



HopSkipDrive

CREATING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL THROUGH MOBILITY

2023

STATE OF SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

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Introduction



Mike Martin

Senior Strategic Advisor,
HopSkipDrive

*Former Executive
Director of National
Association of Pupil
Transportation*



***It is my belief
that student
transportation
is integral to
education; it is
not an ancillary
service.***

Having spent 27 years as Executive Director and CEO of the National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT), I have a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in student transportation today. During my time at NAPT, I initiated numerous partnerships and opportunities aimed at facilitating creative problem-solving and collaboration between public and private school transportation providers and suppliers. I understand the benefits of embracing innovation and new ways of thinking in the student transportation space, which is why I was excited when the opportunity arose earlier this year to join HopSkipDrive as a Senior Strategic Advisor. This is also why I'm honored to introduce this year's 2023 State of School Transportation Report.

It is my belief that student transportation is integral to education; it is not an ancillary service. I am devoted to the core values of student transportation — values that HopSkipDrive shares: safety, integrity, service, accountability and last but certainly not least, student success. The simple and undeniable truth is, how kids get to and from school every day impacts students, families, schools and communities in numerous ways. Barriers to accessible transportation can, and all too often do, lead to issues such as chronic absenteeism and inequitable educational opportunities, which can affect the entire trajectory of a child's life.

I, and everyone who works at HopSkipDrive, have a deep and unwavering respect for the hard-working people on school transportation teams who do everything they can to make sure kids get to and from school. The well-being and safety of students is always the priority, as it should be, but meeting the individual needs of all students can be immensely

complicated, both logistically and financially. School districts need new ways to deliver safe and reliable transportation to students while also dealing with the realities of budgetary constraints, limited resources, environmental impact — and, of course, the national bus driver shortage.

HopSkipDrive's comprehensive State of School Transportation 2023 Report highlights the current successes and areas of focus for school transportation, and also provides key insights into common student transportation pain points such as those mentioned above. As in 2022, the report reflects pertinent data collected through surveying a wide range of school transportation and education professionals including directors of transportation, McKinney-Vento liaisons, transportation supervisors, routers, superintendents, principals and other staff. This year, the scope was expanded to survey parents and caregivers, who shared their thoughts about their children's commutes to school and other related topics.

The intention behind this annual school transportation report is to not only gain insight into the challenges and current climate of school transportation but also to better understand where there are opportunities for us to work together to come up with new approaches and solutions. HopSkipDrive partners with and empowers schools and districts to help ensure all students everywhere have access to the education, opportunities and resources that are available to them. Only by working together and harnessing the technology available can we be sure that the next school year will be even better than this one.

We appreciate you taking the time to read our report and learn more about the State of School Transportation in 2023.

Survey Audience

As in previous years, respondents to our 2023 State of School Transportation survey represent a variety of school transportation and administration leaders. In an effort to have an even greater understanding of the school transportation ecosystem, we also collected insights from parents and caregivers this year for the first time. As a result, the 2023 survey offers an even more holistic view of school transportation.

Respondents from education and transportation hailed from public, charter, and private schools and school districts of all sizes. Surveyed education and transportation staff stakeholders included:

- Superintendents and assistant superintendents
- District presidents, CEOs, COOs and CFOs
- School principals and vice-principals
- District staff (non-transportation)
- School support staff (non-transportation)
- Directors of school transportation
- School transportation staff (bus routers, coordinators, etc.)

Our special parents and caregivers section highlights a survey of parents, foster parents and grandparents.





The Educational Landscape

We can't dive into the details of a survey like this without connecting student transportation to its most significant purpose: providing children with consistent and reliable access to the best possible education and opportunities, regardless of circumstance.

The goal of this survey is to articulate the current state of student transportation across the country. That includes zeroing in on the barriers to educational equity, including chronic absenteeism and bus driver shortages. We'll hear from school districts about how they are adapting to changes in the educational landscape, from modifying bell schedules to seeking supplemental transportation options.

We'll also take the time to celebrate what's going well for school districts. And for the first time ever, we'll hear from parents and caregivers about how transporting their children from home to school — and wherever else they need to go — affects their daily lives.



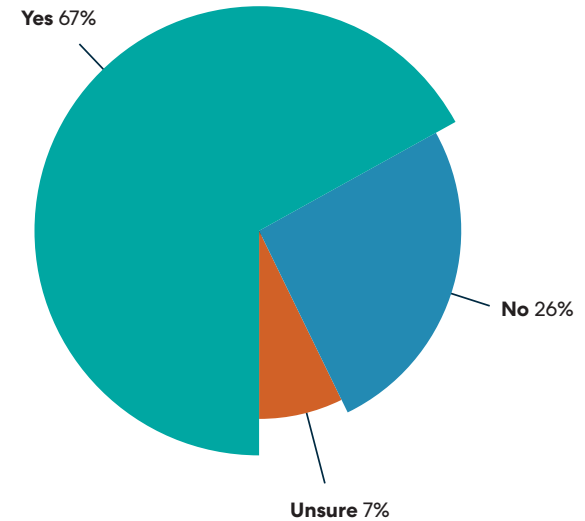
Transportation: One Key to Solving Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism occurs when a student misses more than 15 school days across the academic year. While experts agree that chronic absenteeism is a hidden educational crisis, most schools and school districts face rampant chronic absenteeism. Two-thirds of survey respondents reported chronic absenteeism as a current challenge.

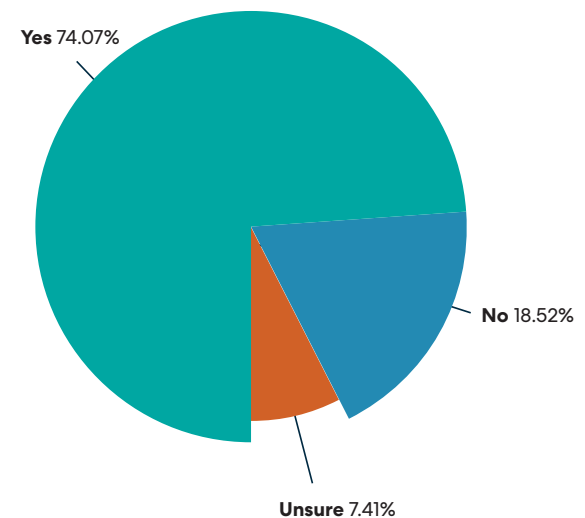
What's more, the problem tends to affect vulnerable students disproportionately. When asked which student groups experience higher rates of absenteeism, the top three responses were students experiencing homelessness (69%), students with special needs (46%) and low-income students (62%).

