

Transportation Modernization Grant Questions

****If after the Provider Call on 1/7/25, you still have questions, you can reach out to Janet Clarke: janet.clarke@ade.arkansas.gov or myself: tim.cain@ade.arkansas.gov.**

One of the reasons that the application is so open (vague) is to avoid limiting districts to what is already being done. If there are things already being done in other districts that are lacking or needed in your district, then that might be considered “modernizing” school transportation for your district’s students. However, please don’t let whether it is already being done limit you. I believe that our leadership is genuinely looking for new/innovative strategies to improve access to school transportation for students across the state.

Here is the big picture:

The Arkansas Department of Education is pleased to launch the \$5 million Transportation Modernization Grant Program. Created through the LEARNS Act, the program focuses on **innovative approaches to transportation for students** who attend public schools, open-enrollment charter schools, and licensed childcare centers serving publicly-funded students.

“Like every parent, I know the challenge of getting your kids out the door and to school on time,” Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders said. “Through Arkansas LEARNS, we established this new grant program to help schools meet parents where they are and provide **efficient transportation** to families across the state,”

“Traditional routes for school buses and established bus stops can sometimes be underutilized and inefficient,” ADE Secretary Jacob Oliva said. “**Modernizing the way students get to and from school is long overdue, and this grant will recognize efforts to reimagine transportation.**”

It is important to emphasize that grant applications will be scored by a committee based on **student safety, cost effectiveness, innovation, and the need and demand.**

In the LEARNS Act it mentions purposes without limitation:

6-20-2703. Transportation Modernization Grant Program grants. The Transportation Modernization Grant Program grants shall be used for the **following purposes without limitation:**

(1) Transportation resource sharing with neighboring public school districts or open-enrollment public charter schools;

(2) Developing or contracting with rideshare programs or engaging neighborhood carpool strategies;

(3) Developing options for reducing costs and improving efficiencies, including without limitation exploring the use of fleet vehicles or using technology to lead to more efficient routing;

(4) Developing options to address personnel shortages or challenges;

(5)(A) Funding in lieu of grants given to parents.

(B)(i) A public school district or open-enrollment public charter school that uses funding in lieu of grants given to parents under subdivision (5)(A) of this section shall give priority to enrolled students who:

(a) Meet the economic eligibility requirements established under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. § 1771 et seq., as in effect on January 1, 2023, and National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. § 34 1751, as in effect on January 1, 2023, for free or reduced-price lunches; and

(b) Are attending a public school district or an open-enrollment public charter school through open enrollment, if such information is available.

(ii) A student who attends a school participating in a community eligibility program is eligible under subdivision (5)(A) of this section;

(6) Partnering with school districts and open-enrollment public charter schools and licensed childcare facilities that accept publicly funded students to reevaluate bus routes to decrease ride time for students, with a priority on routes serving elementary and middle school grades;

(7) Developing collaborations with public schools, early childhood care and education programs, and community partners to identify solutions to ensure students' safe and effective passage to school and early childhood care and education programs;

It is not so much a question of eligibility as it is how the grant will address student safety, cost effectiveness, innovation, and the need and demand.

Thanks,
Tim Cain