

Private schools and charter schools are already getting priority in pupil transportation. Now a state group recommends a higher priority for private and charter student transportation.

Some school districts, particularly the urban districts, carry a heavy financial burden to transport students to private schools and charters. The so-called Fair Bus Bill, which requires public school districts to transport private school students, was enacted in 1965 with at least some guardrails to avoid unreasonable taxpayer expenses.

One such guardrail was to allow school districts to provide an in lieu of payment if private school students must be transported by school bus more than 30 minutes from the public building of attendance to the private school building.

The study group, which includes some legislators and school choice advocates, is recommending the phase-out of the in lieu of payment option. The transition of the phase-out of in lieu of payments could result in school districts being forced to, for example, transport one private/charter school student via school bus to a private or charter school 2 or 3 hours one way to a venue.

If the recommendation becomes state policy, the state should be required to establish and fund the entire transportation system for the private and charter operations. Concurrently the state should be required to report (on a state report card) the cost of transporting private and charter school students. The public school districts should not bear the cost. Neither should taxpayers bear this burden.

State group offers recs to CCS for ‘impractical to transport’ kids

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A state committee aimed at solving the state’s school transportation challenges recommends that Columbus City Schools — along with all other Ohio districts — shouldn’t be allowed to pay off families instead of busing their kids to private school.

A report finalized in June by the Ohio Pupil Transportation Workgroup said the state should phase out the process of labeling students as “impractical to transport” after more than 22,000 students, mostly charter and private school students, were declared impractical in the 2025-2026 school year.

If a district labels such students as “impractical to transport,” it is essentially saying it can’t logistically transport a student to their school. The district is then required to provide financial compensation, essentially paying the students’ families instead of transporting them.

The report noted that while not all members agreed on all solutions, the recommendations aimed to address the current problems facing school transportation.

“For Ohio to thrive, all our students must attend school on a regular basis and graduate high school with the skills and knowledge to take productive next steps. To reach this goal, transportation matters,” the report said.

The Ohio General Assembly gave the work group a June 30 deadline to review student transportation systems to recommend changes to the state to better meet the needs of students. The recommendations are not binding and would need to be acted upon by the state legislature.

The final recommendations report from June 2026 cites a shared goal of transportation for as many students as possible to and from their school of choice. The report includes recommendations for both systemic transportation changes and immediate actions, easing current system challenges and building new system foundations.

The report recommended:

- Phasing out payments instead of transportation
- Allow increased regionalization of school transportation and fund a model program to test the idea
- Fully fund transportation mandate to support statewide guarantee and have the funds “follow the student.”
- Develop a statewide transportation database and bus driver recruitment.

Andy Boy, of United Schools, a charter school in Columbus, worked to develop the recommendations as part of the work group.

The work group was made up of Ohio legislative officials and representatives from public, charter and private schools.

“I believe the recommendations in the report are a step in the right direction. It highlights where challenges have been in the past and attempts to make changes that specifically address these problems,” Boy said.

“Number one is ensuring that we take a close look at funding and make sure that schools are funded fairly to provide the service that we all want to happen in Ohio,” he said. “Then, I believe there are additional provisions that open the door to transportation systems that we haven’t tried in Ohio in the past that will hopefully pave the way to more efficient, more reliable transportation in the future.”

Columbus City Schools says recommendations don’t solve funding problem

School districts are required under state law to provide transportation for nonpublic, community and charter school students unless they declare a student ineligible for transportation, or “impractical to transport.” Then, the districts have the authority to offer Payment in Lieu of Transportation (PILO) to the parent or guardian.

Currently, districts are not required to transport students to and from a charter or private school if the travel time exceeds 30 minutes.

Columbus City Schools is the largest user of the PILO system in Franklin County, paying 2,501 student families, as previously reported by The Dispatch. Westerville City Schools is the second largest in the county, paying 304 student families rather than transporting them on district buses.

CCS spokesperson Mike Brown said that CCS transports more than 20,000 of its students and 8,000 private and religious school students daily to sites all over Franklin County. Removing the impracticality option for students could create an expensive mandate burden on our public schools and local taxpayers to transport students to private and religious schools, he said.

“We appreciate the committee’s recommendations, but we continue to be concerned about the state’s lack of full, fair funding to meet the actual costs,” Brown said in a statement.

CCS plans more than 9 million miles in bus and van routes each year. Transportation costs the district more than \$75 million, which Brown said is far more than the funding received from the state to pay for busing support.

Declarations of impracticality are made by districts and approved by local school boards. According to the state report, districts must currently consider multiple factors when determining if a student is ineligible. But, the process of declaring students ineligible varies between school districts.

For CCS, they make impracticality decisions based on where the student lives, proximity to existing routes, number of children on that route, and how far they are routed. They take these issues very seriously, according to Brown.

Private schools say current system disenfranchises students

The transportation workgroup report notes that “Ohio has made school choice a central part of its education policy.”

“Transportation policy must evolve accordingly,” the report states. “Every transportation-eligible child should have reliable access to the school that best meets their educational needs.”

Brian Hickey, executive director for the Catholic Conference of Ohio, said in a statement that lack of access to busing often prompts families to disenroll from Catholic schools or not enroll at all. He said the current system disenfranchises students who choose to attend private schools.

“Students attending Catholic schools have been able to attend the school of their choice due, in part, to Ohio’s establishment of transportation for all students in 1966,” Hickey said. “Families can remain in communities important to them while placing their children in their preferred schools, thanks to Ohio’s transportation system.”

Charter schools and nonpublic schools are disproportionately impacted by the current PILO system, Boy said.

“The recommendations in here don’t necessarily solve that problem, but recommend that we do serious work in those areas to eventually remove that as a tool to be used,” Boy said.

“This is a great starting point,” he said. “There is more work to be done to fix the system of transportation across the state of Ohio.”

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