

Transportation – Frequently Asked Questions

1. Where is the Transportation department at right now?

Transportation is currently restructuring routes, adding runs and assigning the over 300 late applicant eligible riders to buses. These changes are required as busses were filled with on-time eligible and courtesy riders. Making changes to runs is a complex process in a large interrelated transportation system like SD23, which means that this process will take time. This process may result in additional courtesy seats being available. These seats will be assigned to the waitlisted students who are served on the route and who are furthest away per Board policy.

Once eligible riders have been assigned, in October, Transportation will be conducting a review of its routes and stops to determine if any additional route or stop changes are required.

2. Why has there been delays in receiving notification about transportation?

Central Okanagan Public Schools apologizes to families who have yet to receive a response to their school bus application. We understand that this uncertainty about transportation is unacceptable and can cause anxiety. As a district, we are committed to doing better in the future, especially in regards to better communicating information to families and the community.

Several challenges combined to cause transportation being behind:

- An increase in service requests over previous years
- Courtesy stop realignment
- Restructuring of routes due to a new school

There were almost approximately 1,700 applications that were submitted after July 31, 600 of which were submitted after September 1. Transportation is currently working to get late applicant eligible students on to a bus. **As of September 12, over 5,000 students are riding an SD23 bus.**

3. Why have bus stops been restructured and consolidated this year?

Board policy dictates that *where possible, routes will be designed to minimize the time students spend on a bus with an upper limit of 40 minutes as a guideline.* Courtesy and eligible stops have been restructured to improve efficiency of service and to provide eligible students with better ride times. Courtesy stops, whose frequency in the past has increased ride times for eligible students, have been consolidated to streamline bus routes.

4. Did the District cut routes?

No, this year there will be the same number of buses running as there was last year. Per Board policy, *a minimum of fourteen (14) eligible students is required for the establishment of a bus route.* Routes have been restructured to ensure Board policy is being followed when setting routes and have been moved to provide service to Canyon Falls Middle School. Due to the increase in eligible riders, there are less spots for courtesy riders this year.

5. How is it determined who gets a seat on a bus?

All students who are 4km away from their designated school in elementary and 4.8km for middle and secondary are guaranteed a spot on the bus. Bus routes are structured to efficiently transport eligible students.

Per Board policy, *seats that are not required for eligible students on school bus routes will be made available to courtesy riders based on the criterion of furthest home to school distance.* Priority is also given to courtesy riders that are siblings of eligible K-3 students. Spots are awarded to students on the route until the bus is full and any remaining applications served by that route are placed on a waiting list.

6. Is my child that isn't eligible and didn't get a courtesy seat expected to walk to school?

The eligibility distances reflect the distances that were historically used by the Province when it provided targeted transportation funding and guaranteed service for eligible students. The School Act was changed and now places the responsibility for transportation solely on parents. The Board of Education has made a choice under policy to transport students who meet the historical eligibility distances.

The distances are not a reflection of where a child could reasonably be expected to walk to school, they reflect the distance where the parent remains responsible to ensure their student safely makes it to school.

7. Why is the District reviewing Transportation?

Spending on Transportation has been steadily increasing year over year, while targeted funding for Transportation has remained status quo. This means more and more money has to be taken from the classroom. Last year, the District subsidized Transportation by \$475 per rider from operating funding, or \$2.9 million. This represents the equivalent of 29 additional teachers or 60 CEAs.

With the provincial funding framework review expected to announce significant changes for next school year, it is vital that the District contains its costs, preserves educational services to students and reviews its service levels to ensure it is operating an equitable and sustainable transportation system.

In the first phase of the Transportation Task Force, the task force had two community consultations, reviewed board policy and determined that existing practices that exceeded the policy needed to be discontinued with the exception of practices approved by the Board of Education on April 24, 2019.

In Phase II this year, the Task Force will be engaging the community to make recommendations to the Board of Education in the 2020/21 school year on the following:

- Impact of 2020/21 Government funding changes
- Registration and routing timelines
- Bell times and early dismissal
- Parental Responsibility Distance Limits
- Transportation service levels
- Transit service
- Fee structure

8. What can parents expect from Central Okanagan Public Schools going forward?

The District acknowledges that communications to parents on what changes to practices would occur should have been done better. The District commits the following to its community going forward:

- The Task Force will ensure the community has an opportunity to be informed and to provide feedback that will inform future decisions on Transportation services. Parents are encouraged to participate in the Task Force's consultations to ensure their voice can help shape the direction of how bussing is offered in the future.
- Any changes to policies and practices will be communicated broadly, frequently and with as much time for the parents to adjust as possible.
- Transportation timelines will be adjusted to ensure parents who apply for transportation by the registration deadline are provided the decision on their application well before the start of the school year.