

DRIVING CHOICE GRANT

INTERIM REPORT

Bureau of School Business Services

DECEMBER 31, 2023



Driving Choice Grant Interim Report

Chapter 2022-154, Laws of Florida (House Bill 2524 from the 2022 Legislative session), created the Driving Choice Grant Program in section (s.) 1006.27(3), Florida Statutes (F.S.), to improve access to reliable and safe transportation for students participating in public school choice programs under s. 1002.20(6)(a), F.S., and to support innovative solutions that increase the efficiency of public-school transportation. Section 1006.27(3)(b), F.S., requires the Florida Department of Education to provide an interim report by December 31, 2023, and a final report by December 31, 2024.

The amount of \$15,000,000 in non-recurring funds was appropriated for the grant. Grant proposals included:

- Transportation resource planning and sharing among school districts and local governments.
- Developing or contracting with rideshare programs or developing carpool strategies.
- Developing options to reduce costs and increase efficiencies while improving access to transportation options for families.
- Developing options to address personnel challenges; and
- Expanding the use of transportation funds to help cover the cost of transporting students to and from school.

Forty-five districts applied and were awarded their proportionate share of funds, for a total of \$12,617,210, based on 2022-23 projected unweighted full-time equivalent students, with no district receiving less than \$50,000. The amount of \$2,382,790 in unallocated funds from the 28 districts and lab schools that did not participate in the program is reflected in this report.

In recent years, the most significant transportation barrier for school transportation operations has been the shortage of school bus operators, which creates a challenge for school districts to transport all students to and from school and school activities. At the same time, the growth of open enrollment and school choice options have increased the need for school districts to provide transportation services. School districts have implemented many strategies to accommodate additional transportation demands with fewer school bus operators, including:

- Staggering school start times to allow elementary, middle and high school students to be transported at separate times, requiring the same school bus operator to drive the same route three times, transporting three times more students daily.
- Having non-commercial driver's license (CDL) drivers use smaller multipurpose passenger vehicles to transport isolated and special needs students to allow school buses to be used on routes where they can achieve maximum passenger capacity.
- Establishing depot bus stops for school choice programs, which requires parents to take students to centralized locations.
- Providing vouchers or bus passes for public transportation to school choice programs.
- Encouraging other school staff, such as teachers and coaches, to get their CDL license and become certified to transport students on a bus so they can assist as substitute bus route drivers and transport sports teams and club members.

The common factor that each program narrative directly or indirectly addresses is the school bus operator shortage in each program category. The best practices, such as driver incentive programs, advertising to solicit school bus driver applicants, using non-CDL drivers in multipurpose passenger vehicles, and contracting transportation services to third party providers are all strategies that increase student transportation options for school choice program students.

Grant fund expenditures for each district are provided in the following table.

	District Name	Number of Students benefited from grant funds	Grant Category *	Grant Sub-Category	Allocation
1	Alachua	0	N/A	N/A	\$142,543
2	Baker	22	4	Driver Incentive	\$50,000
3	Bay	45	4	Driver Incentive	\$124,151
4	Bradford	55	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
5	Brevard	636	2	Contracted Transportation	\$355,974
6	Broward	59,000	3	Routing Software	\$1,245,428
7	Calhoun	3	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
8	Charlotte	6,050	4	Driver Incentive	\$79,259
9	Citrus	0	N/A	N/A	\$75,378
10	Clay	35	3	Van Purchase	\$186,692
11	Collier	22,000	4	Driver Incentive	\$229,294
12	Columbia	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
13	Miami-Dade	400	3	Van Purchase	\$1,657,264
14	DeSoto	11	4	Driver Incentive	\$50,000
15	Dixie	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
16	Duval	24	2	Contracted Transportation	\$637,158
17	Escambia	0	N/A	N/A	\$185,018
18	Flagler	6,000	4	Driver Incentive	\$64,581
19	Franklin	680	4	Driver Incentive	\$50,000
20	Gadsden	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
21	Gilchrist	12	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
22	Glades	500	4	Driver Incentive	\$50,000
23	Gulf	15	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
24	Hamilton	8	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
24	Hardee	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
26	Hendry	0	N/A	N/A	\$65,060
27	Hernando	55	3	Bus Purchase	\$121,234
28	Highlands	6,000	4	Driver Incentive	\$60,165
29	Hillsborough	50	2	Contracted Transportation	\$1,083,719
30	Holmes	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
31	Indian River	4,834	3	Routing Software	\$81,804
32	Jackson	6	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
33	Jefferson	32	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
34	Lafayette	5	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
35	Lake	94	3	Bus Purchase	\$230,247
36	Lee	0	N/A	N/A	\$471,996

