



U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Transportation
**Fact Sheet: Bolstering Daily School Attendance
Through Safe, Accessible, Reliable Transportation**

Every day, millions of students ride a bus, walk, or take other forms of transportation to get to and from school. Multiple factors impact a student's experiences with and ability to use school transportation options, including access to yellow school bus services; access to affordable and reliable public transit options; distance between a student's home and school; neighborhood walkability and bikeability; community violence; alignment between parents' work and students' school schedules; and families' ability to maintain a vehicle.

Recognizing the important role that public agencies play in addressing these factors, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) developed this fact sheet to highlight promising strategies to increase students' access to safe, accessible, reliable transportation to and from school.

Rates of chronic absenteeism – missing 10 percent or more of the school year – have spiked across the nation. Chronic absenteeism increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, jumping from 17 percent during the 2018-19 school year to [31 percent in the 2021-22 school year](#). With close to 15 million students chronically absent in the 2021-22 school year, two-thirds of K-12 students in the U.S. were attending a school where at least 20 percent of the student body was chronically absent. [Research](#) shows that **access to safe, accessible, and reliable transportation supports strong school attendance**.

As chronic absenteeism continues to impact rural, Tribal, suburban, and urban school communities throughout the country, **school districts, local and state governments, Tribal governments, and transit agencies are partnering to tackle this complex problem.**

Promising Practices

Below are actions that partners have taken to expand access to school transportation.

- **Host community conversations on school transportation.**
 - In [Washington County, Mississippi](#), grantees of ED's [Promise Neighborhoods Program](#) and [Full-Service Community Schools Program](#) engage local transportation agency representatives to ensure that funding made available through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) [Rural Area Formula Grant Program](#) supports transportation for students in rural communities throughout the region.
- **Encourage and enable students to walk or bike to school.**
 - Communities across the country, including [Cambridge, Massachusetts](#), [Montclair, New Jersey](#), and [Portland, Oregon](#), operate a “[bike bus](#)” or “walking bus” wherein parent-teacher organizations, neighborhood associations, bike-ped advocacy groups, and other supportive adults design a route and timetable for walking or biking to school, then chaperone group trips to school. The “bus” passes through a



neighborhood, picking up students along the way to school, and creating a social support network to help get all students to school.

- **Teach kids to ride bikes:** Many municipalities, including the City of Takoma Park, Maryland, offer free [bike safety rodeos](#), with support from police, parks, safety officials, and bike stores. Parents and their children bring their own bike or borrow a bike for a hands-on session about bike skills, safety, and etiquette. Rodeo sponsors leverage transportation funds or donations to give away helmets, bells, water bottles, reflective gear, and safety lights.
- **Host a walk or bike audit:** Local, Tribal, and state transportation planners and engineers can invite students, educators, and families to participate in a [safety assessment](#) of their routes to school. Participants of all ages walk or ride a bike, pausing frequently to [complete a checklist](#) or draw pictures of their needs, which officials then incorporate into bike-ped plans, projects and policies.
- **Establish School Streets.** School districts can work with their local, Tribal, and state transportation agencies to establish “School Streets,” which designates a road outside a school for temporary restrictions on all traffic during school drop off and pick up times. This improves safety and reduces congestion.
- **Expand safe routes to school:** Transportation planning and public works leaders can [promote comfortable, convenient walking and bicycling](#) for K-12 students of all abilities by [making it safer for students to walk and bike to school](#). State DOTs and local transportation agencies can connect sidewalks, install crosswalks and bike lanes, upgrade signs and signals, and otherwise create safer roads that facilitate active transportation for school children.
- **Align local land use and zoning codes:** Locating housing and other essential uses within walkable proximity to schools enables more students and families to access key destinations without needing to drive or own a vehicle and makes providing public transit more cost effective. City and county officials can work with local school boards to align school siting and design decisions with local land use, zoning, and housing policies to ensure thriving, walkable communities.
- **Make public transit more accessible to students.**
 - **Provide travel training:** Schedule [training sessions](#) to help young people learn to ride transit. Travel trainers can accompany students to their stop or station, share boarding and riding tips, and help kids learn to travel safely and confidently by transit.
 - **Offer free or discounted fares:** School districts, local governments, and transit agencies can work together to provide free or reduced fares for K-12 students. This strategy may work best in places where most young people live within ¼ mile of the nearest transit stop. Supported by a partnership between Leon County Schools, the City of Tallahassee, Florida, and the StarMetro transit system, the



Student Transportation for Academics and Responsibilities (STAR) Program

encourages area students to use public transportation for school, work, and extracurricular activities, or other responsibilities free of charge.

