



Student Transportation Remains a Top Concern for Public School Boards.

It seems as though wherever you may be in the province, student transportation remains a top issue. Urban or rural – no one is immune to the challenges facing families simply trying to get their kids to school.

Transportation is an important element underpinning student success, with the safe arrival and daily attendance of students correlating directly to learning outcomes. One doesn't often think of the impact transportation has on results, but if you're not there, you can't learn and you can't progress.

A flurry of announcements leading up to the election might lead one to believe that all the issues related to student transportation have been addressed - but that is definitely not the case. In fact, recent announcements may come with unintended consequences.

New funding for Charter and Private School transportation takes valuable resources away from classroom resources for Public Schools.

Albertans have real concerns regarding the perpetual funding gap for public school education. Alberta's Public Schools remain underfunded to provide the support needed to achieve the outcomes we hope for our students.

What you need to know is that Charter schools receive 100% of the per student funding the same way as Public, Separate and Francophone schools. Private schools receive 70%. This, despite the fact that neither accept nor accommodate the needs of all students seeking access. Also, important to note is that Charter and Private schools are rarely located in the neighbourhoods of attending students.



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This is an important point as the government recently announced that Charter Schools will now also receive public funding to cover 100% of the costs for student transportation and Private Schools would receive 70% of their student transportation costs. This increased funding means that students can be bussed all around the city to the school of their choice while Public Schools can not always offer this. Why divert these funds to Charter and Private schools who charge additional costs instead of towards public schools who are inclusive, equitable and accessible to all.

Think about that for a moment. Public funds are now being allocated to getting students to elite schools rather than where they are needed most - to solve persistent, and in many cases urgent, public school problems such as: overcrowding and a lack of resources and supports required to achieve learning outcomes. We believe that Alberta public schools and our students should not be sacrificed or disadvantaged for the benefit of a select few.

Public Schools advocate for safe, affordable, and efficient student transportation.

Public Schools not only see but are impacted by transportation issues every day. That puts them in a key position to advocate for improvements and collaborate with both the government and industry, creating a stronger foundation for learning success.

Key areas of focus include:

- School transportation insurance
- Fuel affordability
- Travel times



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We encourage the government to conduct a thorough evaluation of regulations and spending on student transportation across the ecosystem, understanding where and why the system faces persistent challenges.

You may have heard about the recent decision to reduce the eligibility distance for government-funded bussing service from 2.4 kilometres to one kilometre for Grade 1 to 6 students and two kilometres for Grade 7 to 12 students. This sounds great at the outset, but with further consideration, one realizes, a number of new issues have been created. One such example: how families with students spanning a range of grades will have to manage a split between family members' transportation options. Consider this, in rural and urban areas why is it unsafe for one age group to walk 2.4 kilometers on busy roads, but not another?

While reducing walk limits is great news, more implications do follow. Consider this, the introduction of shorter walk limits allows hundreds if not thousands more urban school children to be eligible for bussing. Ask yourself this, with the increased demand on schools for bussing, where do the extra busses and bus drivers come from in time for the new school year?

Workforce challenges require thoughtful and thorough consideration.

While Public Schools work collaboratively with government and industry to provide effective and reliable transportation to and from schools, we are also working with industry to offer flexible and rewarding employment opportunities for Albertans. This is important to driver recruitment and retention.

The proposed changes to school bus driver requirements for removing the mandatory entry level training (MELT) will make it easier for Albertans to obtain their Class 2 licence, but not necessarily solve the transportation issues Public Schools are facing.



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While the province said drivers must still obtain an endorsement on their licence in order to drive a school bus that shows they've been trained in loading passengers, defensive driving, emergencies and other areas for on-the-job training. It should be noted that by removing the safety measures included in MELT, this could lead to implications down the line. We recommend further evaluation and close monitoring going forward to maintain the excellent transportation safety standards at Public Schools provide.

While each district has its own set of challenges and opportunities, we encourage you to become more informed and engaged to ensure students in your region, and across the province, receive the best possible Public School education. I invite you to reach out and meet directly with our community leaders who are guiding K-12 education for your region.

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