

Policy Outline

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I. Policy Value Statement

The Board of Education of Howard County (Board) is committed to providing school transportation services to eligible students in a safe, efficient, and equitable manner.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish the processes and criteria by which transportation services for students are provided.

III. Standards

- A. The provisions of this policy apply to all eligible students, public and non-public, for whom school bus transportation is provided by the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).
- B. Transportation will be provided to all eligible students (see Section III.E. below) that attend public schools designated and approved by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and/or the HCPSS subject to the availability of funding.
- C. Students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan who have transportation specified as a related service will be provided transportation in accordance with federal, State, and local laws/regulations. This includes students who have been placed in non-public schools designated and approved by the MSDE by HCPSS.
- D. When considering the need for and/or implementing school bus service, the Office of Student Transportation will consider:
 - 1. Reasonable levels of safety.

2. Program efficiency.
3. Economy of operations.
4. Equity of service.
5. IEP or Section 504 Plan requirements.
6. Students experiencing homelessness.

Providing a reasonable level of safety will be the major consideration of the Office of Student Transportation.

E. Eligibility for transportation

1. Transportation services will be available to students when the measured distance between their bona fide residence and the home school is greater than the following, except as otherwise specified within Policy 5200, Implementation Procedures.
 - a. Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5: 0.75 mile
 - b. Grade 6 through Grade 8: 1.0 mile
 - c. Grade 9 through Grade 12: 1.5 miles
2. The bona fide residence of the parents will be used to determine eligibility for transportation services. Distances will be calculated utilizing transportation software as follows:
 - a. Detached homes and townhouses – Measurement will be from the residence property line to the property boundary of the school from the closest adjacent suitable pathway.
 - b. Apartment complexes and condominiums – Measurement will be from the property boundary of the complex to the property boundary of the school from the closest adjacent suitable pathway.
3. Other transportation service:
 - a. The parent of a child in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12, who is eligible for transportation services, may request Alternate School Bus Service.
 - b. The parent of a child in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 8, who is not eligible for transportation service, may request Space Available School Bus Service to or from a child care provider.
 - c. Temporary transportation service may be provided when a suitable pathway or suitable crossing does not exist, or if the service is necessitated by a student's medical diagnosis.

F. School Bus Stops

1. Students may be expected to walk up to a half mile to and from a school bus stop.

2. Students may be required to walk more than a half mile where it is unsafe or not feasible to establish a school bus stop within a half mile of a student's bona fide residence.
3. Students are expected to board and exit the bus from the same school bus stop location that is the closest suitable pathway to their residence unless otherwise directed or permitted to exit at an existing established bus stop by a school-based administrator or the Office of Student Transportation.
4. School bus stops for students with needs of accommodation or assistance will be determined consistent with the needs identified in the IEP and/or Section 504 Plan.

G. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Review Appeals

1. Requests for re-evaluation of a walking route or school bus stop are to be directed to the Office of Student Transportation.
2. Appeals of the decisions made by the Office of Student Transportation are to be directed, in writing, to the Student Walking Route and School Bus Stop Review Committee.

IV. Responsibilities

- A. The Superintendent/designee will ensure the safe design of all school bus routes that serve public and non-public schools.
- B. Parents will ensure the safety and conduct of their children from the time they leave home until they board the school bus or enter school property and from the time they leave the school bus or exit school property at the end of the day.
- C. The Office of Student Transportation will identify transported areas, non-transported areas, and school bus routes.
- D. Students will adhere to the HCPSS Student Code of Conduct.

V. Delegation of Authority

The Superintendent is authorized to develop appropriate procedures for the implementation of this policy within the limits set forth by this policy.

