

# Transportation



OTTAWA-CARLETON  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



## THE ISSUE

Changes to funding arrangements along with significant bus driver recruitment and retention issues leave students and families at risk of not having transportation to school.

The City of Ottawa is one of the largest municipalities in Ontario in both population and geographic area. This makes the delivery of transportation of OCDSB students much more complex. It is not simply about transporting students to and from school. It is about equitable access. Particularly for rural communities, access to reliable and safe student transportation allows parents/caregivers to make decisions about programs based on their child's learning needs, rather than transportation barriers. It is also vital for families who may not have a vehicle or require specialized support for their child to be transported to school.

Recent changes to provincial funding for student transportation are expected to have a significant impact on the OCDSB's budget. According to 2023 revised estimates, the OCDSB spent \$51.8 million on student transportation for the 2023-2024 school year. Of this amount, the OCDSB received \$48.9 million in provincial funding. This includes \$13.9 million in transitional funding. This transitional funding is slated to last until 2027. Even with this transitional funding, the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) had to suspend or eliminate a number of programs and services affecting OCDSB services. Under the current funding model, the OCDSB must cover a \$3.0 million deficit to meet transportation needs. With the loss of the transitional funding, this deficit could climb to \$17 million.

# \$17M

*Potential decrease  
funding in  
OCDSB student  
transportation  
budget under new  
provincial funding  
model*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Revised funding framework:** Any policy or funding framework must consider the unique student transportation circumstances of the community. For the OCDSB this includes the geographic size of the district, the complexity of program offerings, the number of students who require specialized support, and the availability of service providers in the region.
- 2 Increased investments:** Investments should include recognition of inflationary increases, rising fuel costs, geographic area, and industry pressures.
- 3 School bus driver recruitment action plan:** Provincial strategy needed to attract and retain school bus drivers.



## MORE INFORMATION

Student transportation is funded by the Ministry of Education. For the 2023-24 school year, the Ministry of Education implemented a new funding framework for the Student Transportation Grant. The new funding framework for Student Transportation applies a needs-based Common Reference Standards and is based on a routing simulation that optimizes the number of vehicles to provide services for eligible students. According to the Ministry, these changes were made to to encourage consistency and improve equitable access.

School bus transportation for students with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is conducted through a consortium with the Ottawa Catholic School Board. The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) provides service to over 230 schools across a large geographic area covering 2,760 square kilometres.

OSTA delivers transportation services to more than 124,000 students at both its member school boards using yellow buses, wheelchair buses, school purpose vans and School Active Transportation programs. For many students living away from the downtown core and public transit services, school buses or vans are their only means of transportation to school.

In recent years, student transportation providers across Ontario are facing challenges with school bus driver recruitment and retention. Driver shortages have forced transportation providers to cancel bus routes, which has had a significant impact on students and their families.



2,760  
km<sup>2</sup>

*The City of Ottawa is the second largest city in Ontario by population and one of the largest municipalities according to geographic size. OCDSB students live in urban and rural communities in a school district covering 2,760 square kilometres. Student transportation needs vary greatly across this area.*