

# At the Crossroads



School Transportation in Allegheny County



ALLIES FOR CHILDREN

## Acknowledgements

This report, produced by Allies for Children in 2017, summarizes school transportation in Allegheny County school districts.

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All data is publically available through the Pennsylvania Department of Education, unless otherwise noted.



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Allies for Children serves as a bold voice for policy and practice changes that improve the wellbeing of all children and youth in Allegheny County, especially those with the greatest need.

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## Introduction

**EDUCATION IS CHANGING EVERY DAY.** From new methods of teaching to new technology; teachers, students, administrators, and parents are constantly innovating and improving education for the 21st century.

Despite innovation and progress, when it comes to transporting students, very little has changed. However, the transportation needs of students are changing as more students choose to attend magnet, charter, and private schools.

School transportation remains an integral part of the daily life and academic success of students, and we must be mindful of its importance.<sup>1</sup> In Pennsylvania, more than 1.5 million elementary and secondary school students start each day riding some form of transportation.<sup>2</sup>

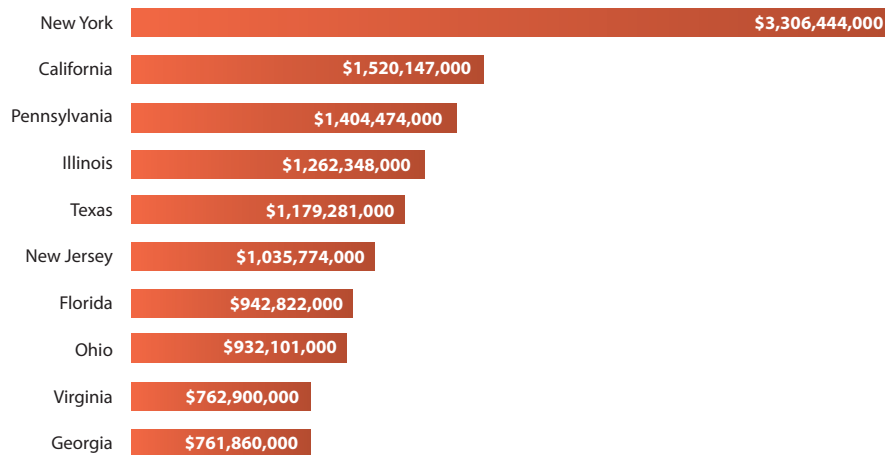
Parents often feel their children spend too much time on a school bus, while many administrators are concerned about safety and disciplinary issues on buses. Yet, while school transportation constitutes a significant portion of state and local school district budgets, these problems are not being solved.

In 2015-16, Pennsylvania spent more than \$1.4 billion on school transportation.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, the average annual cost of transportation for one student in Pennsylvania was \$1,097, which was 14 percent higher than the national average.<sup>4</sup> In 2014-15, school districts in Allegheny County alone spent more than \$147 million on school transportation.<sup>5</sup>

### Allegheny County Snapshot

- Allegheny County spends **\$147 million** to transport **137,000** students to school annually
- There are **5** walking school districts in Allegheny County
- **11** districts own at least one of their own buses
- There are at least **30** bus contractors in Allegheny County

### 2015 Pupil Transportation Expense<sup>6</sup>



The financial system underpinning school transportation dates to the first oil crisis of the 1970s, when policymakers prioritized minimizing energy costs by maximizing the number of students riding each bus within a given district. No consideration of incentives for shared services or regional approaches was given.

In the late 20th century, Congress enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Act and the McKinney-Vento Act, and the Pennsylvania's General Assembly approved legislation allowing for the creation of charter schools, and established the "10-Mile Rule." The federal laws, in particular, changed public education in very positive ways. However, little or no consideration was given to the impact and increased pressure they placed on school transportation.

<sup>1</sup> "Student Transportation and Educational Access." Urban Institute Student Transportation Working Group, Feb. 2017, [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/88481/student\\_transportation\\_educational\\_access\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/88481/student_transportation_educational_access_0.pdf). Accessed 11 July 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "SY 2014-15 eTranssummaryDB Jan2017." Index of /pub/PDE\_PUBLIC/DSDA\_Requests/Pupil\_Transportation/, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, [ftp://copaftp.state.pa.us/pub/PDE\\_PUBLIC/DSDA\\_Requests/Pupil\\_Transportation/](ftp://copaftp.state.pa.us/pub/PDE_PUBLIC/DSDA_Requests/Pupil_Transportation/). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> "AFR Data Detailed." Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016, [www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/School%20Finances/Finances/AFR%20Data%20Summary/Pages/AFR-Data-Detailed-.aspx#tab-1](http://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/School%20Finances/Finances/AFR%20Data%20Summary/Pages/AFR-Data-Detailed-.aspx#tab-1). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Public Education Finances: 2015." The Educational Finance Branch of the United States Census Bureau, June 2017, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/econ/g15-aspef.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2017.

Some school districts across the commonwealth and in neighboring states are working together to improve school transportation. These examples are often small in scale, but they indicate the potential for significant success.

As the yellow bus continues to play an important role in the lives of students, policymakers need to look at school transportation through the lens of time, money, and adaptability. How can students' time on school buses, as well as the cost of school transportation, be reduced? What system best meets the needs of today's student population in the changing education environment? Likely, models of shared services and regional collaborations will need to be developed.

