

Pupil Transportation Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: June 2023

Q. Who may ride on a school bus in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough?

A. Only students enrolled in a school district program will be transported on any district or contracted bus. Only students or persons with verified background checks will be allowed to ride buses. Students who reside outside of the designated walk zone of their assigned attendance center (school) are eligible for daily transportation to and from school. Transportation is only provided from an established bus stop, as designated by the Pupil Transportation Department. Transportation is only provided to and from schools within the designated attendance center.

Q. If the bus drives right by my house, why can't it stop at my house?

A. Stopping at each house delays the bus by increasing the number of stops and makes the students ride time longer. Also, the higher frequency in bus stops, makes the motoring public impatient. This results in people driving around the bus, which is a dangerous situation. Whenever possible, stops are designated at safe and central locations, convenient for groups of students within a subdivision.

Q. Why do some children have to cross the street to board the bus?

A. Whenever possible, bus stops are routed as right-hand stops. Unfortunately, we are not able to route buses so that all students can board the bus on the door side. We recommend that children wait on the side of the street where they reside. The bus will stop traffic in all directions and signal the student to cross the street when it is safe to do so.

Q. Why is my student's bus late?

A. Weather, traffic, driver absenteeism, maintenance difficulties, and unforeseen incidents are responsible for delays in the arrival of school buses. Please know that the contractor will do everything possible to have all buses run on schedule every day. In the event your bus does not arrive as scheduled, please contact

the contractor. Allow 10 minutes past the normal bus stop arrival time before calling. We encourage parents to utilize MSBSD's Blackboard Connect notifications and the 'Where's My Bus?' app, for notifications of route delays. Parents will be advised of late buses, either by email, text message, a voice recording, or an alert banner through the District's main app.

Q. Why can't the District call when you know the bus will be late?

A. There are as many as 50-60 students on each bus. It would be impossible to call everyone in such a short time frame and many parents are not waiting at the stop with their child. When the bus is running 10 or more minutes behind schedule, the bus contractor is required to advise the Pupil Transportation Department and the appropriate school. We encourage parents to utilize MSBSD's Blackboard Connect notifications and the 'Where's My Bus?' app, for notifications of route delays. Parents will be advised of late buses, either by email, text message, a voice recording, or an alert banner through the District's main app. All these services are through Blackboard Connect and are only available for those who have enrolled in this service. Messages will not be sent for any bus that is running 10 minutes or less late.

Q. Why are there only a few students on some buses and my child's bus is crowded?

A. Decisions regarding each bus route are made based on information from school registration, previous routes, and the Department of Transportation's data. Most routes are fixed in late summer and any changes are made after the first three weeks of school. Distance from school, number of buses and drivers, large childcare facilities and grouping of students in neighborhoods, are all factors that are considered.

Q. How can I look up where my student's bus stop is located?

A. There are several ways to look this up. One way is to access the Parent/Guardian quick links on the District's website. Select "Transportation Look-Up." Using the Versatrans E-Link tools, you would select the first link labeled "Transportation Look-Up." Select your student's grade, and then enter

the address for the location of drop off and/or pick-up. Then follow the prompts for bus number and stop location. Sometimes new roads and/or subdivisions may not display. If you need assistance, please contact the Pupil Transportation Office at (907) 761-4357.

Q. Can a bus stop be changed and what is the process for requesting a bus stop?

A. We follow State, Federal, Borough and MSBSD guidelines when assigning bus stops. While requesting a bus stop, we suggest that you review the graphic on our District's website entitled, "Finding Your Bus Stop." If you have verified that your request meets the guidelines, complete a "Stop Change/Review Form." Please be advised that we conduct an onsite review of each bus stop request. Due to receiving hundreds of requests each year, especially within the first few weeks of school, a response to your request may take up to three weeks.

Q. My child is the only student at the scheduled stop. Can't he/she be picked up closer to home?

A. Bus stops are centrally located for all students along a route. Bus stops are not changed to accommodate one or more students. Students may enroll in school throughout the year. As a result, it is possible that students will be added to bus stops throughout the school year.

Q. If my student has a Boundary Exemption, will busing be provided home to school?

A. Bus routing will not be altered to accommodate the transportation of a student with a Boundary Exemption. Parents will be required to transport the student to school or to the closest established bus stop for their school of attendance.

