



DIVISION OF
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

Transportation Handbook
for **Parents** and **Guardians**
of **Special Education Students**





Dear Parents and Guardians,

At the Office of the State Superintendent, Division of Student Transportation (OSSE DOT), we work closely with parents and guardians to provide the best possible service to students with special transportation needs. This handbook is intended to help answer your questions about transportation to school for your child.

In December 2012, the District regained control of special education transportation after 17 years of federal court oversight. This means that the District is now accountable for day-to-day student transportation operations. What doesn't change is the commitment to provide safe, on-time and efficient transportation services for the District's eligible students.

OSSE DOT's mission and vision underscore the commitment to provide a high level of service:

Mission: The mission of OSSE DOT is to provide safe, reliable and efficient transportation services that support and enhance learning opportunities for eligible students in the District of Columbia.

Vision: We envision a future in which all transported students begin and end their school day with the best-in-class transportation services.

OSSE DOT must have a strong partnership with parents and guardians in order for student transportation to be truly successful. That begins with good communication and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. The information in this handbook covers the most frequently asked questions that OSSE DOT receives from parents and guardians. The information also clarifies expectations, roles and responsibilities for both OSSE DOT and parents/guardians. Please take time to read this handbook and keep it as a reference guide throughout the year. If we all play our parts, students will benefit by receiving great transportation services.

As a regional transportation provider for District of Columbia Public Schools, public charter schools and non-public schools, we look forward to providing safe, on-time and efficient transportation services every school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Solchenberger".

Ryan Solchenberger
Director, Division of Student Transportation

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WHAT IS OSSE DOT?

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Division of Student Transportation (OSSE DOT) is a regional transportation system within the State Education Agency that transports eligible special needs students in the District of Columbia to school each day, safely and on-time. OSSE DOT provides its door-to-door services to traditional, public charter and non-public schools in DC, Maryland and Virginia. The division works collaboratively with parents, school staff, special education advocates and other OSSE staff to ensure safe, reliable and efficient transportation for students to and from school each year. These services may be provided on a school bus or through the distribution of Metro Farecards.

PARENT RESOURCE CENTER

The Parent Resource Center (PRC) is the communication link between the Division of Student Transportation, parents/guardians, school personnel, advocates and social workers and can be reached at:

202-576-5000 from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday

The PRC is dedicated to providing quality customer service by promptly addressing student transportation matters both proactively and reactively. Customer service representatives make outbound calls to advise parents/guardians of bus delays of 20 minutes or more and to communicate route schedule changes due to inclement weather or other emergencies. When questions are directed to the PRC, customer service representatives use GPS technology, communicate with terminals and drivers and research using the student database to find real-time information, resolve concerns and answer questions.

In order to provide better customer service, OSSE DOT upgraded the call center phone system so that callers waiting for a customer service representative now have three options:

1 Continue holding for the next available representative.

2 Leave a voice message and a representative returns your call.

3 Hang up, keep your place in line and the next available representative calls you back.

During school start up, callers may experience longer wait times. OSSE DOT's goal is to provide accurate information as quickly as possible. If information is not immediately available when you call, a call center representative will be able to call you back that day with the information.

OFFICE OF AUDIT AND COMPLIANCE/INVESTIGATIONS

The Office of Audit and Compliance is available to receive complaints at **202-576-6860** from **5 a.m. to 7 p.m.** Monday through Friday. To fully understand complaints, compliance specialists resolve concerns by using a variety of tools that include GPS technology, student databases, employee and student interviews and field monitoring.

Complaints and incidents that are considered a priority and investigated immediately include:

- issues affecting the health and safety of students;
- failure to transport students;
- moving traffic violations; and
- improper or inadequate driver or attendant behavior.

Complaints that are safety sensitive will be responded to within 24 hours or one business day. All other complaints receive follow-up within three to five business days depending on the nature of the complaint.

WHO DETERMINES ELIGIBILITY FOR TRANSPORTATION SERVICES?

