



First Nation Student Transportation Fund: Planning, Policy, and Procedures Guide

2025-26 School Year

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Introduction

The [BC Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success](#) (“BCTEA”) between the Province of British Columbia (“BC”), the First Nations Education Steering Committee (“FNESC”), and Indigenous Services Canada (“ISC”) collectively the “Parties” sets the foundation for further growth and changes to support the enhancement of the B.C. public education system. As a component of BCTEA, the Parties agreed to establish a First Nation Student Transportation Fund (“Fund”) to address the transportation needs of First Nation Students who live on-reserve and attend BC Public Schools, as described in BCTEA - [Schedule G: Transportation for First Nation Students Attending BC Public Schools](#). Refer to Appendix A for a list of relevant definitions.

Starting in 2018/19, Boards of Education (“Boards”) and First Nations were encouraged to work together to determine First Nation Student transportation needs and co-develop Joint Transportation Plan Worksheets (“Joint Plans”). The Joint Plans were to be informed by the [Guiding Principles for Developing Joint First Nation Student Transportation Plans](#) (“Guiding Principles”) outlined below and criteria established by the BCTEA Parties. The Parties established a tripartite First Nation Student Transportation Committee (the “Joint Committee”) to assess the Joint Plans submitted by a Board and on behalf of the First Nations it serves.

Transportation Plan funding is intended to be supplemental to already available funding (Provincial general operating grant funding, used to fund various student services and supports for all students, including transportation, proxies for transportation funding included in the First Nation Student Rate, and the Provincial Student Transportation Fund) and to provide enhanced and/or additional services to meet First Nation Students’ transportation needs that have been identified by First Nations through the co-development of Joint Plans.

The Parties agreed to the following interim approach for the 2025/26 school year, including that:

- Service levels and associated spending will remain in place and be used as a baseline for assessing gaps in new Joint Plans.
- Allocations from the First Nation Student Transportation Fund will be used to enhance services that are currently funded by the school district or create new services as per the approved Joint Plans.
- The BC Ministry of Education and Child Care (the “Ministry”) will administer the funds as a special purpose grant under section 115(a) of the *School Act*.
- Transportation funding to enhance First Nation Students participation in extracurricular activities for the 2025/26 school year will be allocated based on review/approval of requests included in Joint Plans. More information can be found in the “Transportation to Extracurricular Activities” section. (NEW)

Purpose

The Joint Committee has developed these *First Nations Student Transportation Planning and Procedures* as a guideline for Boards and First Nations for the application process to access transportation funds.

Guiding Principles for Developing Joint First Nation Student Transportation Plans

The following Guiding Principles apply to the development of Joint First Nation Student Transportation Plans by Boards and First Nations:

1. The Board of Education and First Nation will identify transportation needs and services to get all First Nation Students enrolled in BC public schools to and from those schools, respecting parental choice of where to enroll their child to attend school.
2. Safety is paramount in all planning and decisions:
 - a) there will be a safety protocol in place to address safety issues for the First Nations (e.g., weather conditions, wildlife)

- b) shelters will be made available where needed
- 3. Transportation will be available for extracurricular activities and sports, sporting events.
- 4. There will be no walk limits (i.e., drivers need to go into the community or catchment area to pick up and drop off children).
- 5. The shortest ride possible will be implemented.
- 6. Wherever possible, there will be no highway pickups or drop offs.
- 7. A communications protocol will be established and agreed upon to ensure effective and timely communications to address issues that arise (e.g., travel disruption due to inclement weather) and method of preferred communication (e.g., radio/satellite communication).
- 8. Drivers will receive adequate professional development related to customer service, student management, etc. as required.
- 9. Criminal record checks will be required for bus/water taxi employees (including school district staff and non-school district staff).
- 10. Changes to the joint plan may only be made by written agreement, with timely notice to parents.

2025/26 Joint Plan / Status Quo Letter Submission Process

All reference documents, including the 2025/26 Joint Transportation Plan Worksheet (Joint Plans) can be found on the Ministry’s [BCTEA website](#) and on the [FNESC website](#).

