guidance, even when exploring the recommendations below. While many districts are actively implementing recommendations

contained in these reports, in many communities it remains difficult to hire and retain drivers. State support in the form of funding for a driver recruitment advertising campaign or to increase driver wages would be welcome.

- a) **Review the current bus and van driver certification process for rigor and safety standards.** There is significant opportunity for improvement in the preparation and oversight of van drivers, in particular. This process should include providing a choice of in-person training, particularly as it relates to student management, safe driving habits, and required procedures that would better protect students. Van driver training should also be updated to include similar safety protocols as bus driver training. This training should extend to contracted transportation services to ensure they are compliant with background monitoring and providing districts with appropriate information to ensure driver compliance; and reporting non-compliance and rap back notifications in a timely manner to districts in the same way they would be if the individual were their own employee.

Stronger, consistent safety expectations and enforcement across all student transportation providers, including those that are not regulated by the DEW (e.g., daycares), would be beneficial to students.

- b) **Review the current bus driver training model for opportunities to compress the timeline** from recruitment to employment, while still following the critical bus driver training and certification process and paying potential drivers for their training time, to the extent possible. This model may require additional state funding or a change in legislation if it requires more CDL on-road testing, which is outside of the scope of pre-service.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTIONS TO EASE CURRENT CHALLENGES

Recommendation 7:

Allocate state funds for a scalable, expanded Regional Transportation Consortia Prototype Program for traditional districts, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools to pool their collective resources (e.g., drivers, buses, vans) and develop a plan to facilitate transportation for all students within a defined region using a Regional Transportation Authority. The same standards of care will be applied to each student—regardless of which school type of school they attend—such that they are all treated as regional students deserving of the same transportation opportunities. The consortia may use a primary district, ESC, or other third-party organization to provide transportation services for their students.

Ohio has learned much from the small pilots run at the ESC of Central Ohio and Montgomery County ESC. However, those implementations did not harness the full assets of consistent and

expanded regional ridership, interacting bus route opportunities, use of both hubs and traditional bus stops, and the full range of transportation vehicles available under the law.

- a) **The three prototypes of Regional Transportation Authorities/Consortia should be funded to run over the course of 2–3 years and convene regularly to share lessons and solutions they have developed during planning and implementation, informing the additional policy changes needed prior to statewide implementation.** The difference between a pilot and a prototype is critical: pilots test an idea; prototypes rapidly innovate with the goal of learning as much as possible and implementing rapid improvements to take the program to scale. Having more than one prototype running simultaneously allows for rapid learning from one to the other, and the ability to make choices that fit the context of different regions' needs.

Given the realities of the data we have on transportation challenges in our state, it would make sense to make those regions with the highest current PILO rates eligible for or asked to be part of the prototyping process.

- b) **Fully funded transportation supplements (including the existing weights for community and chartered nonpublic students) would follow the student to fund the program, and the state will provide 2–3 years of funding to each consortium** to cover a regional consortium/transit authority director, collaborative planning, information technology needs, and technical assistance for planning and implementation. Each consortium would be required to gather feedback from schools, riders, and families on their satisfaction and recommendations for the prototype on a quarterly basis; create a communication plan for schools and families; determine what technology supports are critical for implementation; and determine how to build the program collaboratively. In addition, each consortium would be responsible for a sustainability plan to support the work long term, including any recommended policy changes that might be needed.
- c) **The State of Ohio will fund an evaluation** that will compare and contrast the progress, learnings, and outcomes of the three prototype consortia. This evaluation will be both a formative and impact evaluation to help consortia during the planning and implementation process and assess how the approach to regional transportation influences attendance, academic progress and other factors as identified by DEW, which will provide oversight of the program and publish at least one report on progress and another on impact as the program window ends. While participating schools will not be formally subject to R.C. 3327.021 during the prototype period—as they are being asked to innovate and discover new ways of working—the evaluator and DEW will be responsible for identifying any ongoing negative impacts for students and requesting prototype adjustments (in real time) to solve challenges throughout the program period.

Recommendation 8:

Improve accountability and transparency by amending current law to require DEW to play a statewide oversight role for the outcomes of student transportation. Currently, DEW monitors only whether districts follow the proper *process* in determining student eligibility for transportation and for Declarations of Impracticality. The State of Ohio has an interest in ensuring every student attends school on a regular basis and succeeds academically. Transportation plays a significant role in both factors.

- a) **The DEW oversight role will be amended in law to include publication of an annual statewide transportation report** detailing transportation costs, effectiveness, and suggested improvements to policy or implementation at the regional and district levels.