One chief contributor to chronic absenteeism is poor access to reliable transportation. Nearly three-quarters of transportation and education stakeholders reported a connection between transportation access and attendance.

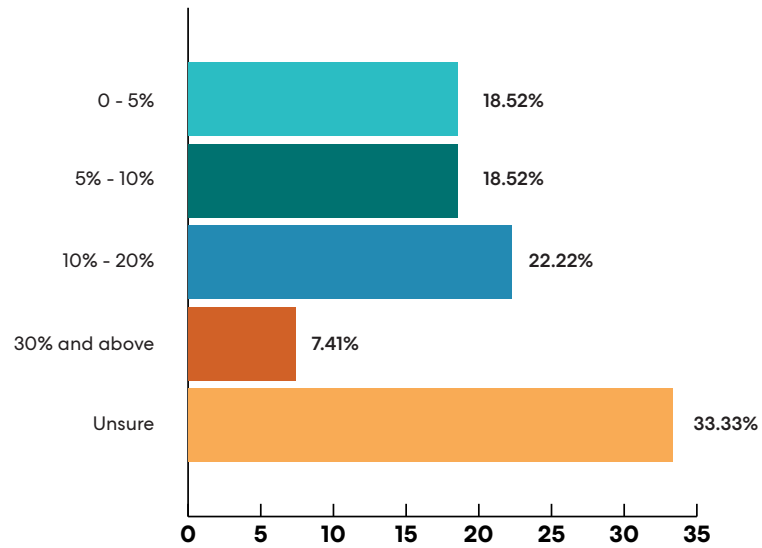
Does your district have issues with chronic absenteeism?



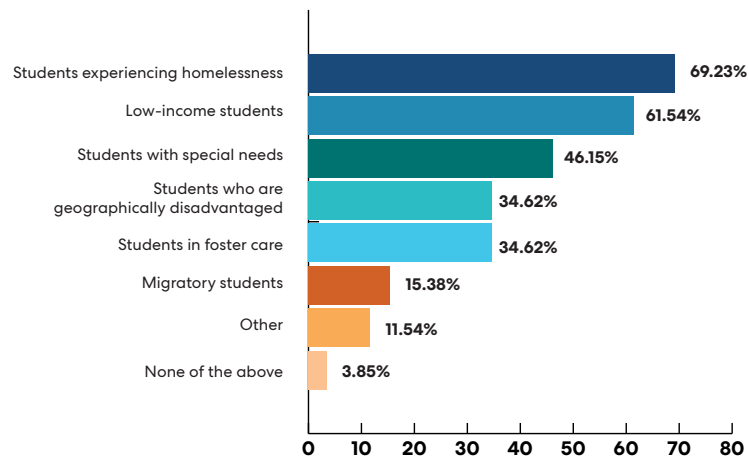
Do you see a correlation between access to transportation and attendance (defined here as a student being present at school) in your district?



Approximately what % of students are chronically absent (here defined as absent more than 15 days in a school year)?



Compared to the general student body, which of the following student populations experience higher rates of absenteeism? Select all that apply.





[Local Education Agencies] report that there is a strong correlation between absenteeism and students experiencing homelessness, low income, and barriers to transportation.

Anonymous Education Liaison



If transportation is provided, the students make it to school on more of a regular basis.

Linda Yates
Curriculum Secretary/McKinney-Vento Liaison



The issue with the homeless population is there is no location where we can pick up the student with consistency. Many times, communicating with the parents is an issue.

Anonymous Secretary,
Special Education



With families experiencing homelessness, the uncertain nature of where they may stay from night to night or week to week causes great issues in getting back and forth to school, especially if there is no public transportation to rely on.

Anonymous respondent



Students experiencing homelessness have many barriers that keep them from attending school. Transportation, lack of food and no medical insurance are just a few of those barriers.

Anonymous Coordinator
Foster-Homeless Youth Services

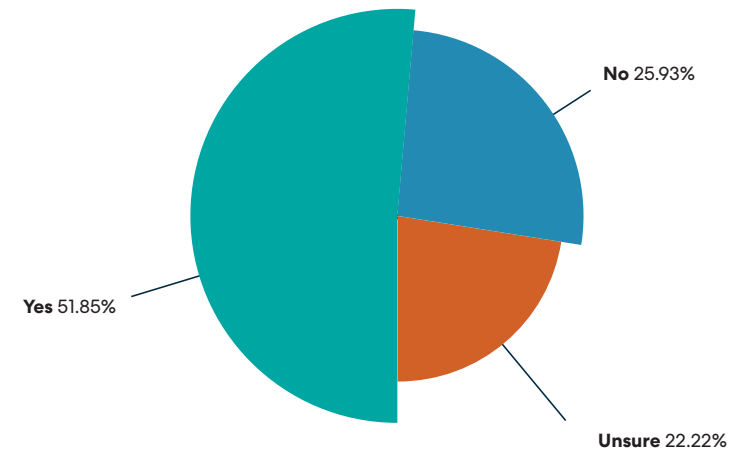
Equity

Educational equity takes many forms, from ensuring students get free lunches so they can be at their best to offering extracurricular activities and creating IEPs for the students who need them. But how can students take advantage of opportunities if they can't get to school in the first place?

That's where transportation comes in: consistent and reliable transportation — or the lack of it — to school, extracurricular activities and appointments can make all the difference to a student's access to opportunities.

Over half of survey respondents reported a link between transportation and educational equity in their district.

Do you see a link between access to transportation and educational equity in your district?





Students from target populations (foster youth, homeless, low-income, etc.) are disproportionately impacted by transportation barriers. If you look at the intersection of these groups and race and income status, it is even more glaring.

Anonymous Homeless Liaison



Students who are the most disadvantaged (disabilities or socioeconomic status) have the most difficult time with transportation needs.

Anonymous Special Education Coordinator



We service an at-risk population that has been failed by other schools because they were difficult to reach. Those students who have reliable transportation have an easier time doing well, and those who we provide transportation for appreciate being given the opportunity that their peers already have.

Sunshine Cummins
Independent Study Teacher



Our students who utilize HopSkipDrive have much higher rates of attendance and are satisfied with the safe and reliable transportation.

Naomi Lara
Principal



We have students that live in nearby low-income cities that do not have access to transportation to get them to school.