BC First Nations, except Treaty and Self-Governing First Nations, may submit the 2025/26 Joint Plans under one of the following three categories:

“New” Joint Plans

For Boards and First Nations that did not submit Joint Plans for previous years (i.e., this is your first submission), please complete and submit the 2025/26 Joint Plan. Boards and First Nations may refer to the Instructions tab in the Joint Plan for more details on how to complete the template. Funding is for new services only, not for existing services, requiring funding.

“Revisions” to Joint Plans

If, after consultation and agreement with the respective First Nation, the 2024/25 Joint Plan **is not** meeting the needs of the First Nation, and revisions to services and/or funding are required for 2025/26, use the 2025/26 Joint Plan to detail the changes.

“Status Quo” Joint Plans

If, after consultation and agreement with respective First Nations, the transportation services under the 2024/25 Joint Plan **continue** to meet First Nation Students’ needs, school districts and First Nations may use the 2025/26 Joint Plan to resubmit their plan under the category of “Status Quo”.

- **Joint Transportation Plan Status Quo Letters**

- To simplify the submission and the review process, school districts and First Nations are eligible to submit a Joint Transportation Plan Status Quo Letter (Status Quo Letter) instead of a Joint Plan if:
 - the services have not changed from last year (i.e. the request includes the **same schools on the same route**)
 - the request is for To/From School only (not applicable if you have Parental Assistance or Special Supports) and
 - the total request does not exceed an increase of 8%
- Note: The calculation increase should be on 2024/25 approved amounts, not on requested amounts.

Transportation “Proxy”

Introduced in the 2021/22 Joint Plan was the request for Boards to include their baseline spending on First Nation Student transportation from their available funding sources e.g., Provincial General Operating Grant budget, including the First Nation Student Rate (FNSR), and the Provincial Student Transportation Fund (STF).

Under BCTEA, there is a portion of the First Nation Student Rate (FNSR) derived from the Student Location Factor (SLF), Supplementary Student Location Factor¹ (SSLF) and Provincial Student Transportation Fund (STF) that is considered a “proxy” for funding First Nation Student transportation.

This amount is the minimum of the FNSR that should be applied to the transportation of First Nations Students living on reserve. This proxy amount can be supplemented by other funding from the FNSR and/or from provincial operating funding and special grants. As per BCTEA Schedule G, this amount was meant to be removed from the FNSR and it has not been removed.

A Board’s spending of the proxy will inform the Joint Committee decision-making on supplemental BCTEA funding and approval of Joint Plans.

Safety Declaration

Introduced in the 2024/25 Joint Plan, First Nations and school districts were requested to review all bus stops. Signatures to the Joint Plan or Status Quo Letter imply that pick-up and drop-off points have been reviewed for safety considerations.

Deadlines

The deadline for 2025/26 Joint Plan submissions is **May 16, 2025**, however, early submissions are encouraged. When completed, please submit Joint Plans, approved by First Nations and Boards, to BCTEA@gov.bc.ca. Submissions may not be brought forward to the Joint Committee for review and approval until documented approval by both parties (signature or email confirmation) is received. Late Joint Plans may not be considered for supplemental funding.

Note: Boards are asked to return the final 2025/26 Joint Plan to the Ministry in Excel format along with any other formats that best supports the Board and First Nation sign-off processes e.g., Excel and a signed Adobe PDF.

Joint Plan Review and Approval Process

The Joint Plan review and approval process will encompass the following 3 steps:

1. The Ministry, working with the BCTEA Transportation Technical Team (“Technical Team”), will conduct a preliminary assessment of all received Joint Plans including verification of complete information, assessment of reasonableness of costs, etc. This will include whether the Boards and First Nations have considered options to find efficiencies and share services where appropriate.
2. The Ministry will share the submitted Joint Plans and additional information with the Joint Committee. The Joint Committee will review the submitted Joint Plans and approve funding levels.
3. The Joint Committee will provide direction to the Technical Team for further action or follow up as necessary.