- b) **DEW will conduct a legislatively requested and funded policy and implementation audit/study of districts with high rates of impracticality determinations** (i.e., a sampling of those districts with 80–100% PILO for community/chartered nonpublic students) to better understand the confluence of factors causing the situation, as well as a sampling of districts with very low PILO determinations to seek out best practices that could inform improvement. The mixed-method research will combine publicly available data with the data identified in 8.d (below) and qualitative review and interviews at the district level. This study will be mindful of district type, size, and trends in district PILO determinations, including total payments made to parents for failure to provide transportation after mediation was requested. The study will be made public and inform the prototype program identified in Recommendation 7 and identify opportunities for district improvement in transportation provision. If driver recruitment and retention is identified as an issue within districts that are part of this study, it will be noted.

- c) **Implement transportation reporting requirements in law that allow DEW to monitor appropriately student transportation effectiveness and efficiency statewide.** As stated previously, transporting districts are not currently required to submit some of the data that would allow DEW to report accurately on pupil transportation efficiency, transportation equity across school types, and ongoing progress on challenges raised in this report. The workgroup recommends that the law be amended to require the following annual data to be reported to DEW by district (or consortia if that applies):
 - i. Number of students who requested transportation, including how many for morning pick-up and how many for afternoon transport back home
 - ii. District snapshot of overall mileage, type of district, and open-ended responses on the issue
 - iii. Number of drivers and substitutes, how many drivers short of full staffing, how often non-typical drivers fill in, how many routes had to be doubled/cancelled, and trend data on these elements

- iv. Description of the transportation fleet (i.e., district or contracted), including traditional buses, 12-person vans, and any alternative transportation used
- v. Daily attendance rate of drivers, incentives, and supports in place for hiring/retention
- vi. Pay for drivers, and whether pay can be raised (i.e., why or why not)
- vii. Fact checks with the chartered nonpublic or community school, communication, and their perspective of the issue
- viii. Actual cost per student for transportation (e.g., fuel, maintenance, bus, van, salary) compared to state reimbursement amounts
- ix. Equal use data (e.g., 2 mile, lower than that) indicating how provision of services is happening across district, community schools, and chartered nonpublic schools such that all are considered

d) All PILO letters districts send to parents (detailing the reasons for declaring impracticality as required by R.C. 3327.02) must also be submitted to DEW. This data will enable DEW to better understand the predominant reasons and evidence supporting PILO determinations and how these could be mitigated.

Recommendation 9:

Clarify Declarations of Impracticality in the short term; phase out impracticality over time. The Workgroup believes all eligible students should receive transportation to their school of choice, and that for many low-income families and/or families with inflexible work or family arrangements the current PILO amounts do not solve their transportation challenge. In a new transportation system, PILO should be exceptionally rare or phased out completely. Until PILO is phased out legislatively, improvements should be made to the existing PILO structure.

The Workgroup members expressed many perspectives on how to make PILO more functional, but agreed upon the following limited set of recommendations:

- a) **Phase out the use of PILO once the new transportation system recommendations are in place** (refer to the Comprehensive Systems Change Recommendations 1–6).
- b) **Legislation should request DEW provides oversight by issuing clear, standardized guidance and administrative rules on the Declarations of Impracticality process.** Currently, districts process these requests in vastly different ways; for instance, some may show a high percentage of Declarations of Impracticality on paper, but those numbers can be easily inflated when compared to the actual number of families actively requesting district transportation services.

By establishing uniform guidelines and expectations on exactly *who* should be declared impractical to transport and *what* evidence at what level needs to be

reported, DEW would ensure all districts are operating on a level playing field. Once that baseline process is clear and consistent statewide, the state will gain a much more accurate, transparent picture of actual student declarations versus those truly deemed impractical to transport. While communication and collaboration among schools can be challenging, the predominant barriers identified by districts remain operational and structural in nature.

- c) **Amend the Six Factors in law** to include the following:
 - (i) Requirement for district to **consider all factors and provide clear evidence** for impractical to transport findings before local board action is taken.
 - (ii) **Vans and alternative transportation** options in the Factors.
 - (iii) **Submit the letters sent to families detailing evidence and reasons for all Declaration of Impracticality to DEW (also listed in Recommendation 8d).**
This is not intended to be a check on local board control, but to provide aggregate data to inform statewide policy and transportation systems improvement.
- d) **Continue allowing districts the ability to contract alternative transportation options, including vans**, on behalf of families if it is more financially efficient for the district than a PILO payment.
- e) **Improve the PILO mediation and approval process to include DEW’s review of the mediation recommendation and evidence provided across all factors, not just whether the PILO process was followed.** As stated previously, DEW currently approves/disapproves outcomes of 119 hearings for each case solely on whether the PILO process (as it is currently defined in R.C. 3327.02 procedures) was followed. If Ohio truly wants Declarations of Impracticability and use of PILO to be the exception, then process, evidence, and outcomes must have real oversight.