Q. Is the driver of a school bus required to see that a student reaches their home or destination safely after they drop them at an assigned stop?

A. No. The responsibility of the driver ends at the time the student disembarks the bus. Once the student leaves the bus, the parent/guardian is responsible between the bus stop and home.

Q. Who determines the locations of the bus stops (pick-up/drop-off locations)?

A. The Pupil Transportation Department will establish all bus routes. Bus stops will be designated at locations within a reasonable distance from the student's homes. Every effort is made to establish stops in safe and convenient locations. However, safety will always take precedence over other criteria. All bus stops are evaluated using the requirements set forth in the State of Alaska Administrative Code 4 AAC 27.011.

Q. How do I submit a Bus Stop Change Form?

A. The form is located on the MSBSD's website, under Transportation. Please note that every request requires a visual inspection from someone within the department. During the months of August and September, this could take up to three weeks for a reply. We would encourage parents/guardians to fill out the form during the summer months (May, June and July) for a quicker response. Additionally, having all the routes established by August will result in more consistent bus service.

Q. Is there a time limit a student can spend on the school bus?

A. No. Alaska law does not specify the length of time a student is scheduled to ride on a bus. The District attempts to limit the travel time to not exceed one hour, one way. However, due to the large area that the District encompasses, longer ride times are possible and should be expected for routes, especially those in areas outside of city limits.

Q. What should I do if the bus does not arrive at its scheduled time?

A. If you are reasonably sure that the delay is not due to weather conditions, please allow at least 10 minutes before leaving the bus stop. School buses endure the same rush hour traffic conditions that commuters do. A traffic snarl, traffic accident, or road construction can easily throw off a bus's schedule. For the most accurate information, please access the "Where's My Bus?" app available on the District's website. Your log-in and password will be your primary

phone number used at the time of registration. This app will show where your student's bus is in the morning and afternoon and give you an estimated time of arrival. If you are unable to access the app, or it appears to be inaccurate, please contact the MSBSD's IT Call Center.

Q. I am not receiving Blackboard messages regarding my student's transportation. How do I opt in?

A. Call Blackboard Hotline at 855-505-STOP from the phone line that has opted out. Reply "START" to "60680" from the opt out phone line for non-emergency messages. Reply "START" to "54968" for emergency messages. Also, we suggest downloading the "MSBSD" app. If your student has been assigned to a regular bus route, and there is a delay of more than 10 minutes, a banner will display on the District's official app with the message.

Q. How do I report bullying that is taking place onboard a bus?

A. Reports of bullying are taken very seriously. The most effective way to reporting bullying on the bus is to download the "MSBSD" app and file a report under the option "TipLine". This report will go directly to the appropriate administrator of each school. The administrator will communicate directly with the contracted bus staff and the Pupil Transportation Department.

Q. How does PLC Mondays Work?

A. All MSBSD schools will start 60 minutes later on Mondays except for the first and last week of school. Dismissal times will remain the same. Secondary schools will start at 8:45 am and end at 2:15 pm. Elementary schools will start at 10:15 am and end at 3:45 pm. For more information on PLC Mondays, please see the District's FAQ online at <https://sites.google.com/view/plcmondays/home>.

Kindergarten Students

Q. How is kindergarten transportation determined?

- A. Kindergarten students enrolled in District programs may be transported with other students on regularly scheduled morning and afternoon bus runs. Transportation of kindergarten students is not provided when it requires a bus to be scheduled separately from the regularly scheduled morning and afternoon routes of other students.

Q. Will the bus pick my child up in front of the house?

- A. No, unless it is required per the Individual Education Program (IEP) of a student with disabilities. Parents/Guardians are responsible to see that the student is at the scheduled bus stop in time to board the school bus and be at the stop upon the student's return at the end of the school day.

Q. Are kindergarteners and first graders required to have an adult at the bus stop to receive them?

- A. Parents/Guardians must be at the bus stop, or plan to have an adult meet the bus, at the time their child is scheduled to be dropped off. Bus drivers are instructed not to leave a kindergarten or first grade student at a bus stop without an adult present.
- B. Parent/Guardians may designate a responsible adult or older sibling to receive a younger student by completing and submitting an "Authorization to Release Form." This form may be obtained from and returned to the bus driver.
- C. The bus driver will take the following steps when a parent/guardian is not at the bus stop to meet their kindergarten or first-grade student:
1. Driver contacts dispatcher.
 2. Contractor makes every reasonable effort to contact guardian or "emergency" contact by telephone while driver continues their route.
 3. If guardians are reached and will be at home, the student can be dropped off at home after the bus has completed the bus run.