## School Transportation Today: Quantifying the Dilemma

In 2015, Pennsylvania ranked the third highest in the nation for spending on school transportation with only New York and California spending more.<sup>7</sup> Together, Pennsylvania and its 500 school districts expend nearly \$1.4 billion annually on school transportation.<sup>8</sup>

The 43 school districts in Allegheny County range in size from 650 students to 28,500 students.<sup>9</sup> Each year, the districts transport approximately 137,000 students to and from school.<sup>10</sup> These students ride a combined 17.8 million miles annually, the equivalent of nearly three-quarters of the Earth's circumference.

Between the 2009-10 and 2014-15 school years, the total number of students transported in Allegheny County decreased while transportation expenses increased from \$130 million to more than \$147 million.<sup>11</sup>

Improving the inefficiencies of school transportation is not an easy task. It is tethered by state and federal mandates and complicated by an uncompromising and outdated reimbursement formula (See *Appendix* on page 10).

## Growing Pressure on School Transportation

### Did You Know

**10-Mile Rule: When a school district elects to transport students, it must transport all students living in the district to their school of choice within 10 miles of the district's borders.**

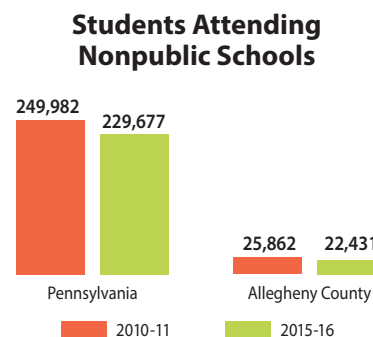
### Transportation Mandates

Since the establishment of the school transportation reimbursement formula, Congress and the Pennsylvania General Assembly have created new categories of students for whom schools are mandated to transport. In Allegheny County, the proportion of students who now meet the state and federal requirements for mandated transportation continues to increase.<sup>12</sup> This places a significant burden on school districts. More buses must be dedicated to transporting students, thereby driving up the overall cost of school transportation.

While districts recognize the importance of providing equitable transportation to all students, and school choice is a more common option, policymakers must identify ways to encourage the sharing of services and a more regional approach to transportation.

### Transporting Students Attending Nonpublic Schools

In Pennsylvania, when a school district elects to transport students it must transport all students living in the school district and attending both public and nonpublic schools up to 10 miles beyond the school district's borders. In Allegheny County there are approximately 160 different nonpublic schools.<sup>13</sup> Although the population of students attending nonpublic schools decreased during the Great Recession, it continues to represent a substantial population.



<sup>7</sup> "Public Education Finances: 2015." The Educational Finance Branch of the United States Census Bureau, June 2017, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/econ/g15-aspef.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Enrollment Reports and Projections." Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, [www.education.pa.gov/Data-and-Statistics/Pages/Enrollment%20Reports%20and%20Projections.aspx#tab-1](http://www.education.pa.gov/Data-and-Statistics/Pages/Enrollment%20Reports%20and%20Projections.aspx#tab-1). Accessed 12 May 2017.

<sup>10</sup> "AFR Data Detailed." Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016, [www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/School%20Finances/Finances/AFR%20Data%20Summary/Pages/AFR-Data-Detailed-.aspx#tab-1](http://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/School%20Finances/Finances/AFR%20Data%20Summary/Pages/AFR-Data-Detailed-.aspx#tab-1). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Education Facts: Pennsylvania Public School Enrollment." Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, 2014, [www.pennbpc.org/education-facts-pennsylvania-public-school-enrollment](http://www.pennbpc.org/education-facts-pennsylvania-public-school-enrollment). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## Transporting Students with Special Needs

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, school districts must provide transportation to students identified with special needs at no expense to the parents or caregivers.<sup>14</sup> Transportation services include “travel to and from school and between schools; travel in and around school buildings; and specialized equipment.”<sup>15</sup> In Allegheny County, the number of students with special needs remains constant at approximately 25,000.

## Transporting Students Attending Charter Schools

Regardless of whether a district provides transportation to resident students, the Pennsylvania Public School Code mandates that school districts provide transportation to all students attending charter schools located within 10 miles of the school district’s boundaries. School districts must also provide transportation on such dates and periods that the charter schools are in regular session, regardless of when the school district operates.<sup>16</sup>

In 2010, Pennsylvania ranked seventh in charter school enrollment and tenth in the nation for the number of operating charter schools.<sup>17</sup> This is the source of recent substantial pressure building on the school transportation system. In Allegheny County, nearly seven percent of the overall student population attend 21 charter schools.<sup>18</sup>

Nationally, practices differ. In some states, charter schools are solely responsible for the transportation of charter school students and often partner with their neighborhood school district.<sup>19</sup>

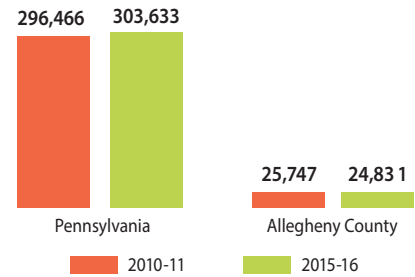
Of the 43 states with charter schools, only 11 states, including Pennsylvania, mandate school districts to fund student transportation for charter schools.<sup>20</sup>

