

CONCLUSION: A review of the transportation programs for nine Mississippi school districts in FY 2023 showed opportunities for districts to strengthen their programs and increase efficiency. For example, three of the eight reporting districts (38%) did not use routing software to manage their bus routes, which can help districts achieve maximize efficiency. There was also wide variance in the performance of districts in key areas such as cost per bus and cost per mile, suggesting that districts have room for improvement. Some districts have characteristics that naturally result in greater program efficiency (e.g., dense population of students in a small geographic area).



BACKGROUND

In FY 2026, PEER received funding to contract with Level Data (formerly GlimpseK12) to conduct a comparative review of nine school districts. This report focuses on one of six non-instructional areas of review—transportation (Volume VI). Other non-instructional reports include:

- Finance and Supply Chain (Volume I);
- Human Resources (Volume II);
- Information technology (Volume III);
- Nutrition (Volume IV);
- Operations (Volume V).

KEY FINDINGS

- **Of the eight school districts reporting transportation data, three (38%) did not utilize routing software to manage their bus routes.**
Bus routing software is intended to help districts achieve maximum efficiency. However, transportation program staff must be proficient in using the software.
- **Five of the eight reporting districts (63%) did not use formal guidelines for student seating on buses.**
Formal guidelines can offer safety, discipline, and accountability benefits.
- **School districts use various bus route methods. For example, several districts indicated that students from all grades in a geographic area ride the bus together and are dropped off at their respective schools, while other districts assign a bus to transport students exclusively to and from one school without additional routes.**
No bus route method can be conclusively deemed superior.
- **Six of the eight reporting districts (75%) did not have a sufficient number of substitute bus drivers to prevent occasional service delays.**
Five districts reported using alternative methods to having substitute bus drivers (e.g., merging routes or having transportation department staff provide coverage).

Cost Savings

Five of the eight reporting districts have the potential for cost savings either through bus route improvements or staffing adjustments. Of the districts reporting, annual projected potential cost savings could be up to **\$4.5 million** for bus route improvements and up to **\$119,000** for staffing adjustments.

Exhibit 11 on page 29 provides a summary of projected potential cost savings from bus route improvements in three districts and Exhibit 12 on page 30 provides a summary of projected potential cost savings from transportation staffing adjustments in three districts.

While the reported data suggests the potential for cost savings for these districts, each district's administration should carefully review the data and recommendations in light of the particular circumstances of the district.

Variance in District Performance on Key Indicators

- Of the districts reporting on key performance indicators,
 - average annual cost per bus overall in FY 2023 ranged from \$24,883 in Humphreys to \$66,065 in Jackson City;
 - cost per rider ranged from \$575 in Humphreys to \$1,325 in Harrison; and,
 - annual cost per mile ranged from \$1.62 in Jackson City to \$15.61 in Yazoo City.
- In terms of staffing, the number of buses per mechanic ranged from 14 in Yazoo City to 50 in Rankin.

Issues with Missing Data

As with previous cohorts, some districts in this cohort required multiple requests for clarification of submitted data and in some instances, the data was never clarified. As a result, the assessment team's ability to analyze the data fully was inhibited. Inaccurate data also impairs district administrators' ability to monitor and manage the transportation function in their district effectively.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICTS

1. In FY 2027, each district superintendent, in consultation with the district's transportation program personnel, should review the information from this report and implement each of the relevant district recommendations to increase efficiency, improve service levels, and/or achieve cost savings. These include, but are not limited to:
 - a. potential implementation of bus routing software;
 - b. potential implementation of formal guidelines for student seating on buses;
 - c. annual reviews of bus routes;
 - d. identify potential opportunities for bus route optimization;
 - e. evaluate approaches for addressing driver absences; and,
 - f. assess mechanic staffing levels and spare fleet size.
2. District administrators should also use the information in this report to compare their performance to that of their peers in Mississippi, as well as regionally and nationally, to identify areas for potential improvement, and take action to improve in those areas.
3. For districts unable to provide benchmarking or performance information during this review pertaining to their transportation programs (or provided questionable data), relevant district personnel should take action to begin collecting and monitoring precise transportation data on an ongoing basis.
4. District personnel should provide an annual performance report to the district superintendent regarding the status of the transportation programs using the measures included in this review.
5. District administrators should use the information from annual performance reports to monitor their district's costs and efficiency in operating its transportation program.