4. If the guardian is unavailable, but another trusted adult will be receiving your students, please inform the individual designated to receive your child that the school bus driver may require to see the designee's identification.
5. If, after the bus completes the bus run and guardians are still unavailable at the stop, students will be taken back to their school or the Alaska State Troopers will be notified, and the child will be released to them. Guardians will be contacted by the contractor, if possible, and will be advised that they must pick up their child at the school or contact the Alaska State Troopers. Continued problems with delivery of students may cause transportation services to be discontinued.

Student Expectations

Q. How should I prepare my student for their bus riding experience?

A. We appreciate parents taking the time to prepare their students for a successful riding experience on board a bus. Here are some important ways parents can assist their student in that preparation:

1. **Proper Dress.** Alaskan winters are harsh, with extended periods of inclement or extremely cold weather. Buses occasionally break down and can be without heat until another bus arrives. Please make sure your student(s) are dressed properly, with many layers, for proper warmth.
2. **Be Visible.** There are many locations within the Mat-Su Valley that have low lighting during winter months. Please make sure your students are visible. This can be achieved by wearing reflectors, using flashlights and/or headlamps, and not dressing in all dark clothes.
3. **As the Bus Approaches.** While waiting for the bus; walk on the left-hand side of road facing traffic, remain a safe distance from the roadway, line up as the bus approaches, stay clear of the wheels until the school bus comes to a complete stop, and let the younger students go first.
4. **Follow Directions.** Students must follow the directions of the school bus driver. His/her primary concern is student safety.
5. **Be Nice to Others.** Students should exercise good manners, caution and consideration for other people.
6. **Assigned Seats.** Elementary students will be assigned seats by the driver. High school and middle school students may also be assigned seats at the driver's or schools' discretion.
7. **Bus Passes.** Students are required to ride the bus assigned to them, and to board and disembark at their assigned stop. Students may be transported to an unassigned bus stop or on a different bus on an occasional basis or for periods less than 30 days upon approval by the school office. Parents should follow their school's procedures for requesting a bus pass.
8. **Dismissal After Boarding the Bus.** Parents may not remove a student from a bus, after the student has boarded, without approval by a school administrator.

9. **School Bus Conduct Report.** Students will be issued a School Bus Conduct Report, by the driver, for infractions of the rules. The school bus driver and the school principals are responsible for handling misbehavior occurring on the school bus. Only the school administrator, or his/her designee, has the authority to suspend a student's bus riding privileges.

Q. What are the bus rules that I should discuss with my student?

1. Students may not have anything in their possession that may cause injury to others.
2. Hanging onto any portion of the school bus from the outside of the bus, whether the bus is moving or not, is illegal and dangerous.
3. Items that can be held in the student's lap or under the student's seat on the bus, may be transported. Musical instruments or sports equipment, which are smaller than 43" x 14" x 10" (approx. size of an acoustic guitar case) may be transported on the bus. These instruments must be placed in the seat with the student next to the window. Tubas, drums, and some base guitars or other instruments larger than specified above, may not be transported.
4. Any electronic devices that play music may be allowed on the bus only if it is audible to only the student using the device.
5. Any items not permitted at school may not be transported on the bus.
6. The District's digital media citizenship policies and expectations apply to the use of all electronics on the bus.
7. Parents are responsible for damages to the school bus due to misconduct of their student.
8. No animals, large or small, other than authorized (or pre-arranged) service animals, are allowed on the bus at any time.
9. Ice skates must have protective guards on the blades or be placed in an appropriate box. Paper bags are not adequate blade protection. Hockey sticks may only be transported in hockey stick bags. The hockey bag may be transported either under the seat or in the seat with the student next to the window.

10. Skis, ski poles and other items with sharp edged objects, will not be permitted unless previously coordinated with the school's principal and the Transportation Department. Sleds and plastic toboggans may not be transported.

