

Charter School Organization Complaining About Transportation Shortfalls

A front page story in the October 10 [Columbus Dispatch](#) features complaints from the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers about what it perceives as a charter school transportation problem. A spokesperson for the Authorizers said, "There's not one that's getting 100% of their students transported the way they are supposed to." Have these charter school parasites on the constitutionally-required public common school system not heard there is a bus driver shortage? Has the Authorizers group done anything to alleviate the problem? The Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers represents charter school sponsors, most of which are non-profit organizations that operate completely out of public view. Charter school sponsors rake off up to 3% of the funds sent to the charter schools they sponsor. These charter school sponsors generally have highly paid personnel that operate out of public view. The public is in the dark regarding the role and work of charter school sponsors. They certainly are not accountable to the taxpayers. The charter school sponsors should be helping to solve the transportation issues, rather than merely complaining via their organization, the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers.

There is a more fundamental problem of which the taxpaying public should be aware. School districts, by law, are burdened with transporting charter school and voucher students. In some cases, districts are required to transport more charter and voucher students than their own public school students. Since the state requires school districts to transport these students, the state should provide 100% of the cost of transporting them. Otherwise, parents who make the decision to enroll their children in alternatives should pay the freight

Are Columbus City Schools violating state law in handling of charter and nonpublic busing?

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Columbus City Schools buses aren't picking up charter school students, or they are and dropping them off late, causing students to miss classroom time and parents to miss work to get their kids to and from school, parents and officials say.

Every charter school in Columbus that receives transportation through Columbus City Schools is having issues with transportation, said Jennifer Schorr, president of the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers.

"There's not one that's getting 100% of their students transported the way they are supposed to," she said. "Some schools have received no transportation at all."

Under Ohio law, Columbus City Schools is required to provide transportation for charter and nonpublic school students if they live within the city school district's boundaries and reside no more than 30 minutes from the school, meaning students can use transportation to cross districts, Schorr said.

The provided transportation, by law, has to get students to their school by the start of school, Schorr said.

According to the Ohio Department of Education, there are 79 charter schools located in Franklin County.

Schorr said Columbus City Schools is breaking the law by not providing transportation to charter school students. But the state's largest school district, with about 47,000 total students, maintains that the transportation issues are beyond its control.

"The severe shortage of bus drivers is impacting CCS students as well as nonpublic school students," Columbus City spokesperson Scott Wortman said. "In short, we have far more routes than bus drivers to drive those routes even though we have contracted with outside transportation vendors to assist with those routes. We continue to work diligently to find solutions to the transportation issues."

As of Tuesday, Columbus City Schools reports that it has 681 routes and 535 school drivers for nearly 38,000 students needing transportation — a figure that includes its students as well as charter and nonpublic school students, causing them to double and triple up on routes. The district continues to average about 18%, or about 100 of those drivers, calling off.

There are 14,022 charter and nonpublic students who are routed through Columbus City Schools transportation as of Wednesday, said Jacqueline Bryant, Columbus City Schools spokesperson.

Columbus City Schools Superintendent Talisa Dixon sent a letter to charter school parents at the end of September about transportation issues.

"All transportation-eligible students, whom we are aware of, have been routed and are receiving transportation services — including Charter and Non-Public Schools, for which we also provide transportation services," Dixon said in her letter.

That's not true, say charter school administrators and parents.

Shawna Blake, 42, said she lost her job cleaning offices and warehouse bathrooms because she was repeatedly missing work to get her three daughters to and from Summit Academy, a charter school that specializes in teaching students with autism, ADHD and related diagnoses.

"How do I afford the gas to be able to go back and forth?" the East Side resident said. "Us parents are being the bus drivers."

Only her ninth-grader has had reliable bus transportation, Blake said.

Her seventh-grader finally got placed on a CCS morning bus route last week — about a month after school started. But it drops her off about a half-hour after the school day starts. And there is no afternoon bus route to take her home.

Blake's first-grader has no bus route to and from school, even though her seventh-grade sister goes to the same campus. Blake wants her daughters to ride together, but the bus driver has told her that the first-grader can't ride the same bus with the seventh-grader.

"That makes no sense to me," Blake said.

Summit Academy's elementary and middle school has about 60 students, and half of them need a school bus. But there is only one morning bus that brings 10 kids, said Cheryl Elliott, principal of Summit Academy Community School Columbus and Summit Academy Middle School – Columbus.

And that bus "is late every day," Elliott said.

There is only one CCS bus in the afternoon, which serves three students.

"It's really been a hardship," Elliott said. "My parents are done. They are losing jobs. They are altering their schedules. They are taking their kids back to work with them. It's just been a disaster."

Some students are close to meeting the threshold for truancy, she said.

"It's so tricky because you don't want to penalize them, but ... they have to send their kid to school," Elliott said. "It is very disruptive to our learning process."

Blake moved her students from public school to Summit and their grades went from F's to A's.

"What is at stake is that they may not be able to continue attending (Summit) if they don't have the busing because how am I supposed to get them back and forth and also feed them?" she said.

Shilliam Daniels had to switch from full-time to part-time at the bank where she works just to get her daughters, a fourth-grader and an eighth-grader at Graham Elementary and Middle School (GEMS), to school.

"That puts me in a very crazy situation because I now have to figure out, 'how am I going to have enough money to pay my rent and pay utilities,'" the 38-year-old Northland resident said.

GEMS is supposed to have seven morning buses, but in reality only two are bringing students to school, said James Kutnow, assistant superintendent of the Graham Family of Schools. There are supposed to be five afternoon buses, he said, but none have shown up this school year.

"It's extremely disruptive because (the buses) are irregular. (The students) are missing chunks of content as teachers need to keep moving through the curriculum. It's very difficult for those students," Kutnow said. "There are some students who have never shown up to school."

Daniels' daughters didn't start getting a morning bus until the week of Sept. 19, and the bus service stopped on Wednesday after the route was canceled, Daniels said.

The few weeks the bus did pick them up, the bus dropped them off a half hour after school started. And because there is no afternoon bus, Daniels leaves work every day by 2:15 p.m. to pick up her daughters.

Daniels said her daughters have already missed four days of school so far this year because of transportation issues, and she worries her daughters could miss more school due to CCS busing problems. Daniels is looking into online school for her daughters.

"It's really stressful, it really is," she said.

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[Charter, nonpublic schools disrupted by Columbus City busing issues \(dispatch.com\)](#)