



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Joint State Government Commission

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Short summary in response to 2021 House Resolution 15
School Bus Driver Shortage in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Report of the Advisory Committee

House Resolution 15 of 2021 directed the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the current school bus driver shortage in the Commonwealth. The Advisory Committee meet via zoom six times throughout the fall and winter of the 2021-2022 school year. Four separate surveys were conducted during the winter of 2022. In the process of developing the survey, staff interviewed bus drivers and transportation directors one on one and then conducted focus groups to develop and refine survey questions and topics. Staff conducted interviews with national associations and reviewed national news.

The Advisory Committee documented a shortage that varied in intensity throughout the Commonwealth. Although some districts did not experience shortages, others combined routes, staggered start times, asked parents to drive students and in one extreme instance, even delayed the start of school.

The first recommendation directed the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to establish a new category of School-Bus-Only CDL. This would exempt school bus drivers from navigating the “under-the-hood” section of the test. In the JSGC survey, the “under-the-hood” portion of the test stood out as the primary barrier or portion of the test with a high level of difficulty.

The next three recommendations focused on subsidies and requirements found in the Public School Code of 1949. The second recommendation focused on review and revision of the state transportation subsidy to school districts found in the Public School Code. Advisory Committee members also suggested that the formula needed to be more fully funded. The third recommendation was to reduce the current distance that public schools are required to transport students who live within their district boundaries but attend non-public schools up to 10 miles outside of the districts’ boundaries. The fourth recommendation would increase the state subsidy for nonpublic pupil transportation and then add an automatic inflationary increase to the subsidy in future years.

The fifth recommendation emphasized the importance of cameras within the school bus both for students and school bus drivers. Cameras should be installed to the full extent currently allowed and PennDOT should permanently change regulations to allow for mid-cabin camera placements. The purpose of this recommendation is to improve working conditions and retain existing drivers.

The sixth recommendation directed contractors and school district to offer better pay and better benefits so as to address the shortage of school bus drivers by attracting more drivers to the industry through better pay and benefits.

Because of the substantial increase in homeless students requiring transportation during the COVID 19 pandemic, the seventh recommendation suggested that districts and the Pennsylvania Department of Education should gather data on the number of homeless students and how many miles they are transported. The increased miles driven for these students (as well as charter and non-public students) increases the need the number of drivers a district must employ.

Finally, the last recommendation directed district to implement annual trainings for bus drivers to help them navigate behavioral issues on school buses. As with the fifth recommendation, the goal of this recommendation is to improve working conditions and retain existing drivers.

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