

Q & A on Nonpublic Transportation Issues

- Q. Why is nonpublic school transportation important to both parents and their children.
- A. For nonpublic schools, transportation is the lifeblood by which parents are able to send their children to these schools. Nonpublic school parents in New Jersey continue to save the state and local districts over \$1.2 B by their decision to send their children to a nonpublic school. In many instances, they are working multiple jobs to accomplish this goal. If they lose transportation for their children, they will no longer be able to send their children to nonpublic schools and may transfer them to a public school at greater taxpayer expense.
- Q. How is nonpublic school transportation currently determined?
- A. Since 1968, nonpublic school students have been eligible for transportation (or aid in lieu payments) if they live the same distances from their elementary or secondary school as the public school students (2 miles for elementary and 2.5 miles for secondary students). A nonpublic school student is able to receive transportation services at a cost of no more than the annual statutory ceiling (currently \$884.00 for the 2014-2015 school year). The ceiling has remained at \$884.00 since the 2008-2009 school year.
- Q. What is the current problem?
- A: The building of nonpublic schools has not kept pace with the changing demographics of New Jersey's population. It is impossible to build nonpublic schools in areas where population growth has taken place in the same increasing numbers where public schools are being built or expanded. Therefore, nonpublic schools have become regional entities, with children traveling greater distances to attend them.
- The cost of transportation is determined by the number of miles that the bus travels and the amount of stops that it makes. Buses operated by both districts and private contractors serve nonpublic school students. However, over 85% of transportation services to nonpublic school students are provided by private contractors over whom the State of New Jersey has no control regarding the prices established in the bidding process.
- Q. What percentage of nonpublic school students eligible for transportation are actually transported rather receiving aid-in-lieu payments.
- A. Current estimates indicate that about 55% of the eligible students receive transportation rather than aid-in-lieu payments. This figure is much lower than what was intended by the sponsors of the original legislation in 1968, whereby aid-in-lieu was only conceived of for those children who "lived on top of the mountain," and transportation services would be very costly. Private contractors often bid just beyond the ceiling for nonpublic school transportation, with the results that when the bids are not accepted (as they cannot

be by law) these same contractors will charge greater amounts to concerned nonpublic school parents who are simply looking to get their child a ride to school.

Q. Does the same problem occur for public school students?

A. No, because public school students must be transported regardless of cost. It is important to note that most, if not all, public school routes are established at far below the cost of the nonpublic school routes. That occurs because there is a density of public school pupils in a concentrated area, and thus the cost of transportation is limited by both the time and the number of stops.

Q. What has the nonpublic school community attempted to do in order to create transportation within the constraints of the \$884.00 per pupil ceiling.

A. Several steps have occurred in order to attempt to attain transportation. They are as follows:

1. We have used cluster stops by which nonpublic school pupils are picked up and dropped off at a more centralized location. This situation may cause the route to run, but nonpublic school parents see themselves as “second class citizens” when their neighbor’s child, who attends a public school, is picked up at the door.
2. The New Jersey transportation code has always permitted the mixing the public and nonpublic school students on buses so that the nonpublic school child may be dropped off before or after the stop at the public school student’s school of attendance. In order to do this, we need to depend upon the will and the competency of the district’s school transportation coordinator who must be creative in establishing the routes.
3. For those students who do not receive transportation, a 1997 law requires that their names be submitted to a Coordinated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA) in each county in order to attempt to create a route for students in several districts attending the same nonpublic school.
4. Nonpublic school administrators have attempted to work with representatives of their own parent constituency, as well as those district coordinators who are willing, in order to establish routes that would fit under the \$884.00 per pupil cap.
5. More recently, nonpublic school officials have asked district transportation coordinators to bid the route at something less than 180 days (perhaps 175 or 176), with particular emphasis on eliminating the half-days in the schedule. The value of this would be that transportation may fit under the \$884.00 cap in instances where the bids are close to that figure in the initial bidding process.

6. Representatives of the major nonpublic school constituencies have been working in an attempt to have nonpublic school transportation configured by a county-wide entity (at least in a pilot) in order to determine whether this would, in fact, create more bussing for nonpublic school pupils.

THESE ATTEMPTS AT REMEDIES ARE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES THAT HAVE BEEN TAKEN IN ORDER TO TRY TO SALVAGE TRANSPORTATION WHEN BIDS HAVE COME IN AT ABOVE THE \$884.00 CEILING, OR NO BIDS AT ALL HAVE BEEN RECEIVED BY THE DISTRICT.

Q. What is the “ask” of the Governor?

A. We are asking Governor Christie to increase the ceiling for nonpublic school transportation to \$950.00 in his Fiscal Year 2016 Budget. This number would cover much of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increment since the freeze was initiated in 2008-2009 school year. Our hope is that this increase will permit private contractors to bid on nonpublic routes in order to salvage transportation for our students.

When making the case for this increase, it is important to note that nonpublic school parents and children are held hostage by the bids from both districts and private contractors, and every attempt at finding transportation after the initial bidding process has occurred (and failed) has been utilized throughout the period during which the freeze has been enacted.