Open Enrollment Transportation Assistance

Introduction

The purpose of this technical assistance is to provide parents, guardians, and school districts with information about the requirements for open enrollment transportation assistance. This document includes information about what the income eligibility guidelines, how parents or guardians can apply for assistance, and what the resident district's responsibilities are in this process.

Eligibility

Transportation assistance for those who qualify according to **income guidelines (see chart below)** is available only **between contiguous districts**. The resident district determines how assistance is distributed. This is not a parent / guardian choice. If the student's household does not meet this requirement, the parent or guardian of a pupil who has been accepted for open enrollment is responsible for transporting the pupil (Iowa Administrative Code rule 281—17.8(1)). *If transportation is provided by the receiving district to and from school in the receiving district, then a parent is no longer eligible to receive reimbursement from the resident district* (Iowa Code §282.18(10)).

Table 1. Income Eligibility by Household Size

Persons in Household/Family	Yearly Income	Monthly Income	Twice per Month Income	Every Two Weeks Income	Weekly Income
1	$31,920	$2,660	$1,330	$1,228	$614
2	$43,280	$3,607	$1,803	$1,665	$832
3	$54,640	$4,553	$2,277	$2,102	$1,051
4	$66,000	$5,500	$2,750	$2,538	$1,269
5	$77,360	$6,447	$3,223	$2,975	$1,488
6	$88,720	$7,393	$3,697	$3,412	$1,706
7	$111,440	$9,287	$4,643	$4,286	$2,143
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Additional family member (if more than 8), add	$5,680	$473	$237	$218	$109

*These guidelines reflect the revisions made in the Federal Poverty Guidelines that are effective for July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. **These guidelines are NOT the same as the guidelines for Free and Reduced Fees**

Definition of Income

"Income" means income before any deductions such as income taxes, social security taxes, insurance premiums, charitable contributions, and bonds. Income includes the following:

1. Monetary compensations for services, including wages, salary, commissions, or fees
2. Net income from non-farm self-employment
3. Social Security
4. Dividends, interest on savings, bonds, income from estates, or trusts

5. Net rental income
6. Public assistance or welfare payments
7. Unemployment compensation
8. Government civilian employee, military retirement, pensions, or veterans' payments
9. Private pensions or annuities
10. Alimony or child support payments
11. Regular contributions from persons not living in the household
12. Net royalties
13. Other cash income including income from farming. Other cash income would include cash amounts received or withdrawn from any source including savings, investments, trust accounts, and other resources. Income does not include any income or benefits received under federal programs that are excluded from consideration as income by any legislation prohibition.

Transportation Assistance Process

Parent or Guardian Responsibilities

To request transportation assistance, the parent or guardian must indicate they wish to participate by checking "Yes" for line-item number 13 on the Open Enrollment Application. Attach verification of income and household size information to the application. If the household's monthly income changes by $50 or more, the parent or guardian must notify the resident district. If the household has not already completed and filed a free-and-reduced lunch application, it is recommended to do so. It is important to note that transportation assistance is only available to families who open enroll between contiguous (or bordering) districts AND are not provided transportation services from the receiving district.

Resident District Responsibilities

DETERMINE WHAT TYPE OF TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE WILL BE PROVIDED TO ELIGIBLE FAMILIES

The resident district has the right to determine which option will apply. This is not a parent / guardian choice. Transportation assistance for those who qualify according to income guidelines (see chart above) is available only between contiguous districts and shall be deducted from the amount sent to the receiving district. In case of road construction or road relocation, a receiving district may drive into another district to pick up open enrollment students if, and only if, there was road construction or road relocation that makes this necessary.

The resident district may discharge this obligation in one of three ways:

1. The resident district may provide transportation for the pupil(s) to a stop on the bus route of the receiving district.
2. The resident district may allow the receiving district to enter the resident district to pick up the open enrolled pupil(s).
3. The resident district may provide a parent / guardian reimbursement. If this option is selected by the resident district, the amount to be paid to the parent is determined as follows:
    a. The transportation reimbursement amount shall be the state calculated average as determined in Iowa Code §285.1(3) or the local cost per pupil for the previous year as specified on the resident district's Annual Transportation Report, whichever is lower. The amount for 2025-2026 was $751.00 (annual). The amount for 2026-2027 will be released in January 2027.
    b. This amount is limited to reimbursement for three elementary (K-8) students and one secondary (grades 9 -12) students.
    c. The amount of transportation assistance can be prorated according to the date of application submission.

If transportation is provided by the receiving district to and from school in the receiving district, then the resident district is no longer responsible for reimbursement. (Iowa Code §282.18(10)).

RECEIVE THE OPEN ENROLLMENT APPLICATION AND REQUEST FOR TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE

If a parent or guardian qualifies for transportation assistance, the request for transportation assistance is indicated on the open enrollment application filed with the resident district and supported by eligibility attachments (i.e., verification of income, number of individuals in the household). The district should remind parents and guardians that they must notify the district if their family's monthly income changes by $50 or more. If the request is not indicated on the original application and the parent / guardian's household circumstances change, a parent / guardian may request assistance from the resident district at any time. The parent / guardian will need to provide documentation of the household size and income to verify the need for assistance.

PAY THE RECEIVING DISTRICT TUITION MINUS INCURRED TRANSPORTATION COST

The resident district deducts its incurred transportation reimbursement cost from the tuition it sends to the receiving district. This may be prorated after the start of the year if a parent / guardian qualifies for assistance later in the school year.

Students with IEPs

Transportation assistance costs for students with individualized education plans (IEPs) cannot be deducted from special education tuition. *It is important to note that when a parent elects to open enroll their child to another school district, the parent waives the right for transportation as a related service on their child's IEP. It is only for transportation assistance under Open Enrollment that the resident district becomes involved again.*

Questions and Technical Assistance

For additional technical assistance, see the Department's Open Enrollment Transportation Assistance webpage.

For general open enrollment questions contact Sara Nickel at 515-971-7558 or sara.nickel@iowa.gov or Eric Heitz at 515-326-1018 or eric.heitz@iowa.gov

For transportation assistance finance questions contact Tom Simpson at 515-336-3965 or tom.simpson@iowa.gov or Holli Marolf at 515-281-5812 or holli.marolf@iowa.gov.