

**NORTH CALDWELL BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING SUBSCRIPTION BUSING**

April 27, 2016

The North Caldwell Board of Education has adopted a subscription busing program. Under this program, children who live more than two miles from their school will continue to be bused without charge and children who live two miles or less from their school will be required to pay a subsidized cost to receive busing. This notice will provide you with some answers to frequently asked questions regarding the program.

**Why is the Board implementing subscription busing?**

Subscription busing is being done for three principal reasons.

First, the Board concluded that there is inequity in the current busing program. Specifically, 58.4% of students are offered busing even though it isn't required by law (called "courtesy busing"). Another 21% of students are not offered busing. If we continue our busing program unchanged, the percentage of students without courtesy busing would grow over time, resulting in further inequity.

Second, the Board wishes to make busing available to all parents if they believe that it is the safest alternative for their children to get to school.

Third, this was done for budgetary reasons. It is anticipated that busing costs will be increasing over time. Additionally, while the District is run efficiently, many of the District's costs rise more than the legally permitted increase in tax revenues. The District is also facing a future influx of new students resulting from new housing in North Caldwell. Subscription busing helps prevent educational program cuts, helps maintain class sizes and allows the District to continue to maintain appropriate reserves for future emergency and capital expenditures.

**Can I subscribe for busing even if my children don't receive busing now?**

Yes. Subscription busing will be available to all children, even those who do not currently receive busing.

**When will this take effect?**

This will take effect beginning with the 2016-2017 school year.

**What is the cost of subscription busing?**

The cost is \$450 per child for the entire school year, with a maximum charge of \$1,000 per family. The charge for an a.m. or p.m. route only (see below) is \$300 per child.

**How was the maximum charge of \$1,000 established?**

The Board identified the maximum amount of money it was comfortable asking a family to pay at the beginning of this program.

**Will the cost go up every year?**

The \$450 fee was established with a goal of not increasing it for several years.

**Can I sign up for a limited number of days or for only one way travel (i.e., either morning or afternoon busing)?**

You cannot sign up for a limited number of days. The \$450 fee purchases a seat to and from school for 5 days a week.

You can sign up for one-way travel. However, one-way travel is only available if the routes are not full with round-trip riders. Round-trip seats will be assigned and filled first. Any remaining seats will be available for those electing one-way travel. If there are more elections than seats, it will be assigned by lottery. If you elect one-way seating and are not selected in the lottery, you will not have busing.

**What are the next steps?**

In May, you will receive a Board communication providing a web link to sign up for subscription busing. This link will also be on [www.ncboe.org](http://www.ncboe.org). The deadline to enroll will be June 1, and the deadline for payment (by check) is June 15. Bus routes will be created in July. In August, parents will receive bus passes by mail, along with a service contact to call or e-mail.

**How do I know my bus stop before I sign up?**

As part of the online sign up process, you will be given a list of stops and asked to select a first and second choice. We will do our best to honor the first choice.

**What if I live more than two miles away from the school?**

Children who live more than two miles from the school they attend will continue to be bused, without charge, as required by law. You will be notified in May whether you are two miles away and will be automatically assigned to a bus route.

**How do you determine if I live more than 2 miles from the school?**

The measurement is made by the shortest distance along public roadways or walkways between the entrance to the student's home and the nearest public entrance to the school building. This measurement is for eligibility purposes and may not necessarily be the travel path to and from school.

**Will there be any service improvements?**

The bus co-op the District contracts with will provide a single point of contact so that if you do have busing issues, you do not need to go through the school offices or multiple points of contact in order to have your needs addressed.

**Won't the carline be much more crowded and take more time?**

Based on estimates, it is very possible that there will be little to no impact on the carline. However, this is only an estimate, and the actual impact will depend on the number of people who ultimately subscribe to busing. This program is being rolled out early to give the District and the Borough sufficient time to understand and address the impact of the subscription levels, if any. However, parents should be aware that if the number of walkers increases significantly, this will impact waiting time on the car line. Parents should consider this possibility carefully when deciding whether to subscribe.

**If I don't sign up by June 1, can I sign up later in the year?**

No. In order to properly and efficiently assign routes and allocate buses, we must know in advance who will be using the program. Accordingly, this will be the only opportunity to sign up for the 2016-2017 plan year.

**How will the bus driver know who subscribed and who did not?**

In August, bus passes will be mailed to those who subscribed for busing. Since bus driver absences are not uncommon, children should have the bus pass with them each day.

**What if I have to drop my child off or pick my child up at two schools?**

Last year, the Board implemented an extended release time for the convenience of parents who must pick up at both schools. A staff member is available to supervise dismissal at both Grandview and Gould Schools until 3:45 p.m., which provides sufficient time to get from one building to the other.

**If I don't elect subscription busing, who is responsible for my child when he or she is walking to and from school?**

You are responsible for your child getting to and from school in a safe manner. If you do not believe that your children have a safe walking path, you should seriously consider subscribing to busing.

**What if I can't afford it?**

A fee waiver is available for those who meet certain income requirements. The Board will utilize the Income Guidelines that are used by the National School Lunch program. If you think this may apply to you, please contact the Board office for more information regarding the documentation requirements.

**How is the Borough of North Caldwell being informed of the changes so it can consider whether additional safety measures, like crossing guards, are needed?**

For several months, the Board and the Borough (including the Mayor's office, the Borough Council and the Police Department) have been meeting to discuss the potential impact of subscription busing, if any. This close dialogue will continue throughout the implementation process. The Board has also committed to providing the Borough with information regarding subscription levels as soon as it is available.

**Were there other options explored?**

Yes. The Board also considered eliminating all courtesy busing and providing only the transportation mandated by law. It also considered restructuring the existing courtesy program and redrawing boundaries to increase the number of walkers as costs increase. Notwithstanding its potential disadvantages, the Board believes that subscription busing is a more favorable option.

With respect to budgetary issues, the Board rejected the possibility of eliminating or reducing educational programs. Annual surveys of parents in our community have consistently indicated that courtesy busing is the lowest priority when compared to academic programs and class sizes.

**If the District ends up saving money, what will that money be used for?**

The Board is only permitted to allocate funds on a year-to-year basis. Accordingly, until there is an understanding of the amount of cost savings generated, if any, no decision can be made as to the appropriate use of these dollars. However, as a general matter, any savings will be used to maintain programs in the face of expenses that rise more rapidly than revenue and/or to increase reserves maintained for such things as future capital improvements.