



# Toronto Student Transportation Group

Annual Report 2021-2022

## General Managers Report

It is with pleasure that I provide this annual report on the activities of the Toronto Student Transportation Group over the past school year. This report summarizes the activities and plans that the transportation consortium has undertaken over the past school year. The summary of data, activities, challenges, and successes is reflective of the joint transportation unit that has been supplying transportation services to the Boards for over a decade.

The Covid Pandemic continued to influence student transportation in the 2021-2022 school year. Far fewer days impacted, but the requirements around vaccination certainly impacted our school bus operators. Driver recruitment and retention continued to be an issue as a result of these requirements. The Ministry of Education supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) helped to ensure that our front-line staff were provided with the necessary means to minimize their risk of infection while on the job.

The consortium for the first time in its organizational life took to making temporary cancellation of service on routes where drivers came down with covid. Service was cancelled on certain routes for up to 5 days to not only allow time for the driver to recover but provide families notice ahead of time of the service interruptions so they could make alternate arrangements during that time frame. As with all public endeavors this decision was made to balance both serviceability and safety for all our stakeholders.

This report highlights some of the issues, challenges, and successes that the Toronto Student Transportation Group has experienced over the past school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Hodgkinson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a horizontal line.

Kevin Hodgkinson  
General Manger

## Mission and Vision Statement

### Mission Statement

**Service:** To facilitate the provision of safe, secure, and consistently on-time delivery of student transportation services for those students entrusted in our care.

**Cost Effective:** To provide adequate, equitable, and fair services to those members that actively look for the best means to achieve cost effective transportation solutions.

**Accountable:** To provide effective, efficient, and accountable solutions that meets the needs of our stakeholders.

**Communications:** To actively pursue initiatives that will maximize the level of service provided to our stakeholders.

**Responsibility:** To actively pursue economic, environmental, and social initiatives that will allow us to lead the way in meeting public demand.

**Human Resources:** To actively pursue programming and training that will assist staff in delivering a level of service that exceeds our shareholder's expectations.

### Vision Statement

To provide and facilitate intermodal transportation solutions so that all school aged children can equally access education.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Toronto Student Transportation Group (TSTG) is a consortium formed to manage and facilitate the student transportation services for the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) & Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The TSTG provides transportation services for approximately 40,000 students in more than eight hundred schools and centres throughout the City of Toronto. Seven different school bus operators in eleven divisions provide more than 1800 vehicles to provide transportation services for students with a budget of just over \$100,000,000.

The consortium is physically located at 2 Trethewey Dr with a staff of twenty-eight individuals responsible for the operation, planning, technology, and safety of transported students.

## History

The TDSB & TCDSB have been sharing transportation services since 1995. Laidlaw Planning Services was originally hired to implement a computerized routing solution that optimized the TCDSB regular home to school fleet and integrate the TCDSB and North York School Boards special education routes. These two routing solutions removed over one hundred buses from the road and saved the Boards over \$3.2M in transportation expenditure. Over the next eight years, the former cities making up the current City of Toronto were systematically introduced into the combined routing solution removing an additional thirty-eight buses from the system.

In 1998 the key planning staff from Laidlaw was recruited to form the nucleus of shared transportation services provided by the Boards. The introduction of new staff was complemented by an introduction of an upgraded transportation planning management software from Education Logistics. With staff and technology in place, the Boards had the key component to managing and maintaining transportation services. Transportation staff from both Boards relocated in 2005 to the TDSB's Trethewey facility where the operations, planning, technology, and safety units work together to facilitate and deliver transportation services. In September of 2011, the two School Boards signed a membership agreement officially creating the 'Toronto Student Transportation Group'.

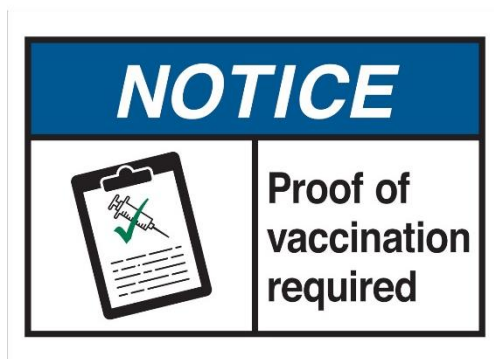


## A Look Back

The 2021 -2022 school year provided the Toronto Student Transportation Group with several challenges that not only provided obstacles but also opportunities to understand and improve the way we do business.