OSSE DOT does not determine who is eligible for student transportation. After a student becomes eligible for transportation services, OSSE DOT processes the request, routes the student and begins transporting the student within three days of the request.

THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) TEAM

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines whether a special education student requires transportation services in order to support that student's specific education goals. IEP teams may consist of teachers, healthcare specialists, advocates and parents/guardians.

Questions about eligibility for student transportation must be directed to staff at your child's school.

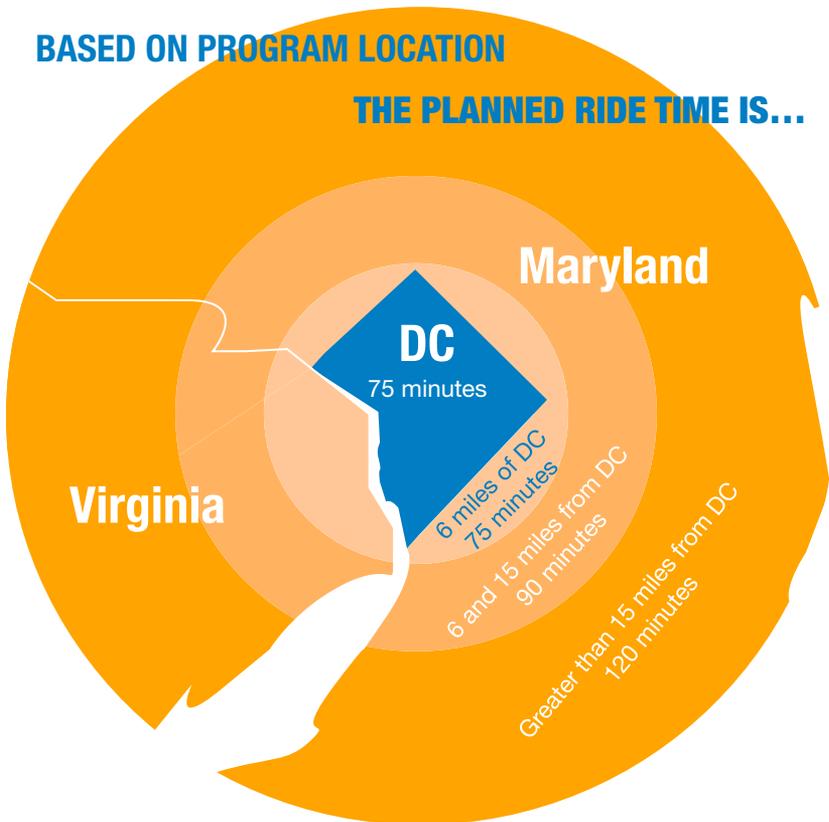
HOW THE SCHOOL BUS ROUTE SCHEDULE WORKS

DEVELOPING A SCHOOL BUS ROUTE

OSSE DOT develops school bus routes using a combination of routing software, GPS data and driver feedback. There are many factors that build a school bus route: the school's location, the number of students on the bus and traffic patterns for particular areas.

RIDE TIMES ON THE BUS

Ride times are determined on a case-by-case basis to take into account the individual medical needs of students. Traffic and weather conditions may impact ride times on a given day. Throughout the school year, OSSE DOT monitors ride times and adjusts routes as needed. The current ride-time standards set by OSSE DOT are:



ARRIVING AT SCHOOL ON TIME

Arriving at school on time is one of OSSE DOT's main priorities. OSSE DOT's goal is to arrive at a school within a 20-minute window, no earlier than 30 minutes before the school bell rings and no later than 10 minutes before the school bell rings. For example, if a school's bell time is 8 a.m., then an on-time school bus arrival is any time between 7:30 a.m. and 7:50 a.m. During the first few weeks of school, OSSE DOT may adjust routes to ensure on-time arrivals. With GPS devices on every school bus, OSSE DOT tracks bus arrivals to school to ensure students arrive in time to be in their seats and ready to learn.

