

# Questions & Answers

A number of transportation issues have been raised by parents. Here are a simple set of Questions and Answers to explain how we go about handling various questions. These Q&A's certainly do not cover every circumstance, but they serve as the framework within which we operate to ensure that we are providing transportation with an even-handed approach for all students.

**Q: Under New York law, how far can a student walk before we must provide transportation?**

**A:** Education Law 3635(1) permits a district to require students in grade 9-12 to walk up to 3 miles from their home to school. Children in grades K-8 can be required to walk up to 2 miles.

**Q: That's a long way. How far do Indian River students have to walk?**

**A:** Students at Indian River may not be required to walk more than three tenths of a mile. This distance is measured from where the driveway enters the public right of way to the school.

**Q: That's the distance they can walk to school. How far do they have to walk to a bus stop?**

**A:** Again, three tenths of a mile. A child may not be required to walk a longer distance to a bus stop than another child is required to walk to a school.

**Q: Who came up with the distance?**

**A:** The distance of three tenths of a mile was reaffirmed on August 30, 1982 by public referendum. This was done at a special meeting. As a result of a failed budget vote that year, the Board voted to extend the walking distance to 2 miles. However, a special meeting was called to vote on a proposition to retain the current (SY 81-82) walking distances and to raise taxes to support that vote. This proposition passed and has not been acted upon again since that date. Thus, it remains the official "walking distance".

**Q: How do you determine where to place bus stops?**

**A:** This is where it gets complicated. We look at a number of general issues.

1. First is the walking distance. I've already addressed that earlier.
2. Next is the need for a "group" stop instead of a "door" stop. Normally, we consider group stops only in villages, hamlets, and housing developments, though there may be occasions where they are appropriate in the more rural countryside. Many of our students get "door stops" by virtue of the fact that they do not live in close proximity to others. But when houses are in close proximity to each other, we try to group the children together. This is for safety as much as it is for efficiency. Consider this scenario. If three children live next door to each other, and their driveways are 150 feet apart, it makes sense to collect the children at one of the driveways (or another safe location) to make a single pickup. This eliminates the need for the bus to continually be in a start, then stop, mode. Starting and immediately stopping frustrates other drivers and tempts them to pass, often illegally. This presents a dangerous situation, and it would be a situation purely of our own making. We try to avoid doing that.
3. We look for safe places for children to stand and await their bus. These stops need relatively straight lines of sight to ensure approaching drivers are not surprised by a bus on a blind curve. They also need an ability to stand back from the actual roadway, so it's often a driveway or other similar area with distance to back up from the road.
4. We try to find places that do not present property rights issues. Simply put, stops in public places are better than those on private property.
5. Where we can, we utilize bus shelters. These are most often found on Fort Drum or in 801 housing developments.
6. Finally, we look at the route the child must walk to get to the assigned stop. We have added stops where children would have to walk through unsafe areas (depressions, blind curves, extremely narrow places with no chance of escaping oncoming traffic [bridges]). This safety evaluation is fairly subjective, and we temper the decision with an assessment of the age of the child we're asking to make the trek. Please note: no child will ever need to walk over railroad tracks to get to and from a bus stop nor will they cross a multi-lane road (ie. US Route 11 from the north gate to NYS Rt, 342). We avoid these hazards.

**Q: So, who gets a "door stop"?**

**A:** Obviously, those in the more rural areas are candidates for door-to-door transportation. Additionally, children whose IEP or 504 accommodation plan require the door stop will receive that treatment. However, the Commissioner of Education has held since 1981 that door-to-door transportation is not required in all cases.

**Q: What is the maximum distance we are required to transport children?**

**A:** The law sets the maximum at 15 miles. However, due to the size of the district, the Board established 17.3 miles as the distance they would apply for both public and private school transportation. The did this on December 6, 2007

**Q: How long do children ride?**

**A:** We have set a general guideline in establishing routes to have primary and intermediate school children ride no more than 45-50 minutes, while middle and high school children ride no more than 60 minutes. In reality there are a few exceptions to this guideline simply because of the size of the district, especially in the northern end of the district. Please note that this only applies to regular home-to-school transportation. "Late" runs may run longer than that because they are not on a scheduled route.

**Q: How many children do we put on a bus?**

**A:** As a guideline we use 60 for the maximum number of primary school children and 50 as the maximum for middle and high schoolers. Most are far less than this. The larger buses have capacities of 66 and 72 passengers. These are posted on the buses.

**Q: Why can't my child ride with his friends from the next bus stop? A different bus picks them up and they go to the same place.**

**A:** We don't permit "bus stop hopping" by children. The reason for this is to maintain the capacity as stated in the previous question. If too many children change buses without our knowledge it can and has resulted in the unsafe condition of having children sitting in the aisle.

**Q: My child was beat up by another student at the bus stop and the school couldn't do anything about it. Why?**

**A:** The perception may be that "nothing was done," but that is often far from the truth. Quite often student misbehavior at the bus stop is handled by school administration, but the administration's "reach" is limited. Parents are responsible for their children's behavior until they get on the bus. Once on the bus, the school shares responsibility for that behavior. In any case, the school will not normally tell an aggrieved parent how the case was handled. This protects the privacy of the other student involved or alleged to be involved. Student behavior is taken seriously by the administration, but the responsibility for corrective action is shared between the school and the parent.

**Q: My child was told he couldn't ride the bus for five days because of his behavior. The law requires the district to provide transportation. How can you just deny him this right?**

**A:** The school board and the superintendent of school may suspend a student's bus privileges. Once suspended, it is a parent's responsibility to get the student to and from school. However, please understand that a bus driver CANNOT suspend a student from the bus. He or she can only report the infraction that may lead to the suspension.

**Q: My child goes to a private school in Watertown. Why won't you transport him?**

**A:** Indian River does provide transportation to and from private schools in Watertown, Carthage, and Gouverneur. However, the district is not obligated to exceed the maximum distance it transports its own students. Thus, in general, the district will not transport a child beyond 17.3 miles. To accommodate residents who live outside of that distance, the district has established group pick-up points at Evans Mills and Calcium Primary Schools. Parents living outside of the 17.3 mile limit arrange for transportation to that group stop and the district takes it from there.

**Q: I want my child to go to another primary school because my afternoon babysitter lives by that one, but the district won't transport her there. Why?**

**A:** The district has established attendance zones for its five primary schools. Since 2000 the district has not transported children (except those with disabilities) across attendance zone boundaries. Education Law 3635(1) does not require the district to transport across attendance zone boundaries.