## Vaccination Requirement

September 2021 brought a new school year while still dealing with the global pandemic. However, vaccinations against the deadly virus had been discovered and the general population was in the process of receiving vaccinations as a way to help fight against the spread of the virus and to keep those around us safe. The vaccination of workers including school bus drivers was a hotly debated discussion for the School Boards.



The School Boards took different approaches to handling the vaccination issue. Several individuals were not in favour of getting the shot and as such created a gap around who could be serviced. The TDSB mandated that all staff including drivers be vaccinated in order to work around students. The TCDSB simply required workers to

follow pandemic safety protocols and submit to weekly testing. The requirement for vaccination created an issue with driver availability. Bus Companies were quick to alter their hiring practices to only accept applicants who were already vaccinated to avoid any situation where an unvaccinated driver would be on a bus route with TDSB students. Drivers that were unvaccinated but agreed to follow pandemic safety protocols and get tested weekly were allowed to continue to drive on routes where no TDSB students were present. A phase in of this requirement for full compliance to vaccination did allow us to maintain driver availability throughout the Fall and early Winter.



## Omicron Cancellations

Although vaccinations were available for most individuals the virus continued to spread though out the population. School bus drivers were not immune to catching the virus and many had to take leaves in order to recover. The absence of a large spare pool of drivers resulted in the TSTG to temporarily suspend bus routes for up to a week at a time when drivers caught Covid and there were no more spare drivers to cover the service.



Over 250 routes were temporarily suspended for up to five days throughout the school year as a result of drivers testing positive. The bright side to this was that it was for only 5 days as revised instructions from Toronto Public Health indicated a shorter isolation period for individuals who caught the virus.

The cancellation of service was a departure from historical practice of continuing to service students but running the service late. Given the number of drivers off each week it was felt that the short-term cancellations provided more stability through out the system by keeping drivers on their assigned routes and not moving them around to deal with routes without drivers. Some cancellations were for as short as one day while others covered the full 5 days if notification was provided on the Monday. The cancellations also helped create a gap and minimized the opportunity for the virus to spread given the smaller confines within a school bus. While covid protocols were still fully in place, the service disruption did allow all parties to ensure they were healthy prior to returning to work/school.



## Active Travel Supervisor

The School Boards have worked with the City of Toronto over the decades in addressing safe student travel. Students that reside within the Board approved transportation zones receive school bus transportation but there is a large population that continues to drive or get to school



via other travel modes. In fact, less than 15% of students are transported via school bus in the city. A majority of those resources are to provide transportation services for those students with special needs. Many of those students live within 'walk zones' around schools while some are commuting from out of area. The creation of an Active Travel Supervisor is intended to help our families who are not

transported via school bus but need assistance to get their children to and from school.

The creation of this position is a result of funding from the City of Toronto that allowed us to create this temporary position. To help our school communities create an environment where active travel is the most viable option for our students. The active transportation supervisor will work with a team of school facilitators to observe, review, and make recommendations to remove obstacles for those active travellers and improve the general experience. One of the major concerns from parents around letting their children walk or bike to and from school is the lack of active travel friendly infrastructure. Knowing that their children are safe is the critical condition for improving active travel. These teams will work within the city and schools and support the vision zero mandate of improving safety for all.



## A Look Ahead

While successfully transporting over 45,000 students to and from school safely each and every day for another year we look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that the upcoming school years will hold for us.