DROPPING OFF STUDENTS AT HOME

At some schools dozens of buses try to leave the parking area at the same time, which can lead to delays if your child's bus has to wait in a line of buses. A customer service representative will call to notify you if your child's bus will be more than 20 minutes late arriving home in the afternoon.

THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR: WHAT TO EXPECT

The start of a new school year is a time of change and can become very busy for parents and guardians, teachers and other school staff as well as for OSSE DOT. Prior to the first day of school, OSSE DOT takes several steps to ensure that routes and pick-up times are as accurate as possible.

8 WEEKS PRIOR

Schools

Submit student transportation requests

5 WEEKS PRIOR

OSSE DOT Routing Analysts

Use GPS and routing software to create an effective routing system

1 WEEK PRIOR

OSSE DOT Drivers

Perform several practice runs to ensure timing and accuracy of routes

5 DAYS PRIOR

OSSE DOT Customer Service Representatives

Call parents and mail letters to communicate specific route information

ROUTE SCHEDULE CHANGES

Route changes occur at the beginning of a school year for a variety of reasons, including:

- Late student enrollments;
- A change in a student's school placement;
- A change in the student's pick-up or drop-off address; or
- OSSE DOT may change a route to ensure better ride times, more accurate pick-up times or to improve on-time arrivals at school.

All of these situations can lead to a route change. During the first couple of weeks of the school year, parents may notice some variation in their child's route, such as early or late pick-ups or dropoffs. OSSE DOT will notify parents by phone about any route changes. Parents may also contact the Parent Resource Center with questions about a particular route.

PROCESSING ROUTE CHANGES

If a school requests an address change for a student or some other type of route change, OSSE DOT will process that change within three business days. Processing a route change requires three days because OSSE DOT takes the following steps to ensure route accuracy:



PARENT AND GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

A safe, reliable, efficient and on-time student transportation system depends on a strong partnership between parents, guardians, schools and the OSSE DOT team. It is very important that parents and guardians:

- Communicate effectively with bus drivers and bus attendants
- Keep contact information accurate and up to date
- Ensure children are ready for morning pick-up
- Ensure an adult is available for afternoon drop-off

EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH BUS DRIVERS AND BUS ATTENDANTS

Two-way, effective communication is the key to building a good working relationship with the bus driver and bus attendant. It is also a good way to ensure that the driver and attendant understand the unique personality traits of your child. Please introduce yourself to the driver and attendant and do not hesitate to ask them questions. However, it is important to keep in mind that the school bus is picking up multiple students and can only spend a limited amount of time at each stop in order to keep the route on time. If you would like to leave a message for your driver or attendant, you can call the Parent Resource Center at 202-576-5000. A relationship of mutual respect between parents and the driver and attendant will foster a more positive environment on the bus.

KEEP CONTACT INFORMATION ACCURATE AND UP TO DATE

Please ensure that OSSE DOT has your up-to-date phone number and backup numbers as well as your email address. OSSE DOT contacts parents and guardians over the phone to provide route information, bus status information as well as any changes to a route. Please contact the Parent Resource Center to verify your information. If the information is incorrect please contact your school to correct it.

ENSURE CHILDREN ARE READY FOR MORNING PICK-UP

At the beginning of the school year, OSSE DOT provides parents with an estimated pick-up/arrival window of 30 minutes. It is important that your child is ready to board the bus during the entire 30-minute window. As routes stabilize and beginning-of-year route changes stop, OSSE DOT will provide a more precise pick-up time.

Preferably parents or children will look out the window to spot the bus as it arrives. The attendant will walk up to the outermost door, wait three minutes and knock if needed. Dogs and locked gates will prevent the attendant from coming to the door.

You must notify the Parent Resource Center if your child will not need transportation services due to illness, vacation, etc. Chronic student absences from the bus may result in the following: after three (3) consecutive days, OSSE DOT will contact you and the Local Education Authority (LEA) in writing asking for an explanation for the absences; after seven (7) consecutive days, you will receive a written notification of OSSE DOT's intent to cease school bus services with a proposed date of termination; after ten (10) consecutive days, your child will be removed from the bus route roster and will no longer be provided special education transportation services through OSSE DOT.

