



Beyond the Yellow Bus

Promising Practices for Maximizing Access to Opportunity Through Innovations in Student Transportation

ISSUE

Access to safe, affordable, and convenient transportation shapes the ‘geography of opportunity’ for many children and youth. It impacts their decisions on which schools to consider attending, which extracurricular activities they can join, and what internships or work-based learning

opportunities they might take advantage of. For children and youth in isolated, disadvantaged communities, this ‘opportunity gap’ is even more pronounced – and it is mirrored in the pernicious and deeply entrenched achievement gap.



The publicly funded yellow school bus has been the long-standing pillar of student transportation service across the country (more than 25 million children ride one each day). However, the continued operation of yellow bus service is threatened by a host of challenges, including school consolidations and school choice programs, making routing complex and expensive. As a result, many school districts are privatizing bus service, reducing it, or discontinuing it altogether.

FINDINGS

Localities across the country are implementing new and innovative alternative approaches to student transportation that expand regional transportation access for K-12 students, improve cost-effectiveness, and leverage inter-agency partnerships beyond the traditional yellow school bus. We found four main areas of innovation:

- Subsidized youth passes for public transit
- Tools to facilitate easier use of student transit
- Supportive transport programs to increase school attendance
- Programs that reduce student transport costs and environmental impacts

LESSONS

Transportation plays a key role in the contemporary context of educational choice and opportunity. Public transportation can – and should – be an important part of the mix of student transportation options. Our cases show that carefully structured partnerships can be compatible with federal Tripper Rules, which protect private student transportation operators from competition from school districts working with public transportation providers. When adequate transportation is not available, either families bear undue financial burdens, students suffer intolerable safety risks, and/or children effectively lose the ability to make the choice for where to attend school.

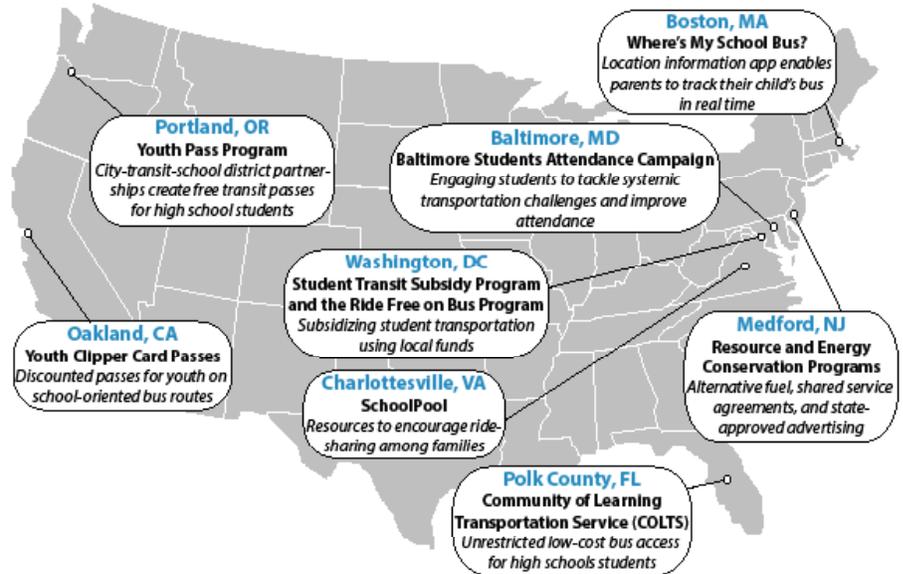




RECOMMENDATIONS

For School Districts:

1. When adequate local transit service is available, collaborate with local transportation agencies to offer youth and other student passes as a cost-effective, traffic-reducing, and equity-enhancing supplement to yellow buses and parent vehicles.
2. Explore shared service agreements among transportation providers, including public transportation, community/health and human service transportation, and school transportation
3. Use technologies to improve safety, service levels, and student tracking.



For State and Federal Policy Makers:

1. Considering the protected status of the private yellow bus industry, explore options for modification of the Tripper rule to enable more innovative and cost-effective student transportation programs.
2. Provide technical guidance to school districts in making contracts with private companies to ensure they limit cost increases.
3. Review state funding and reimbursement formulas for school transport to identify opportunities for cost sharing and to ensure the long-term cost-effectiveness of vendor selections.

For Local Elected Officials and Planning Departments:

1. Collaborate with school districts to locate new school sites in efficient locations that are near students' homes, afterschool programs, job centers, and other prominent destinations to maximize efficiency and convenience.
2. Collaborate with school districts to create district wide facility master plans that promote adequate capital investment in maintaining (and perhaps expanding capacity) of schools already located in transit-rich areas.
3. Improve pedestrian infrastructure between transit stops and schools to promote safety and walkability.
4. Focus new family housing development in areas within walking distances of schools.

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