



OSTA

Ottawa Student
Transportation
Authority

Access to Empty Seats
Effective Date: April 1, 2017

Policy Code – Version: T1 – V4

Policy Name: Access to Empty Seats

Approved by motion of Board on	29/10/2012
Modified by motion of the Board on	25/04/2016
Modified by motion of the Board on	27/02/2017

Cross Reference

T14 – Transportation Services;
T17 – Weighted Vehicle Loading Capacity for School Buses;
T18 – Transportation Eligibility

Related Forms

F4 – Request for Special Transportation;
F1 – Application for Access to Empty Seats on School Bus Vehicles

Policy Statement

1. The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority shall establish procedures to enable any students not normally eligible for home to school transportation services under OSTA's Transportation Eligibility Policy T18 to apply to access available empty seats on contracted school bus vehicles.
2. The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority shall maintain accurate vehicle size, weighted capacity, vehicle load, and bus stop information at all times to ensure comprehensive information is available to school staff for the purpose of administering this policy.
3. OSTA shall be authorized to assign OCSB and OCDSB students to available empty seats on school bus vehicles under procedures and timelines established by the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority.
4. Transportation services provided under this policy may be withdrawn at any time during the school year to accommodate eligible students, operational requirements and/or budget constraints.
5. Application for and/or approval of transportation service under this policy shall be for the current school year only.

Procedure

General Procedures and Guidelines

1. The General Manager may grant permission for the children of school bus drivers to accompany their driver-parent on their assigned route in accordance with the requirements of the OSTA's "Transportation Services" policy. The accommodation of children of driver-parents will be prioritized over empty seat/courtesy rider applicants.
2. Parents of students requiring transportation to two homes due to joint custody are encouraged to review OSTA's variable transportation policy, procedure and application forms, prior to applying for an empty seat: [T22-V3-Transportation-for-Students-in-a-Joint-Custody-Arrangement-and-Having-Two-Homes-Procedure-Updated-Aug-30-2018.pdf](#)
3. Only valid bus stops that are currently being accessed by eligible students will be available for the assignment of students under this policy. Bus stop locations that are not being used by eligible students will be removed from bus routes by Ottawa Student Transportation Authority staff, and any students who may have been approved by school staff to access those stops will be relocated to the next closest available bus stop location.
4. Students approved to access empty seats will meet the school bus at established, regularly-scheduled bus stop locations: School bus stops will not be added, nor will special routing be authorized to accommodate students approved for service under this policy.
5. Ridership will not exceed the established Optimum Weighted Loading Capacity for school bus vehicles as established under the OSTA's "Weighted Vehicle Loading Capacity for School Buses" policy, for the purposes of empty seat/courtesy transportation.
6. OCSB secondary students participating in Cooperative Learning placements at OCSB Board elementary schools, and Non-Resident students participating in Student Exchanges, are not eligible for transportation services to and from work placements, but may apply for an empty seat providing such service can be accommodated without disruption on existing routes/stops for the duration of the placement and the student resides and/or the work placement is outside the UTA.
7. Students approved for service under this policy may be assigned to bus stops that are beyond OSTA's established distances for transportation entitlement for the school the student attends.
8. Small vehicle services will not normally be considered for the purposes of empty seat/courtesy transportation services.
9. Eligible and ineligible students will only be assigned to **one** empty seat at any one time.
10. Different routes than that servicing the area closest to the home address may be considered, providing the parent/guardian makes arrangements to deliver

the student to the appropriate bus stop. In these cases, OSTA will seek confirmation from the parent/guardian that the alternate arrangements are acceptable before assigning the student to that route.

11. Emergency/Extenuating Circumstances – Short-term approval

Emergency or other unforeseen situations requiring a change in pick up and/or drop-off point will be addressed at the discretion of the school Principal, subject to the availability of space on a vehicle.

Occasional or emergency requests for a change in a student's pick up/drop-off point must be submitted by the parent/guardian in writing to the school Principal in advance of the requirement for service change. Where approval is granted, notice will be provided to the carrier/driver through the Operator Bus Planner Web Portal. It is the responsibility of the school Principal to notify both the school bus driver and the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority of these temporary changes.