Q. What is expected of students while on board a school bus?

- A. In general, classroom conduct will be observed. The school bus is not a playground. Save horseplay and wrestling for another place and time.
1. Place books and other gear in your lap.
 2. Avoid loud talking, screaming or anything else that may distract the driver.
 3. Do not sit in the driver's seat or interfere with him/her in any manner or at any time.
 4. Keep quiet near railroad crossings so that the driver can listen for approaching trains.
 5. Keep head, arms, and body inside the bus.
 6. Do not vape, smoke, eat, drink or make use of, or have in possession, alcohol, drugs, or controlled substances on the bus.
 7. Do not throw objects inside or outside of the bus.
 8. Remain seated until the bus has come to a complete stop and only get off the bus at your assigned bus stop.
 9. Do not open windows without permission. Windows may only be opened max down, two (2) notches.
 10. Do not damage the bus and always assist in keeping it clean.
 11. Keep feet on the floor in front of the seat you are sitting in. Do not have feet in the aisle.
 12. Fighting with other students and/or attacking other students or the driver is prohibited.
 13. Use of abusive, vulgar language or directing such language toward other students or adults is prohibited.
 14. Keeps aisles and exits clear.
 15. The emergency door and exit controls may be used only during supervised drills and actual emergencies.

Q. What is the standard process for waiting at the bus stop?

1. All students must be ready for pick-up 5 minutes prior to the scheduled pick-up time. Buses must operate on a firm schedule to provide consistent service and for schools to start on time.
2. Walk on the left-hand side of the road facing traffic.
3. Line up at the place designated by the bus driver when the school bus approaches.
4. Stay clear of the wheels until the school bus has come to a complete stop.
5. When boarding, go directly to your seat and be seated.
6. After you leave the bus, go directly home or to your assigned drop off location.

Q. What are the requirements of a driver of a vehicle when they approach a school bus that is disembarking students?

- A. Drivers in school zones must obey reduced speed limits during school hours when students are present. When a school bus is traveling on a two-lane roadway and is stopped with red lights, and the stop arm extended to pick-up or drop off pupils, the vehicles in all lanes of traffic must stop. Vehicles should stop at least 20 feet before reaching the school bus to allow students to cross the roadway safely. When a school bus is traveling on a four-lane roadway with at least two lanes of traffic traveling in the opposite direction, only those lanes of traffic traveling in the same direction as the school bus must stop. Students will not be required to cross four or more lanes of traffic to reach their residence. When a school bus is traveling on a one-way roadway and is stopped to pick up or drop off pupils, all lanes of traffic must stop, regardless of the number of lanes of traffic. Drivers should be aware that school buses make stops at all railroad crossings. State laws requires all school buses to stop at railroad crossings, whether students are present or not. The school bus driver will pull to the right-hand lane, display the hazard warning lights, stop the bus within 15 and 50 feet of the first rail of the railroad crossing, open the driver window and service door, look, and listen for an approaching train, and then proceed across the tracks without changing gears. Other vehicles should not try to cross the tracks behind the school bus until the bus has cleared the tracks and there is

room for the vehicle behind the bus on the other side. Some railroad crossings have limited space between rail crossings and stop signs or signals on the other side of the tracks. If the school bus must make a stop after crossing the tracks, a vehicle following the bus may be trapped on the tracks until the bus moves or the stop signal light changes. This could have tragic results should a train approach the crossing and vehicles are unable to go forward or backward to clear the tracks.

Special Education Transportation

Q. Are districts required to provide transportation for students with Special Needs?

- A. MSBSD provides transportation for all students with IEP's that include a transportation plan. The Pupil Transportation Department will provide services that are based on the student's individual needs. This procedure will be part of the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed by Student Support Services in cooperation with the Pupil Transportation Department.