¹ These factors were used by BCTEA as a formula to determine per First Nation Student spending and doesn’t mean the student has to meet the Supplementary Student Location Factor criteria.

Transportation to Extracurricular Activities

In response to feedback from First Nations and school districts regarding the accumulation of Extracurricular funding carryover, the First Nations Student Transportation Fund remaining constant, and the increasing demand for funds for transportation To/From school, the allocation of funding for Extracurricular activities will change for the 2025/26 school year. Beginning in the 2025/26 school year, the allocation of funding for transportation to Extracurricular activities will be integrated into the Joint Plan process. For clarity, school districts are still able to access a funding allocation equivalent to the 2024/25 school year to support transportation to Extracurricular activities from BCTEA in the 2025/26 school year.

It is expected that school districts have discussions with each First Nation it serves regarding First Nation Students' extracurricular transportation needs and priorities as part of the co-development of the Joint Plan. Even though funding is allocated on a per student basis, this does not mean the funds must be spent this way and can be spent to support those students who participate in extracurricular activities, in the most efficient way possible.

Extracurricular transportation funding will no longer be allocated to each district automatically. Extracurricular funding may be requested for up to the allocation received in 2024/25 as indicated on the 2025/26 Joint Plan or Status Quo Letter. This funding is not meant to cover full costs but rather to serve as a subsidy for extracurricular transportation.

When a school district has Extracurricular carryover funds, and is requesting Extracurricular funding, they will be asked to use the carryover first. If the carryover is insufficient to fund the requested amount, then additional funds will be allocated. Extracurricular Transportation funding is not allocated to Treaty/Self-Governing First Nations and First Nations not submitting Nominal Roll to ISC BC Region, who are not eligible for BCTEA funding.

Examples of eligible extracurricular transportation costs are school organized extracurricular activities e.g., athletics, homework and music clubs and cultural activities. These activities may be located off school property e.g., a different school gym or soccer field and/or delivered by a private organization in cases where the school district works with an organization to deliver extracurricular activities.

Examples of ineligible extracurricular transportation costs:

- All-classroom field trips that take place within the school day that would be addressed separately through the Board
- Community-based activities/services e.g., recreation centre or First Nation based activities, counselling, private ballet, swimming, karate lessons, library events, community athletics teams, arts, crafts, drumming, weaving, etc.

Boards and First Nations are expected to find reasonable, and the most cost-effective transportation means for students to attend school-organized extracurricular activities and sports. They are also expected to work together to provide opportunities for First Nation Students' participation in extracurricular activities in ways that best meet the needs of those students. If more funds are needed, Boards may supplement costs from general operating funds.

Considerations when requesting Extracurricular funds include:

- Extracurricular funds must be spent to support those students who participate in extracurricular activities in the most efficient way possible
- Boards and First Nations must work together to determine the most efficient process for reimbursement of funds for transportation to extracurricular activities

Future funding for transportation to Extracurricular activities is not guaranteed as the demand for To/From school transportation may be higher.

Funds that are not spent by the end of the 2025/26 school year may be carried forward for use in the 2026/27 school year; however, they may also be subject to repurposing – see *Reporting Carry Over/Deferred Revenue* section below. The Extracurricular funding is undergoing a review and there may be changes in future years.

Water Transportation

Modes of transportation in areas where First Nation Students are required to cross bodies of water to attend school may be included in the Joint Plan. Some preliminary identified eligible expenses include:

- Operational costs for ferries/water taxis
- Required supervision during ferry ride or while waiting for the ferry
- Required supervision boarding and disembarking water transportation

Note: More information and discussion may be required prior to funding approval.

First Nations and school districts are encouraged to provide feedback to BC Ferries regarding more appropriate and efficient routes for First Nation Students.

Special Supports

In some cases, there may be a need for additional supports to facilitate the safe arrival of children. Some preliminary eligible expenses may include:

- Supervision during bus travel for children due to safety concerns
- Supplemental funding to support transportation of students with disabilities or diverse abilities
- Supervision while waiting for the bus

Note: Bus monitor supports and/or strategies to prevent bullying during transportation should be a Board responsibility and will not be considered for BCTEA funding.