## Strategic Plan Overhaul

In 2011, staff at the Toronto Student Transportation underwent a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis as part of the process to develop the initial strategic plan for the consortium. Along with that analysis, surveys were sent out to stakeholders to collect their

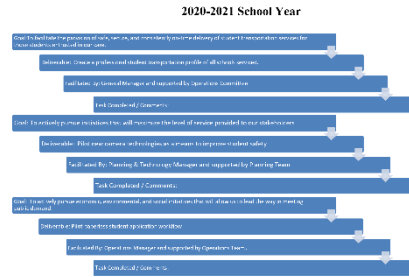


vision on what the priorities they felt the consortium should pursue. These endeavours created the base to the original strategic plan. Since then, the plan has added a section to cover recommendation from external agencies and a yearly update of goals and objectives for the consortium. A longer-term vision is also updated annually and

included in the strategic plan as new priorities and technologies change the student transportation landscape.

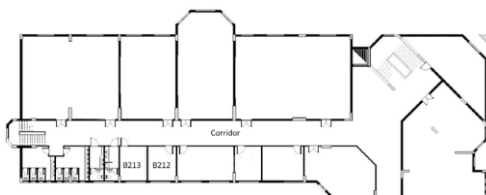


As directed by the Governance committee, it was felt that a review of the strategic plan and what the document was intended to deliver should be reviewed. In order to fulfil that direction a facilitator with experience in developing strategic plans will be used to help the consortium develop a new look and feel of the TSTG Strategic plan. The review will not only be cosmetic in delivering a new plan but clearly highlight the new direction that the consortium should undertake. Although several attempts have been made to transform the consortium to date, nothing has taken hold. The strategic plan may be the impetus required to generate that change within the consortium.



## A New Home Version 2.0

The TSTG will be looking for a new home come summer 2023. The current facility at 2 Trethewey and attached to York Memorial High School will be torn down to make way for new classroom at the high school. The Trethewey location has been home to the Transportation units since 2006. Prior to relocating to the Trethewey location the School Boards operated transportation facilities at 80 Sheppard Ave E for the TCDSB and multiple locations throughout the city for the TDSB. The School Boards have secured space at the TCDSB’s Our Lady of Mount Carmel (OLMC) facility located at



270 Cherokee Blvd near the 401 and 404 highway interchange. Plans are under way to get the facility renovated to office standards. You may recall that OLMC was the transportation unit’s disaster recovery site when the unit had to relocate

due to the fire at York Memorial. Staff at that time had to utilize existing furniture and accessories to bridge the gap until we were allowed to resume work at the Trethewey facility. Staff will continue to work in a hybrid mode at the new facility working some days in the office while other days are done remotely. This allows the consortium to reduce our footprint and make more effective use of the space made available to us.

## Procurement Work

Work will start on a new procurement document for student transportation services as we near the end of our current contract with school bus operators. At the forefront of the new contract



is the question, how can we improve service for students and schools through the procurement process. During our current contract we have had two years where driver shortages have caused significant service-related issues. The new procurement document will attempt to provide incentives for bus operators to ensure they have proper resources in place while adding additional penalties to apply to those that fail to meet

their contractual obligations. Student transportation in the city of Toronto has continued to evolve and create nuances that may make driver recruitment more problematic. Traffic combined with students that have very unique needs means drivers are on the road longer and dealing with more student issues than ever before. As part of the procurement process, we will be providing all potential bidders with existing transportation data so they know ahead of time what services will be required as part of the contract.

Communication and technology continue to be big issues that we wish to see improvements in. Although GPS was required on all buses in the last contract there was a disconnect between how the bus operators delivered that service and what information was available to the Boards and stakeholders. The new procurement document is intended to raise the level of communication and technology so that stakeholders are provided with more accurate and timely information regarding the services the bus operators are providing.





