



## Transportation Department

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### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Regarding School Bus Transportation

Red Deer Public Schools follows Alberta Education's guidelines and policies pertaining to student eligibility and distances. Below is a list of "Frequently Asked Questions" to assist you with any inquiries. If your question is not on this list, please email [transportation@rdpsd.ab.ca](mailto:transportation@rdpsd.ab.ca) and we will get back to you as soon as possible. Schools might also be able to assist you depending on the question.

#### Eligibility

##### What does "designated school" mean?

*Answer.* A designated school is one in which The Board has directed the student to attend; by virtue of the area they live in (school attendance boundary) or by the (special) educational program they are enrolled in.

##### What does "school of choice" mean?

*Answer.* A school of choice is one in which the student has chosen to attend other than their designated school. Students who are attending a school of choice are not eligible for subsidized transportation as per Alberta Education Transportation Department funding guidelines. The responsibility to provide transportation to and from the school of choice remains with the parent(s). In the event there is space available on a chartered (yellow) bus that is serving that school, the student may apply for approved ineligible status (AIS) and may access the chartered bus at an established bus stop for a fee. No new bus stops will be created for AIS students.

##### What is an eligible student?

*Answer.* Alberta Education defines *eligible* students for transportation funding as those residing 2.4 kms or greater from their designated school, or residing 2.4 kms from their designated school and 2.4 kms from their attended school of choice.

##### What is an ineligible student?

*Answer.* An *ineligible* student is one who lives less than 2.4 km away from his/her designated school. If an ineligible student wishes to access RDPSD's transportation, he/she is automatically subject to an *Ineligible Rider fee*. Refer to the information below regarding living more than 1.6kms from a designated elementary school.

### **What if I live more than 1.6 kms and less than 2.4 kms from my designated elementary school?**

*Answer.* Students residing between 1.6 km and 2.39 kms from their designated elementary school will receive approval to be eligible for busing. Because this is a board policy and not an Alberta Government funding guideline, there will be a fee attached if requiring transportation.

### **What if I live less than 1.6 kms from my designated elementary school?**

*Answer.* Students residing less than 1.6 km from their designated elementary school will be required to provide their own transportation. In the event there are empty seats on a chartered bus that is serving that school, the student may apply for approved ineligible status (AIS) and may access the chartered bus at a previously established bus stop. There will be an applicable fee for this service.

### **Why is the Christian and Spanish Bilingual school not considered a designated school?**

*Answer.* The Christian and Spanish Bilingual schools are not recognized programs for funding by Alberta Education, therefore will always be considered a school of choice.

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## **Charter (Yellow bus)- General**

### **How do I apply for transportation for my child?**

*Answer.* Applications can be found on the RDPSD website and are fillable. These completed forms can be emailed to the school and to transportation. Applications are also accepted directly at the schools. Please allow for up to 4 business days before transportation might be activated

### **How do I know if my son/daughter is eligible for Transportation to school?**

*Answer.* Red Deer Public Schools establishes designated schools for each area of the city. Eligibility for transportation services is determined by the distance from a student's primary residence (a student can only have one primary residence for designation) to their designated school. Guidelines for determining distances are established by the Department of Education. Designated schools for the various areas of the city are outlined on the Red Deer Public School District website at <http://www.rdpsd.ab.ca/AttendanceBoundaries.php>. Schools will typically know who is eligible or not depending on distances displayed on Powerschool.

### **Should I have received any information confirming his/her application?**

*Answer.* No, all "eligible" applications are automatically confirmed and considered as having a seat on the bus. ("eligible" = attending his/her designated school, in grades K to 5 and over the 1.6 km minimum walk distance). Student specific transportation information can be found on the Powerschool Parent Portal. Please allow up to 4 business days for confirmation.

## **How do I pay my transportation fees?**

*Answer.* Families are encouraged to submit their student transportation payments online using their Powerschool Parent account. The fees should be entered into Powerschool by the school once fees are established. If there are questions about the fees or payments, please direct them to the school.

## **How are parents notified of route revisions?**

*Answer.* Routes are occasionally revised to add stops for new students, for students that have a change of residence, and to eliminate stops that are no longer required. These changes may affect the pickup/ drop off times for other stops on the route. Specific student Transportation information can be found on the Powerschool Parent Portal. Large route changes are typically accompanied by a School Messenger message asking parents to check Powerschool for the change. In some cases the change may also be distributed to the riders as they exit the bus. This allows information to be given to parents in a timely fashion. The school has access to the student Transportation information also.