Parental Assistance

It is the expectation that First Nation Students on reserve will be bused to school. Funding for parental transportation assistance has only been allocated in extraordinary/unique circumstances. Parental school of choice (e.g. arts programs, sports academies, alternate education, dual-credit programs) is not considered an extraordinary/unique circumstance eligible for BCTEA parental transportation assistance funding. Previous approvals for parental transportation assistance are subject to review and may not be approved in future Joint Plan reviews.

If the school district does not have a Parental Assistance policy that includes a Per KM rate, the [National Joint Council rates](#) may be referred to as a guideline when calculating the request.

First Nation Schools of Choice

Under amendments made to the *School Act*, First Nations can designate a public school of choice for First Nation Students living on reserve. There is no additional funding to accommodate transportation to First Nation Schools of Choice other than existing sources. School districts and First Nations should consider the use of existing funding sources: Operating Grant, Student Transportation Fund, Transportation Proxy, and the BCTEA Student

Transportation Fund. Indicate if the route includes a First Nation School(s) of Choice by selecting the check box on the Joint Plan.

Boarded Students

Some First Nation Students are required to leave home to attend school and are boarded or billeted away from home. These Students may need additional supports. Boards should be reaching out to parents and First Nations, particularly in cases where the First Nation is not local, to make sure the Student's transportation needs "to/from" school and home are addressed equitably, including transportation to extracurricular activities. This may include the allocation of available transportation services or alternative services (e.g., providing bus passes). Boards and First Nations may include funding requests under a Joint Plan; however, it should be noted that as for all other eligible students the approval of funding is not guaranteed.

Funding for Capital Acquisition

Yellow Fleet Buses: Requests for buses are processed through the provincial application-based [Bus Acquisition Program](#). This Program is for school district assets only and is restricted to "yellow fleet" (diesel and electric) buses.

The Fund is not to be used to acquire transportation assets like mini-vans or transport vans. It is to support operational costs of enhanced transportation services.

Funding for Shelters: Funding for bus shelters was made available to school districts in 2019 and to First Nations in 2021. The BCTEA Transportation Fund currently does not provide funding for shelters. Funding options could include school district Local Capital; the Annual Facility Grant (AFG) and/or the use of other operating funds.

Reporting Requirements

Data collected through the BCTEA Transportation Revenue and Spending Report (introduced for the 2021/22 reporting period) that includes Board spending, description of transportation services and student count information is being used to better understand school baseline spending on First Nation Students transportation, and to inform Joint Committee decision-making related to Joint Plans.

As noted in the 2024/25 BCTEA approval letters, there are specific reporting requirements for the transportation funding. Boards will meet the transportation reporting requirements by completing the following forms on the 2024/25 Revenue and Spending Report:

- (1) Revenue and Spending Report
- (2) Extracurricular Report

The deadline for the 2024/25 BCTEA Revenue and Spending Report is **May 16, 2025**.

Revenue and Spending Report

Data and financial values will be pre-populated where possible. Reporting requirements include:

- 2024/25 Amended budget for all First Nation Student Transportation as of February 28, 2025 to June 30, 2025
- Spending of the First Nation Student Transportation Proxy
- Spending of the approved funding values for transportation "to/from school", "shelters" and "extracurricular" and
- Qualitative information regarding how the "to/from school" funding allocation assisted in reducing travel times and extending services to First Nations

Extracurricular Report

Reporting for transportation to school-organized extracurricular activities is required.

Boards who request and receive Extracurricular Transportation funds are required to administer these funds and to collect data and report as per the Extracurricular Reporting tab within the BCTEA Revenue and Spending Report. This data will help to develop a more long-term approach to support student participation in extracurricular activities.