Anonymous Principal

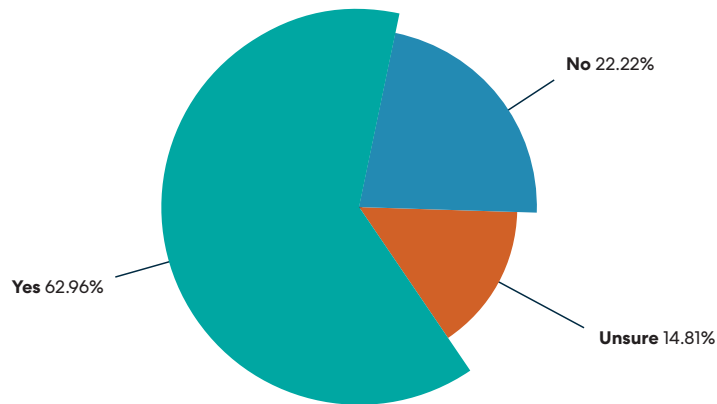
Staffing Shortages

While we'll zero in on the effects of the bus driver shortage later in this report, this year's survey also focused on the other shortages school districts are experiencing. After all, nearly 63% of non-transportation district respondents reported that their district has a staffing shortage.

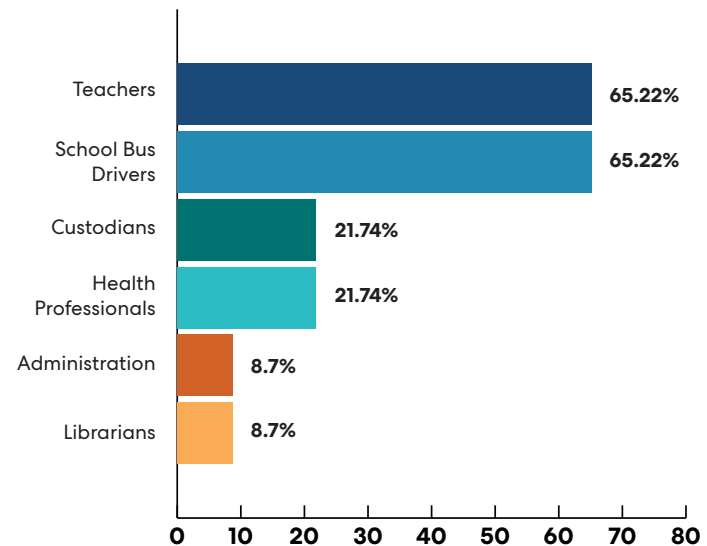
Of the respondents experiencing a shortage, 65% reported trouble staffing key positions like teachers and bus drivers, and 25% reported the same challenge staffing custodians and health professionals.



Does your district have a staffing shortage?



If any, which positions are you experiencing staffing shortages?



What Keeps District Leaders Up at Night

When asked, “What keeps you up at night?,” educators and administrative staff showed their deep concern for students, particularly those from vulnerable populations, doesn’t stop when they get home.



Stressing about filling positions.

Sheree Goessman
Human Resources Director



The cost of transportation.

Anonymous Executive
Director



The inability to provide safe and reliable transportation to all students. Also, the large percentage of students who are chronically absent.

Naomi Lara
Principal



I have a lot of students who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. I worry a lot about them and whether or not they have a safe place to sleep or food to eat.

Sunshine Cummins
Independent Study Teacher



The lack of safe and reliable transportation to school and home is extremely concerning, and is one of the highest levels of complaints that I receive.

Kym Cochran
Director, Pupil Safety & Attendance



Trying to figure out how to help our homeless families better.

Linda Yates, Curriculum Secretary
McKinney-Vento Liaison



Transportation for kids who deserve it but can’t get it because of the financial burden and bad school district policy.

Anonymous Special Education
Coordinator



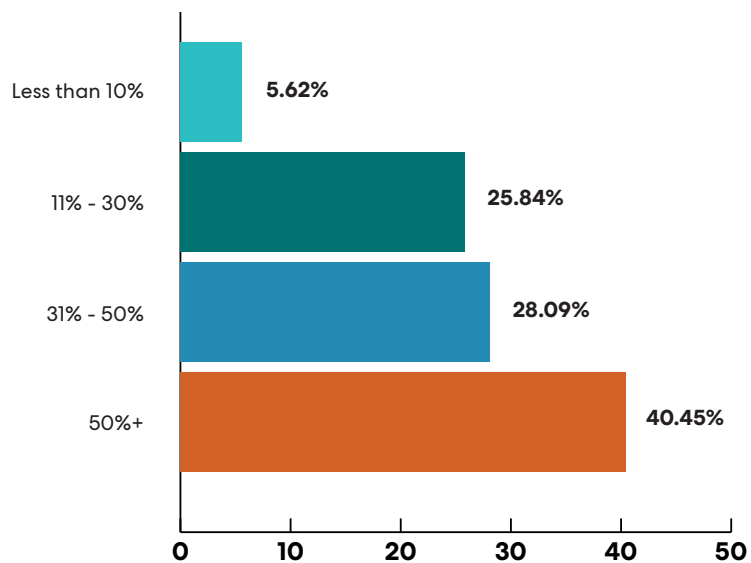
Students who should be attending school who are not.

Anonymous McKinney-Vento
Liaison

School Transportation Staff Speaks

In our survey of school transportation staff, we determined that the challenges of the past few years — bus driver shortages, funding, and operational challenges — remain very much top of mind. School transportation staff also celebrate what’s going well and future opportunities. In addition to reporting that they have great people on their teams, they are continuously adapting to utilize technology and new solutions to overcome existing challenges.

What percent of students in your school or district are transported by bus or another form of school-funded transportation?



Bus Driver Shortages Aren't Getting Better

If transportation is so essential to addressing educational inequity, the solution may seem simple. Why not put more school buses on the road? Here's why: it's not that simple. First, a school bus driver shortage has plagued nearly every school district nationwide for years. Second, it's nearly impossible for every student to fit neatly on a fixed bus route. Third, students experiencing homelessness or in foster care are often highly mobile, and rerouting school buses for a single student is inefficient and impossible to operationalize. And finally, not every student thrives on a yellow school bus. Students with special needs often benefit from a more individualized experience


or require transportation to appointments and support services. Transporting a single student on a 72-passenger school bus is inefficient in a myriad of ways — and this approach also singles out a child who may already feel different.

Instead, the key is to ensure we have the right number of school buses on the roads to support the kids, and routes, for which buses make the most sense. And with that, it's critical that we have the right number of school bus drivers for those buses.

