



TRANSPORTATION

What is the role of free transportation in public schooling?

- Safe, reliable transportation to and from school is a basic need for students and families throughout the country. School districts provide transportation to students every day for a variety of reasons, most commonly related to geographic distance from school.
- State-provided transportation was initially used as an explicit part of desegregation efforts following the Civil Rights Act. Although in southern states, transportation often helped maintain school segregation prior to *Brown*.
 - The first formal discussion of free transportation was written into the 1965 federal desegregation guidelines outlining how districts should comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
 - Two subsequent Supreme Court cases about districts' desegregation obligations noted the importance of transportation to help create desegregated schools, particularly in communities with segregated neighborhoods.
- Given the strong link between residential segregation and neighborhood schools, access to free transportation historically has been—and still remains—a fundamental component of desegregation efforts.

Why is transportation important in implementing school choice?

- With the growth of efforts to allow families more school choices, transportation remains a critical component of allowing all students access to schools outside of their neighborhood—to allow students the same access to schools regardless of where they live.
- Transportation is particularly critical for the success of magnet schools, which are designed to attract students from across a district. At the same time, this very design makes magnet school transportation more costly. Yet, research finds that the provision of free transportation is particularly important for minority parents' consideration of magnet schools for their children, and magnets without transportation are more likely to be racially isolated.
- Studies of charter schools, another popular school choice option, reveal that students attending charter schools may travel further than students attending traditional public schools; however, charter schools often lack transportation requirements.

What are the current challenges with transportation?

- In an era of rising transportation costs and declining budgets, transportation has been one of the areas where school districts have made cuts. Yet, these cuts may limit access to out-of-neighborhood schools—which limits students' choices and may impede diversity efforts.
- Many states now allow for transferring to other districts through open enrollment policies, but few offer transportation even for children from low-income families. By contrast, interdistrict choice programs with an explicit desegregation focus all provide transportation to every student.
 - Further, providing reimbursement for transportation costs is less effective at serving disadvantaged students because of the burden placed on these families to pay for transportation up-front and understand what is required for reimbursement.

Why should we care?

A growing body of evidence shows that there are important academic and social outcomes for students and their communities where there are diverse schools. Given persistently high levels of housing segregation, transportation is a critical tool to helping districts create integrated schools—and realize other system goals regarding student outcomes.