



TO: Parents of Students Eligible for School Bus Transportation
FROM: The Great Falls Public Schools Transportation Office
DATE: 2023-2024 School Year
RE: 2023-2024 Transportation Information

Welcome to the 2023-24 school year! Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) is committed to doing our part to ensure that every student is at school every day, and the transportation program is an integral part of that process. GFPS contracts and partners with Big Sky Bus Lines for busing services. Together we are committed to providing safe and efficient busing to our students. BSBL is a local company with a long history of providing transportation services in Great Falls and their bus drivers are community members providing an important service. As the school year begins, there will no doubt be challenges as students, parents, teachers and even drivers are becoming familiar with the bus system and routes. We provide the following information to help overcome some of those challenges.

TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM OVERVIEW

General Information

GFPS Board Policy and Montana State Law govern all transportation matters. Copies of the school district transportation policies are available for your review at this website: <http://www.gfps.k12.mt.us/districtinformation/boardpolicy>.

Bus Stops

- The bus stop for your child is based on the residential address contained in the official school records provided by you to the school offices. If you have moved or anticipate any changes, please contact the school office. Bus stop and route information is available at each school and via an interactive map at this website <http://www.infofinder.com/ifi/?cid=GFPS3W3Z6TBAC>. Please check bus stop information annually as changes may occur over the summer.
- Consolidated bus stops are utilized in order to transport numerous students safely and efficiently. This means that students may need to walk down the road a little to catch the bus in the morning instead of having pickup occur in front of or next to their house. The listed time for each bus stop is approximate and subject to change during the school year. The student must be at the stop 5 minutes prior to arrival time and wait until 10-15 minutes after pickup time in case the bus is late. See "What if the bus doesn't come" section below for more information.

Bus Routes

The route(s) assigned to your child have been designed and timed to provide the safest, most expedient and cost-efficient means of transporting your child between home and school. We have taken weather conditions into consideration when determining bus stop protocols. The number of stops and the distance between them varies according to the grade level of the students. The routes have been designed to minimize the total amount of time students spend riding the bus. The first few weeks are very busy for us as we fine tune each route. Because we are currently experiencing a shortage in the number of qualified bus drivers, we also may have to combine routes from time-to-time.

Changes to Bus Routes

- Occasionally bus routes must be changed due to weather conditions, construction, the addition of new students, timing, shortage of contracted driving staff, etc. If changes are to occur, communication will be sent out to you in various formats. These include mail, phone call, remind, text and/or letters sent home with your student.
- During the first few weeks of school the number of requested or required changes is significant. Changes will not normally be made until the third week of school unless the change is minor or safety related. Please be patient. All requests for changes will be reviewed and evaluated against the GFPS Board Transportation Policies and MT School Bus Transportation laws. The district cannot approve any changes which are solely for the purpose of convenience but will evaluate each request and circumstance.

Public vs. Private Roads

Several roads have been constructed during the past few years to service new residential areas. Very few of these roads have been accepted by the City as public roads maintained by the City. Due to liability issues school buses are prohibited from traveling private roads, except under special conditions.



Communication with Parents:

- In an effort to get emergency transportation information out to parents in a timely manner, the *remind* mass communication system will be used. Messages will be sent out through text and/or phone call to the student's contact number listed in Powerschool. IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THESE MESSAGES, YOUR NUMBER MUST BE PROPERLY ENTERED INTO POWERSCHOOL. Contact your school to ensure accuracy. Principals at some schools may also use Remind 101 system to communicate as well.
- Parents can access lots of information at the GFPS website: www.gfps.k12.mt.us. Specific transportation information can be found under the "Parents & Students" tab and then "Transportation/Bus Info" in the dropdown menu.
- If you have specific questions or concerns, you can contact either Big Sky Bus Lines at 454-1283 or, GFPS Transportation & Safety Department at 268-6015.

Weather and Emergency Information

Living in Montana, we understand that beautiful fall weather will eventually turn to winter. You can find our "School Disruption due to Weather and Emergencies" information on the school district website on the Transportation/Bus Info webpage (www.gfps.k12.mt.us/content/transportation-and-bus-information). You can also access it on the GFPS Crisis Manager Smartphone application that can be found here: <http://gfps.k12.mt.us/students/safety>. More information will be sent home in early October with elementary students via Wednesday Envelopes.

Young Rider Information

In order to help school staff and bus drivers identify your student and deliver them to the correct bus stop, the schools will issue color-coded bus tags to be placed on your student's backpack. *It is important that these tags remain with your student throughout the school year.* We encourage all parents of young students to be present at their child's bus stop during pickup and drop off. It is also important to note your student's bus number, as this will help expedite any transportation information being requested.

Bus Stop Tips

These tips mostly apply to our youngest riders, but they can be helpful to all:

- Make sure your child knows his/her first and last name, home address and a number to contact you. This will help those who will help your student should something go awry.
- Take your child to the bus stop before the first day of riding the bus:
 - Point out the color of houses and other landmarks. This prevents students from getting off at the wrong stop.
 - Practice the safest route to and from your home to the bus stop.
 - Time how long it takes to walk the route to ensure being to the stop a few minutes early.
- While a rare occurrence, plan as to what to do if the bus doesn't come. They should not wait more than 10 minutes.

School Bus Rules

During the past school year, GFPS worked with BSBL to create a simple, understandable set of bus rules. For your convenience, we've included the rules with this letter. Please understand that these are the basic guidelines and a comprehensive list is available on the website. Please help your student become familiar with the acronym "SAFTEY" for the school bus rules:

Stay in assigned seat

Arrive 5 minutes early

Follow all directions

Eating is prohibited

Treat everyone with respect

You are responsible for your own behavior

Also review these general safety rules from the Safe Kids organization: www.safekids.org/safetytips/field_risks/school-bus-safety.

This transportation information is just a sampling of the many ways we promote safety and good attendance. If you need more information, please feel free to contact the principal of your child's school. Have a great and safe year!