The bus driver shortage is a very real and present challenge for school districts around the country. It was exacerbated during the pandemic, and is only getting worse: In 2021, 78% of school districts reported their operations were constrained by bus driver shortages; in 2022, that number was 88%. This year, 92% of respondents reported their operations were constrained by bus driver shortages.

Moreover, 30% of this year's respondents classified these constraints as severe; 62% identified them as somewhat constrained. Only 8% of districts reported not experiencing any constraints.

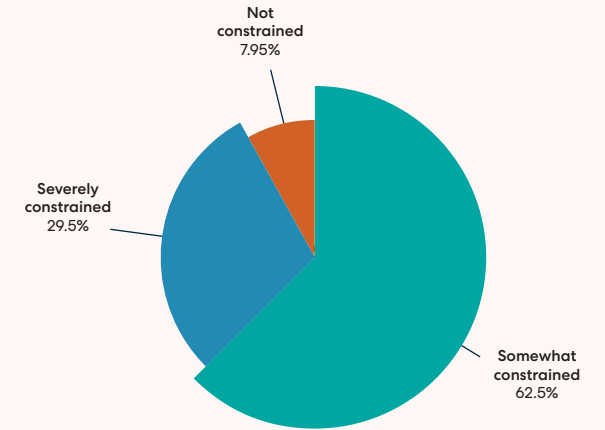
Unfortunately, 39% of respondents say they've reduced transportation services due to the bus driver shortage. This only increases barriers to educational equity, especially when the students affected by service cuts are also the most vulnerable.



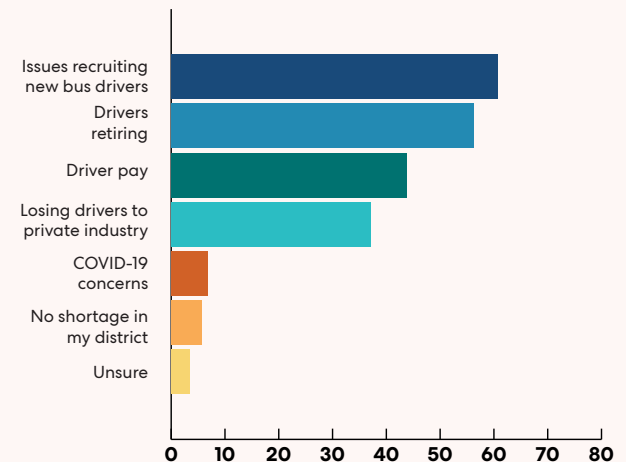
92%

OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THEIR OPERATIONS WERE CONSTRAINED BY BUS DRIVER SHORTAGES THIS YEAR.

Are your transportation operations constrained by school bus driver shortages?



What are the main reasons for the school bus driver shortage in your district?





The driver shortage has been around as a whole for decades. Proactive districts began to employ alternative methods to counter this crisis. Using a small-vehicle vendor has been the key for the last five years.

Kimberly Raney
Executive Director Procurement
Transport & Warehouse



One of the things that people fail to realize is school bus drivers do not get paid year-round, and they are not working 40 hours a week. This puts them at part-time and seasonal status.

Elizabeth Banks
Transportation Supervisor



As a rural district, applicants are very limited. Working a split shift doesn't help matters, so we try to offer work duties in the middle of the day and a facility that offers a workout area and lounging areas so that our drivers don't have to leave the facility.

Anonymous Director of Transportation



Since COVID hit, we have had about 10 to 12 drivers retire per year. It's hard to recruit with the salary wars going on.

Anonymous Director of
Transportation



We are fortunate that all routes are covered. It is the McKinney-Vento/foster trips and absences where we get creative.

Lorri Smith
Transportation Director



The Coronavirus has placed fear in a lot of people, and they have retired.

Anonymous Transportation Supervisor

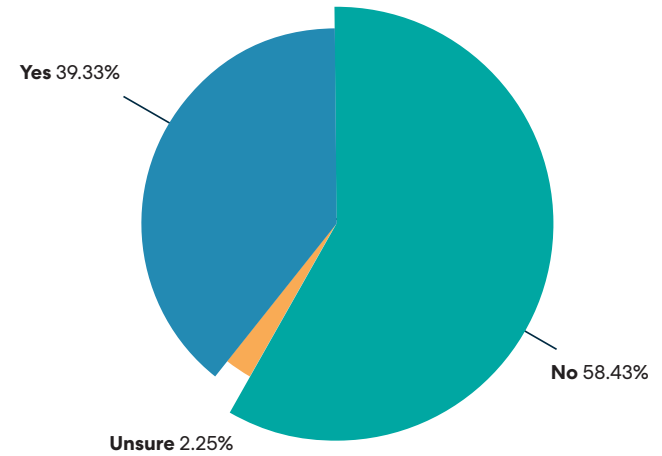


We can't compete with other jobs that pay a lot more. Even the fast food industry pays more.

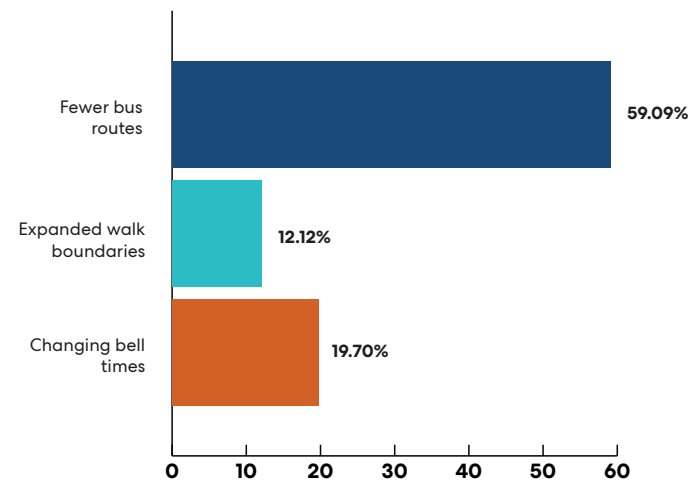
Valerie Crespin
Special Needs Router/Liaison



Has your district reduced transportation services due to the bus driver shortage?



How has your district reduced transportation services due to bus driver shortages?



How Districts Are Adapting

In the face of the many challenges covered in this report, school districts and schools of every shape and size have adapted to the current realities of student transportation. From aggressively recruiting bus drivers to working with supplemental transportation solutions, every district has found its own way to ensure kids still get to school.