ENSURE AN AUTHORIZED ADULT IS PRESENT FOR AFTERNOON DROP-OFF

For safety reasons, an authorized adult must be present at the designated afternoon drop-off address. (Exceptions are made for independent student drop-off. Please see the Frequently Asked Questions for more information.) If an authorized adult is not present at the designated afternoon drop-off address, OSSE DOT takes the following steps:

- The student will remain safely on the bus and the bus driver will notify OSSE DOT management;
- The Parent Resource Center will make repeated attempts to contact the parent or guardian;
- The bus driver will continue the route and drop off the remaining students;
- The bus driver will return to the address and attempt a second drop-off;
- If OSSE DOT cannot contact an authorized adult, we will transport the child to the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) located at 200 I Street SE, 202-442-6100.

SAFETY ON THE BUS

Above and beyond on-time arrival, transporting students safely is OSSE DOT's primary focus. Every driver has a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and is accompanied by a trained bus attendant on every bus route.

DRIVER AND ATTENDANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Rigorous tests, both driving and written, must be passed by each driver in order to maintain their CDL. Additionally, OSSE DOT trains drivers and attendants in First Aid and CPR so that the team is prepared for an emergency while the bus is in transport. In the event of an emergency, drivers and attendants first ensure the students' safety and then contact dispatch who then contacts 911.

Drivers are responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle. In addition to actually driving the bus, drivers conduct pre- and post-trip inspections to ensure that the vehicle's safety features are operational. Lights, tires, oil and other fluid levels and many other bus components are checked to ensure they are in working order.

Bus attendants are responsible for ensuring that the students safely board the bus, that students are wearing their seat belts before the bus departs and that the students get off the bus safely at school. Typically, bus attendants monitor student behavior by sitting in a bus seat that is behind all of the students so that all activity is in front of them. Additionally, after dropping off students at school, bus attendants are required to look on and under every seat to ensure that students are no longer on the bus and that student belongings have not been left behind. Like bus drivers, bus attendants are trained in First Aid and CPR. Bus attendants are also trained to operate and secure any extra equipment necessitated by the students.

School Bus Rules

- Students will not use profane language.
- Students will not bully or fight with others.
- Students will not talk on a cell phone or play loud music.
- Students will keep hands and feet inside the bus and remain seated at all times.
- Alcohol and tobacco use are prohibited.
- Students will not be allowed to eat or drink (unless indicated in the IEP).
- Students should not leave the bus prior to their authorized stop.
- Students must wear prescribed assistive devices, such as helmets, while on the bus as required by or specified in the IEP.
- Students are not allowed to deface, destroy or damage the school bus or behave in a way that interferes with the safe transportation of other students.



STUDENT BEHAVIOR ON THE BUS

The driver and attendant team are also responsible for reporting student behavior that may compromise bus safety. When unsafe student behavior is reported, OSSE DOT is obligated to contact the family and school to discuss the student's behavior. The school is responsible for providing guidance on student behavior management and disciplinary actions. Student misconduct on the bus may result in revocation of bus services.

BUS SEAT ASSIGNMENTS

In an effort to prevent potentially unsafe student behavior on the school bus and create an atmosphere of consistency for students, OSSE DOT may create seating charts for specific routes. The goal of seat assignments is to reduce the likelihood of conflicts between students and help set positive expectations for daily behavior.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

BUSING

1 Where is my child's bus? Why does the bus arrive at different times during the week?

Traffic, weather and small changes in the route mean that the bus will not get to your house at the exact same time every day. For example, if children normally picked up before your child are out sick then the bus may be earlier, and if there is construction on the route then the bus may be later. If you have concerns about where your bus is, call the Parent Resource Center to find out when to expect it.

2 Can my child's route be changed? Can I request a different driver or attendant?

Months of planning determines how routes look and who staffs them. Because many different children depend on the route, the route and staff must stay consistent. However, if there are major concerns call the Parent Resource Center to discuss options.

