



## Transportation for Homeless Children and Youth: Strategies for Rural School Districts

The following strategies were compiled by the National Center for Homeless Education in March 2008 from local homeless education liaisons, state coordinators for homeless education, and state pupil transportation directors. All strategies must be reviewed for their alignment with your state's or school district's laws and policies related to pupil transportation.

### **Arranging Transportation – Existing Pupil Transportation**

- Be creative with methods already in place.
  - Work closely with the pupil transportation department.
  - Have the school bus dispatcher extend a driver's existing route.
  - Arrange a transfer from the middle/high schools with an elementary school in the district (with a bus that may be going near the temporary location where the student is staying).
  - Reroute buses past motels, hotels, transitional living homes, etc.
  - Use special education buses (special education buses often have the greatest flexibility in routing).
  - Use transportation that has been set up for students attending alternative education programs.
  - Encourage students to participate in after-school programs because more bus drivers may be available at a later time or the parent may be able to pick up the child after work.
  - Advocate for a family to move to a shelter or motel where access to a school bus is available.
- Work with regional people who can see the “big picture.”
  - “Try to find the most inexpensive way possible; don't just use the most obvious.”
  - Create awareness, keep transportation on the “radar screen;” for example, attend housing agency meetings that meet monthly, send reminder cards to transportation directors each year, talk to families in the school or by phone to inform them of their rights, and advise schools to work with their special education transportation contractors.
  - Reimburse parents, caregivers, or older youth.
    - Identify a gas station that will work with you to assist parents using vouchers.
    - Establish guidelines and have parents sign an agreement, which may include: actual miles from home to district and rate of reimbursement (similar to that of other district transportation reimbursement agreements; agree on one fixed rate of reimbursement because this will save district paperwork if a child lives with a parent one week and stays with relatives another week, etc.)
    - Reimbursement based on actual days of student attendance.
    - Have a staff member meet families at an assigned gas station every Friday and pay for gas based on their child(ren)'s school attendance for the week.

### **Arranging Transportation – Other Ideas**

- Innovation and creativity are key.

- Purchase “fuel only” cards (from a gas station or convenience store); calculate the mileage the parent/guardian drives to and from school; provide cards on a weekly basis in accordance with the student’s attendance for the week.
- Have parents with cars agree to transport their children to a specially appointed bus stop to facilitate the transfer of students.
- Link taxis with magnet school buses.
- Taxi students to their former neighborhood where they can catch their school bus if that is closer to the location where the student is staying temporarily.
- Look for buses that might be able to serve homeless students on their way to their assignments (and back). Bus drivers may be able to eliminate “deadhead” miles by transporting homeless students.
- Explore the use of shelter or other community vans in terms of insurance, driver qualifications, logistics, pay, etc.
- Find parents who carpool and ask them to transport a child identified as homeless who lives in their area.
- Contract with a community member to transport children identified as homeless to and from school; one school district placed an ad in the local newspaper asking retired people to respond if they were interested in being paid to provide district transportation services. Each driver undergoes a background check, a health physical, and a vehicle inspection. Each driver receives passenger and route information and is paid a flat stipend of \$1.00/mile plus the federal reimbursement rate to reimburse the driver for additional insurance coverage and a \$5.00/morning and \$5.00/afternoon retainer fee.
- Arrange for school district staff to transport students experiencing homelessness; the employee should be reimbursed for additional costs incurred while providing transportation. All requirements for alternative vehicles and drivers, including background checks, health physicals, vehicle inspections, and insurance verification, as specified under state and local statutes, would apply.
- Work with subsidized public transportation (e.g., vehicles used to transport people to doctor’s visits).

### **Interdistrict Coordination**

- A local liaison’s working with transportation supervisors is important; however, once districts agree to work together, make sure the dispatchers in different districts are in contact with each other. They are the people that will actually coordinate the trips. They will be able to arrange more economical trips if they are working together.
- Many transportation personnel know transportation staff from nearby districts because they attend trainings and coordinate special education routes together. Build on these existing relationships.
- Have transportation directors meet to review school district maps to isolate and plot pick-up at inter-district transportation points.
- Create a student transfer with another district at either a private school or vo-tech school.
- Have buses from different districts meet at district lines to transfer students from bus to bus.

### **Resources**

- Work in tandem with other districts to save money (economy of scale).
- Investigate the possibility of using Medicare/Medicaid transportation brokers for covering routes that exceed district capacity. The use of Medicare/Medicaid brokers may be able to qualify for a “coordinated transportation” grant. Check with your state’s department



of transportation regarding your state's coordinated transportation program. (All states have some kind of program of this nature; however, it may be lumped in with transit oversight, etc.)

- Create an agreement with your department of social services to pay transportation bills when they place a family in emergency shelter outside the student's school district of origin.

### **Collaborative Infrastructure**

- Build on community spirit: "Families freely

take in students and help provide for them; staff and other students provide rides and other assistance." Build on the small town mentality: "We take care of our own."

- Contact shelters, community agencies, and faith-based organizations; create awareness of the need for transportation for homeless families.
- Provide awareness training for pupil transportation directors, dispatchers, and drivers.
- Meet periodically with local liaisons and pupil transportation personnel from neighboring school districts.

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For additional information and sample forms, visit NCHE's Online Forum at <http://www.serve.org/nche/forum/forum.php>. Additionally, download *Increasing School Stability for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Overcoming Challenges to Providing Transportation to the School of Origin* at [http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/nche\\_transp\\_body.pdf](http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/nche_transp_body.pdf).

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If you have additional strategies to share related to providing transportation for homeless children and youth to and from the school of origin, contact the National Center for Homeless Education.

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