

Pupil Transportation Questions and Answers-COVID-19

Updated 3/25/2020

The permissible expenditures set forth in this guidance are for FY 2020 only and expire at the earlier of June 30, 2020 or the date upon which all emergency declaration(s) requiring that school campuses remain closed to onsite instruction expire.

Are school districts still going to receive the state and county transportation reimbursements?

The first semester payment is issued on March 27th. During the closure period, the state will pay the second semester payment as if the district were still open and operating a full transportation program. The OPI encourages counties to provide the budgeted payments for the closure period to school districts in line with 20-10-146, MCA, and with what the state is paying to keep the districts budgets whole.

Please contact Donell Rosenthal at (406) 444-3024 or email drosenthal@mt.gov or Kara Flath at (406) 444-3249 or email at Kara.Flath@mt.gov.

How will the second semester payment be paid?

During the closure period, the OPI will reimburse districts for the *originally planned school days* for transportation days as defined in §20-10-145. The district will claim the actual transportation days up to the point of school closure (March 15th, 2020) and from that point on (if schools are still closed) the district will claim the *originally planned school days* which the district will obtain from the school calendars submitted to the OPI through TEAMS. Districts will receive reimbursement based on the routes submitted (using TR1's and TR4's) prior to the closure of schools (and as if the district were still open and operational).

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How can districts use the transportation fund during the closure period?

Districts can use the transportation fund to pay for transportation services which provide instructional services to students.

This can include a variety of required functions during the closure:

- Cost of providing nutritional programs, which would include transportation of food, not the food costs.
- Costs of providing *accessibility* to student services for remote learning.
- Costs of providing instructional materials to students which can include items such internet service to ensure that students without internet access are provided such access during periods of school closure.
- Cost of instructional materials, supplies, and software licenses.
- Costs of technological equipment needed for correspondence study purchased by the school district and loaned to students without such equipment.

- Cost of correspondence study.
- Costs of providing services to students with an IEP.
- Costs of time off or repurposed time for staff normally paid from the transportation fund.
- Costs to contractors of transportation services.

The OPI recommends districts that pay for new services such as internet access for students have the appropriate policies, procedures, timelines, and guidelines to parents in place before any payment of services is provided.

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Will districts still be reimbursing parents for Individual Contracts (TR4's) during the school closures?

The reimbursement of Individual Contracts (TR4's) will be paid based on actual days of attendance up until March 15th, 2020. From that point to the end of the school closure time frame, the OPI will reimburse districts for the *originally planned school days* as defined in §20-10-145. The district will claim the actual transportation days up to the point of school closure (March 15th, 2020) and from that point on (if schools are still closed) the district will claim the *originally planned school days* which the district will obtain from the school calendars submitted to the OPI through TEAMS. Districts will receive reimbursement based on the existing contracts submitted (using TR4's) prior to the closure of schools. The OPI will not accept new individual contracts from the closure date forward.

The purpose of this is to maintain all state funding as if the district were still open and operational. The OPI is not directing nor recommending districts use this funding to continue paying parents for transportation days. Districts are required to honor the individual contracts up until March 15th, 2020, and after that the district Board of Trustees will have the funding available to pay for any of the allowable expenses discussed above.

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Are there any exceptions given for when a bus driver's Commercial Driver's License (CDL) or Medical Exam Certificate (MEC) expires during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Due to the global health crisis and recommendation for social distancing, the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) has made changes to Driver License and Medical Examiner's Certificates (MEC) expirations.

The Governor issued an Executive Order allowing DOJ to extend credentials for an additional 90 days from the date of expiration for March, April and May. Commercial Driver License (CDL) have been included in this order. Driving records will report these licenses as valid in the system but the physical card will show expired.

In the situation where a MEC has expired, MVD will **not** be downgrading them during this time, if the driver is unable to get into a doctor to obtain a current MEC.

For further questions, please email MVDcovid19@mt.gov

Are there any exceptions available for when a bus driver's First Aid and CPR expires during the COVID-19 outbreak?

During this global health crisis and the recommendation for social distancing, first aid and CPR renewal may be difficult for drivers to obtain. Drivers who only need to renew can do so [online](#).

NEW drivers are required to have an in-person training of at least four hours. Districts may take advantage of the 60-day grace period for these drivers. If the 60-day grace period expires before restrictions are lifted due to the COVID-19, please contact Donell Rosenthal at (406) 444-3024 or email drosenthal@mt.gov

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, if the district has a driver that has an expiration of either their CDL, MEC, First Aid, or CPR, how will a district receive full reimbursement on the second semester claim?

Districts will still need to enter and submit second semester claims before the scheduled deadlines. When districts begin to enter bus route claims for reimbursement and recognize that they are receiving a reduction in days it may be due to an expiration date related to the driver. In this case, the district will need to update the expiration date to include the extension time related to the COVID-19 restrictions. In this case, please contact Donell Rosenthal at (406) 444-3024 or email drosenthal@mt.gov for the extension.

Due to the closure of schools and the possibility of not reopening, what if a driver has not completed their mandatory 15 hours of training?

Most bus drivers may have completed the mandatory 15 hours of the training requirement. However, if drivers have not completed or fulfilled this requirement, an extension will be granted to allow the driver to complete their hours of training beyond June 30th. Districts can use the transportation fund for drivers to complete their training during the closure.

NOTE: Drivers may NOT double up their training hours. For example, if a driver completes their hours in August, the hours of training will still only be recognized for the FY2020. Drivers would still have to complete 15 hours for 2021.

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