

Frequently Asked Questions about Bus Transportation

The bus didn't show up on time for my child. How long should he/she wait at the stop?

Your child should arrive at the stop at least five minutes before the regular arrival time of the bus. If the bus is late, ask your child to remain at the stop. Buses break down, roads are blocked, drivers become ill or have emergencies, but there will always be a bus at every stop. If the wait becomes extreme (approximately 15 minutes), please call the transportation office at 340-2962.

My child's bus is overcrowded. Can some children be placed on another bus?

Passenger capacity for elementary school buses is three students per seat. Middle school students are assumed to ride two-three per seat. High school students are assumed to ride two per seat. The bus may seem crowded but is not over capacity and is still safe. It is our goal to fully utilize all the space on all the buses in our fleet.

I see buses all the time with only a few children on them. What are they doing?

Buses make two to four runs into and out of schools each day. On the majority of these runs, Edmond buses achieve a load factor of more than 75%. However, we have many special programs (vocational programs, alternative programs) that require that students be transported considerable distances. When transporting students to these special programs, the time length of the run sometimes makes it impossible to fully utilize the capacity of the bus. Often, however, as the bus travels within the school's attendance boundary it will stop and pick up additional students.

Examples of these special programs would be:

Alternative programs, vocational programs, parking shuttle, and other programs with limited enrollment and central location result in light loads.

Special Needs Programs - Special need runs tend to be light loaded due to the small number of children assigned to centers and the boundaries can be citywide.

Another reason is school boundaries. Some school boundaries cover wide land areas that extend bus runs in miles and time resulting in less than capacity loads.

We live very far from the school and there is no bus stop near for my child. How do I arrange transportation?

EPS policy provides for transportation for all elementary students living in excess of one mile from school and for all secondary students living in excess of one and a half miles from school. Regardless of the distance, transportation will be provided if there is no safe walking route. School bus stops are designed to be within three-tenths of a mile from the residence.

I drove it in my car and we live more than that distance from school.

Supervisors measure all distances with a walking wheel over the shortest safe route between the property line of the home and property line of the school. Car odometers are not accurate enough to precisely measure the distance.

But the walking route to the bus stop is not safe. To whom should I speak about that?

Transportation staff familiar with the area and the traffic patterns, evaluate the walking routes in consultation with the Traffic Engineering Department and the Edmond Police Department. If you believe an unsafe situation exists, address your concerns to the school principal or the area transportation director at 340-2962. If a further evaluation is required the school system safety officer is consulted.

I can't see my child's bus stop from my house. How can I get the bus stop moved closer?

Bus stops are placed at centralized locations that can be safely accessed by a significant number of students to minimize the time length and mileage of the run. If you have concerns about your child's safety you are encouraged to accompany your child to the bus stop or arrange a neighborhood buddy to walk with your child. Elementary children may be required to walk up to one mile to a bus stop. Secondary students may be required to walk up to one and a half miles to a bus stop. However, bus stops are typically designed to be within three-tenths of a mile from the residence.

My child goes to a day care provider in an area with bus service. May my child ride the bus?

The district is authorized to provide transportation only on a space available basis to children attending day care services in the school zone they attend.

My child is a special education student. To whom should I speak concerning his transportation?

Initial transportation for special needs children is established by an IEP team at the time of enrollment. Please discuss these programs with a counselor at your child's school. If you have transportation questions after acceptance into the special needs program, call the transportation department at 340-2962.

My child left an item on the bus. How can I retrieve it?

Drivers check their buses after every run. Items left by students are held by the driver for several days and may be claimed on the bus by the child. Fragile items are often taken out the buses in the evening for their protection, but will be available the next morning. After several days the driver will make an effort to locate the owner. Unclaimed and unlabeled items are donated to charity. You can help by labeling all of your child's school belongings. Please know the number of your child's bus, when inquiring about lost articles.

What are the different types of school buses?

EPS use both the conventional style school buses and smaller special needs buses. The 71-passenger conventional style school bus is the traditional style with the long forward hood, used to transport most students. The smaller buses range in size from 8-passenger to 54-passenger.

Several of our buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts. A single wheelchair position requires the same space as two or three bench seats. Therefore, a lift-equipped bus will carry far fewer passengers than its nominal size might indicate.

All buses are diesel-powered, equipped with two-way radios and most have audio and video capability.

Why are school bus seats spaced so closely together?

The basic purpose in spacing school bus seats so closely is to contain the child in a cushioned compartment with only a minimum amount of space between energy-absorbing surfaces.

After extensive research during the 1970's, the Department of Transportation and its agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) determined that the safest and most practical arrangement for school bus seating would be a "compartmentalization" concept. Accordingly, the new safety regulations established in 1977 included this requirement among many other improvements made that year. Under the compartmentalization concept, seat backs in school buses are made higher, wider and thicker than before. All metal surfaces are covered with foam padding. This structure must then pass rigid test requirements for absorbing energy, such as would be required if a child's body were thrown against the padded back. In addition, the equivalent of a seat back, called a "barrier," is placed in front of the first seat at the front of the bus.