## Transporting Students Experiencing Homelessness

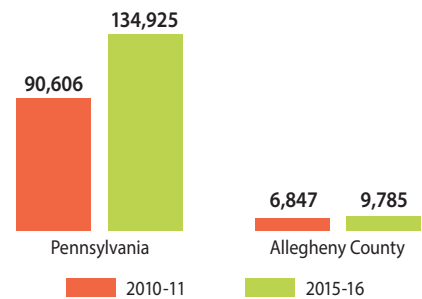
Originally passed in 1987, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act ensures that students experiencing homelessness have transportation to and from their schools of origin.<sup>21</sup> Students experiencing homelessness are entitled to receive transportation that is comparable to what is available to non-homeless students.<sup>22</sup> The number of students experiencing homelessness attending public schools in Pennsylvania and in Allegheny County is on the rise.<sup>23</sup>

Without a regional approach, the cost of transporting each of these categories of students is exorbitant for individual school districts. As more

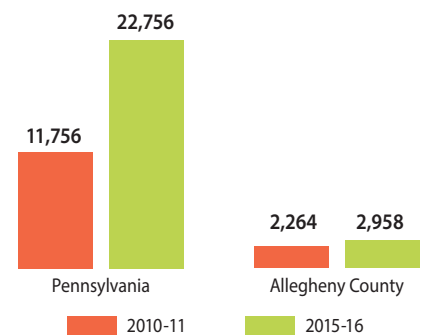
### Students with Special Needs



### Students Attending Charter Schools



### Students Experiencing Homelessness



<sup>14</sup> “Use of ‘Transportation.’” Parents, Let’s Unite for Kids-PLUK, [www.pluk.org/Pubs/Fed/IDEA\\_Transportation\\_606K.pdf](http://www.pluk.org/Pubs/Fed/IDEA_Transportation_606K.pdf). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>15</sup> “Guidelines for Transporting Students with Special Needs.” Oklahoma Department of Education, [sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov/sde/files/SpecEd-Transportation.pdf](http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov/sde/files/SpecEd-Transportation.pdf). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>16</sup> “1949 Act 14.” Pennsylvania General Assembly, [penndata.hbg.psu.edu/PublicReporting/StatisticalSummary/tabid/2546/Default.aspx](http://penndata.hbg.psu.edu/PublicReporting/StatisticalSummary/tabid/2546/Default.aspx). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>17</sup> “Charter Schools: Facts & Issues.” League of Women Voters of Alabama Education Fund, 2011, <http://www.lwval.org/learn-vote/charter-schools/page273/page273.html>. Accessed 11 July 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Public Charter School Fiscal Impact on School Districts.” Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, May 2017, [lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/584.pdf](http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/584.pdf). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Washington State Requirements and Guidance for Education of Homeless Children and Youth.” State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 3 Mar. 2017, [www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/AssistanceAct.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/AssistanceAct.aspx). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>22</sup> “Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance.” U.S. Department of Education, 27 July 2016, [www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Niederberger, Mary. “Pennsylvania Sees Rise in Homeless Students.” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 15 Sept. 2015. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, [www.post-gazette.com/news/state/2015/09/15/Pennsylvania-sees-rise-in-homeless-students/stories/201509150089](http://www.post-gazette.com/news/state/2015/09/15/Pennsylvania-sees-rise-in-homeless-students/stories/201509150089). Accessed 10 July 2017.

students enroll in schools of choice, more individual bus runs are required, driving up expenses for individual school districts. According to a 2015 report by the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, 17 of 36 superintendents surveyed expressed concern about transportation costs and the need to operate “two busing systems,” one for traditional public school students and one for other student populations.<sup>24</sup>

Across the nation, particularly in urban areas, school districts wrestle with the issue of how to provide safe and affordable school transportation for students.

New Orleans	Boston	Ohio
<p>The costs of transporting students increased 67 percent in a New Orleans school district affected by Hurricane Katrina. Annual costs rose from \$18 million in the 2005-06 school year to \$30 million in 2013-14.<sup>25</sup></p>	<p>Policy changes increasing school choice led to a direct increase in the budget for the Boston Public School District.<sup>26</sup> In 2012, Boston Public Schools spent approximately \$84 million transporting students.<sup>27</sup> In 2017, the district spent \$116 million on school transportation.<sup>28</sup></p>	<p>School districts spend 44 percent more transporting charter school students compared to students attending public schools in Ohio. This is due to the longer distances bus drivers travel, often picking up fewer students along routes. Statewide, school buses traveled 15,600 miles each day to transport charter students, for an additional \$85,000 daily.<sup>29</sup></p>

In Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley, two school districts have been hit hard from the recent increase in the number of charter and nonpublic students who require transportation.