## **Where can I find the location of the bus route or bus stop closest to me?**

*Answer.* The most up to date bus stop information for all of our bus routes can be found by contacting the attending school or the Transportation Department

## **How are bus stops determined?**

*Answer.* School bus routes are developed each year based upon actual enrollment of (transportation) eligible students. Student pickup and drop-off locations may change from year to year based upon actual student enrollment and geographic distribution. School bus routes are developed to allow the school bus to travel in the most direct route through neighborhoods. Students are expected to cross neighborhood streets and to walk up to the guideline distances to and from the school bus stop. School bus stops normally serve multiple students residing near the stop point. Unfortunately, it is not possible to locate all school bus pickup locations within sight of the home and visibility from the residence is not a factor in the establishment of school bus stops. If the student is in KI or Grade 1, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to provide supervision while walking to and from, and while waiting at the pickup location. RDPSSD has a policy of no more than 500 meters from a residence to a stop (might not always apply due to accessibility issues). Bus stops will only be located in residential areas. Because of safety concerns we will not consider bus stops in commercial or retail locations.

## **Can my child have more than one bus stop?**

*Answer.* Section 273 of the School Act states that a person can have only one primary residence for school purposes, therefore, the student's primary residential address is what determines eligibility. If another bus stop is requested, we will look at bus capacity and bus availability to determine approval. There will be a \$300 fee for any additional buses being utilized. If the stop requested is part of the students current bus route, there is no fee.

## **How far ahead of time should my child be at the bus stop?**

*Answer.* We recommend you take your child to the bus stop at least 5 minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive.

## **Why is my child's bus late?**

*Answer.* School bus routes can be delayed for a variety of reasons including Weather, traffic, driver absenteeism, maintenance difficulties, unacceptable student behavior and unforeseen incidents. Students should remain at their assigned school bus stop for at least 15 minutes after the scheduled pickup time. Parents/guardians who leave for work before the scheduled school bus pickup time should make arrangements with a neighbor or family member to assist their child(ren) in case of an unscheduled delay.

- Sometimes bus routes must be doubled out or run as a second load to or from the school due to the regular driver being absent (and therefore a temporary driver may be driving the route).
- City construction can temporarily delay buses
- Drivers check buses before their routes and sometimes find mechanical problems that can cause delays and require driving a different bus for that day. This can cause the bus to be behind schedule.
- Not enough drivers. The Public School district (and its contracted transportation service provider) is not immune to staffing shortages similar to other City service companies. Our Transportation services provider is constantly recruiting drivers to mitigate the risk of insufficient, qualified bus drivers.
- Student management issues. There are times when a bus may be rerouted back to the school for school staff to deal with a student's behavior issues.

## **Why can't you come further into my sub-division?**

*Answer.* School buses come in various sizes ranging from 25 to 36 feet long, 20,000-26,000 pounds, 12- 13 feet high and 6-9 feet wide. The length of the bus is one thing that limits school bus maneuverability in Cul-de-sacs, Crescents, Closes and other tight places. Smaller buses can turn in a shorter radius, while longer buses cannot maneuver the same circle without backing the bus, which is avoided in bus routing if possible. In the winter environment, many secondary streets are either poorly plowed or not plowed at all resulting in buses becoming stuck, blocking the road and severely congested traffic and extending bus route times. Bus routes are not divided up into winter and summer routes, therefore winter conditions are taken into consideration during the route planning phase. Please know that we design school bus routes to be as safe and convenient as possible but obviously it is inconceivable to think that it would be ideal for all students. Under no circumstances will any bus be routed to back down streets, execute a three-point turn around maneuver, travel on unpaved roads, enter situations that require a backing maneuver, travel on roadways that are narrow or impassable or restricted by vegetation.

### **Why does my child have to cross a busy road to access the stop location?**

*Answer.* School bus stops are established based upon the most current information available at the time the route is planned and are normally designed to serve multiple students residing near the stop. Yellow bus routes can be long due to the geographic area covered. Minimizing student ride-times is a high priority and therefore the necessity to maintain routes along the collector/main roads (which are often busy) is a necessary practice. We realize that in order to access yellow bus service, roads will have to be crossed and that an escort for the children is prudent and that crosswalks are used when available. Although RDPSD makes it mandatory to have a parent/guardian/or older responsible sibling accompany any students in Kindergarten or grade 1 to and from a stop, we encourage parents to walk with any students if you have any concerns about the stop.