Several states are implementing more than one of these strategies as part of a broader, comprehensive effort to make it easier for students to get to and from school. For example, [Move Ahead Washington](#) committed \$16 billion over 16 years to support transportation infrastructure and provides operating and capital funds for transit agencies that provide fare-free bus, rail and ferry rides for youth under 18. The effort also aims to provide free bikes to students through the [School-Based Bike Program](#) and makes streets safer through the [Complete Streets Program](#) and bicycle pedestrian projects.

Federal Funding Resources and Student Transportation Provisions

Below are federal funding resources and provisions that impact student transportation.

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- Under Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), school districts may use funds to cover additional costs needed to provide transportation for [students in foster care](#) to their school of origin (i.e., the costs above what the district would ordinarily incur to transport students to school), including costs related to public transportation, rerouting school district bus routes, and reimbursing caregivers for driving students to school. Additionally, school districts may use funds reserved for [students experiencing homelessness](#) under Title I (set-aside funds) to defray the excess cost of transporting students experiencing homelessness to their school of origin.
- School districts that receive funding through the [Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program](#) or the [American Rescue Plan–Homeless Children and Youth funds](#) can use grant funds to defray the excess cost of transporting students experiencing homelessness to their school of origin by, for example, buying transit farecards or vouchers, buying gas cards, providing mileage reimbursement, or paying the excess cost of re-routing school buses. These funds can also be used for transportation for students experiencing homelessness to enable them to fully participate in school activities, including extracurriculars, when such transportation is not otherwise provided to students. Visit the [National Center for Homeless Education](#) for more information on how to provide transportation to students experiencing homelessness.
- The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) can cover transportation costs for an eligible child with a disability, including children with an individualized education program (IEP) that articulates the need for a service animal as defined by the [American Disabilities Act](#). A child's IEP team determines if transportation services are required and how such services should be implemented. These funds may be used to transport an eligible child with a disability to and from school, between schools, or in and around school buildings, or for specialized equipment (such as special or adapted buses, lifts, and ramps).



- School districts and community-based organizations that receive funding through the [Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program](#) to provide academic enrichment programming during non-school hours can cover the cost of transporting students to and from the program.
- School districts that receive funding through the [Magnet Schools Assistance Program](#) (MSAP) can provide transportation costs to and from magnet schools provided that such transportation is sustainable beyond the grant period; and the costs of providing transportation do not represent a significant portion of the grant funds received by the district under MSAP.

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- Safe routes to school projects that create safety plans, add sidewalks, redesign intersections, and install measures to reduce vehicle speeds can be funded under numerous DOT programs. The \$5 billion [Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant Program](#) can fund local and Tribal communities that do not have a program in place and want to try out a bike or walking bus. Local agencies are eligible to apply for these grants with a simple application process.
- Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, including improved access to transit, can be funded under many programs administered by States and Metropolitan Planning Organizations including the [Surface Transportation Block Grant Program](#), [Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside](#), and [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program](#). [This funding opportunities table](#) indicates potential eligibility for such projects under all DOT surface transportation funding programs. Activities and projects must meet program eligibility requirements.
- Safety audits, bicycle safety programs, and similar safety education and encouragement programs are eligible under several programs including the [Highway Safety Improvement Program](#) and [Section 402](#).
- Some of the Federal Transit Administration's formula funding programs – [Urbanized Area Formula Grants](#), [Formula Grants for Rural Areas](#) and [Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and People with Disabilities](#) – provide [funds for travel training](#) under the umbrella of Mobility Management.

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