**Salisbury Township School District** is 11.3 square miles and consists of only two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, but buses students to 46 schools.<sup>30</sup> The district transports 203 private school students using 19 bus runs and 39 charter school students with six bus runs. The district spends an average of \$2,514 annually per student to transport.<sup>31</sup>

**Parkland School District** covers 72 square miles and has 11 schools of its own, but transports students to 56 schools in total. In the 2011-12 school year, Parkland expended an average of \$1,656 to transport each student going to a charter or nonpublic school.<sup>32</sup> For those who were transported farther distances, ranging from five to ten miles outside of the district, the price per student was much higher at \$3,809 annually. The Parkland superintendent believes if the distance required to transport charter and nonpublic students was reduced from ten miles to five miles, the district could save nearly half a million dollars each year.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “Public Charter School Fiscal Impact on School Districts.” Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, May 2017, [lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/584.pdf](http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/Resources/Documents/Reports/584.pdf). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Hasselle, Della, and Marta Jewson. “Cost of Busing Students in New Orleans Rises as Parents Exercise School Choice.” *The Lens* [New Orleans], 12 Sept. 2013. [The Lens](http://thelensnola.org/2013/09/12/cost-of-busing-students-in-new-orleans-rises-as-parents-exercise-school-choice/). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Sutherland, Amy. “To Bus or Not: Boston’s School Choice Program.” *BU Today*, [www.bu.edu/bostonia/web/to-bus-or-not/](http://www.bu.edu/bostonia/web/to-bus-or-not/). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>27</sup> “Transportation Challenge: Solving Routing and Bell Times.” Boston Public Schools, [www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/2263/17.04.01%20Transportation%20Challenge%20Kickoff%20Presentation%20v9.F.pdf](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/2263/17.04.01%20Transportation%20Challenge%20Kickoff%20Presentation%20v9.F.pdf). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Ash, Katie. “Charter Students Contribute to Higher Transit Costs.” *Education Week*, 16 Apr. 2014, p. 5. Academic OneFile, [go.galegroup.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=A-ONE&sw=w&u=upitt\\_main&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA366207076&sid=summon&asid=4cbd83672e98e0ce89e63382f72a6289](http://go.galegroup.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=A-ONE&sw=w&u=upitt_main&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA366207076&sid=summon&asid=4cbd83672e98e0ce89e63382f72a6289). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Peterson, Margie. “Busing to Other Schools Burdens Districts.” *The Morning Call* (Allentown), 1 Dec. 2013. *The Morning Call*, [articles.mcall.com/2013-12-01/news/mc-school-districts-transportation-20131201\\_1\\_parkland-school-district-business-administrator-charter-and-private-schools](http://articles.mcall.com/2013-12-01/news/mc-school-districts-transportation-20131201_1_parkland-school-district-business-administrator-charter-and-private-schools). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

## Different School Calendars and Start/End Times

The calendar and the start and end times of a school day are another source of rising costs. In Pennsylvania, a school district is required to provide transportation to charter school students, even when the school district is closed and the charter school is open, unless closures are weather-related.<sup>34</sup> In Allegheny County, there are more than 250 traditional public school buildings, 161 charter schools, and 60 nonpublic schools, in addition to special education and career and technical education centers. There is typically no coordination around start and end times, even for schools serving students in the same age ranges. With so many schools and no communication around hours of operation, school districts spend even more money transporting charter and nonpublic school students.

## Bus Driver Shortage

School bus driver shortages are a common problem across the nation. There are not enough drivers to staff all the routes required by school districts, and Pennsylvania is not immune to this crisis.<sup>35</sup> School bus drivers are responsible for the safety of dozens of students and maintaining good behavior on the bus. In addition, they are responsible for several administrative tasks tied to state reporting requirements. Many transportation jobs outside of the education arena require similar qualifications, but provide much higher wages and far fewer responsibilities. It is common for school bus drivers to leverage their current roles in order to acquire the experience needed for these more lucrative positions.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, driving students becomes the training ground for higher paying jobs in the transportation field. By sharing buses and reducing the need for more vehicles, school districts would need fewer bus drivers, lessening the impact of the driver shortage.

The reimbursement formula makes it difficult for school districts in Pennsylvania to respond to the changing populations of students and the always-evolving education system. The mandate to transport students up to 10 miles beyond district boundaries and the growing proportion of students covered by federal and state transportation laws forces school districts to dedicate more resources to costlier routes. Differentiation in calendars and start times compound the problem. **Solutions must be found in innovations that improve school transportation.**

## Paving the Way

Promising practices aiming to solve school transportation challenges are emerging in school districts across the commonwealth and in neighboring states. The examples provided in this report are by no means an exhaustive list, but are presented to show how districts can improve the experience of students by utilizing already existing systems of transportation, and sharing services across school districts to alleviate internal and external pressures.

## Utilizing Public Transportation

Public transportation is one of the simplest yet most significant innovations used to transport students. When an option, it can positively impact the transportation experience. Currently, 18 Allegheny County school districts provide students with bus passes from Port Authority Transit of Allegheny County; of those, only five school districts utilize this option for 10 or more students.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, with greater effort and collaboration, more districts could rely on public transportation as an option for more students.

In **Minneapolis**, the local school district distributed public bus passes to high school students and found compelling evidence suggesting the public bus passes positively impacted student academics. Students who used the bus passes to participate in afterschool activities increased their GPA by an average of 0.28.<sup>38</sup> District officials found that this form of transportation not only decreased ride times for students, but also benefited the city by increasing the number of people using public transportation and those who are likely to use public transportation in the future.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> "Selected Pupil Transportation Sections Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949." Education Pa, [www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Teachers-Administrators/Pupil%20Transportation/PupilTransp%20SchoolCode%20Transportation%209-25-08.pdf](http://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Teachers-Administrators/Pupil%20Transportation/PupilTransp%20SchoolCode%20Transportation%209-25-08.pdf). Accessed 12 May 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Blazina, Ed. "Shortage of Bus Drivers Has School Districts, Contractors Scrambling." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 11 Apr. 2016. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, [www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2016/04/11/Shortage-of-bus-drivers-has-school-districts-contractors-scrambling/stories/201604110015](http://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2016/04/11/Shortage-of-bus-drivers-has-school-districts-contractors-scrambling/stories/201604110015). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Guerrero, Rafael. "Bus Driver Shortage Poses Challenges to School Districts." *Elgin Courier News*, 28 Sept. 2017. *Chicago Tribune*, [www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/elgin-courier-news/news/ct-ecn/school-bus-driver-shortage-st-0927-20170927-story.html](http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/elgin-courier-news/news/ct-ecn/school-bus-driver-shortage-st-0927-20170927-story.html). Accessed 2 Oct. 2017.

