

2019-2020
NORTHBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SCHOOL BUS PAY-TO-RIDE TRANSPORTATION
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

TRANSPORTATION ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

Who is eligible for transportation?

Per School Committee Policy, students in K-4 are eligible for transportation if they live more than (1) mile from the school they are attending. Students in grades 5-12 are eligible for transportation if they live more than (2) miles from the school they are attending. *If a student is not eligible for transportation based on these guidelines, they may register for an **Open Seat** (see information below).*

Who is eligible for free transportation?

Under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71, Section 68, students in grades K-6 who reside more than two (2) miles from the school they attend are eligible for free transportation. Free transportation will also be provided to students qualifying under the federal guidelines for Free & Reduced Lunch and students with special needs who have “specialized transportation by a “special vehicle” indicated in their IEPs.

How is the home to school mileage determined?

Distance is determined from “portal to portal,” which means using the shortest drivable route from the roadway in front of a student’s home to the entrance of their assigned school building. The bus company uses a transportation mapping software called Versatrans to calculate the distance from your home to school. If you have a question regarding your student’s mileage and their eligibility for transportation, please contact the Transportation Coordinator at 508-234-8156 x 5213 or email transportation@nps.org.

Is my child able to take the bus to/from daycare or a relative’s house? How will an alternate address impact whether or not I need to pay a bus fee?

Students are able to take the bus to/from daycare or a relative’s house as long as distance from the school to the alternate address is greater than one (1) mile from Northbridge Elementary School and Balmer School and greater than two (2) miles from the Middle and High School. This mileage requirement determines if that location is eligible for transportation. The fee is determined by a student’s home to school mileage. For example, if a student lives 1.5 miles from the Balmer School and the alternate address is 2.5 miles from the Balmer School, the student would be able to take the bus to the alternate address because it is greater than one (1) mile but would be required to pay the bus fee because their home to school mileage is not greater than two (2) miles. Conversely, if the student lives 2.5 miles from the Balmer School but the alternate address is 1.5 miles from the Balmer School, the student would be able to take the bus to the alternate address because it is greater than one (1) mile but the student would be eligible for free transportation because their home to school mileage is greater than two miles.

What should I do if I disagree with the mileage measurement?

Versatrans software is used to calculate your mileage, however, if you would like to appeal the mileage determination for a specific address, please submit the appeal in writing to the Transportation Coordinator at transportation@nps.org. Appeals will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

REGISTRATION PROCEDURE FOR ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

If I am eligible for free transportation, do I need to register for the bus?

YES! All eligible students, whether free or paid, who plan on taking the bus for the 2017-2018 school year **MUST register for a bus pass** in order to ride the bus. Registration does not carry over from the previous year, therefore, a student must register for the bus **EACH YEAR**. **Please note that if you are required to pay a transportation fee, your registration will not be considered complete and a bus pass will not be issued until payment is made in full.**

How do I register my eligible child for transportation for the 2019-2020 school year?

Online registration will be available at www.nps.org beginning **Monday April 9, 2019** utilizing the **2019-2020 Transportation Registration** form. Paper registration forms will also be available at each school office and the Administration Building.

If my child has an IEP or a 504 plan, do I need to register them and pay for transportation?

Students with an IEP or students who have a 504 plan must be registered for transportation and are subject to the fee under the same provisions as other students, unless they have “specialized transportation” by a “special vehicle” indicated in their IEP or 504 plan. If “specialized transportation” by a “special vehicle” is indicated in their IEP or 504 plan, the student does not need to register or pay, and transportation will be set up by the Special Education Office.

REGISTRATION PROCEDURE FOR OPEN SEAT (NOT ELIGIBLE) STUDENTS

If my child is not eligible for transportation based on the mileage of my home residence, daycare, or relative's house to their school, may I purchase a bus pass so my child can ride the school bus?

It is our intent to sell Open Seats on the school buses if space is available. Open Seats will be granted to students on a first come first served basis and transportation will only be provided if there is a bus with available open seats in close proximity to the interested student.

How do I register for an Open Seat?

Open Seat Registration for the 2017-2018 school year will be available online at www.nps.org beginning **Monday April 9, 2019** utilizing the **2019-2020 Open Seat Registration form**. Paper Open Seat registration forms will also be available at each school office and the Administration Building.

How will I know if my child has been granted an Open Seat?

A letter will be sent to you confirming that your child has been granted an Open Seat. Confirmation of a granted seat will be given as soon as possible but may not be confirmed until mid to late August. Updates regarding Open Seat confirmation letters will be available in the Transportation Section of the District's website at www.nps.org. If you do not receive a confirmation letter, your student will remain on the Open Seat Waiting list. Bus ridership is routinely reviewed throughout the school year and additional Open Seats may be granted should they become available.

When do I pay for an Open Seat?

Open Seats do not need to be paid for until you have received a letter confirming that your student has been granted an Open Seat. Payment information will be included in the letter. Paying in advance for an Open Seat does not “secure” a seat for your student. Students are granted an Open Seat based on their registration date (first come/first served), and seat availability. The cost for an Open Seat is **\$200** for the school year if the student is granted a seat and was registered **on or before 4PM on June 7, 2019**. The cost for an Open Seat is **\$250** for the school year if the student is granted a seat but was registered **after 4PM on June 7, 2019**.

TRANSPORTATION FEES

Who has to pay a transportation fee?

In accordance with state law, all students in grades K-6 living two (2) miles or less, and all students in Grades 7-12 regardless of where they live, may be charged a fee if they wish to use school bus transportation.

What is cost of a bus pass?