In addition to padding, today's seats also must have a steel inner structure that springs and bends forward to help absorb energy when a child is thrown against it. The steel frame must "give" just enough to absorb the child in the seat ahead. Also, of course, the seat is required to be anchored to the floor so strongly it will not pull loose during this bending action. The floor itself must be so strong that it will not be bent or torn by the pulling action of the seat anchors.

Finally, the requirement was added that seat backs can be no farther apart than a distance that is deemed safe. Clearly, if the backs were too far apart, the child could be thrown too far before being cushioned and/or could be thrown outside the compartment altogether. Today's rules call for a seat back to be no farther than 24" away from a defined point in the middle of a child's abdomen (the seat reference point).

Why aren't seat belts required in school buses?

Seat belts are not required in school buses because research by DOT and others determined that compartmentalization was a better solution, as mentioned under the previous question. Some of the key arguments favoring compartmentalization over seat belts are as follows:

- a) Compartmentalization is more manageable. The protective surfaces exist in place without depending on any action by the children or any extra special supervision by the drivers. Seat belts require discipline and supervision to keep them clean, unraveled and in use.
- b) Compartmentalization works equally well for 1, 2 or 3 students per seat. Today's 39" wide standard seats may contain three small children or two large ones, or any combination in between. Arranging seat belts to properly handle any combination is difficult, if not impossible; the best known solution with seat belts is to restrict each seat to two students and two belts, which has the disadvantage of sharply reducing the carrying capacity of bus fleets.
- c) Compartmentalization works whether students have fully developed abdominal areas or not. Conventional seat belts, which are lap restraints only, are not suitable for small children whose abdominal area and bone structure are not adequately developed to take the force of a lap belt alone. They need the help of chest harnesses also, which adds to the complexity of a proper seat belt solution.
- d) Compartmentalization, once it has done its energy-absorbing job, leaves the student free to escape the bus. Seat belts could leave students strapped in, upside down, perhaps unconscious, in burning or flooding buses.
- e) Compartmentalization is most affordable. Although not a part of the DOT reasoning, this is a factor to be considered. In evaluating the cost of seat belts alone, one should include the cost of retractors and chest restraints also, since those appear needed. Even more important is the probability that a seat belt solution should lead to two students per seat and greater spacing between seats, thereby requiring more buses for the same student load.

Why are 39" seats in school buses rated for three children when they only will accommodate two?

The rated capacity of a 39" width passenger seat was devised many years ago by the committee then making recommendations to the National Minimum Standards for School buses. In determining seating capacity of a bus, an allowable average rump width standard was established.

Accordingly, 13" of rump width was suggested when a 3 - 3 seating plan was used. This suggested guideline is still recognized by most states as the accepted approach. It is not a federally mandated requirement.

Do state regulations for school buses supersede federal requirements?

No. State laws do not supersede federal requirements. State regulations for school buses can and usually do add requirements for safety. These requirements are additional to the federal requirements.

Why are buses sometimes late?

School bus drivers can have the same reasons as motorists for being late. Traffic delays, weather conditions, accidents or driver's illness are just a few reasons. School buses also have mechanical breakdowns or "no starts" that cause delays in picking students up on time. A school bus may be able to run but have a red traffic light malfunction which would make it unsafe to pick up or discharge students on our highways, before it is repaired. In cases where the regularly assigned bus or driver is unable to pick up students, a separate bus and driver are dispatched to pick up the students. Generally, when a bus starts out late on its first or second run, it continues to be late for its third or fourth run also.

Why aren't buses always available for field trips?

The first priority is to provide transportation to and from school. The school bus fleet does not contain a separate set of buses designated for field trip use. Therefore, whenever school buses are not in use for normal to and from school transportation, they are available for field trip use. For planning purposes, school buses are available on school days from 9:15 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and again after 4:00 p.m. Occasionally, in the Spring, the demand for field trips can outnumber the drivers and buses available. Transportation staff and requesters of field trips discuss individual circumstances.

Why can't all high schools, middle schools and elementary schools start at the same time for each group?

In order to maximize the use of our school bus fleet and to provide a more efficient operation with as few buses as possible, schools are put into one of four distinctly different time schedules. That enables one bus to serve two to four different schools within 2 1/2 hours in the morning and afternoon. High schools are generally in the 1st time schedule, elementary schools on 3rd and 4th schedule, and middle schools on the 2nd time schedule.

Typical school time schedules are:

High School - 7:50 a.m. - 2:20 p.m.

Middle School – 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Early Elementary School - 8:35 a.m. – 3:05 p.m.

Late Elementary School – 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

How can I arrange to have my child ride a different bus home from school for one day?

You must contact the Transportation office for prior approval. If approved, the Office will provide written authorization to the driver of that bus. Use this service only in the event of an emergency.

