

# School Transportation

# Coalition

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## ***Education Policy Convening*** **Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007** **School Transportation Crisis**

We wanted to thank EdSource and the foundations for organizing and hosting this convening.

This paper will present a problem statement followed by "Getting Down to School Transportation Facts".

### Problem Statement

We believe that California is facing a School Transportation Crisis. This crisis is especially impacting both rural and urban school districts that need to bus children from lower-income families. In the last 20 years, we have seen over a 40% decrease in the percentage of children that ride school buses. Every state in the union has a greater percentage of children riding school buses.

The state pays less than 50% of the cost of state 'approved' trips to and from school. The system is broken. It is archaic, unfair, and extremely inequitable. It needs a complete overhaul.

Our school bus fleet is one of the oldest in the nation. We still have buses on the road that were built before 1977 and do not meet the federal safety standards. We have over 3,000 school buses on the road that were built before particulate standards were required.

Ironically, the new seat belt requirement will only make things worse because the installation of seat belts will reduce the seating capacity of school buses. We will have to buy 3 new buses in order to replace 2 old buses. Fuel and labor cost will increase by 33%.

**Before the state funds any new programs, it needs to equitable and fully fund the school transportation program. The state also needs to provide additional funds for school bus replacement.**



It is no wonder that there has been the drastic decrease in the ridership and in the number of school districts that offer school bus services. Every other state has a greater percentage of children that ride school buses.

School buses are the safest form of transportation for children – safer than walking, cars, or transit buses. Using school buses means fewer accidents, injuries, and fatalities. It also means fewer cars on the road, less congestion, and less pollution.

Many states reimburse school districts for 100% of their cost of transporting students to and from school. School transportation costs vary depending on the geographic location, student density, and demographic characteristics of the school district. It is a true variable cost program. The California Department of Education (CDE) only ‘approves’ the cost of transporting students – regular and special education, to and from schools. All other transportation costs such as athletic events and field trips are not ‘state approved’ for state reimbursement.





In California, school districts are only partially reimbursed for the state-approved cost of home-to-school transportation for regular and special education children. California severely under funds school transportation. The state reimbursement rate is less than 50%. That is, the state pays for less than 50% of the approved state cost. The approved state cost for regular and special education transportation is over \$1.3 billion. The state share is \$630 million. The other \$600 million plus has to be paid for by the school districts. These funds have to come out of the classroom.

The State Auditor has recommended that the Department of Education (CDE) should seek legislation to revise the current law so that 1) all school districts that provide transportation services could receive funds, and 2) ensure that all school districts are funded equitably for the Home-to-School Transportation program.

The school transportation formulas are so outdated, that the program is extremely inequitable. The reimbursement rates can range from 0% to 100%. This program is especially unfair to school districts that serve a large number of poor children.

Attachment A shows the reimbursement rates for a sample of 75 school districts in the state. The first school district in the attachment is West Contra Costa Unified. Their approved transportation cost is \$3.7 million. Their reimbursement rate is 11.5%. That means that the state only reimburses the school district for \$425,000 for home-to-school transportation costs. The school district must use \$3.3 million of their discretionary funds to make up the difference. These are funds that would have been available for classroom purposes. This is extremely unfair to the school district.

As far back as 1988, the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) recommended that the school transportation formula needed revision because:





-  It resulted in an inequitable distribution of state aid.
-  It does not relate reimbursements to actual cost.
-  It does not provide an incentive for schools to be efficient and use economies of scale.
-  There is no mechanism for new school districts that want to start up a transportation program to receive reimbursements.

Recent attempts to solely study options to the transportation formula have failed – AB 1786 (Bermudez), AB 2803 (Cogdill), AB 1213 (Liu), and AB 1191 (Benoit)

Because the formulas are so inequitable and inadequate, in May of 2004, the California State PTA adopted a resolution that stated:

*“RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation that provides more equitable and adequate funding for home to school transportation and replacement of school buses that do not meet current safety standards.”*

In the *PTA in California, April 2005*, the state PTA made the following points about increased transportation funding:

-  One of the purposes of the PTA is to “secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth”.
-  A new pupil transportation funding formula needs to be developed and implemented that will provide equitable transportation funding throughout California.
-  The California State PTA has been advocating for seat belts in school buses since 1980s, yet most school districts are not prepared to handle this added fee for safety without state funding.
-  Talk to your legislative representatives about equitable and adequate funding for home-to-school transportation.

In recent years, funds have been allocated for school bus replacement. Both the Davis and Schwarzenegger administrations have allocated funds for new school buses. Proposition 1B provides \$200 million for new school buses and diesel traps. Local air quality districts will determine the how much of the funds will be spent for new school buses and how much will be allocated for traps.

However, California has the dubious distinction of having one of the oldest, dirtiest, and most inadequate school bus fleets in the nation. The average age of our fleet is 15 years, compared to the national average of 9 years.

California has 3,400 school buses that do not meet the Air Resources Board particulate standards. These buses were built prior to 1988. A large number of these buses are located in the worst air quality areas of the state – the Los Angeles Basin and the Central Valley. The new buses emit 60 times more pollution than new school buses.