Paying outside sources to transport some students (right now, limited to McKinney-Vento and foster students, but may start to include general education students as well).

John Sides
Director of Transportation



We use non-CDL support personnel for operating vans for remote schools and longer distances from population centers.

Michael Hush
Director of Transportation



We have done a drive-the-bus event, which is new to the district.

Michelle Clark
Director of Transportation



We have offered signing bonuses, sent advertisement letters to parents, and parked a school bus around town with an advertisement for bus drivers on the side. School staff like teachers, coaches, and anyone who holds a CDL in the school system are driving to help with our shortage.

Robert Young
Transportation Director



We've tried to cut back on routes, but our number and location of student riders have not allowed this. We have to look to the future of either tiering our start of the school day from two to three start times and/or creating walk zones where safe.

Anonymous District Student
Transportation Coordinator



I don't think any effort is unconventional anymore. Districts are trying so many things, from guaranteed hours to signing bonuses, increased pay and PTO.

Tanya Sears-Ward
Transportation Director



Combining special education and general education routes.

Mark Dissette
Trainer



We are in the process of adding a white van fleet to help alleviate some of the routing issues.

Shanti Wilson
Transportation Supervisor



We are guaranteeing 40-hour work weeks for some of our driving positions now. We are allowing drivers to work other part-time positions, such as food server, to get more hours throughout the district in between routes.

Anonymous Director of
Transportation

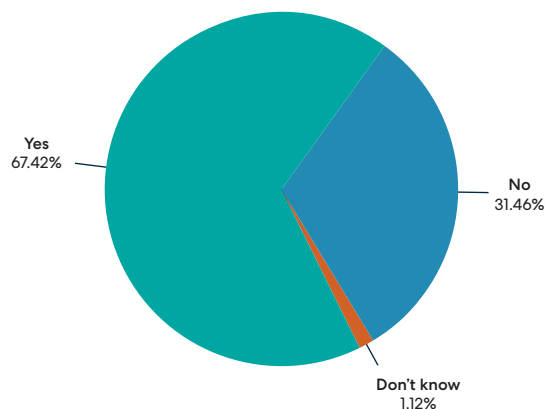
Supplemental Transportation

There are dozens of reasons school districts rely on supplemental transportation to help students get from home to school to anywhere else they need to be. Over two-thirds of respondents reported utilizing supplemental transportation.

The most common populations for which supplemental transportation solutions are provided include those transported to their schools of origin per the MicKinney-Vento Act (69%), students enrolled in special education programs (60%) and students in foster care (49%).

Because supplemental transportation includes private car services, it's no surprise to see these three student populations at the top of school districts' lists. After all, these students may live across the county from both the school that is best for them, and the appointments laid out in their individualized education plans (IEPs.)

Do you use supplemental school transportation solutions?

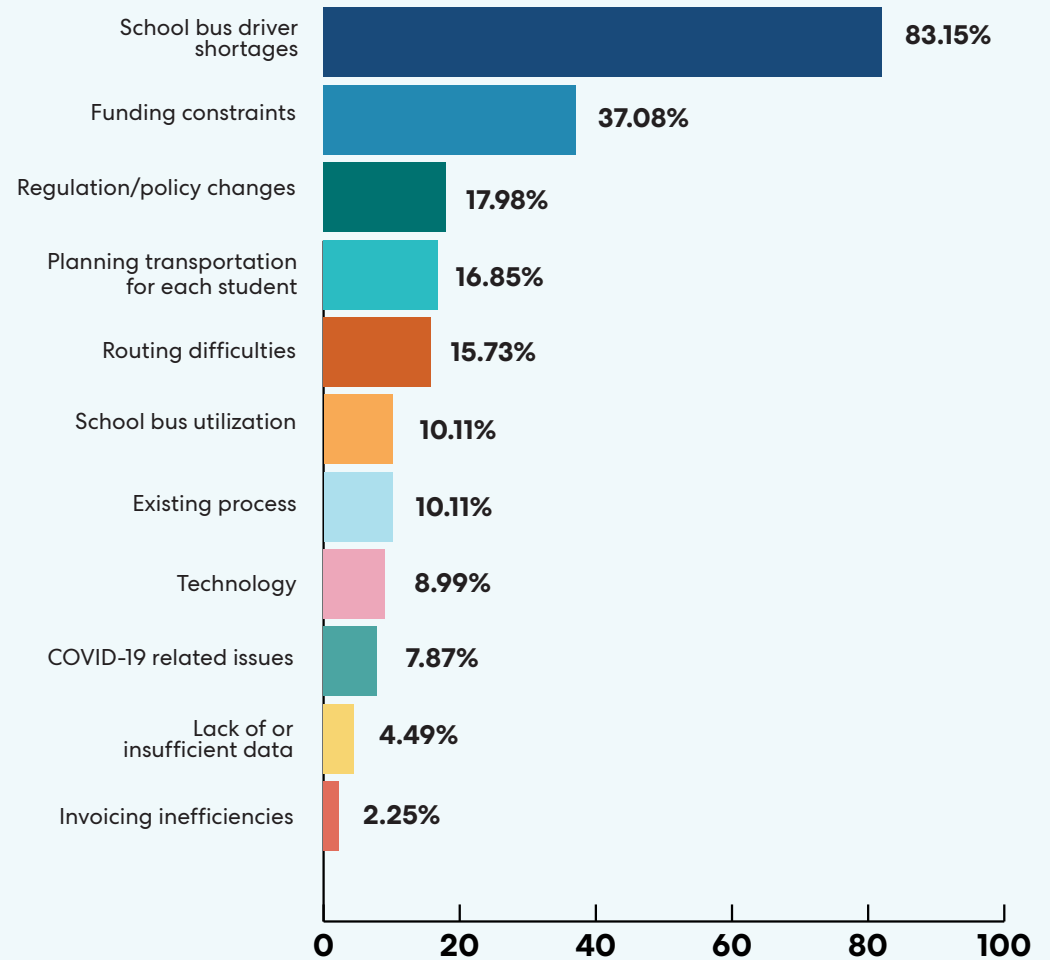


School Transportation Pain Points

Every year, our State of School Transportation Report provides an opportunity to understand the biggest frustrations and challenges school districts face today. Unsurprisingly, the school bus driver shortage secured the top spot yet again in 2023, as it has the past two years.

After that, funding constraints, followed by regulation and policy changes, were at the top of the respondents' list of pain points.