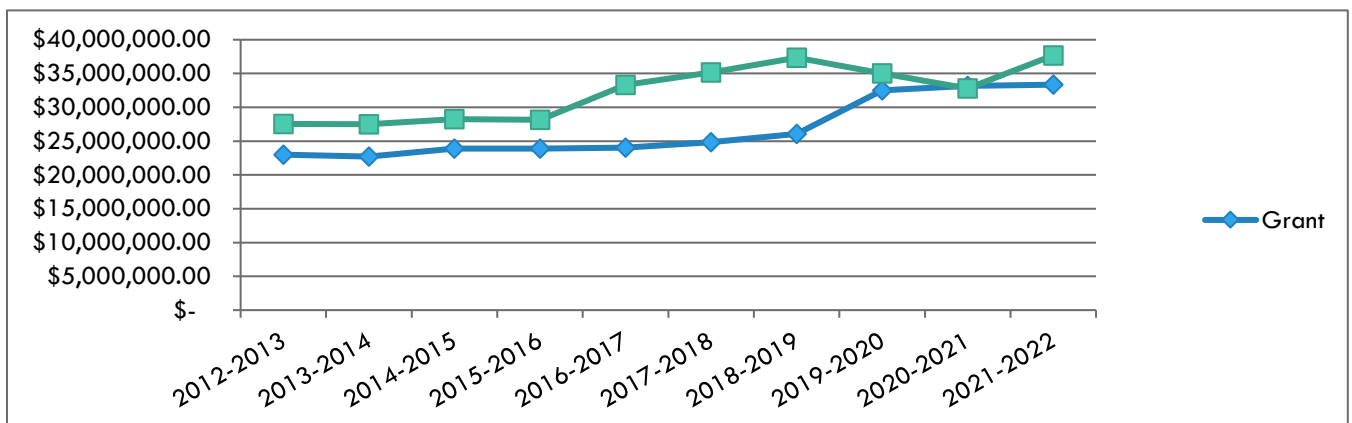
## Student Transportation Services

### Financial

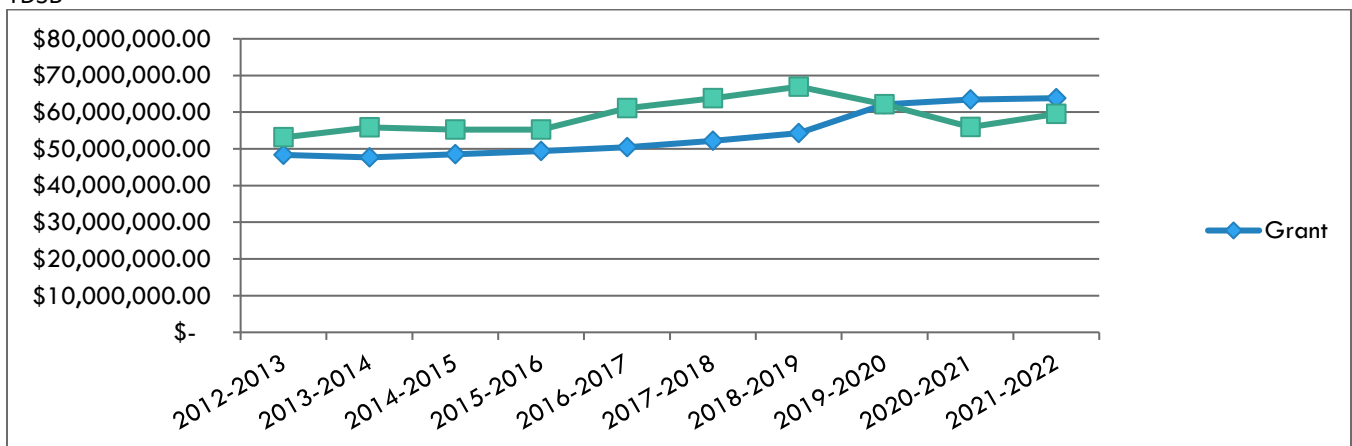
The Toronto Student Transportation Group was to spend about \$103M on transportation services for the TCDSB and TDSB for the 2021-2022 school year. With continuing issues with Covid-19 and service reductions however, expenditure reached about \$97M. The Ministry of Education provided a transportation Grant in 2021-2022 of approximately \$33M for the TCDSB and \$63M for the TDSB. Covid funding top ups assisted School Boards to deal with those additional costs but are not represented in the data below. A breakdown of the transportation budget along with a historical summary of the Transportation Grant and Expenditure is displayed below:

#### 1. Historical Transportation Grant vs. Expenditure

##### TCDSB



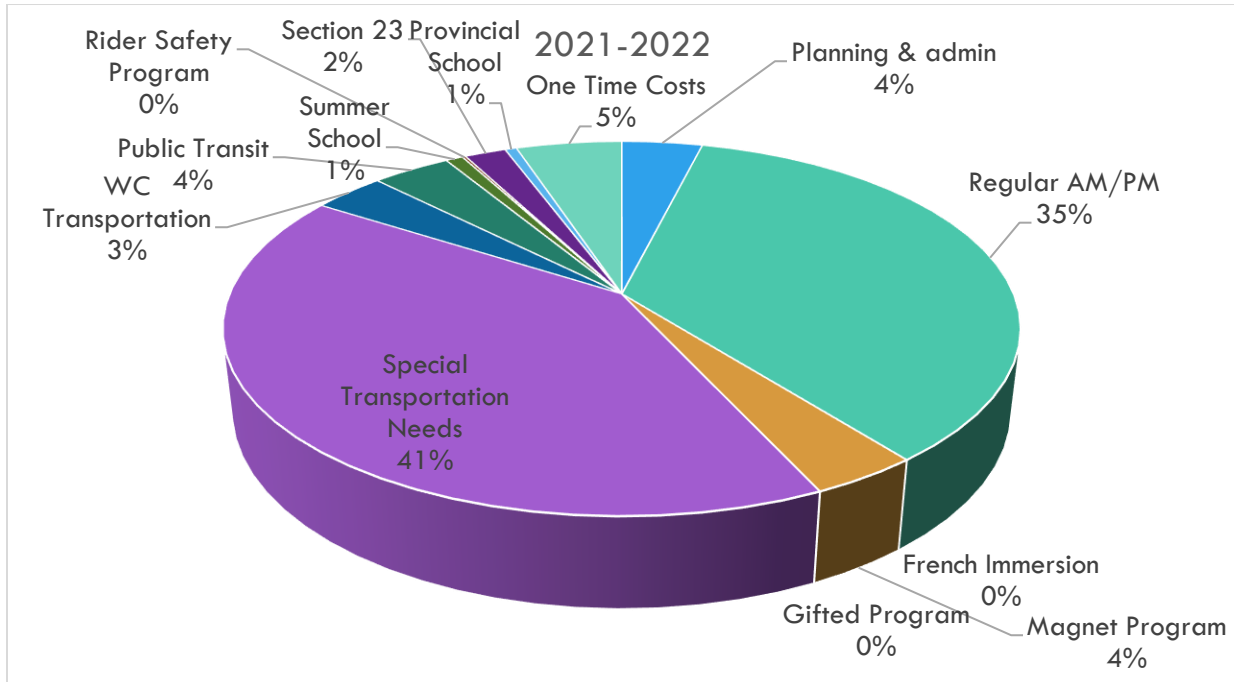
##### TDSB