In considering the request, the school Principal will take into account space availability on the school vehicle and the availability of existing bus stops.

School bus routes shall neither be altered nor overloaded to accommodate such requests.

OSTA will not accommodate requests for temporary changes to transportation assignments due to parent vacations.

12. Students with Special Needs, and/or Short or Long-Term Medical Accommodations

Students with special needs, short or long-term medical accommodations should refer to the Accessible Transportation Policy T21 to request a seat on a vehicle.

Schools are NOT to place students applying for empty seats on any buses until they appear on a route manifest due to safety and security concerns. This is particularly important at school start-up in early September when OSTA makes numerous changes to the system.

Application and Processing Procedure – For October Review

13. Parents/Guardians seeking access to empty seats for their child/children will annually complete and submit an "Application for Access Empty Seats on School Bus Vehicles" form to OSTA or their school for consideration. The school will forward all applications to OSTA.

14. While empty seat applications are accepted all year-long, parents applying for transportation during the annual October review period must submit their applications **no later than the third Friday of September**.

15. After October 1 of each school year, OSTA will review applications received for access to empty seats on school bus vehicles servicing individual schools. OSTA will be placing greater emphasis on student need, than on other factors. Applications are not reviewed on a "first come, first served" basis. OSTA staff will make decisions based on the following criteria and may confer with the Principal to better understand individual family situations:

- a) Distance from school, giving priority to those living the farthest distance from school, and the age of the applicant, giving priority to the youngest applicant;
 - b) Grade level of student, with the first priority given to Junior and Senior Kindergarten students;
 - c) Child care needs;
 - d) Applicant has siblings attending the same school;
 - e) Compassionate requests due to special family circumstances;
 - f) Students on a cross-boundary transfer;
 - g) Availability of empty seats on any given route;
 - h) Date of completion of application.
16. OSTA will review seat availability on a regular basis throughout the year, based on the original application. Multiple applications for the same child at the same address going to the same school are not necessary and are discouraged.
17. Parents may make a new application if the home or daycare address, or school have changed.
18. Application Processing Procedures:
- a) Parents/Guardians complete and sign an "Application for Access to Empty Seats on School Bus Vehicles" form, acknowledging the conditions of approval, and submit the completed form to their child's school or to OSTA.
 - b) School sends applications to OSTA via inter-board mail.
 - c) The completed form is reviewed by OSTA staff to ensure that all information required is complete and reflects the information maintained by the school in their student database.
 - d) After October 1 of each school year, OSTA will begin reviewing empty seat applications and preparing a list of proposed seat assignments.
 - e) OSTA may contact the school regarding student needs, depending on circumstances and number of applications received.
 - f) A list of proposed assignments is sent to the school for review, and the opportunity to highlight compassionate consideration due to unusual circumstances.
 - g) Based on the school's feedback, OSTA proceeds with the seat assignment.
 - h) OSTA staff updates the database based on information received nightly through Bus Planner, to reflect the approval and assignment of an empty seat.

- i) OSTA will contact parents regarding empty seat assignments if necessary. Approved empty seat assignments will appear on the Bus Planner Parent Web Portal.
- j) Schools will verify daily Route Changes via the Bus Planner School Web Portal to note empty seat assignments and other regular transportation changes for eligible students.
- k) Schools may print and send home "Student Summary" for individual students' backpacks to advise parents of the effective date of the approved empty seat transportation.
- l) Parents are expected to check the Bus Planner Parent Web Portal for their child's transportation assignment.

Application and Processing Procedure – Throughout the year

- 19. The same application process and prioritization will occur as for the October review and applications are accepted at all times.
- 20. OSTA will maintain a waiting list of students who were not able to access an empty seat due to lack of space and/or prioritization of students with greater need as of October 1.
- 21. Students assigned to empty seats as of October 1 may be displaced by eligible students throughout the year, but will not be displaced by other students requiring empty seats throughout the year.
- 22. The waiting list may be re-prioritized based on student needs of late applicants, and is NOT on a "first come, first serve" basis.
- 23. Waiting lists are reviewed no less than once per month after October, and until the end of the school year.