<sup>37</sup> "SY 2014-15 eTransummaryDB Jan2017." Index of /pub/PDE\_PUBLIC/DSDA\_Requests/Pupil\_Transportation/, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, [ftp://copaftp.state.pa.us/pub/PDE\\_PUBLIC/DSDA\\_Requests/Pupil\\_Transportation/](ftp://copaftp.state.pa.us/pub/PDE_PUBLIC/DSDA_Requests/Pupil_Transportation/) Accessed 23 June 2017.



**Pittsburgh Public Schools** relies heavily on Port Authority Transit for many of its high school students. The school district provides a monthly bus pass to every high school student with access to Port Authority Transit. In the 2016-17 school year, Pittsburgh Public Schools provided 3,800 students with public bus passes.<sup>40</sup> This practice dramatically reduces the administrative requirements set by the state for reimbursement. A Port Authority Transit bus pass costs approximately \$100 per month, far less than the state subsidized yellow bus transportation.<sup>41</sup> When the school district applies for reimbursement for the bus passes it receives back nearly 100 percent of the cost from the state. This practice shows promise, for students, families, and the Port Authority Transit. Students receiving passes are permitted to use them to take advantage of afterschool programming, employment, and recreation.

## Centrally-Located Transfer Stations

Transfer stations can be used to reduce ride times and transportation costs, especially for nonpublic and charter school students.<sup>42</sup> These stations are usually located at a public school and sometimes require parents or caregivers to transport their children to this central location.<sup>43</sup> In rural areas specifically, the consolidation of bus stops and the use of transfer stations minimizes the length of bus rides and number of buses required.<sup>44</sup>

In **North Allegheny School District**, parents drop off high school students at the public high school to board a bus to their respective charter or nonpublic schools. Parents are not compensated for the miles traveled to the drop off point, however they participate due to the reduced ride times for students. According to the North Allegheny transportation director, the district reduced its overall transportation costs with this innovative practice.<sup>45</sup>

## Sharing Services

Districts that collaborate to share transportation services can reduce the financial burden associated with government mandates.

**Brentwood Borough School District**, a district serving approximately 1,200 students in K-12,<sup>46</sup> elects not to transport students. The district is still required to provide transportation services to students with special needs, students enrolled in career and technical educational programs, students experiencing homelessness, and students enrolled in charter schools. Since the state reimbursement formula encourages packing more students on buses and stacking routes, it does not adequately support Brentwood's transportation costs.

Therefore, in 2014, Brentwood contracted with neighboring **Baldwin-Whitehall School District** to provide transportation services for the student population the walking school district is mandated to transport.<sup>47</sup> Brentwood's cost-savings totaled \$275,000, cutting transportation costs nearly in half.<sup>48</sup> Leaders from both school districts praise the sharing of school transportation services as beneficial to their students and each school districts' finances.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Fan, Yingling, and Kirti Das. "Assessing the Impacts of Student Transportation on Public Transport." Attendance Works, Dec. 2015, [www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Minneapolis-Student-Pass-Study.pdf](http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Minneapolis-Student-Pass-Study.pdf). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Vasser, Ted. Interview. By Mara Kelosky. 27 June 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Park, Junhyuk, and Byung-In Kim. "The School Bus Routing Problem: A Review." Science Direct, Elsevier, 18 May 2009, [www.sciencedirect.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S037722170900349X](http://www.sciencedirect.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S037722170900349X). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Bottie, Roger. Telephone interview. By Kelli Burgess. 22 Feb. 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Park, Junhyuk, and Byung-In Kim. "The School Bus Routing Problem: A Review." Science Direct, Elsevier, 18 May 2009, [www.sciencedirect.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S037722170900349X](http://www.sciencedirect.com/pitt.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S037722170900349X). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Bottie, Roger. Telephone interview. By Kelli Burgess. 22 Feb. 2017.

<sup>46</sup> "Brentwood Borough School District." Brentwood Borough School District, [www.bb-sd.com/index.asp](http://www.bb-sd.com/index.asp). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>47</sup> "Transportation Department." Baldwin-Whitehall Schools, [www.bwschools.net/our-district/district-departments/transportation](http://www.bwschools.net/our-district/district-departments/transportation). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Hacke, Stephanie. "Brentwood OKs Plan to Contract Bus Service with Baldwin-Whitehall." TRIB Live [Pittsburgh], 14 Aug. 2014. TRIB Live, [triblive.com/neighborhoods/yourouthhills/yourouthhillsmore/6602482-74/brentwood-baldwin-students](http://triblive.com/neighborhoods/yourouthhills/yourouthhillsmore/6602482-74/brentwood-baldwin-students). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



## Regional Collaboration

The sharing of school transportation services can be applied at the regional level. In such cases, there must be an intermediary to either coordinate the contracts and services, or to provide the services directly to school districts by owning a fleet of buses. One example of the latter is found in Berks County.