VI. Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. Accommodation – A strategy, service, or facility modification that allows a student to access academic, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities comparable to peers without disabilities.
- B. Alternate School Bus Service – A program for students in grades Pre-K through 12 who are eligible for transportation services and need to ride two different buses on a regular basis due to individual parental needs.
- C. Bona Fide Residence – A person’s principal residence maintained in good faith. It does not include a temporary residence or a superficial residence established for the purpose of attendance in the HCPSS. Evaluation of a person’s bona fide residence is a factual one made on an individual basis.
- D. Child Care Provider – An individual or center chosen by a parent to care for or supervise their child(ren) in their absence.
- E. Eligible – Students who may receive school bus transportation to school.
- F. Individualized Education Program (IEP) – A written description of the special education and related services for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised by the student’s IEP Team.
- G. Non-Transported Area – The geographical area within each school attendance area, as defined by the Board of Education, within which HCPSS school bus transportation services are not provided.
- H. Office of Student Transportation – The HCPSS office that is responsible for coordinating transportation services.
- I. Parent – Any one of the following, recognized as the adult(s) legally responsible for the student:
 - 1. Biological Parent – A natural parent whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 - 2. Adoptive Parent – A person who has legally adopted the student and whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 - 3. Custodian – A person or agency appointed by the court as the legal custodian of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.

4. Guardian – A person who has been placed by the court in charge of the affairs of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.
 5. Caregiver – An adult resident of Howard County who exercises care, custody or control over the student, but who is neither the biological parent nor legal guardian, as long as the person satisfies the requirements of the Education Article, §7-101 (c) (Informal Kinship Care) or has been issued a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Verification of Release form entering into a custodial arrangement with the federal government.
 6. Foster Parent – An adult approved to care for a child who has been placed in their home by a State agency or a licensed child placement agency as provided by the Family Law Article, §5-507.
- J. School Bus Routes – A set of scheduled school bus stops and planned roadways traveled by a school bus as developed by the Office of Student Transportation.
- K. School Bus Stop – A designated location where students board and are discharged from a school bus.
- L. Section 504 Plan – A plan to provide accommodation for an individual student to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- M. Space Available School Bus Service – A program for students in grades Pre-K through 8 whose residence is located outside the service area. Student participation in this program is predicated on the need for child care services on a daily basis and meeting all eligibility requirements. Bus service will be provided only if school bus seating space is available.
- N. Student Experiencing Homelessness – Students who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, whether or not the temporary housing is located in Howard County, including:
1. Students who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or to economic hardship, or due to a similar reason; living in motels, hotels, transitional housing, or campgrounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; abandoned in hospitals; are runaways, living in shelters or other inadequate accommodations.
 2. Students who have a primary night-time residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
 3. Students who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing (lacking utilities, overcrowded, infested, unsafe, etc.), bus or train stations, or similar settings.

4. Migratory students as defined under federal law who qualify as a student experiencing homelessness because they are living in the circumstances above.
- O. Student Walking Route – The path a student walks to and from home to school.
- P. Student Walking Route and School Bus Stop Review Committee – Committee composed of external representatives and one (1) or more citizens of Howard County approved by the Superintendent/designee to review walking route and school bus stop appeals. Persons with a pending student walking route and school bus stop appeal will be temporarily prohibited from participating in related activities of the Student Walking Route and School Bus Stop Review Committee.
- Q. Suitable Crossings
1. Where adequate sight distance, line striping, and crosswalk signing exists when warranted.
 2. Where pupils are not required to walk across railroads, bridges, tunnels, or overpasses unless they have adequate pedestrian walkways.
 3. Where adequate safety provisions can be made for crossing roadways.
 4. Where pupils are not required to cross certain roadways unless a grade separated crossing is available.
- R. Suitable Pathways – Road shoulder, walkway, right-of-way, sidewalk or other surface which students can walk without being required to step on the portion of the road used by vehicles except:
1. Residential streets in a community with little or no transient traffic.
 2. Roads/streets with speed limits of 30 miles per hour or less.
- S. Transported Area – The geographical area within each school attendance area, as defined by the Board of Education, within which HCPSS school bus transportation services are provided.