The transportation fee for the 2017-2018 school year is **\$200** per student with a **\$600** family cap. Bus registrations submitted **after 4:00 PM on Friday, June 7, 2019** will be subject to a fee of **\$250** with a family cap of **\$700**.

How do I pay the transportation fee?

The most convenient way to pay is online. The link to the online payment center is located on the main page of the District’s website at www.nps.org Select the online payment center and then Transportation from the drop down menu. Online payments may be made directly from a checking account or by accepted debit/credit cards. A check or money order made payable to the Northbridge Public Schools may be mailed to or dropped off at the Administration Building, 87 Linwood Avenue, Whitinsville, MA 01588 Attn: Bonnie O’Donnell. Please note that any check returned due to insufficient funds or closed bank accounts will have a \$25 bank fee charged to the check writer.

If I cannot afford to pay the transportation fee, can it be waived?

A student who is approved for free or reduced lunch is eligible for free transportation. If your child was approved for free or reduced lunch for the 2018-2019 school year, please indicate that information on the bus registration form. The 2018-2019 free or reduced lunch status will be accepted temporarily until the new 2019-2020 applications have been processed. Once the new applications have been processed, the updated status will determine if transportation will remain free for the student, or if the student will be required to pay the transportation fee. If a student no longer qualifies for free or reduced lunch, the student will be required to pay the transportation fee in full within 30 days of notification. Parents of new Kindergarten students who have questions regarding their child’s free or reduced qualification should contact Bonnie O’Donnell at 508-234-8156 x 5213 or at transportation@nps.org.

If my child only takes the bus to school one way, or does not require the bus every day, can I pay half of the transportation fee?

No, the transportation fee will not be pro-rated based on one way or occasional use. The full transportation fee must be paid regardless of how often your child takes the bus.

If my child stops taking the bus in November, can I receive a refund for the unused portion of the transportation fee?

No, the transportation fee is not refundable and will not be prorated for less than a full year of transportation.

Are there any circumstances in which I can get a refund because our situation has changed and we no longer require transportation?

Any requests for refunds must be made at least one week prior to the start of the school year and will be issued on a case by case basis. These refunds are subject to the approval of the Superintendent. If a family moves within the town during the school year and eligibility for transportation changes, refunds or proration can be discussed on an individual basis.

What would the transportation fee be if I decide in December that I would like to purchase a seat on a bus that services my neighborhood?

The fee would be \$250 per student with a family cap of \$700 and will not be prorated. The student would only be eligible for a seat if there is room on the existing bus.

If I am paying for my child's transportation, will my child be picked up at my door?

No. Students are not entitled to street-by-street or door-to-door pickup of drop-off whether they pay for transportation or not. Bus routes and bus stops are established under the direction of the Superintendent in cooperation with the bus company using bus capacity, bus route length, population density, student grade level, reasonable walking distance to a bus stop, road conditions, etc. to determine the routes. Authorized bus stops are located at convenient intervals in places where students can get on or off the bus safely, and are made as safe, fair, and consistent as possible for all.

BUS PASS INFORMATION

Does my child need a bus pass to get on the bus?

Yes. All students using school bus transportation will be required to carry a bus pass on a daily basis beginning the first day of school, even if the student is eligible for free transportation. Bus passes will be checked by the bus drivers throughout the school year and not having a pass may result in exclusion from the bus. In the event a student loses a bus pass, please contact the Transportation Coordinator as soon as possible so that a new pass can be made. Multiple lost passes could result in a replacement fee of \$5.00.

Where do I pick up my student's bus pass?

Bus passes will be available at your student's school, the week before school starts, during the school's designated times for student packet pick-up. The dates for packet pick-up will be posted on the District's website at www.nps.org. If your student is registered for transportation **after** the start of the school year, there may be a two (2) day waiting period prior to beginning transportation so that your student can be registered with the bus company and a bus pass can be sent to their school. Please note that if a transportation fee is owed for your student, their pass will be held until the full fee has been paid.

What if my child forgets their bus pass? Will they be able to get on the bus?

A bus driver will not refuse transportation to the student if they forget their bus pass. If the student is not entitled to ride the bus, the parent will be contacted and will be responsible for getting the child home at the end of the day.

Can my child be picked up or dropped off from multiple locations?

No. One address must be selected at the time of registration. Students must be picked up and dropped off at the same location five days a week. The bus stop a student is picked up in the morning must be the same bus stop the student is dropped off at in the afternoon. A note requesting the student take the bus to/from a different bus stop on any given day is not acceptable. If there is a family emergency or a medical situation, parents should notify the building Principal and other transportation arrangements should be made.

IF A STUDENT IS NOT TRANSPORTED

If my child is not eligible for transportation, or if I choose not to purchase a bus pass, is the school assuming that my child should walk?

If a student is not eligible for transportation, or if a parent chooses not to purchase a bus pass, it is the parent's responsibility to decide on how to get the child to and from school. The school department is not telling parents that any student has to walk to school. If a parent chooses to have a child walk to school because that situation works best for that family, that is the decision of the parent. Please remember, it is ultimately the responsibility of the parent to make sure their child gets to school safely. The school's responsibility begins once the student arrives on school grounds or embarks on the school bus.

Who is responsible for making sure sidewalks are available for my child to walk to school?

There is no guarantee of sidewalks being available. Not all roads in town have sidewalks, and even when roads do have sidewalks, they are not always accessible. If there is a concern about a sidewalk that is on school-owned property, the concern can be brought to the attention of the Director of Buildings and Grounds. If there is a concern about a sidewalk that is not on school-owned property, the concern can be brought to the attention of the Northbridge Department of Public Works.