Factors that have a negative impact on district transportation operations



“

There are not enough drivers to cover if someone is sick or requires time off. The cost of fuel and the unpredictability of inflation has made it difficult to budget. Federally mandated out-of-district transportation is out of control!

Anonymous Supervisor of Transportation

“

Driver morale, sickness, call-ins and exhaustion.

Anonymous Supervisor of Transportation

“

Buses are overcrowded, but in the end, we make sure every student gets to and from school safely. We never turn away students.

Anonymous Director of Transportation

“

Everyone ends up out of the office to drive or bus aide.

Anonymous Transportation Secretary

“

When we combine routes on a temporary basis, it increases student ride times. This occurs on a last-minute basis making it difficult for families. Additionally, we revert to our mechanics and office staff to fill in, which makes them unavailable to do their job functions.

Lorri Smith
Transportation Director

“

With driver shortages and absences, every day is a challenge.

Robert Trotter
Director of Transportation

“

Families are not serviced properly when students have to arrive at school late due to bus shortages. The first route finished will go do a route that doesn't have a driver, so the students are 20 to 40 minutes late.

Anonymous District Student
Transportation Coordinator

“

We are strained not being able to cover routes for field trips or athletics.

Elizabeth Banks
Transportation Supervisor

“

We have to navigate double routes most days to make sure that our buses are rolling and students are being serviced to and from school.

Robert Young,
Transportation Director

What's Going Well

While mounting frustrations about the school bus driver shortage, continued challenges with chronic absenteeism, and ongoing concern about educational equity exist, there's still plenty that school districts and transportation stakeholders are quick to celebrate.





We have a lot that is going well. We have a great mechanics team and buses are, on average, eight years old.

Lorri Smith
Transportation Director



People are continuing to work together to make it possible. My fear is job burnout if it doesn't improve soon.

Anonymous Director of
Transportation



An attendance bonus seems to be having a positive impact.

Anonymous Director of
Transportation



Our routing software and parent apps are strong, and we are proficient at changing routes at the drop of a hat, which is unfortunately necessary due to driver shortages.

John Sides
Director of Transportation



The one-cent sales tax buys our buses. The drivers we have are willing to do extra. My superintendent and school board support me.

Anonymous respondent



A transportation team that works to support the mission: Students are our why! They cover, we reroute hourly if needed, we wash buses and clean our offices, shop and grounds together.

Katie Delano
Director of Transportation Services



Working on updating technology to help with efficiency.

Robert Trotter
Director of Transportation



My team of drivers are great, and they work well with the constraints of the driver shortage. Also, my maintenance personnel is top-tier; his ability to keep our aging fleet running is nothing short of a miracle.

Shanti Wilson
Transportation Supervisor



Great drivers and personnel.

Bill Rosell
Director of Facilities

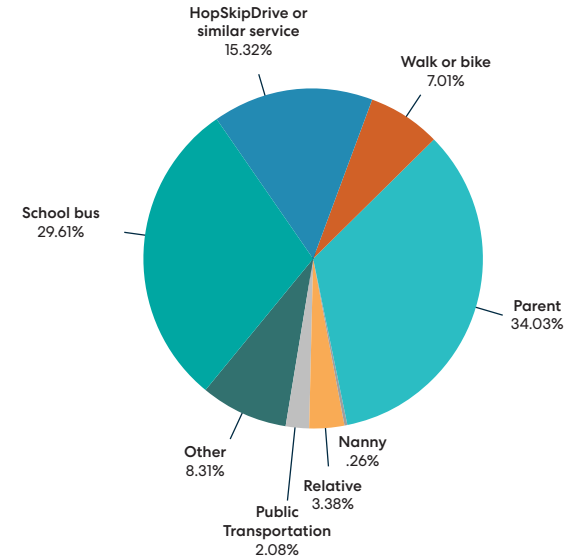
Parents and Caregivers

This year, we added a new source of insights into school transportation by surveying parents and caregivers across the country. One of the most interesting responses was that two-thirds of parents and caregivers would place their children in more extracurricular activities or tutoring if the school district offered transportation. Virtually the same amount of respondents wished the school provided more transportation options.

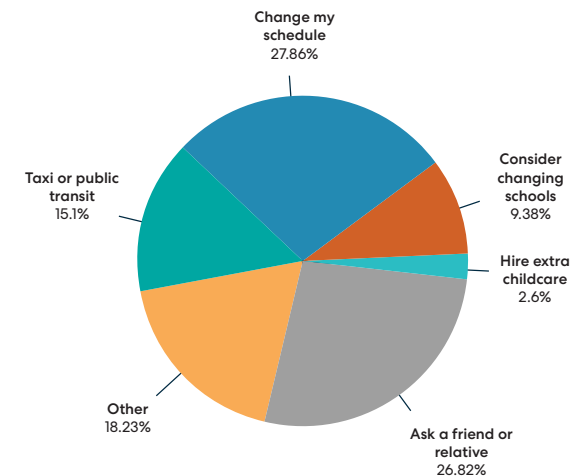
This could partly be because 37% of parents and caregivers listed figuring out transportation and children’s schedules as the most stressful part of the school year. Nearly three out of ten parents reported thinking about their child’s school transportation needs daily. Another 25% reported thinking about transportation needs several times a week. Over 30% of respondents said they’d consider sending their child to a different school if transportation was provided.

Almost 46% of respondents missed a professional opportunity because they needed to drive a child to school or an after-school activity, demonstrating the compounding issues created by constrained access to transportation.

How does your child get to school?



If your child’s current school transportation solution became unavailable, what would you do instead?



Without supplemental transportation, I may have lost my job. Public school transportation was unavailable due to a multitude of reasons.