### **Why can't last minute busing changes be granted?**

*Answer.* SAFETY is our main goal and concern. All buses have seating plans and attendance is taken regularly. In order to ensure the driver and RDPSD have the most accurate information, there is time needed to get everything updated. Please allow up to 4 business days from applying to being able to ride the bus.

### **Can my child bring his friend home after school with him on the bus?**

*Answer.* The School District operates a large and very complex school bus route system. To ensure the safety of our students, only those students who have submitted a Charter Transportation Application, have been approved for yellow bus service, and hold a current bus pass are authorized to ride the bus. For the bus driver to have the most accurate attendance manifest, students will not be allowed to bring other students with them on a bus they are not assigned to.

### **Can my son be transported from his school to a location other than home for sports?**

*Answer.* Transportation service **is not provided** for students to or from any location other than the regular assigned school bus stop. Transportation to personal after school activities such as medical visits, tutoring, recreational activities, shopping religious instruction or other activities is the responsibility of the parent or guardian.

### **Can my child get off wherever they want to in the afternoon?**

*Answer.* To avoid multiple problems, the driver is not authorized to transport any student other than those registered to ride that particular bus. A student may, with a note signed by the parent, be permitted to get off at a different bus stop as long as this bus stop is located on the assigned bus route of that student. This allows the drivers to focus on driving and safety instead of having to decide whether the student should be allowed to change their routine and get off with a friend without the parent's knowledge or permission. This should

be the decision of the parent. The driver has no other way to verify that the parent has made this decision. This best practice avoids confusion and the chance of students getting lost or running away. Only students registered to ride that particular bus may ride on that bus and they must possess a bus pass that designates that bus.

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## **Special Needs Transportation**

### **My son/daughter is in a special education program. How will they be transported?**

*Answer.* A committee of people already involved in a student's education determines transportation needs. After it has been determined that the student would benefit from being transported apart from the mainstream students, the student's family and his/her teacher will complete the appropriate applications. This application process is in two parts: Part 1 - *The Special Transportation Application* is completed and signed by the student's parent or guardian. Part 2 - *The Special Transportation Request* is completed, substantiated and signed by the student's teacher or Student Services. Both of these forms must be submitted together to the school and forwarded to the Transportation office for processing. The school offering the system program becomes your child's designated school. If in need of the Action Bus, that form will need to be filled out by the school in place of the *Special Transportation Request*.

### **I have curb service for a child with special education needs. Can I make arrangements for a sibling to ride that bus?**

*Answer.* Only students that have been approved for special needs transportation are eligible to ride a bus designated for special needs. Alberta Education provides transportation funding for special needs students with the stipulation that only special needs students are on that particular bus. Funding for special needs transportation is calculated differently than regular busing due to the complex needs of the student.

### **How long does it take to set up transportation for my special needs child?** *Answer.*

Three (3) to four (4) days minimum are needed to obtain all emergency information, process routing information, contact drivers and communicate with parents. Please understand that special needs students are on buses that are not on a regularly established bus route and when additional students are added or removed, all students riding that bus are affected.

### **What is the average time length of the ride for special needs students?**

*Answer.* Our goal for students within the Red Deer Public School District is to have no more than one hour ride times. These buses pick up students all over the City and in most cases service multiple schools, therefore may ride longer than regular routes.

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## **City Of Red Deer Transit**

### **Who utilizes public transportation?**

*Answer.* Students residing in the City of Red Deer, attending their designated school in grades 6 to 12 can access City public Transit buses. Students that reside 2.4 km or greater away from their designated school will receive a yearly public Transit pass at no cost, and the pass can be picked up at the school's main office. Ineligible riders must purchase a bus

pass directly from the City of Red Deer Transportation Dept.

### **How do I get a City Transit bus pass for a Middle or High School student?**

*Answer.* All eligible students wishing to receive a subsidized City Transit bus pass must complete an application form annually. There are two (2) types of City Transit passes available to an eligible student; (subsidized) restricted and the (subsidized plus the cost difference) unrestricted. Transit transportation applications are submitted online.

<http://www.rdpsd.ab.ca/Application%20Forms%20and%20Fees.php>

### **What is the difference between a “restricted” and an “unrestricted” Transit bus pass?**

Restricted passes are for use Monday to Friday during the school year.

Unrestricted passes may be used at all times City Transit operates during the school year.