Note: Boards are asked to return the Final 2024-25 BCTEA Revenue and Spending Report to the Ministry in Excel format in addition to other formats that best supports the Board and First Nation sign-off processes e.g., Excel and a signed Adobe PDF with signatures (or email to confirm Report has been shared with First Nation).

Reporting Carryover

Funds received by Boards should be spent in the school year that they are received. Various factors have impacted the ability of Boards to fully invest the transportation funds previously received to carry out the Joint Plans, resulting in carryover (deferred revenue). Funds issued in previous years for “To/From School”, “Special Supports” and “Bus Shelters” that have not been spent by the end of the 2024/25 school year will be used to offset the amount transferred in 2025/26. Funds issued in previous years for “Extracurricular Transportation” that have not been spent by the end of the 2025/26 school year may be subject to repurposing.

NOTE: The above reporting requirements are in addition to the Ministry’s regular financial reporting.

Important Dates

Please submit the following completed documents **by May 16, 2025 to BCTEA@gov.bc.ca:**

- Co-signed 2024/25 BCTEA Revenue and Spending Report (in Excel format)
- Co-signed 2025/26 BCTEA Joint Transportation Plan Worksheet (in Excel format) or Status Quo letter (if eligible). Signatures imply that pick-up and drop-off points have been reviewed for safety considerations.

Email confirmation that there is agreement in the complete Joint Plan from both the school district and First Nations will be accepted and considered a signed plan.

First Nations signature on the Revenue and Spending Report confirms that they have received it, but does not imply agreement.

Questions / Further Information

If First Nations have questions related to the 2024/25 BCTEA Revenue and Spending Report or the 2025/26 BCTEA Joint Transportation Plan Worksheet, they may contact FNESC at BCTEA@fnesc.ca. Boards may contact Kristine Heaney, A/Project Director, Funding and Financial Accountability Branch, Ministry of Education and Child Care, at bctea@gov.bc.ca.

Summary

Policy	Eligibility
<p>Administrative Fees</p> <p>Costs for administering education and/or transportation programs to cover expenses for students (First Nations and Non-First Nations) attending a BC Public School in a provincial school district. Examples of ineligible items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation registration fees • Overhead costs to operate a school district transportation web portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Courtesy Rider Fees (and catchment areas)</p> <p>First Nation Students living on-reserve and attending BC public schools will not be charged rider fees. There are no catchment areas or walk limits for on-reserve students. Courtesy rider fees are not applicable to First Nation Students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Accessories</p> <p>Communication devices and additional equipment for school buses and water taxis are considered to be the school district’s responsibility. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buying and installing cameras on school buses and water taxis • Bus driver cell phone or radios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Professional Development</p> <p>Bus driver training and professional development is considered to be the school district’s responsibility. For example, bus drivers may require training in the following areas: cultural awareness, group management, customer service, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Parental Assistance</p> <p>It is the expectation that students on reserve will be bused to school. Parental Transportation assistance may be considered on a case-by-case basis <u>only under extraordinary/unique circumstances</u>. Transportation to/from parental school of choice is not considered an extraordinary circumstance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible except for extraordinary/unique circumstances. Requires Joint Committee review and approval.
<p>Water-taxi and/or Ferry Services</p> <p>Modes of transportation in areas where First Nation Students are required to cross bodies of water to attend school are eligible for funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for operational costs.

