



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction

Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, Fiscal Research Division, and Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee

*Charter School Transportation Grant
Program*

*SL 2021-180, sec. 7.69(b) (SB 105)
amending § 115C-218.42*

Date Due: March 15, 2023
DPI Chronological Schedule, 2022-2023

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Background

PERMANENT CHARTER SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION GRANT PROGRAM

Senate Bill 105, Session Law 2021-80, amended Article 14A of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes by adding a new section to read:

"§ 115C-218.42. Charter School Transportation Grant Program.

- (a) Purpose; Definition. – There is established the Charter School Transportation Grant Program (Program). The purpose of the Program shall be to award grant funds to a charter school that meets the requirements of subsection (b) of this section for the reimbursement of up to sixty-five percent (65%) of the eligible student transportation costs incurred by the school in accordance with the provisions of this section. For purposes of this section, the term "eligible student transportation costs" means costs incurred by the charter school for (i) transportation fuel, (ii) vehicle maintenance, (iii) contracted transportation services, and (iv) transportation personnel salaries.
- (b) Program Eligibility. – If a charter school has student enrollment in a semester of the school year of at least fifty percent (50%) of its students residing in households with an income level not in excess of the amount required for a student to qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, the charter school may apply to the Department for grant funds under the Program for reimbursement of up to sixty-five percent (65%) of the eligible student transportation costs incurred by the school for that semester.
- (c) Applications. – By August 1 of each year, the Department shall establish the criteria and guidelines for the grant application process for the upcoming school year, including any documentation required to be submitted with the application. Each school year, the Department shall accept applications until December 31 for eligible student transportation costs incurred during the fall semester of the school year and until May 15 for eligible student transportation costs incurred during the spring semester of the school year.
- (d) Award of Funds. – From funds made available for the Program, the Department shall award grant funds to the selected charter schools by February 15 for eligible student transportation costs incurred during the fall semester of the same school year and by June 15 for eligible student transportation costs incurred during the spring semester of the prior school year. The total amount of each grant awarded under the Program shall not exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per charter school per school year.
- (e) Reporting. – No later than March 15 of each year in which funds are awarded under the Program, the Department shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, the Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee, the Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee, the House Committee on Appropriations, and the Fiscal Research Division

on the administration of the Program, including at least the following information: (1) The number of charter schools that received grant funds. (2) The amount of grant funds awarded to those charter schools. (3) Whether implementing the Program has led to an increase in charter schools offering lunch. (4) Whether implementing the Program has led to an increase in student lunch participation at charter schools offering lunch. (5) Whether implementing the Program has increased or expanded the offering of student transportation by charter schools. (6) The modes of student transportation offered by charter schools that received grant funds."

This report fulfills the March 15th annual reporting requirement referenced above.

2023 Award Cycle Process

The NCDPI Office of Charter Schools (OCS) administers the grant program. The 2023 award cycle took place in fall 2022. Charter schools had until December 31, 2022, to submit applications and eligible expense documentation. The timeline and instructions for schools was as follows:

Until December 31st

OCS shall accept applications for eligible student transportation costs incurred during the fall semester of the school year. Following the availability of the December 1st economically disadvantaged student (EDS) headcount data, OCS will confirm eligibility for each applicant.

By February 15th

OCS shall award grant funds to the selected charter schools for eligible student transportation costs incurred during the fall semester of the same school year.

- Up to 65% of the eligible student transportation costs incurred by the school.
- Eligible student transportation costs: (i) transportation fuel, (ii) vehicle maintenance, (iii) contracted transportation services, and (iv) transportation personnel salaries.

Eligibility

1. A charter school with student enrollment in a semester of the school year of at least 50% students residing in households with an income level not in excess of the amount required for a student to qualify for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program.
2. A charter school should know if it meets this requirement. DPI/Accountability produces two EDS headcount collections each year - as of April 1 and December 1. OCS will confirm the applicant school meets the 50% threshold using this headcount data prior to awarding subgrants.

2023 Award Impact

A total of 45 charter schools submitted applications and were found eligible for awards. A total of \$2,338,917.76 was distributed to the eligible schools in the second week of February 2023.

Free and Reduced Lunch

All 45 charter schools report serving free and reduced lunches. Thirty-eight schools reported that the transportation grant improved the school's ability to provide free and reduced school nutrition services and lunch. In response to the question, "Did the transportation grant improve your ability to offer free/reduced lunch?" the Office of Charter Schools received specific feedback including:

- "By offering meals and transportation to our student population we were able to expand to areas and neighborhoods we have not been at prior."
- "Tremendously. We were able to increase the territory we served and pay for increased transportation costs."
- "Yes. We are able to transport students, by bus, to the local middle school for lunch. The Public Schools of Robeson County cater our lunches daily."
- "It creates greater access for students to get a breakfast every morning."
- "Yes. Students who ride the bus are consistently present and on time increasing access and participation."
- "Yes - by providing those funds, we were able to offset costs for the transportation of meals in the spring, and for the cost of left-over meals in the fall."

Thirty-six schools report an increase in the number of students participating in student lunch offerings. Schools noted an increase in consistent attendance, which increases meal participation, when transportation is offered.

Expanded Transportation Services

Forty schools reported an expansion of its transportation program. Schools reported a combination of additional routes and additional buses. The schools receiving grant awards all reported busing as the form of transportation although the method varied. The schools reported a mix of door to door busing, cluster stop busing, and contracted bus services.

Next Steps

The 2024 award cycle will open in fall 2023. All 2023 funds have been awarded based on applications from 2022 fall expenses.