### **Who is eligible for the unrestricted City Transit bus pass?**

*Answer.* Eligibility for transportation is determined by the distance a student lives from their designated school. The distance for eligibility for grades 6-12 is 2.4 kms or greater. The distance is measured from the student’s residence to the school property.

Students who live 2.4kms or greater from their *designated* school will be eligible to receive a *restricted* bus pass each year for no additional cost, upon completion of the application form. These students may also choose to upgrade to an *unrestricted* bus pass for an additional fee.

Students attending a *school of choice* are eligible for subsidized (restricted) transportation if they live 2.4 kms or greater from both their attending school of choice and their designated school.

Students living less than 2.4 kms from their *designated school* will be required to purchase an unrestricted bus pass from the City Transportation Dept.

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## **Inclement Weather and School Closures**

### **When is it too dangerous to transport students to school due to inclement weather?**

*Answer.* The Superintendent of schools is responsible for the final decision to close schools due to inclement weather. The decision will be made after administrative staff report from various positions in the City regarding road conditions. Other factors considered are school facility information (i.e. lack of heat, water, power etc.), school parking lot conditions, temperature and wind chill, snow and ice build up on main and secondary roads and weather forecasts and predictions.

### **How are parents notified if schools are closed due to weather?**

*Answer.* Once a decision has been made to close the schools, the public will immediately be

notified. Our website at <http://www.rdpsd.ab.ca> is immediately updated as well as all local radio stations are contacted and requested to broadcast this information. A message will also be sent out via School Messenger to students affected. If the schools close during the day, the students will be sent home on their regularly scheduled bus unless other directions are on file at the student's school indicating otherwise. **UNFORTUNATELY UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, SCHOOLS CANNOT ACCEPT PHONED-IN ALTERNATE DIRECTIONS THAT DAY.** Please give your child's school written instructions regarding inclement weather transportation ASAP if non-routine transportation is to be used.

### **Under what weather conditions will schools be closed?**

*Answer.* The practice of the Red Deer Public School District is to keep the schools open, if at all possible. In this way, we are able to meet our responsibility to provide access to education, to provide a safe haven for children during severe weather conditions, and to meet the needs of parents who wish/need to send their children to school. As a result, it is extremely rare for the schools to be closed. However, if extreme weather conditions cause power outages in schools, or roads and sidewalks become impassable due to snow or other conditions, the schools *may* be closed. If this occurs, announcements to that effect will be posted on our website, message sent out via School Messenger, and will be broadcasted on local radio stations.

### **Under what conditions are school buses cancelled?**

*Answer.* In the Red Deer Public School district, buses will operate as long as the roads are passable and the bus contractor feels that the buses can be operated safely. The Red Deer Public School District closely works with two different busing contractors; City of Red Deer and Prairie Bus Lines. When severe weather conditions occur, representatives of these contractors will contact the District's Transportation Manager if they feel they cannot operate their buses safely at the time. If buses will not be operating on a particular day, a message will be sent via School Messenger, announcements will be made on local media outlets and will be posted on our District website. If buses are operating, they will be operated as close to the established schedule as possible, but delays may occur and should be expected.

### **Will the schools be open if the buses are not running?**

*Answer.* In most cases, yes. Keeping the schools open and operating and whether buses are running are two separate decisions.

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## **Other Questions**

### **I recently moved to Red Deer County, how do I get busing to a Red Deer Public school?**

*Answer.* Red Deer Public School Division only transports within the City of Red Deer boundary and does not transport students from the County into the City of Red Deer. Red Deer County residents are designated to attend Chinook's Edge School Division or Wolf Creek School division schools in the surrounding County. All school transportation services from the County are provided by either Chinooks' Edge School Division (for those living West, East and South of Red Deer) or by Wolf Creek School Division (for residents living North of Red Deer).



Please contact one of the above County school divisions for transportation information.

**I recently moved to the City of Red Deer, how do I access busing to a Public school?**

*Answer.* Charter (Yellow) Transportation Applications for Elementary schools are available at the attending school or online. City Transit applications are submitted online. Please complete appropriate form either online or at the school and submit/email to the school office for processing. Any fees can be paid through the Powerschool parent portal.

**How do I know if my child will be on a yellow bus or a City Transit bus?**

*Answer.* All “eligible” elementary students, including Kindergarten children, are transported on yellow school buses. With the exception of Westpark Middle School, all “eligible” Middle and High School students are transported on Red Deer City Transit. Eligible Westpark Middle School students are transported on a yellow charter school bus.