Policy	Eligibility
<p>Boarded Students</p> <p>Some First Nation Students who are required to leave home to attend BC Public School are boarded or billeted. Regular communication must take place between the First Nation, the Board, parents, and the billeted family to ensure the boarded students have the appropriate transportation supports and services. Refer to Boarding Students section for more information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for to/from school. • Eligible for transportation to/from extracurricular • Eligible for to/from home.
<p>Dual Credit Courses/Programs</p> <p>Dual credit courses/programs provide high-school students the opportunity to earn credits recognized by both a high school and a post-secondary institution under the British Columbia Transfer System or programs offered in French through Educacentre. Dual credit courses/programs are part of a regular school day, which are administered by school districts. Transportation to/from dual credit programs are considered the responsibility of the school district.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Unsigned Plans</p> <p>Unsigned Joint Plans received by the Ministry to express the need of transportation for First Nation Students to attend a BC public school will be considered incomplete and not considered for funding. Email agreement/confirmation that the Joint Plan is complete from both the school district and First Nations will be accepted and considered a signed plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>To/From School and Special Supports Funding</p> <p>First Nation Student Transportation Fund ("Fund") was set to address the transportation needs of First Nation Students reported on ISC BC Region's Nominal Roll who live on-reserve and attend BC Public Schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible through the Joint Plan review and approval process. • <u>Ineligible: Treaty/Self-Governing First Nations and First Nations not submitting Nominal Roll to ISC BC Region are not eligible.</u>
<p>Allocation of Extracurricular Funding</p> <p>The funding provided to Boards may be used for the transportation of on-reserve First Nation Students attending public schools and participating in school-organized extracurricular activities.</p> <p>Refer to the Transportation to Extracurricular Activities section for more information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible by request through the Joint Plan review and approval process (refer to Transportation to Extracurricular Activities section). • <u>Ineligible: Treaty/Self-Governing First Nations and First Nations not submitting Nominal Roll to ISC BC Region are not eligible.</u>

Policy	Eligibility
<p>Alternate Education Programs</p> <p>Transportation costs to Alternate Education Programs are ineligible. School districts are expected to assess student transportation needs and address them equitably.</p> <p>Alternate Education Programs focus on educational, social, and emotional issues for students whose needs are not being met in a traditional school program (e.g., standard school). An alternate education program provides its support through differentiated instruction, specialized program delivery and enhanced counselling services based on students’ needs (see related policy).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Funding for Shelters</p> <p>Funding for bus shelters was made available to school districts in 2019 and to First Nations in 2021. The BCTEA Transportation Fund currently does not provide funding for shelters. Funding options could include school district Local Capital; the Annual Facility Grant (AFG) and/or the use of other operating funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.
<p>Funding for Buses</p> <p>Requests for buses will be processed through the established Ministry application-based Bus Acquisition Program. Please note that the Bus Acquisition Program is for school district assets only and is restricted to “yellow fleet” (diesel and electric) buses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineligible.

Appendix A: Definitions

The following definitions from the BCTEA support common interpretation of transportation-related Q&As:

- **“BC Public School”** means all public schools in British Columbia providing kindergarten to grade 12 education, but does not include BC Independent Schools or First Nation Schools.
- **“First Nation Student”** in BCTEA means a student who is ordinarily resident on reserve in BC and is eligible to be on the Nominal Roll.
- **“Nominal Roll”** means the registry of all eligible elementary and secondary students ordinarily resident on reserve and funded by Canada to attend a band-operated, federal, provincial, or private/independent school. To be eligible for the Nominal Roll, a student must be:
 - i. enrolled in a band-operated, federal, provincial, or a private/independent school (including E-learning institutions and Alternative/Outreach schools) recognized by the province in which the school is located as an elementary/secondary institution;
 - ii. a school student aged 4 to 21 years on December 31 of the school year in which funding support is required and enrolled in Kindergarten 4(K) through grade 12, or an adult student age 18 and over and enrolled in an Adult Graduation Diploma program, on December 31 of the school year in which funding support is required; and
 - iii. ordinarily resident on reserve; and
 - iv. a student who is ordinarily resident on reserve land that is leased is not eligible to be on the Nominal Roll unless that student is a registered Indian.
- **“Ordinarily resident on reserve”** means that the student usually lives at a civic address on reserve, is a child in joint custody who lives on reserve most of the time or is staying on reserve and has no usual home elsewhere. Students continue to be considered ordinarily resident on reserve if they return to live on reserve with their parents, guardians, or maintainers during the year, even if they live elsewhere while attending school or working at a summer job. (In this context, reserves are deemed to include all land set aside by the federal government for the use and occupancy of an Indian band, along with all other Crown lands which are recognized by Canada as settlement lands of the Indian band of which the student is a resident).