In the mid-1990s, the Reading School District issued a request for proposals for school transportation services. The **Berks County Intermediate Unit** (BCIU) submitted a proposal. The BCIU is one of 29 intermediate units established by the state to operate as regional agencies and charged with providing cost-effective programs to school districts.<sup>50</sup> The Reading School District is a district within the BCIU's service area.<sup>51</sup>

After winning the contract, the BCIU lease-purchased buses and hired the drivers necessary to serve the district. Today, the BCIU continues to maintain its fleet and drivers and is providing transportation for four of the 18 school districts within Berks County.<sup>52</sup>

The BCIU states, that as a local intermediate unit, it is able to provide efficient transportation services at an affordable rate.<sup>53</sup>

## Statewide Initiatives

To be more efficient with school transportation, Pennsylvania should look to the Straight A Fund in Ohio, a statewide initiative awarding local governments the resources and incentives necessary to innovate.

In 2014, Ohio awarded the **Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center** a \$1.8 million grant to design and implement a shared school transportation collaborative.<sup>54</sup> Muskingum Valley formed a consortium of multiple districts, redesigned traditional school transportation, and with the support of the Straight A Fund, invested an effective shared services transportation model. Today, Muskingum Valley provides transportation services to 16 school districts by utilizing cross-district routes and is providing real results for school districts and students.

In the first year, the participating school districts reduced transportation costs by two percent, and saved a total of \$4 million over five years. In one year alone, the annual savings ranged from \$242,000 to \$376,000. Over the next five years, the 20-district shared services consortium generated an annual cost savings ranging from \$1.4 million to \$2.1 million. The Educational Service Center has proven extremely innovative by improving route efficiency, upgrading buses with new software such as GPS systems, and reducing idle times to a total annual savings of more than \$50,000.<sup>55</sup> This successful cross-district consortium provided a solution to make transportation work better for students and may be a viable solution for school districts in Allegheny County.

<sup>50</sup> "About Intermediate Units." *Pennsylvania Allegheny Intermediate Units*, [www.paiu.org/ius.php](http://www.paiu.org/ius.php). Accessed 10 July 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Blessing, Carl D. Telephone interview. By Mara Kelosky. 30 Mar. 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "Straight A Fund." Ohio Department of Education, 22 Dec. 2016, [education.ohio.gov/Topics/Straight-A-Fund](http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Straight-A-Fund). Accessed 12 May 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Luby, Amy, et al. Telephone interview. By Kelli Burgess. 27 Mar. 2017.

# The Road Ahead

Today's education system continues to evolve, while school transportation remains stagnant.

Together, we must re-examine the landscape with student experiences in the forefront and develop innovative practices, processes, and systems to efficiently and resourcefully transport students to and from school.

Advocates and policymakers need to act now.

**1. Now is the time** to conduct an analysis of the current system. Further research should be conducted to determine the:

- Cost of transporting different populations of students
- Amount of time students spend riding school buses
- Impact of different school calendars and schedules on district budgets
- Effects of school transportation on student behavior
- Causes and possible solutions of school bus driver shortage

**2. Now is the time** for policymakers to re-examine the school transportation reimbursement formula to empower school districts to meet the changing needs for transportation. A redesigned formula should maintain the shared responsibility between the state and local school districts. Specifically, policymakers should revise the formula in ways that:

- Encourage sharing of services between school districts
- Maintain and strengthen incentives to use existing public transportation systems when appropriate
- Incentivize regional collaborations among multiple school districts
- Establish standards for the amount of time students should spend riding school transportation
- Emphasize fuel efficiency
- Maintain the use of an aid ratio

**3. Now is the time** when policymakers should **NOT** cut state support for school transportation. Rather, they should design a statewide solution based on incentives. They should:

- Create a special fund to incentivize local school districts to develop innovative practices to support their transportation needs
- Design and implement either the sharing of services between school districts or a regional approach to school transportation

**Now is the time to lay the foundation for a new system of school transportation that not only works for students but also provides a positive start and finish to each school day.**

The road ahead is one that school leaders, transportation experts, and policymakers can pave together for students.



## Appendix

### School Transportation Costs

To understand school transportation costs requires understanding the myriad laws at the local, state, and federal levels governing school transportation in Pennsylvania. The driving elements of the system and the need for change can be found in the Pennsylvania School Code.<sup>56</sup>

Decades ago, the General Assembly legislated that “school districts may elect to provide transportation to public students.”<sup>57</sup> Once a school district decides to transport one student, the law requires the district to provide transportation to all students, including those attending nonpublic schools.<sup>58</sup>

Regardless of whether or not a school district elects to transport students, enacted legislation mandates specific student populations—students with special needs, those attending charter schools, and students experiencing homelessness—receive transportation services.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly also enacted the “10-Mile Rule.” Therefore, a school district must transport not only students attending schools within the school district but also those attending schools up to a 10-mile radius beyond the district’s boundaries, including charter and nonpublic schools.

The Public School Code obligates the state to pay for a portion of the costs of transporting students. Any school district transporting one or more students is eligible to receive reimbursements from the state, which covers, on average, 40 percent of a school district’s transportation expenses.<sup>59</sup> The local school district incurs the remaining costs and submits significant paperwork and request for reimbursement to the state. The money appropriated each year by the General Assembly covers costs already incurred by local school districts.