Q. Are districts required to provide transportation for Special Needs Students from a personal driveway to their school?

- A. No. Curb-to-curb service is not the required service per Alaska State Statutes. Every effort is made to establish stops in a safe and convenient location. Safety will always take precedence over other criteria when establishing a pick-up and drop-off location. Please make sure that your home address is clearly identifiable from the street.
- B. As part of our safety criteria, established by the District, we often reference the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development regulation 4 AAC 27.011 (a) (2) which may apply: the entire route must be over regularly maintained roads, having at least a gravel surface, which are under the supervision and all-weather maintenance of the Alaska Department of Highways, a public utility district, a municipality, a borough service area, or any other agency supported by public funds. Adequate turn around space for transportation vehicles must be available on the route.
- C. During Alaska winters, snow berms may decrease the width of streets and the turning radius in cul-de-sacs. Your student's pick-up point may need to be relocated if the bus cannot safely navigate the streets. Cars parked in cul-de-sacs and on narrow streets also create problems for school bus access. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and their contractors have been cooperative in removing snow when notified of bus routes. All bus stops are subject to the approval of the MSBSD Pupil Transportation Department.

Q. What should happen if my special education student is not riding the bus to school?

- A. The Parent/Guardian should call the contractor's (First Student) dispatch office at (907) 357-6327 and inform them their student will not be riding that day.

Q. What should I do to prepare my student for their special education transportation?

1. All students must be ready for pick-up five (5) minutes prior to the scheduled pick-up time.
2. Buses must operate on a definite schedule to provide consistent service, and for schools to start on time. Buses will wait only one (1) minute after arrival at the end of the driveway.
3. The bus will not depart your stop until it is the designated pick-up time. It is imperative that your student be ready on time. If the bus is required to wait for each student on the route, the bus will be late for school.
4. The parent/guardian is responsible for assisting the student from the house to the bus in the morning, and from the bus to the house in the evening. Drivers and attendants will not come to your door.
5. The contractor's personnel will notify you if your student's pick-up time changes more than five (5) minutes from the previous schedule.
6. If bus arrives three (3) consecutive days without being notified that the student is not riding, bus service will be discontinued until a phone call is received reinstating the service.

Q. What should I do to prepare my student for their arrival home?

- A. A student is only permitted to leave the bus at the school or at their designated stop. If the Parent/Guardian is unable to meet the bus and had not made other arrangements to have a responsible person receive their student at the designated drop-off point, the bus driver will be instructed to take the student back to school or the Alaska State Troopers will be notified. The parent/guardian will be notified where they must pick-up their student, as soon as possible. The school bus driver will only be able to release a student without a

parent/guardian present if prior written consent or "Authorization to Release Form" is on file with the contractor. The form may be obtained from the bus driver. Please provide the individual designated to receive your student with written permission to do so. The school bus driver may require that the designee provide identification.

- B. Continued problems with delivery of students may cause transportation services to discontinue.

Q. What happens if we do not call in a special education or preschool student's absence?

- A. After three (3) consecutive days of uncommunicated absences, bussing service will be discontinued until the parent/guardian calls either the contractor's dispatch office or the Pupil Transportation Department, to reinstate service.

Q. Can the driver drop off a special education student at a different address if they have a note/pass?

- A. No. The bus driver cannot alter the pick-up or drop-off location with prior approval from the Pupil Transportation Department.

Q. How do I update my student's pick-up and drop-off location?

- A. First, if it is a home address that has changed, please verify the correct address in Parent Vue. Second, please contact your student's special education teacher to request an address change. The teacher or administrator will update your student's file, which, when filled out properly, will automatically send a request to the District's Pupil Transportation Department. Changes must be submitted by noon on Friday, to go into effect on Wednesday of the following week. This allows time for the contractor's staff (bus drivers/attendance) to update families with any time changes.

Q. How do I remove a safety vest from my student's file?

A. Contact your student's special education teacher to request the removal of the vest from their IEP.

Q. Why does the bus arrive at different times during the week?

A. Traffic, weather, other students who ride, and small changes in the route, mean that the bus will not get to your house at the exact time every day. For example, if the student that is normally picked up before your student is not riding, then the bus may be earlier. Also, if there is a road delay on the route, then the bus may be late.

Q. Can my student's route be changed? Can I request a different driver or attendant?

A. Months of planning go into scheduling each route. Changes in buses, routes, time of pick up and/or drop off should be expected throughout the school year because of student additions, withdrawals, or address changes. After the initial adjustment period at the start of the school year, parents will be notified if their student's pick-up or drop-off time is adjusted more than five minutes or has been moved to another route. For time changes, students will bring home a time change slip, given to them by their bus driver. Drivers, attendants, and monitors are all personnel of the contractor, and not the District.