The shift for DEW to consider student outcomes for transportation would contemplate whether the PILO offer is a reasonable one that allows the student to make it to school consistently or the district should accommodate transportation in some other way. This change requires both a mindset shift and a refinement in the law that prioritizes solutions to get the student to school.

Ohio has made school choice a central part of its education policy. Transportation policy must evolve accordingly. Every transportation-eligible child should have reliable access to the school that best meets their educational needs.

Appendix A: Ohio Pupil Transportation Workgroup Materials

Meeting #1 | [October 30, 2025](#)

Meeting #2 | [December 4, 2025](#)

Meeting #3 | [January 15, 2026](#)

Meeting #4 | [February 12, 2026](#)

Meeting #5 | [April 2, 2026](#)

Meeting #6 | [May 14, 2026](#)

Appendix B: Additional Areas of Ohio Pupil Transportation Workgroup Discussion

Over the course of 9 months, the Workgroup discussed a wide range of transportation issues. Given the make-up of the group and the very different perspectives represented, it was unlikely they would agree on everything.

Perspectives ranged widely in the following areas:

- Disagreement over the most important transportation problem(s) to solve
- A want for “funds to follow the student” to include requiring school types to transport their own students, instead of having districts remain responsible for transportation
- Following the nearly 57% of states that do not require transportation for community and/or chartered nonpublic schools to simply “tweaking” the current system
- Openness to conceiving a fully new reality for transportation to fighting to keep things exactly the way they are and instituting penalties for non-compliance

In the end, most Workgroup members were able to stand behind most of the recommendations in this report. Some individuals, however, simply could not, and are noted as such in the list of members at the beginning of this report.

While the recommendations represent the consensus the group did build, there were other items discussed and drafted that did not make the final set. **These determinations, though, included significant issues but support broke down based on school types.**

- **Designate all students impractical to transport who have similar profiles (regardless of school type)** when considered against the Six Factors, including district attending students. The legal structure in Ohio makes this extremely complicated and could result in an undue burden of having to evaluate every student within a district for similarity to students attending community and chartered nonpublic schools. The Workgroup wants all students transported to school safely and consistently, but this designation approach would likely cause more bureaucratic burden than services to students.
- **Codify the reasoning expressed in AGO Opinions 1974-040 and 1968-156**, that whatever permissive or optional transportation is provided to students attending traditional schools must also be provided for students who attend community or chartered nonpublic school. This item was discussed at length and determined to be sufficient as it stands, but to gather data going forward on compliance with the “2-mile” rule and districts’ implementation to transport all students at 2 miles or closer (residence to school).

- **Move from “considering” the Six Factors to a “preponderance of evidence for each Factor”** as a determinant for designating a student impractical to transport. The Workgroup did move to clarify that “all” of the Six Factors must be considered but did not move to the “preponderance of evidence” level for each one. However, recommendations do ask the DEW to clarify the level of evidence and standardize the PILO process to eliminate districts using it in vastly different ways.
- **Increase PILO payments per student and institute a family PILO cap.** PILO payments for many families are not sufficient to transport students to school consistently, putting poorer families at a distinct disadvantage. PILO payments are also not a sufficient deterrent for districts to choose to transport in many cases. While community schools and chartered nonpublic schools would like PILO payments to be rare, they also would like them to be high enough to make a difference for families. Public districts, given that the transportation supplement is not fully funded, would like PILO levels to be based on data and not simply raised as a penalty for districts. This is especially true while structural and other factors like bell times are not within their control.
- **Gather additional detailed local routing and rider data.** The Workgroup indicated that a statewide system for transportation is likely unworkable, given variations in regions across the state. And in Ohio, transportation is a local responsibility. Given this, Workgroup members agreed to a limited data set for districts to send forth to DEW within this report. The data can be used to gather a much more detailed view of how students are served, but not to second guess ongoing decision making at the local level. However, more data were requested by the chartered nonpublic schools than was agreed to by the overall group.
- **Establish maximum ridership times.** While there was general discussion of getting students to school and back “efficiently” and that some routes and hubs could increase ridership time, the group did not spend enough time to reach consensus on what times might be appropriate to put into guidance or law. There was also concern that the time lengths might be used in a way that did not best serve students but instead might be better solved by providing additional flexibility for students.