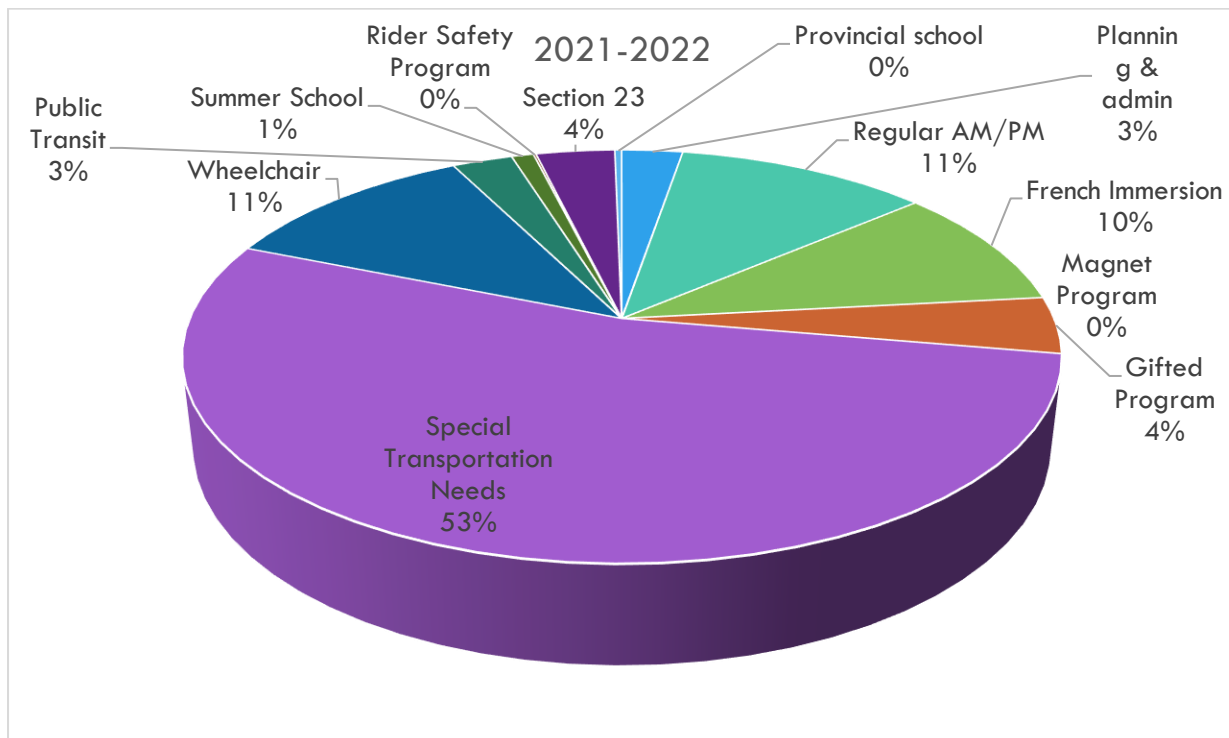


**2. Transportation Expenditure by Area**

TCDSB



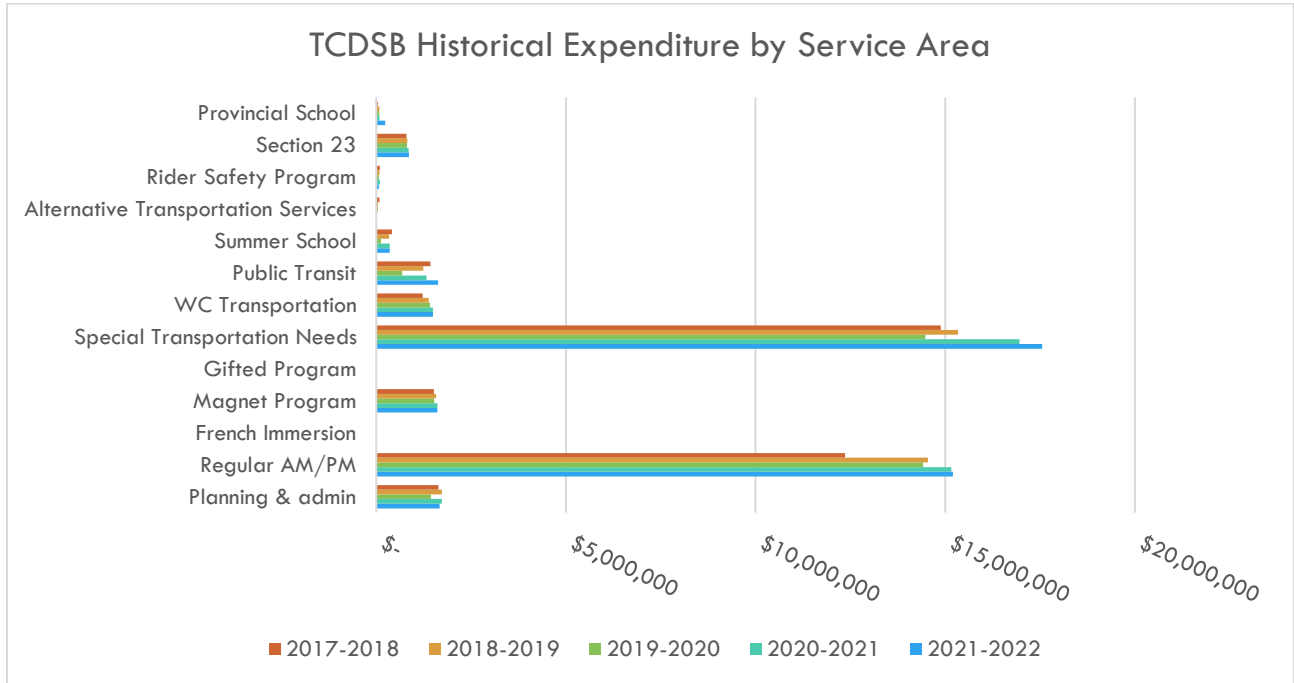