The State PTA, the Coalition for Clean Air, the Union for Concerned Scientists, and the American Lung Association all agree that California needs a major increase in funding to upgrade its aging school bus fleet in order to protect the health and safety of its schoolchildren. Without this funding, California school districts are going to have to choose between school books and school buses.

The new seatbelt requirement is a fiscal nightmare for school transportation. It will cost \$20,000 per bus to add seatbelts to existing school buses. New or old school buses will have their seating capacity reduced from 84 students to 54 students. Districts will have to buy 3 new school buses in order to replace 2 old school buses. Fuel and labor costs will increase by at least 33%.

#### Conclusion:

California does have a crisis in school transportation. Our recommendation is to follow the State Auditor’s recommendations. All school districts providing school transportation services must be able to receive state aid. The funding formulas need to be changed so that all school districts

are treated equitably. There is no reason why a school district like West Contra Costa should have a state reimbursement rate of 11.5% and another school district have a state reimbursement rate of 80%. That simply is not fair. There is not a logical rationale for such large differences. The system needs to be changed. The state's average reimbursement rate must increase. We need additional dollars for school transportation. This is our number one priority.

We also need and support additional state dollars for school bus replacement. However, without additional state aid for increasing school transportation reimbursements, our school transportation system is just going to continue into a death spiral. The students in those school districts that have a large number of students in poverty will suffer the most because an inordinate amount of local funds will have to be taken away from the classroom to be spent on school transportation. Those school districts, both rural and urban have no other choice. They have to bus their students to and from school.

**Attachment A**  
**Sample of School Districts**  
**Regular Home-to-School Transportation**

<b>District</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>2005-06 Approved Cost</b>	<b>2005-06 % Approved Cost</b>
West Contra Costa Unified	Contra Costa	\$3,742,274	11.5%
San Ramon Valley Unified		\$1,492,129	3.2%
Calexico Unified	Imperial	\$732,377	26.0%
Central Union High		\$837,688	19.6%
Baldwin Park Unified	Los Angeles	\$1,296,375	8.4%
Bellflower Unified		\$1,975,083	10.0%
Burbank Unified		\$250,834	0.0%
Covina Valley Unified		\$846,803	34.4%
El Rancho Unified		\$1,167,237	12.9%
Glendale Unified		\$706,530	10.7%
Inglewood Unified		\$800,107	1.8%
Los Angeles Unified		\$76,836,276	53.0%
Montebello Unified		\$3,917,216	28.1%
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Norwalk-La Mirada Unified		\$1,875,391	35.0%
Palmdale Elementary		\$2,020,658	3.2%
Pomona Unified		\$1,604,626	33.1%
South Pasadena Unified		\$135,223	28.6%
Atwater Elementary	Merced	\$675,342	34.4%
Merced Union High		\$1,697,476	34.8%
Salinas Union High	Monterey	\$1,757,258	26.0%
Anaheim Elementary	Orange	\$4,113,004	16.3%
Anaheim Union High		\$2,963,342	1.1%
Capistrano Unified		\$5,440,328	14.2%

District	County	2005-06 Approved Cost	2005-06 % Approved Cost
Fullerton Jt. Union High		\$1,189,749	17.3%
Garden Grove Unified		\$7,012,027	34.0%
Placentia-Yorba Linda		\$1,537,932	22.4%
Santa Ana Unified		\$4,467,419	22.9%
Tustin Unified		\$2,999,760	13.3%
Eureka Union	Placer	\$1,205,972	38.2%
Roseville City Elementary		\$993,711	13.7%
Roseville Jt. Union High		\$1,203,225	20.6%
Rocklin Unified		\$2,057,161	11.9%
Corona-Norco Unified	Riverside	\$4,361,674	25.2%
Moreno Valley Unified		\$5,269,197	11.4%
Perris Union High		\$1,424,787	38.2%
Riverside Unified		\$5,269,197	11.4%
Murrieta Valley Unified		\$1,725,190	5.6%
Elk Grove Unified	Sacramento	\$6,118,294	27.4%
Sacramento City Unified		\$3,738,386	37.1%
San Juan Unified		\$8,946,188	31.9%
Chaffey Joint Union High	San Bernardino	\$1,875,340	24.3%
Chino Valley Unified		\$2,433,271	24.7%
Fontana Unified		\$3,004,032	38.2%
Ontario-Montclair Elem		\$1,524,181	23.7%
Redlands Unified		\$3,308,969	29.5%
Rialto Unified		\$2,554,445	26.0%
San Bernardino City Unif		\$8,109,902	10.1%
Victor Elementary		\$1,549,923	15.4%
Chula Vista Elementary	San Diego	\$3,583,536	14.6%
Fallbrook Union Elem		\$1,875,231	32.6%
Grossmont Union High		\$2,799,447	24.0%
Poway Unified		\$5,171,316	27.9%
San Diego Unified		\$6,480,070	42.0%
Santee Elementary		\$835,443	30.4%
San Jose Unified	Santa Clara	\$5,453,730	30.8%
Fairfield-Suisun Unified	Solano	\$2,074,211	26.4%
Travis Unified		\$934,452	23.5%
Ceres Unified	Stanislaus	\$1,263,866	39.4%
Oakdale Joint Unified		\$1,472,280	30.4%
Turlock Unified		\$1,914,982	25.7%
Washington Unified	Yolo County	\$1,417,044	22.4%