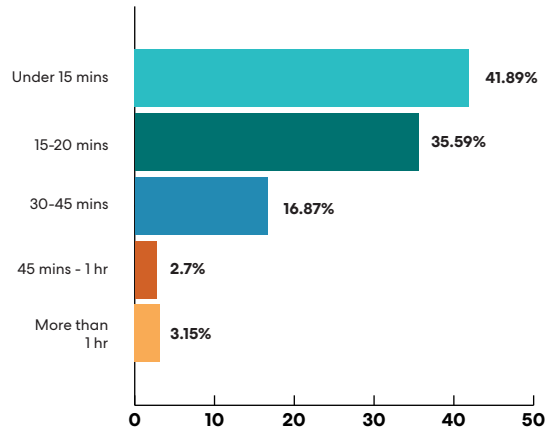
Hans
Dad



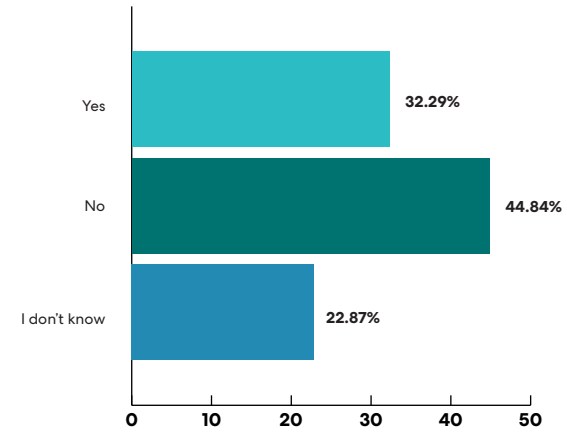
We luckily live close enough to our school to walk, but our school does not provide any sort of transportation.

Jason
Dad

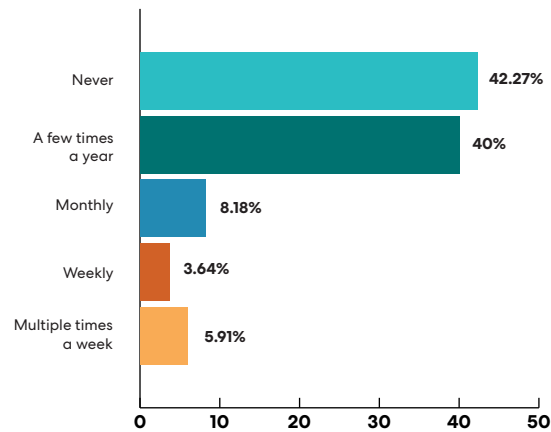
How long is your child's commute time to school?



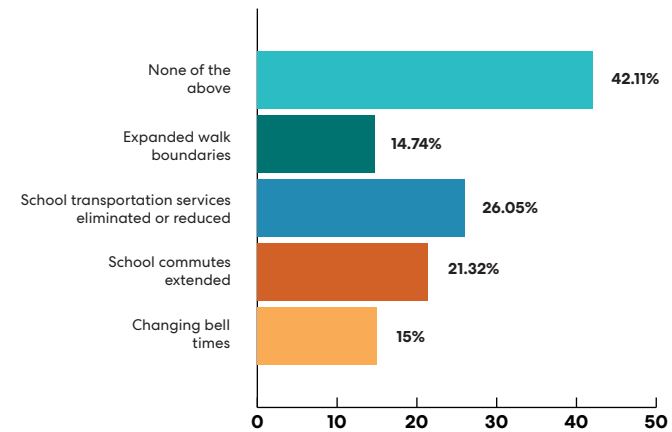
Would you send your child to a different school if an easy transportation option was available?



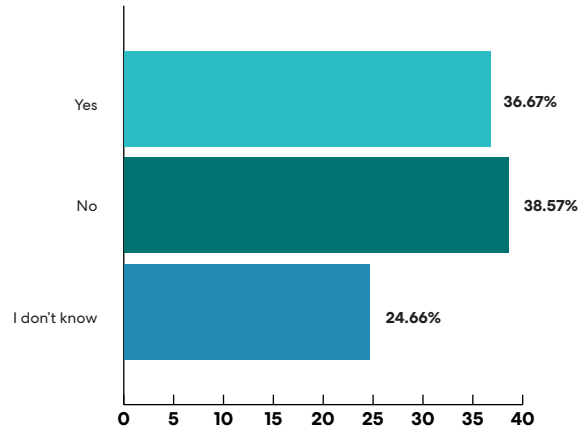
How often is your child late to school because of issues with transportation (e.g. school bus running late)?



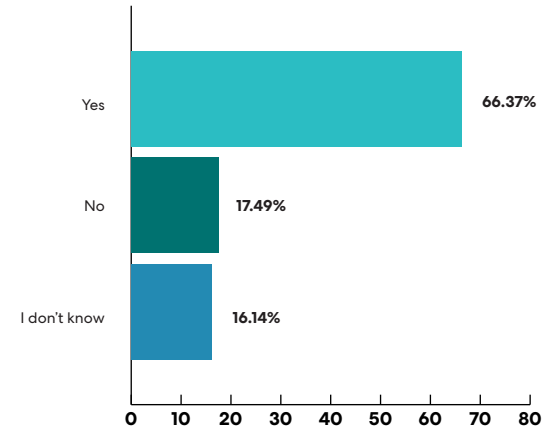
Have any of the following things affected your child's commute to school?



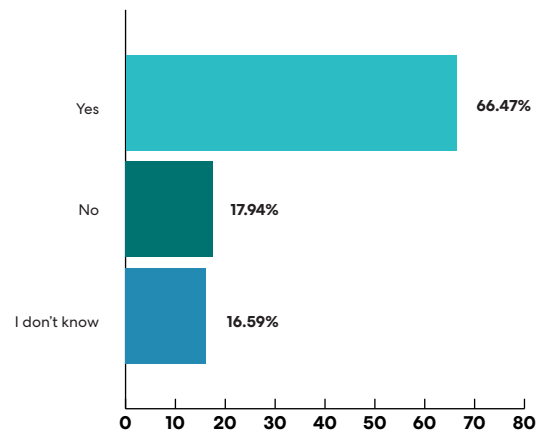
Does your school district provide transportation options for extracurricular activities (e.g. sports, tutoring)?



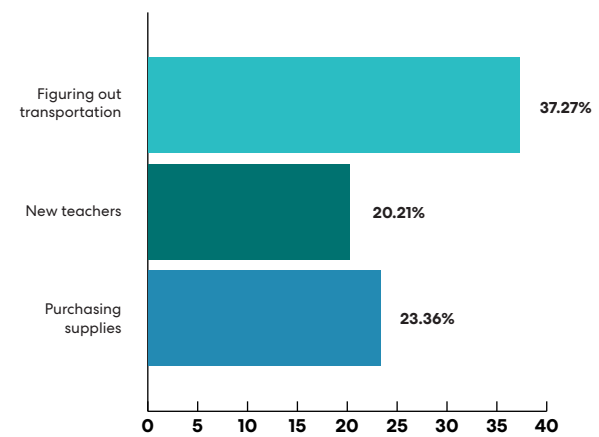
Would you put your child in more extracurricular activities or tutoring if there were transportation options offered by your school district?



