



## Ideas To Assure Efficiency and Reduce Pupil Transportation Costs

Forty-eight percent of Oregon's K-12 students ride the school bus. When they get on the bus, their parents can relax knowing their children are taking the safest form of ground transportation in the country to get to and from school. In fact, in the twenty years since Oregon established our high standards for pupil transportation and the funding mechanism to support it, we have transported hundreds of thousands of students millions of miles -- *and we haven't had a single death or serious injury.*

In the past few years, pupil transportation funding has come under attack as fostering inefficiency, although no evidence has been presented to support this claim. The reimbursement formula was established in recognition that the major cost drivers in pupil transportation (student residence location, equipment and fuel costs, etc.) are beyond the control of school districts. In the twenty years since its establishment, it has allowed districts to err on the side of student safety when making transportation decisions, and our safety record is evidence of our success.

However, like every other part of education, the chronic underfunding of school districts has affected pupil transportation departments. In some districts untrained dispatchers have replaced professional managers or superintendents, who may be making choices that may not make the program as efficient as possible. Changing the mandate or funding formula will not positively impact this situation - and may in fact, jeopardize student safety and cause higher transportation costs.

There are several things that could be done however, which would assure district accountability in pupil transportation and increase efficiency in currently inefficient programs. Following is a list of ideas that would increase efficiency of pupil transportation:

- Standardize school calendars. Require all schools to have the same half days, conference days, late start days, etc. to increase buses running at full capacity and reduce the need to have double runs or the transportation of small numbers of students.
- Coordinate bell times. Tiered bell times would enable districts to use buses for multiple schools, or groups of schools in close proximity to each other, transporting more students at one time. This may require adjustment of the school day, so that all students attend the same hours each day, to allow both morning and afternoon routes to align in an efficient manner.
- Transport special needs students to the closest available program. Currently, some students are transported to a program across the district or even out of the district, rather than to a program offered at a local school.
- Limit home-to-school transportation for special needs students to only those students who have needs that require such service.
- Discontinue reimbursement to school districts for the transportation of students under open enrollment policies. Limit state reimbursement to transportation of those students eligible for transportation to the closest local school.

- Require all districts to use routing software to efficiently design routes, and provide routing software under a state contract to small districts that are unable to afford to purchase software on their own.
- ODE establish supervisor training and certification program to teach transportation best practices for efficiency and safety in transportation departments. Require all district transportation administrators to receive training and achieve certification.
- ODE establish a safety and efficiency formula to evaluate pupil transportation department operations. The safety formula would evaluate vehicle maintenance and inspections, driver training compliance, and citation/accident records. The efficiency formula would evaluate how well equipment is being utilized and other best practices of the pupil transportation industry. The formula could also factor how well district spending meets state expectations, including an examination of areas identified on the district's supplemental plan to verify the safety hazards identified.
- Require districts to submit updated supplemental plans in order to continue to receive reimbursement for transportation to/from locations inside of the walk area due to safety hazards. Require districts to submit specific information about the safety hazard requiring transportation.
- Require ODE to assure the annual transportation report matches the supplemental plan on file at ODE.
- Increase ODE Pupil Transportation inspection visits, currently once every six years, to ensure districts are complying with state pupil transportation standards and rules.

OSEA members work every day to assure that our students receive the safest, most efficient pupil transportation services possible. We stand ready to work with the legislature and other stakeholders to make the improvements in our pupil transportation system that make sense.