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New Data: Bus Driver, Funding Shortages Part of School Transportation Crisis Impacting Educators, Parents

School staff forced to manage increased needs, parents report job loss from cuts, reduced bus routes.

As students return to schools across the country this fall, a new pair of surveys conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research in partnership with HopSkipDrive showcase the issues plaguing school administrators and the impacts on educators, parents, and students. The surveys show that most school administrator respondents still face transportation challenges in their schools and districts, including the persistent impacts of bus driver shortages (80%) and budget shortfalls (73%) on transportation operations. Most students still rely on driving to school, even though 9 in 10 school administrators say the number of students eligible for free school transportation is growing (44%) or staying the same (46%).

In the context of shifting transportation needs and responsibilities, the 2025 HopSkipDrive State of School Transportation Report examines the numerous challenges and constraints facing school administrators. These shifts create ripple effects for families and communities. Students are missing out on educational support and opportunities, and face tardiness and absenteeism, and 11% of parents have lost a job due to needing to take their children to and from school or other activities.

The survey also highlights potential solutions to what the two groups report are significant impacts of these transportation challenges.

Overview and Key Facts: School Administrators

As demand rises and budgets tighten, school transportation operations are struggling to keep up with fewer bus drivers, turning to cutting or shortening bus routes, and asking staff or parents to step in. The negative impacts are far reaching, as many parents report transportation is an important consideration if they could choose any school in their area for their child.

- Nine in 10 say the number of students who qualify for free, school-provided transportation in the last 5 years has stayed the same (46%) or increased (44%), and 45% expect the need to keep increasing over the next 5 years.
- 81% say school bus driver shortages are a problem in their school or district, including 46% who say it is a major problem.
- 26% of respondents report that their school or district has addressed these shortages by cutting or shortening bus routes.
- 73% reported transportation budget shortages have affected their transportation operations.
- 83% report that their teachers and educators have to step away from their core responsibilities to cover transportation needs.
- 89% say students in their school or district are typically driven to school.
- 75% say access to transportation has an impact on their school or district's problems with chronic absenteeism.

"School administrators are sounding the alarm: transportation challenges are no longer just logistical—they're educational. When teachers are pulled from classrooms to support operations and students miss out on learning opportunities, the ripple effects are profound," said Joanna McFarland, CEO and Co-Founder at HopSkipDrive. "The good news is that administrators are open to innovative solutions, from

centralized pick-up locations to supplemental transportation services, so every student can get to school safely, reliably, and ready to learn. Cutting transportation has become a default option with unacceptable consequences, shifting the burden to other educators, students and families."

Overview and Key Facts: Parents of K-12 Students

As schools struggle to keep up with transportation needs, families are increasingly responsible for driving their students to and from school. This shift creates additional and damaging consequences for parents as students miss out on educational opportunities or face tardiness and absenteeism due to transportation challenges.

Many parents of K-12 children, especially mothers, have suffered personal and professional impacts due to school transportation issues, and 11% of parents report losing a job due to needing to take their children to and from school or other activities.

- 26% say students have missed extracurricular activities in the last school year, 21% have missed school services like school meals or counseling, and 17% have missed tutoring or academic help.
- 78% of parents say transportation would be at least a somewhat important consideration if they could send their children to any school in their area.
- 44% say their students have been late to school at least a few times in the last year due to issues with transportation.
- 56% experience stress about their children's transportation at least a few times a year, with a quarter feeling stressed at least monthly.
- About 3 in 10 have missed work or been prevented from taking personal opportunities or work opportunities, and 11% have lost a job due to needing to take their children to and from school or other activities.
- Women are significantly more likely than men to report being prevented from pursuing work opportunities (33% vs. 23%) or personal opportunities (37% vs. 23%) due to child transportation responsibilities.
- 20% of women without a college degree report having lost a job due to transportation responsibilities compared to 2% of women with a college degree.

"Transportation issues are impacting families in deeply personal ways—from missed work and lost jobs to children missing out on meals, counseling, and extracurriculars. These challenges are especially acute for mothers and for families with fewer resources," said Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. "The data show that when transportation breaks down, it's not just a scheduling problem—it's a barrier to opportunity. Understanding these impacts is essential to crafting solutions that work for both schools and families."

Overview and Key Facts: A Way Forward

Parents and school administrator respondents share common ground on possible solutions to transportation challenges.

Most school administrator respondents favor:

- Organizing centralized pick-up and drop-off locations for students using school buses (73%)
- Improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in areas near schools (70%)
- Allowing school districts to use school-arranged supplemental transportation services (65%)

About 4 in 10 parents agree that offering school-arranged supplemental transportation services and improving safe pedestrian and bike infrastructure would make getting to school easier for their family,

and a third say the same about organizing centralized pick-up and drop-off locations for students. About half say it wouldn't make much difference to them.

About the Study

This study was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research in partnership with HopSkipDrive.

The Parent Survey was conducted June 30 – July 11, 2025 using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, which is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Online interviews were conducted with 838 adults with school-aged children (children age 5-17). The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.6 percentage points.

The School Administrator Survey was conducted June 30 – July 25, 2025, using sample sourced from a non-probability list from marketing data from a marketing database and from Dynata's non-probability panel. Online interviews were conducted with 510 school administrators. Because non-probability panels do not start with a frame where there is known probability of selection, standard measures of sampling cannot be calculated for this sample.

The study's full report is available at: https://apnorc.org/projects/2025-state-of-school-transportation/

About the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

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- The Associated Press (AP) is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP today remains the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world's population sees AP journalism every day. www.ap.org
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. Learn more at www.apnorc.org.

About HopSkipDrive

HopSkipDrive is a technology company that solves complex transportation challenges where there is a heightened need for safety, access, and care. HopSkipDrive is modernizing the $30 billion school transportation industry through two core solutions: a care-centered transportation marketplace and industry-leading transportation intelligence platform, RouteWise AI™. HopSkipDrive's marketplace supplements school buses and existing transportation options by connecting kids to highly vetted caregivers on wheels, such as grandparents, babysitters, and nurses in local communities. RouteWise AI helps schools and districts address critical challenges, including budget cuts, bus driver shortages, and reaching climate goals. HopSkipDrive has supported over 13,500 schools across 17 states, with nearly 1,300 school districts, government agencies, and nonprofit partners. More than 5 million rides over 95 million miles have been completed through HopSkipDrive since the company was founded in 2014 by three working mothers.

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