Do you wish there were more transportation options offered by your school district?

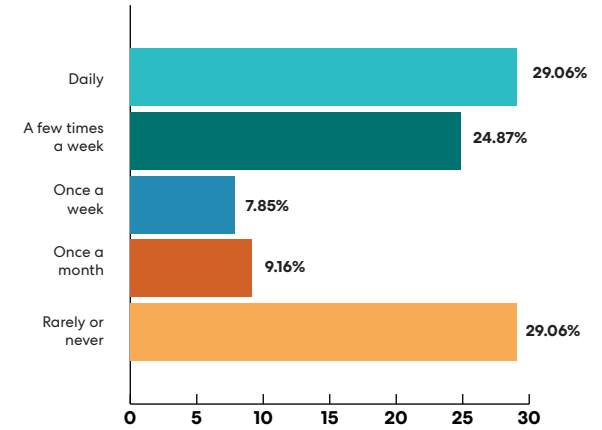


What is the most stressful part of the school year?

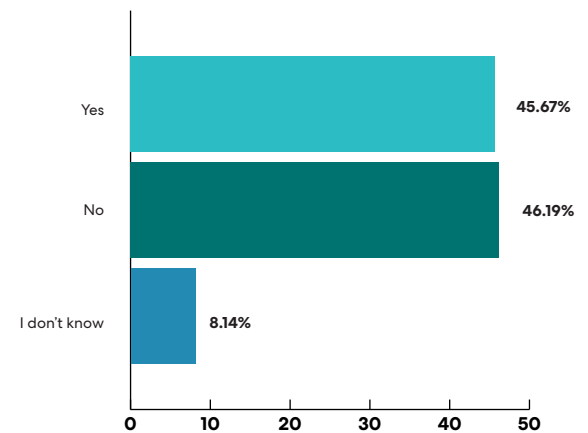




How many days a week do you find yourself thinking about your child's transportation needs?



Has needing to drive your child to school or activities ever caused you to miss out on a professional opportunity?



Students with IEPs

We asked survey respondents who have children with disabilities or Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) about their school transportation experience.

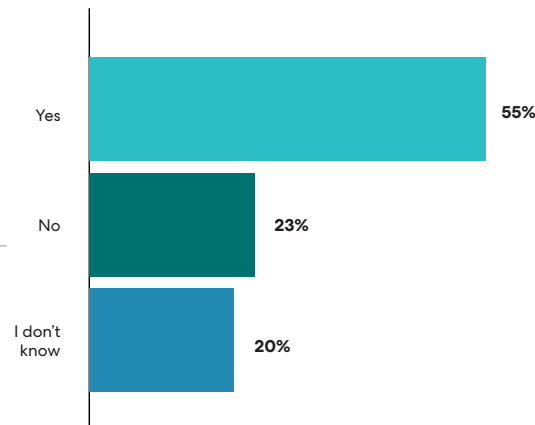
About 55% of parents and caregivers of students with IEPs or disabilities reported that their school or district offers transportation to accommodate a specific school schedule, an IEP-specific appointment or an enrichment activity. When asked what was most important in their school transportation experience, 40% listed a consistent pickup, ride, and drop-off experience as the most important part of the ride. Having the same driver most days was cited as the second most important thing, followed by tracking technology.



“Thanks to [supplemental transportation services], my disabled child was able to graduate high school.”

Anonymous Mom

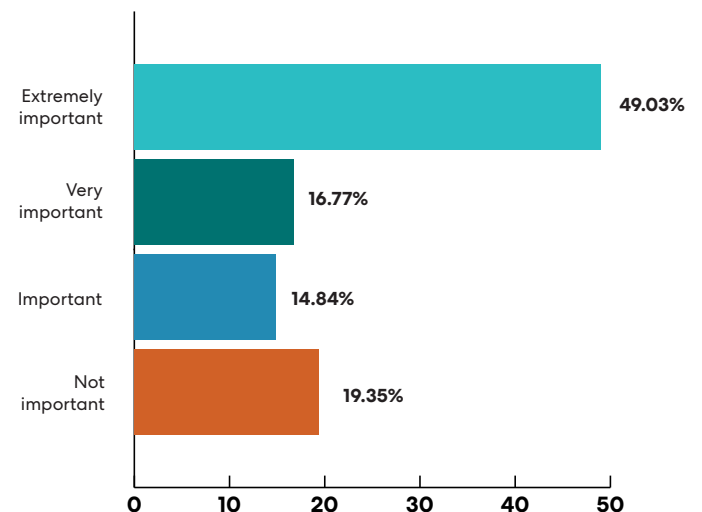
Does your school or district offer transportation to accommodate a specific school schedule, IEP-specific appointments or enrichment activities?



What is the most important part of a ride for you?

- 38.75%** Having the same pickup, in-ride and drop-off experience
- 23.75%** Having the same driver most days
- 11.25%** Efficient route and commute time
- 12.50%** Tracking technology
- 8.75%** Real-time monitoring of driving behavior

How important is it that your school provides individual transportation for your child, with features designed for students with disabilities or IEPs?





Thank you

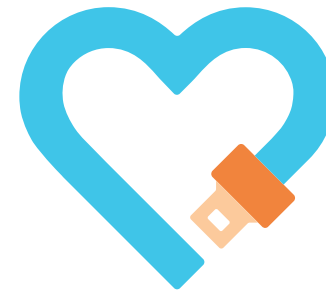
On behalf of HopSkipDrive, we want to thank every education and transportation professional, parent, and caregiver who took the time to provide unique insights into the current state of school transportation. Every year, these responses help us better understand the challenges school districts face, the decisions parents and caregivers must make, and how we can all work together to continue removing barriers to educational equity.

About HopSkipDrive

Designed by protective moms and driven by caregivers, HopSkipDrive is the leader in innovative, supplemental school transportation solutions for schools, districts, government agencies and families. HopSkipDrive's advanced technology platform and industry-leading operational expertise provide school districts with safety, flexibility and visibility while helping to create opportunity for all through mobility.

HopSkipDrive currently operates in 24 markets across 13 states and Washington, DC, and has contracts with 400+ school districts and county government agencies. HopSkipDrive CareDrivers have safely driven more than 3M rides over 46M+ safe miles.

Visit us at www.hopskipdrive.com



HopSkipDrive

46M+

SAFE MILES DRIVEN

3M+

RIDERS DRIVEN

16K+

SCHOOLS COVERED



THANKS FOR READING!