VII. References

- A. Legal
- Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. §1411
 - Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §791 et seq
 - McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act – 42 U.S.C. §11301 et. seq.
 - Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, § 5-203
 - Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, § 7-606
 - Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, § 9-100
 - Md. Ann. Code, Education Article, § 9-101
 - Md. Ann. Code, Transportation Article, § 22-228
 - COMAR 13A.06.07, Pupil Transportation
 - COMAR 13A.05.01-16, Provisions of a Free, Appropriate Public Education

Opinions of the Maryland State Board of Education

- B. Board Policies
 - Policy 9000 Student Residency, Eligibility, Enrollment and Assignment
 - Policy 9060 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Compliance: Section 504
 - Policy 9300 Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness
- C. Relevant Data Sources
- D. Other
 - HCPSS Student Code of Conduct

VIII. History¹

ADOPTED: July 24, 1980
REVIEWED: December 13, 2018
MODIFIED: May 26, 2022
 July 14, 2022
 June 12, 2025
REVISED: June 14, 1990
 June 21, 2005
 June 10, 2021
 June 6, 2024
EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2025

¹ Key: ***Adopted***-Original date the Board took action to approve a policy; ***Reviewed***-The date the status of a policy was assessed by the Superintendent's Standing Policy Group; ***Modified***-The date the Board took action to alter a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee did not require a comprehensive examination; ***Revised***-The date the Board took action on a policy that based on the recommendation of the Superintendent/designee needed a comprehensive examination; ***Effective***-The date a policy is implemented throughout the HCPSS, typically July 1 following Board action.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATIONEffective: July 1, 2025

I. Eligibility for Transportation Services

- A. Distance criteria will be adhered to concerning walking to a school bus stop or when determining eligibility for school bus service provided that traffic and/or walking conditions meet a reasonable level of safety and/or conditions permit safe bus operations. Some students may be required to walk to a school bus stop or to school in excess of the stated distance if a reasonable level of safety cannot be achieved.
- B. In establishing the demarcation line between transported and non-transported areas, the Office of Student Transportation may extend these distances to coincide with breaks in the pattern of homes, such as cul-de-sac, street intersections, major roadways, streams, parks, walking easements, commercial property, vacant land, unusual contour variations, and other features. These distances will be capped at 0.1 miles at the elementary school, middle and high school levels.
- C. Where applicable, the Office of Student Transportation will identify geographic areas where exceptions are made to the eligibility criteria because of safety reasons. When this occurs, the Office of Student Transportation will notify the appropriate school-based administration of the exception.
- D. Non-transported area information can be found on the HCPSS website's Transportation page. The school-based administration will notify the parent(s) and student(s) that the student(s) is ineligible for bus transportation services. If a student is not eligible for transportation, it is the parents' responsibility to determine their child's method of travel to and from school. While it is the responsibility of the parent to determine their child's method of travel to and from school, school-based administrators may be able to help connect them to community resources and supports.
- E. All school bus route information will be posted on the HCPSS website's Transportation page.

II. Other Transportation Services

- A. Alternate School Bus Service
 - 1. Alternate School Bus Service must be requested using the Alternate School Bus form, which can be obtained from the HCPSS website's Transportation page.

2. The parent must submit the form to the Office of Student Transportation where it will be reviewed upon receipt.
3. The requested service remains consistent throughout the school year.
4. Both the home address and the alternate address are located in the same school attendance area and within the service area for the school.
5. No more than one alternate bus may be requested.

B. Space Available School Bus Service

1. Space Available Bus Service must be requested using the Space Available form, which can be obtained from the HCPSS website's Transportation page.
2. The child care provider must be located in the same school attendance area and within the service area for the school.
3. In the event that there is a change in the location of the child care provider that may change the student's eligibility status, the parent must notify the school-based administration of the new location. The parent will be notified by the school-based administration with any changes in transportation.
4. Space Available Bus Service may be terminated on short notice with notification if space is no longer available. Service provided to out-of-district students will be terminated before that of in-district students.

C. Temporary School Bus Service

1. Unsafe Walking Conditions
 - a. Temporary school bus transportation may be authorized by the Superintendent/designee if HCPSS determines that conditions render walking to and from school unsafe.
 - b. Parents will be notified 48 hours prior to the termination of temporary school bus service by the school administration.
2. Medical Condition
 - a. A student not eligible for regular transportation services may be granted temporary service if the service is necessitated by a medical diagnosis.
 - b. Requests for temporary transportation services for medical reasons will be submitted to the school to be reviewed immediately by the Student Support Team (SST).
 - c. If the parent request for temporary services is approved by the SST, the school-based administrator will notify the Office of Student Transportation to initiate service.

