

## Minnesota Pupil Transportation

***Who has responsibility for pupil transportation?***

School boards are required to provide transportation to and from school, or to provide board and lodging, for all students who live two miles or more from schools. School boards are required to provide equal transportation for nonpublic school students.

School districts may provide pupil transportation services by operating a district-owned school bus fleet, contracting with a private vendor of transportation services, or a combination of district operated and contracted services.

***How are pupil transportation services funded?***

The 1995 Legislature made substantial changes to the pupil transportation funding programs. Categorical funding programs were replaced with an across-the-board increase in the general education allowance of \$170 per pupil and the remaining categorical transportation formulas were reduced in size and scope. These legislative changes attempted to clarify the state mandate as well as eliminate a series of formulas that were seen by some as creating disincentives for cost efficiency in pupil transportation.

***What school bus safety standards exist?***

School districts must provide school bus safety training for public school students in kindergarten through tenth grade. Age-appropriate training must take place both in the classroom and on a school bus.

All Type A, B, C, and D school buses used for the transportation of school students are required to meet the requirements of the 1995 revised edition of the *National Standards for School Buses and School Bus Operations*, adopted by the Twelfth National Conference on School Transportation. In addition, Minnesota requires school bus equipment standards beyond the standards adopted by the Twelfth National Conference on School Transportation.

The Department of Public Safety has primary responsibility for school transportation safety. The Minnesota State Patrol is required to annually inspect every school bus to ensure that construction, design, equipment, and color comply with the law. The Minnesota State Patrol is also authorized to conduct random spot inspections of school buses.

***What qualifications must school bus drivers meet?***

There are five different classifications of school buses in Minnesota: Type A, B, C, D, and III. Types A through D are different sizes of yellow school buses. Type III school buses are restricted to passenger cars, station wagons, vans, and buses.

In order to become a driver of a Type A, B, C, or D school bus, an individual must take both written and driving tests. In addition, the individual must have a background check, drug testing, and submit to a physical exam every two years

(upon renewal of the school bus endorsement).

Individuals who drive Type III school buses can do so with a Class D license, without any additional endorsements. However, the local school board may adopt additional requirements for Type III school bus drivers.

***What are some potential legislative issues?***

During the 2002 legislative session, the Commissioner of Children, Families, and Learning submitted a legislatively mandated report to the legislature that identified funding inequities in pupil transportation and made recommendations for providing equitable transportation funding. This report may be discussed during the budget process.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration is due to release a report with the results of a research program that considered alternative methods for potentially improving federal school bus passenger crash protection requirements, including requiring seat belts on school buses. The results of this report may require changes in state school bus safety standards to conform to federal standards.

There have been several studies indicating that diesel fumes cause increased health risks to children riding in school buses. Other issues related to this are the placement of school bus loading and unloading areas in relation to school building air intake valves and school bus loading and unloading areas configured so that school buses are forced to line up end-to-end with the exhaust fumes from one bus flowing into the next bus.

Officials with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimate that nationwide, 8,300 premature deaths, 5,500 cases of chronic bronchitis, and 17,600 cases of acute bronchitis in children would be prevented annually by the use of low-sulfur fuel technology. Recently, the EPA has required that almost all heavy-duty trucks and buses switch to ultra-low-sulfur fuel beginning in June 2006. In addition to low-sulfur diesel fuel, other alternative fuels include natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, methanol, and ethanol.

**For more information:** See the House Research Publication *Minnesota Pupil Transportation*, November 2001.