37	Leon	0	N/A	N/A	\$160,038
38	Levy	77	3	Bus Purchase	\$50,000
39	Liberty	6	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
40	Madison	9	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
41	Manatee	15,000	4	Driver Incentive	\$244,422
42	Marion	0	N/A	N/A	\$214,303
43	Martin	0	N/A	N/A	\$89,796
44	Monroe	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
45	Nassau	0	N/A	N/A	\$61,910
46	Okaloosa	77	3	Bus Purchase	\$157,702
47	Okeechobee	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
48	Orange	500	2	Contracted Transportation	\$1,013,616
49	Osceola	31,000	4	Driver Incentive	\$372,050
50	Palm Beach	240	3	Bus Purchase	\$919,177
51	Pasco	42,470	4	Driver Incentive	\$404,168
52	Pinellas	100	2	Contracted Transportation	\$453,491
53	Polk	480	2	Contracted Transportation	\$548,890
54	Putnam	489	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
55	St. Johns	6,161	4	Driver Incentive	\$237,151
56	St. Lucie	19,680	4	Driver Incentive	\$219,119
57	Santa Rosa	0	N/A	N/A	\$147,281
58	Sarasota	0	N/A	N/A	\$215,607
59	Seminole	26,000	3	Routing Software	\$330,238
60	Sumter	16	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
61	Suwannee	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
62	Taylor	8	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
63	Union	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
64	Volusia	355	3	Bus Purchase	\$310,216
65	Wakulla	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
66	Walton	0	N/A	N/A	\$53,860
67	Washington	12	3	Van Purchase	\$50,000
69	FAMU Lab School	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
70	FAU Palm Beach	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
71	FAU St. Lucie	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
72	FSU Lab: Broward	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
73	FSU Lab: Leon	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
74	UF Lab School	0	N/A	N/A	\$50,000
TOTAL		249,252			\$15,000,000

* Pursuant to s. 1006.27(3)(a), F.S., the grant funds could be used for:

1. Transportation resource planning and sharing among school districts and local governments.
2. Developing or contracting with rideshare programs or developing carpool strategies.
3. Developing options to reduce costs and increase efficiencies while improving access to transportation options for families.
4. Developing options to address personnel challenges.
5. Expanding the use of transportation funds to help cover the cost of transporting students to and from school.

N/A School district did not participate in the grant.

The following table lists the number of students served by grant recipients based on the five categories described above.

DISTRICT USAGE BY GRANT SUB-CATEGORY	Number of Districts	Number of Students Served
Driver Incentive Programs	14	155,619
Contracted Transportation	6	1,790
Van (multi-purpose van) Purchase	16	1,111
School Bus Purchase(s)	6	898
Ridership Tracking or Routing Software	3	89,834
TOTAL	45	249,252

Section 23 of the 2023 General Appropriations Act (chapter 2023-239, Laws of Florida), provided authority to revert the unused amount of \$2,382,790, and reallocate the funds to participating school districts based on the original 2022-23 projected unweighted full-time equivalent students. Those funds are available to participating school districts in 2023-24 to expend on this program. A final report on the expenditures of these grant funds will be posted on the Florida Department of Education's website by December 31, 2024.