- d. The school-based administrator will inform the parent of the decision made by the SST.

3. Students Experiencing Homelessness

- a. Transportation will be provided for students who are experiencing homelessness in accordance with requirements in the McKinney-Vento Act and HCPSS Policy 9300 Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness.
- b. The Pupil Personnel Worker will notify the Office of Student Transportation of students who are experiencing homelessness.
- c. The Office of Student Transportation or Pupil Personnel Worker (PPW) will schedule transportation services depending on the type of transportation required.

III. Establishing School Bus Stops and Routes

- A. School bus stops will be established in compliance with Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.06.07 with consideration given to, but not limited to, safety, efficiency, economics, equity, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Section 504 Plan requirements.
- B. School bus stops will generally be at least 1/4 mile apart.
- C. School bus stops may be established on both sides of a roadway when sight distance and/or traffic conditions warrant.
- D. Off-road school bus stops (loading and unloading zones) will be established whenever possible, consistent with Maryland Vehicle Laws and COMAR 13A.06.07.
- E. School bus routes will be developed using industry accepted standards, including, but not limited to, string routes, circular routes, feeder routes, shuttle routes and double coverage routes.
 1. The Office of Student Transportation may, at its sole discretion, adjust routes if deemed necessary to ensure the overall efficiency of the school bus routes.
 2. The Office of Student Transportation will, at its sole discretion, adjust a school start time plus or minus a maximum of ten (10) minutes if deemed necessary to ensure the overall efficiency of the school bus routes.
- F. Prior to the start of each school year, individual school bus times and bus stop locations will be available to parents and students.

IV. Resources and Reviews

- A. Road crossings may require final approval from the Howard County Department of Public Works Traffic Engineering Division. The Howard County Office of Transportation should be consulted in any review of road crossings.
- B. The following resources will be used, as appropriate, to help determine suitable pathways, walkways, school bus stops, suitable crossings, bus turnarounds, school bus routes, etc.
 - 1. Howard County Police Department
 - 2. Howard County Department of Public Works Traffic Engineering Division
 - 3. Howard County Office of Transportation
 - 4. Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks
 - 5. Columbia Association
 - 6. Other state or county agencies

V. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeals

- A. Parents who have a concern about their student's walking route or school bus stop location will contact the Office of Student Transportation to indicate their concern.
- B. If the parent disagrees with the response from the Office of Student Transportation, the parent will be provided a Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeal form.
- C. Walking Route and School Bus Stop Appeals must be submitted to the Office of Student Transportation in writing, using the Walking Route Appeal Survey or the School Bus Stop Survey forms.
- D. Appeals will be forwarded to the Student Walking Route and Bus Stop Review Committee, who will submit its findings and recommendations to the Superintendent/designee.
- E. The Superintendent/designee will review the committee's findings and recommendations, as well as those of the Office of Student Transportation, and render a decision that will be communicated to the appellant.
- F. If the appellant is not satisfied with the Superintendent's decision, a final written appeal may be made to the Board.

VI. Other

The Office of Student Transportation, Howard County Police, Howard County Traffic Engineering Office, Howard County Office of Transportation and/or any other State or

county agency may make recommendations to the Superintendent on safety-related matters related to Policy 5200 Student Transportation.

VII. Definitions

Within the context of these implementation procedures, the following definitions apply:

- A. Demarcation Line – The boundary line between transported and non-transported areas.
- B. Student Support Team (SST) – A diverse group of school-based educators, that may include school counselors, psychologists, administrators, nurses, and teachers, that meets regularly to discuss the educational and behavioral needs of students. When necessary, this group also collaboratively develops interventions to support the specific needs of students.

VIII. Monitoring

Policy 5200 implementation procedures will be overseen by the Division of Operations.

IX. History¹

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