#### APPROVED REIMBURSABLE COST

$$\text{Vehicle Allowance} + \text{Mileage Allowance} + \text{Utilized Passenger Capacity Mileage Allowance} + \text{Layover/Congested Miles Allowance} = \text{Total} \times \text{Cost Index}$$

At its simplest, school districts calculate reimbursements using a set of allowable costs and an annually determined cost index.<sup>60</sup> This number is then multiplied by the Market Value Aid Ratio, which is an index commonly used by the Department of Education to determine the relative wealth of a community. To see the items taken into account, see 2015 Student Transportation Expenses for Allegheny County chart.

In addition to this calculation, Pennsylvania’s transportation reimbursement formula includes a cumbersome system of reporting that school districts are required to use.

<sup>56</sup> Keagy, Dale R., and Wayne McCullough, Dr. “The Elements of Transportation.” Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, 4th ed., Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, Apr. 2015. Accessed 12 May 2017.

<sup>57</sup> “Chapter 51 General Provisions.” The Pennsylvania Code, [www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/chapter51/chap51toc.html](http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/chapter51/chap51toc.html). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “Selected Pupil Transportation Sections Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949.” Pennsylvania Department of Education, [www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Teachers-Administrators/Pupil%20Transportation/PupilTransp%20SchoolCode%20Transportation%209-25-08.pdf](http://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Teachers-Administrators/Pupil%20Transportation/PupilTransp%20SchoolCode%20Transportation%209-25-08.pdf). Accessed 23 June 2017.

<sup>60</sup> The provisions of this § 23.35 adopted June 6, 1975, effective June 7, 1975, 5 Pa.B. 1453; amended August 3, 1990, effective August 4, 1990, and apply to pupil transportation services provided beginning with the 1990-91 school year and reimbursements payable beginning during the 1991-92 Fiscal Year, 20 Pa.B. 4194. Immediately preceding text appears at serial pages (21517) to (21518).

## Recalibrate the Formula

The reimbursement formula cannot respond to changes in public education or mandates to transport specific student populations. As a result, the reimbursement formula fails in three ways.

**First, the reimbursement formula fails to encourage a more regional approach to school transportation.** Although, the formula encourages school districts to be as efficient as possible with transportation services for students living within the jurisdiction, it does not encourage innovation beyond those boundaries. District administrators are likely doing all they can to provide the most efficient transportation services to their students within their districts. In Allegheny County, that means two school districts may send two buses to transport students living along the same route and attending the same school. There are few, if any, economic or operational incentives for a regional approach to school transportation, nor any for sharing of services among school districts. In fact, the mileage allowance and the provisions related to stacking may, in some cases, discourage school districts from sharing services.

**Second, the practice of stacking creates several inefficiencies.** The practice of stacking involves using one bus during multiple runs in the morning and multiple runs in the afternoon. In doing this, school districts maximize their reimbursements. For example, if a bus were to make two runs in the morning and the first run had 67 students and the second run had 40 students, the district would be able to claim a Utilized Passenger Capacity Miles (UPCM) Allowance of 67 for both runs.

It also encourages school districts to use larger buses than needed. Again, because of stacking, a bus could make a first run that is nearly full and a second run that is nearly empty. The school district receives a higher reimbursement, based on the first run, compared to paying for a smaller bus to complete the second route. Stacking means that districts are efficient with some routes and some students, but not all routes and not all students.

**Third, the formula fails to consider the amount of time students spend on a single bus ride.** There is no standard set by the state or local school districts for time students in Allegheny County should be riding the yellow bus.

Anecdotal evidence from Allegheny County indicates that students spend too much time on the bus. Besides the driver, these rides are generally unsupervised and many districts report significant discipline issues on all buses. Future analysis must examine school transportation from the perspective of students, parents, drivers, teachers, and administrators.

Overall, the reimbursement formula does take into consideration some of the important factors involved in transportation, including how many students were transported, how many miles driven, what means of transportation were used, and more. However, as the number and types of public schools change, as more students are covered by state and federal mandates for school transportation, and as the number of unique rides increases, pressure continues to build for changing the formula.

**Embedded within the formula are several incentives for school districts. The formula encourages districts to:**

- Use newer vehicles
- Contract with private transportation providers rather than owning their operating fleet
- Drive fewer miles without students
- Increase the number of students riding on a bus
- “Stack” routes - Stacking routes occurs when districts use one bus multiple times in the morning and multiple times in the afternoon. When school districts stack routes they are reimbursed through the Utilized Passenger Capacity Mile Allowance (UPCM). The UPCM allows the school district to use the route with the largest number of students for reimbursement purposes.

