

Financing Special Education in New Jersey

New Jersey School Boards Association

September 2007

Transportation Costs for Students with Disabilities

Special Education Transportation. When students with disabilities are placed in another public school or a private school for the disabled, they must be taken there by bus. The number of students transported, the distances they must travel and the location of the routes influence total costs. In 2005, districts reported \$396,850,646 in special needs transportation in the state Audit Summary, equaling 7.3% of all mandated bussing. This transportation was provided through district-owned busses (15%, representing employee salaries and benefits), vendors (44%), joint agreements (16%), and Educational Services Commissions or County Transportation Service Agreements (26%).

Transportation aid has been frozen for seven years at \$284 million. If 7.3% of that aid were attributed to the transporting of students with special needs, \$20,732,000 could be counted as special education transportation aid. (Information on transportation by district is not known; therefore, it could not be used to analyze the revenue rates among districts.)

The chart below shows the types of transportation providers used by districts, according to region, grade-range/operating type, and district factor group – an indicator of socio-economic status ranging from A (lowest) to J. (highest).

Percent of Transportation by Provider					
District Group	District (Salary/ Benefits)	Vendors	Joint Agree- ments	ESC- CTSA	Total
New Jersey	15	44	16	26	100
North	8	49	18	26	100
Central	18	42	11	29	100
South	33	30	17	20	100
A. K-6	26	18	37	19	100
B. K-8 / 0-400	8	20	20	52	100
C. K-8 / 401-750	11	28	26	36	100
D. K-8 / 751 +	31	15	25	30	100
E. K-12 / 0-1800	12	24	35	29	100
F. K-12 / 1801-3500	20	38	22	21	100
G. K-12 / 3501 +	16	39	8	36	100
H. 7-12 / 9-12	25	30	22	24	100
A*	6*	31	6	57	100
B	14	46	21	19	100
CD	25	28	17	30	100
DE	27	30	19	24	100
FG	27	38	9	26	100
GH	23	39	15	23	100
I	21	30	21	29	100

J	12	27	25	35	100
* Employee (non-salary) benefits in DFG A were not reported and, therefore, could not be included in the state, regional or operating type totals for district-provided transportation.					

The northern and central regions rely on vendors and county consortia for over 80% of their transportation. In these regions, very little transportation is provided using district-owned busses. Being more rural and needing more transportation for general education as well as for special education students, districts in the south divide their transportation by about one-third each among their own buses, vendors and county or joint agreements. By operating type, smaller K-6, K-8 and K-12 districts rely on county consortia or joint agreements from half to three-quarters of the time. The remainder of transportation in these districts is divided between district-owned busses and vendors. The larger K-12 and secondary districts rely on county consortia or joint agreements for over 40% of their transportation, vendors for 35%, with the remainder provided through district busses. DFG A and DFG J districts use county consortia and joint agreements for over 60% of their special education transportation and vendors for 30%. DFG B districts divide transportation about equally between vendors and county arrangements. The remaining DFGs provide about 25% of their special education transportation through district-owned buses, about one-third through vendors, and the rest through county arrangements.

The number of students with disabilities who are transported has increased by 40% since 1997. Almost half the students transported are sent to separate public or private schools. The other half is transported to other public schools. (*Transportation statistics do not include students with disabilities who travel to school on the general education school bus without special accommodations designated in their individual education programs.*)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Students with Disabilities with Special Needs – Number Transported	14,179	30,262	32,425	35,278	37,573	38,754	39,612	39,337	41,235	42,168
Growth from Previous Year		113.4%	7.1%	8.8%	6.5%	3.1%	2.2%	-0.7%	4.8%	2.3%
Students in Separate Public and Private Schools	14,314	14,981	17,107	17,202	18,044	18,607	19,232	19,600	20,260	19,777
Percent Transported to Public-Private Schools	100	49.5	52.8	48.8	48.0	48.0	48.6	49.8	49.13	46.9

It is not known why the number of students transported in 1996 was half that of successive years; however, it appears that the students sent to other public schools may have been omitted from the count.

District Group	Transportation Costs	SE Students Transported	Per Pupil Trans Cost
New Jersey	\$396,850,646	38,298	\$10,362
North	\$212,576,178	15,274	\$13,918
Central	\$113,848,442	12,282	\$9,270
South	\$70,426,026	10,742	\$6,556
A. K-6	\$6,281,783	442	\$14,212
B. K-8 / 0-400	\$3,491,409	396	\$8,817
C. K-8 / 401-750	\$6,958,549	718	\$9,692

D. K-8 / 751 +	\$33,322,964	2,654	\$12,556
E. K-12 / 0-1800	\$15,934,070	2,132	\$7,474
F. K-12 / 1801-3500	\$32,644,010	4,708	\$6,934
G. K-12 / 3501 +	\$191,585,543	23,590	\$8,121
H. 7-12 / 9-12	\$20,543,823	3,462	\$5,934
A	\$71,271,951	11,172	\$6,380
B	\$32,939,055	4,476	\$7,359
CD	\$28,628,275	3,354	\$8,536
DE	\$31,881,362	4,508	\$7,072
FG	\$37,312,257	3,956	\$9,432
GH	\$46,998,452	5,170	\$9,091
I	\$49,640,890	4,548	\$10,915
J	\$9,534,894	834	\$11,433

The total transportation costs for students with disabilities with special needs in the north are about twice that in the central region and three times that in the south. For the sake of discussion, the number of students transported in each region, operating type and district factor group was estimated at twice the number of students sent to separate public and private schools in those areas. The total special education transportation costs in each district group was divided by the estimated number of students transported to get an estimate of the per pupil transportation cost. The state average was \$10,362; however, it was much more expensive in the north (\$13,918) than in the central region (\$9,270) or south (\$6,556). The highest per pupil costs by operating type were in small K-8 districts (\$14,212) and large K-8 districts (\$12,556). The lowest cost was in very large K-12 districts (\$6,934). The rest ranged from \$8,000 to \$9,000 per pupil. The transportation costs increased steadily as socio-economic status increased, with per pupil costs in DFG A districts averaging \$6,380 and in DFG J districts, \$11,433.