3 When should my child be ready for the bus and where should they wait? Does the attendant have to knock on the door? How long does the bus have to wait for my child?

Children and parents should be ready for the bus for the entire 30-minute pick-up window and watch through their window for the bus' arrival. Once the bus arrives at your house, the bus will wait three minutes for your child and the attendant will knock on your door. In order to pick up all children on the route during their pick-up windows and get to school on time, the bus must keep to a strict schedule.

4 Are there alternatives to the school bus?

Children who are able to ride the metro on their own are eligible to receive WMATA tokens or fare cards to ride to school and may receive travel training to do so. In some circumstances parents can transport their children to school and receive reimbursement, but they must get the permission of the director of student transportation before doing so.

PARENT/STUDENT/SCHOOL INFORMATION

5 Who do I notify if my child is sick?

Call the Parent Resource Center to notify us that your child is sick so that the route can be re-planned and the attendant will not knock on your door.

6 How do I update my contact information? What if we move or change schools during the year?

Call your school to update any and all information changes. OSSE DOT is not able to change information such as phone numbers and addresses unless notified by your school.

7 How long is a temporary address change? What's the process for getting this request granted?

Temporary address changes can last up to a week. Call the Parent Resource Center to request this service.

8 Can my child be dropped off at a child care center or different address in the afternoon?

OSSE DOT is not able to drop off a child in the afternoon at a different address than where they were picked up in the morning.

9 What if I am not at home in the afternoon when my child is dropped off?

You may authorize a different person to accept your child at your address by calling the Parent Resource Center. This person must be over 18 years old and show proper identification to the bus attendant. If no one is available to receive your child, the Parent Resource Center will attempt to contact you several times and a second drop-off will be attempted. Following these attempts your child will be dropped off at the CFSA until you are able to arrange transportation from there.

INCIDENTS

10 When will my complaint be resolved? When will I get a call back?

OSSE DOT processes your concern when you call. Resolution time varies depending on the type of complaint.

11 How do I report and/or stop bullying?

Call the OSSE DOT Department of Audit and Compliance to report bullying on the bus. An investigator will be assigned to your case and he/she will interview the driver, attendant and other children on the bus to get an understanding of the situation and to find a resolution.

12 What happens if my child is involved in a school bus accident?

The Parent Resource Center will notify you immediately if your child is on a school bus that is involved in an accident. The bus terminal will send a “rescue bus” to the scene of the accident to resume the route and take the children to school. The police and EMS will also arrive on the scene and if there are any injuries the attendant will ride along in the ambulance.

OTHER

13 Can a bus driver or attendant deliver medicine to school for my child? Can a bus driver or attendant administer medicine on the bus?

Medicine cannot be transported or administered on the bus unless it is done so by a certified nurse. IEP teams must request a nurse.

14 How do I recover items left on the bus?

Call the Parent Resource Center and they will call the terminal to find out if the item was recovered. The item will be brought to our offices at 810 First St. NE where you can pick up the item.

15 How can I request a form for independent student drop-off for my child?

If your child is determined eligible for independent student drop-off by his/her IEP team, you may request a sign-up form from your child’s school. The school must submit written permission in advance to OSSE DOT in order for your child to be dropped off without an adult present. Only students twelve (12) years of age or older in the Accessing a Specialized Program (ASP) transportation category are eligible for independent student drop-off.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Division of Student Transportation Central Office | 202-576-6228 |
| Parent Resource Center | 202-576-5000 |
| Office of Investigations | 202-576-6860 |
| Office of the State Superintendent of Education | 202-727-6436 |
| Office of the State Superintendent of Education Division of Specialized Education | 202-727-6436 |
| DC Public Schools Special Education | 202-442-4800 |
| DC State Board of Education | 202-741-0888 |
| Child and Family Services Administration | 202-442-6100 |
| CFSA Hotline (to report allegations of abuse) | 202-671-SAFE |
| District of Columbia Government Service Request | 311 |



**Office of the State Superintendent of Education
Division of Student Transportation (OSSE DOT)**

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