**Schools must be audited annually. For both the reimbursement process and audit process, schools are required to keep the following records.**

1. School calendars (for public, private, and charter schools)
2. Monthly mileage forms displaying miles traveled with and without students
3. Monthly student rosters for each vehicle
4. Odometer reading
5. Hazardous route records
6. Fuel records
7. A copy of each agreement with contracted service providers
8. Evacuation drills verification
9. Filed transportation forms
10. Vehicle information
11. Any supporting calculations
12. Run information
13. Contractor information and record of payments made
14. Copies of Board minutes with driver and route approvals
15. Driver files

## 2015 Student Transportation Expenses for Allegheny County

School District	Total Pupil Transportation Expense	Total Students Transported	Total Pupil Transportation Subsidy	Nonpublic and Charter Subsidy	Total Transportation Subsidies	Percent of Expense Covered by Subsidy	Expense Per Student Transported
Allegheny Valley	\$1,115,928	580	\$279,825	\$9,240	\$289,065	26%	\$1,924
Avonworth	\$1,496,752	1,803	\$544,929	\$88,935	\$633,864	42%	\$830
Baldwin-Whitehall	\$4,578,425	2,686	\$1,128,678	\$297,220	\$1,425,898	31%	\$1,705
Bethel Park	\$3,965,603	5,043	\$890,018	\$198,660	\$1,088,678	27%	\$786
Brentwood Borough*	\$340,386	74	\$222,858	\$770	\$223,628	66%	\$4,600
Carlynton	\$1,730,704	1,370	\$483,868	\$84,700	\$568,568	33%	\$1,263
Chartiers Valley	\$4,211,856	3,994	\$907,572	\$150,535	\$1,058,107	25%	\$1,055
Clairton City	\$441,530	171	\$220,293	\$31,955	\$252,248	57%	\$2,582
Cornell	\$702,412	743	\$240,060	\$40,425	\$280,485	40%	\$945
Deer Lakes	\$2,730,648	2,188	\$949,630	\$55,440	\$1,005,070	37%	\$1,248
Duquesne City	\$675,910	652	\$346,370	\$101,255	\$447,625	66%	\$1,037
East Allegheny	\$2,441,105	1,890	\$1,065,618	\$115,500	\$1,181,118	48%	\$1,292
Elizabeth Forward	\$2,347,157	2,572	\$1,192,510	\$33,110	\$1,225,620	52%	\$913
Fox Chapel Area	\$3,868,326	4,856	\$1,004,864	\$277,585	\$1,282,449	33%	\$797
Gateway	\$4,625,803	3,537	\$1,329,662	\$159,390	\$1,489,052	32%	\$1,308
Hampton Township	\$2,137,306	2,985	\$686,180	\$93,170	\$779,350	36%	\$716
Highlands	\$2,356,201	2,544	\$919,445	\$78,925	\$998,370	42%	\$926
Keystone Oaks	\$2,239,538	1,819	\$420,342	\$135,905	\$556,247	25%	\$1,231
McKeesport Area	\$2,384,929	3,620	\$1,419,049	\$227,535	\$1,646,584	69%	\$659
Montour	\$4,099,008	3,299	\$459,491	\$168,245	\$627,736	15%	\$1,243
Moon Area	\$2,823,230	4,271	\$809,044	\$118,195	\$927,239	33%	\$661
Mt. Lebanon*	\$1,318,016	100	\$120,253	\$0	\$120,253	9%	\$13,180
North Allegheny	\$6,435,256	9,208	\$1,817,712	\$399,630	\$2,217,342	34%	\$699
North Hills	\$2,564,365	4,382	\$812,030	\$149,380	\$961,410	37%	\$585
Northgate*	\$487,961	64	\$137,367	\$0	\$137,367	28%	\$7,624
Penn Hills	\$8,015,895	4,658	\$2,009,308	\$562,100	\$2,571,408	32%	\$1,721
Pine-Richland	\$4,394,849	5,167	\$1,394,785	\$174,405	\$1,569,190	36%	\$851
Pittsburgh Public	\$32,476,247	21,892	\$10,867,997	\$2,698,850	\$13,566,847	42%	\$1,483
Plum Borough	\$3,352,236	3,980	\$1,081,916	\$184,030	\$1,265,946	38%	\$842
Quaker Valley	\$1,906,870	1,939	\$294,941	\$75,845	\$370,786	19%	\$983
Riverview	\$816,940	269	\$169,647	\$30,030	\$199,677	24%	\$3,037
Shaler Area	\$4,698,317	4,932	\$1,349,187	\$160,160	\$1,509,347	32%	\$953
South Allegheny	\$1,351,952	1,658	\$741,198	\$21,945	\$763,143	56%	\$815
South Fayette Twp.	\$3,632,370	3,053	\$1,083,546	\$64,680	\$1,148,226	32%	\$1,190
South Park	\$1,638,255	1,971	\$585,398	\$43,890	\$629,288	38%	\$831
Steel Valley*	\$825,666	93	\$144,658	\$20,405	\$165,063	20%	\$8,878
Sto-Rox	\$1,889,668	1,687	\$676,907	\$168,630	\$845,537	45%	\$1,120
Upper St. Clair	\$4,307,287	4,543	\$924,154	\$87,780	\$1,011,934	23%	\$948
West Allegheny	\$3,630,461	3,370	\$886,764	\$51,975	\$938,739	26%	\$1,077
West Jefferson Hills	\$2,365,980	2,779	\$715,061	\$55,055	\$770,116	33%	\$851
West Mifflin Area	\$2,290,415	2,861	\$987,246	\$68,530	\$1,055,776	46%	\$801
Wilkinsburg Borough*	\$1,143,931	412	\$180,602	\$127,820	\$308,422	27%	\$2,777
Woodland Hills	\$6,249,563	7,833	\$1,964,650	\$763,455	\$2,728,105	44%	\$798
* Walking SD	Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education						





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