The Office of Supporting Programs, Pupil Transportation, is responsible for the management of a statewide comprehensive student transportation program and the statewide Driver Education and Traffic Safety Education Program. Staff in Pupil Transportation are always available to assist any local education agency in planning, establishing, and maintaining a successful transportation program.

Although a portion of public charter school costs (expenditures) will be offset by state transportation allocations, reimbursement should be considered as a separate issue after basic estimated costs has been identified. If the local school system or private provider provides the transportation services for any public charter school, state funding will be based and calculated according to the same funding formula used by other public schools.

If the agreement is that the transportation will be provided by the local school system, the local school system will require the same lead-time and information that would be required for the opening of any other new school. This planning generally requires, as early as possible, specific answers to the following questions:

- **What is the planned opening date of the public charter school and when will transportation service be needed?** The local school system will need as much as a six months’ to one-year lead-time if it has to acquire additional equipment and/or operators.

- **What is the location of the public charter school facility?**

- **Where do the public charter school students live?** The local school system may require a specific list of student addresses or at least the estimated number of students from specific neighborhoods or areas of the district who will be attending the public charter school.

- **What are the desired opening and closing (bell) times of the public charter school?**

- **If transportation is provided by the local school system, will the local school system be granted the authority to establish bell times to improve bus utilization and efficiency?** Coordinating bell times with other schools and transportation schedules allows local school systems to dedicate routes using existing buses [i.e., use buses on multiple runs] or incorporate public charter school students into existing routes.

- **How many days, and on which days, will the public charter school operate?**

- **Will transportation be provided following after-school activities?**

- **What is the public charter school zone outer boundary (reasonable distance)?** What, if any, transportation services within two miles does the charter school plan to offer?
• Are there any students with special needs requiring school buses to be equipped with wheelchair lifts, air conditioning, infant/toddler seats, and/or specialized equipment for students with medical complexities? If yes, how many students with disabilities will require specialized transportation equipment? Where do they reside?

• What is the traffic situation on and around the public charter school grounds and facility, and has a separate student loading/unloading area for parents been established for school buses?

• Is the public charter school offering a breakfast program that would necessitate early transportation?

• May all students from the same area be transported simultaneously? (e.g., Will elementary and middle school students be transported on the same bus to a multi-grade public charter school?)

• May public charter school students be integrated into existing routes with other public school students?

• Will transportation be expected on days when the non-charter public schools are not in session?

The above list is not intended to be all-inclusive or prohibitive; however, the answers to these and other basic questions are necessary to develop reasonably accurate cost estimates and to plan the transportation services. Such considerations should be used as a “checklist” of items for potential public charter school operators and local school systems when formulating an agreement. The cost of transporting students to such specialized enrollment schools is often much higher than for traditional public schools due to traditional public schools’ inherent economies of scale, their limited geographic zones or attendance areas, and the ability of the local school system to coordinate all traditional public schools’ schedules to maximize economy.

Monitoring Requirements

The Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety, states, “There should be a single State agency having primary administrative responsibility for pupil transportation...” The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), Pupil Transportation, is the prescribed state agency in Alabama. The ALSDE Pupil Transportation Section is charged with monitoring local boards of education that provide transportation services to ensure they comply with established state and federal laws/guidelines/rules/regulations. With this authorization, the ALSDE monitors each local school system’s transportation safety compliance on a scheduled basis. With the establishment of public charter schools, the ALSDE will have a duty, in turn, to monitor public charter schools, which includes assessing the compliance of public charter schools with requirements relating to student transportation safety.
The following documentation of compliance is monitored periodically by the ALSDE Pupil Transportation Section using the following criteria:

- **Vehicles used for transporting students:**
  All students should be transported only in vehicles that conform to state and federal safety specifications. *Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety; Code of Alabama, 16-27-1 and 16-27-3*

- **School Bus Evacuation Drills:**
  Documentation should be sufficient to confirm that all students (regular riders and non-riders that may ride occasionally) and all persons qualified to transport students participated in school bus emergency evacuation drills on buses serving the school during the first six weeks of each semester in accordance with laws and rules. *Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety*

- **School Bus Loading Zones:**
  Supervision should be provided and school bus loading zones should be designed and located to minimize hazards to students. Vehicular traffic directional and warning signs should be posted and traffic monitored to ensure an orderly and safe flow. *Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety*

- **School Bus Operator Licensure/Qualifications:**
  All persons who drive school buses that transport students must meet the requirements of law and State Board of Education rules related to background checks, physical examination, proper licensing, training, qualifications, and requests for driving history records. *Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety; Code of Alabama, 16-27-4 and 16-27-4.1; Alabama Act Number 2002-457*

- **School Bus Inspection Records:**
  There is a system of record keeping verifying that all school buses have been inspected in accordance with law and rule, whether daily, monthly, or annually. *Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety; Code of Alabama, 16-27-5*

- **School Bus Safety Inspections:**
  Physical inspections of school buses verify that the buses are inspected thoroughly by the driver, local school systems, or ALSDE inspectors, whether daily, monthly, or annually, and school buses are maintained in safe operating condition. *Highway Safety Program, Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Safety; Code of Alabama, 16-27-3 and 16-27-5*

- **School Bus Routes:**
  School bus routes should be designed to eliminate students sitting in the floor or standing in the aisle while the bus is in motion and maintain current route maps and information on all school bus routes.
Drug Testing:
All local school systems that provide transportation services should comply with drug testing requirements concerning pre-employment, random, reasonable suspicion, and post-accident drug screenings. *Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act of 1991*

Mechanic Certification:
Each local school system that provides and maintains a transportation program should employ a minimum of one certified mechanic per 25 school buses. *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), r. 292-020-040-.06(3)*

Special Needs Transportation Services:
Any local school system providing transportation as a related service to any student who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) should ensure that he/she is allowed the same opportunities as his/her non-disabled peers, including a full (not shortened) school day and are afforded the least restrictive environment (LRE), as decided by the IEP Team. Any students transported in a school bus where the use of a wheelchair securement or occupant restraint system is required should comply with the latest guidelines for ensuring safe transportation. *Code of Alabama 16-39-2(3)(7); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 29 U.S.C. *794, and its implementing regulation, 34 C.F.R. Part 104; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, 42 U.S.C. *12131, and its implementing regulation, 28 C.F.R. Part 35; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*

Transportation Funding:
All transportation reports should contain accurate data. *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), r. 290-2-1-.03(2)(a), (b) & (3)*
All operating funds should be expended in an efficient manner and only used for transportation functions. *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), r. 290-2-1-.03*
All transportation departments should maintain proper internal controls regarding costing of part inventories (generally accepted accounting principles).
All transportation departments should code properly any costs associated with the use of school buses for extracurricular activities and non-funded route transportation. *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), r. 290-2-1-.03(1)*
The *Local Education Agency Personnel System (LEAPS)* report should reflect accurate data for transportation personnel. *Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), r. 290-2-1-.03(2)(b)*

**NOTE:** This *working document* provides a preliminary guidance from the Office of Supporting Programs, Pupil Transportation Section. It “highlights” some of the key components of *Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (Act 2015-3)* related to pupil transportation, but does not attempt to address all content. Information included in this working document will be updated as the Alabama State Department of Education develops specific guidance regarding Alabama public charter schools. Please send questions to pcs@alsde.edu.