TDSB



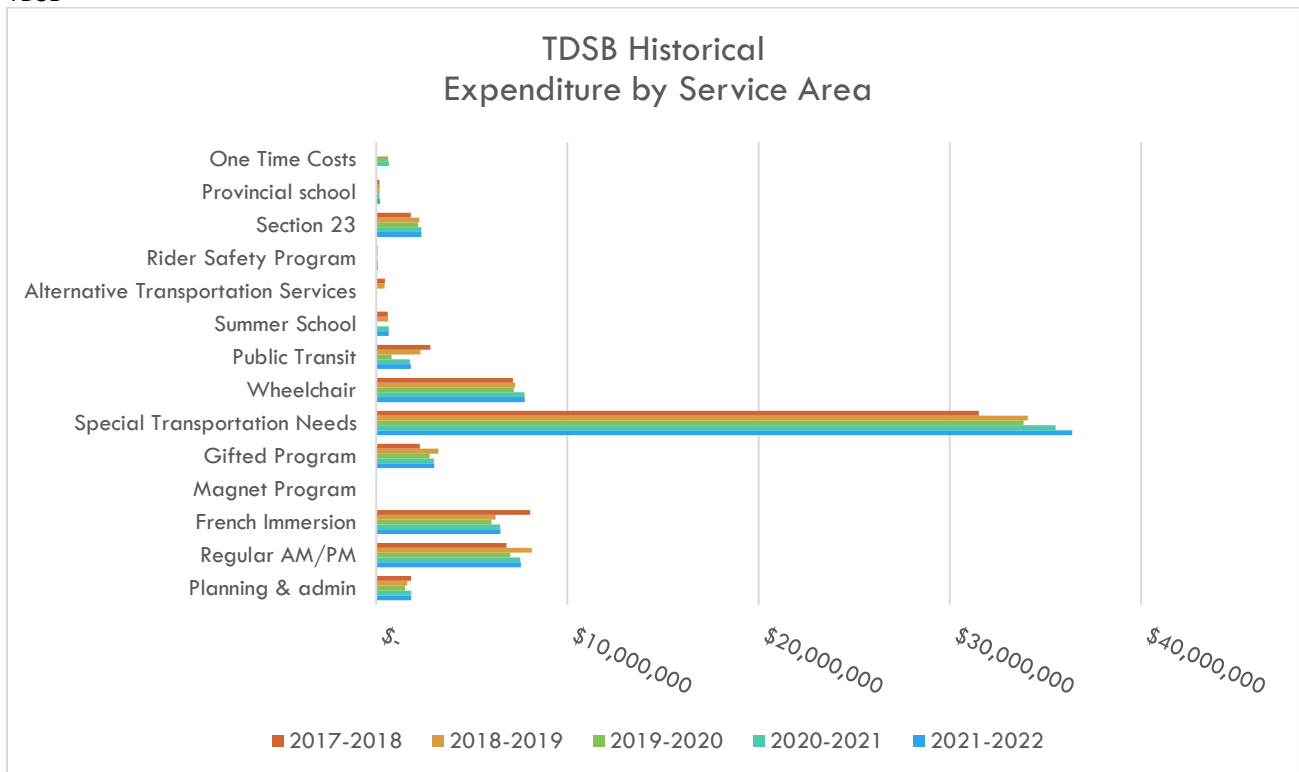


**3. Historical Summary of Transportation Expenditure 2017 - 2022**

TCDSB



TDSB



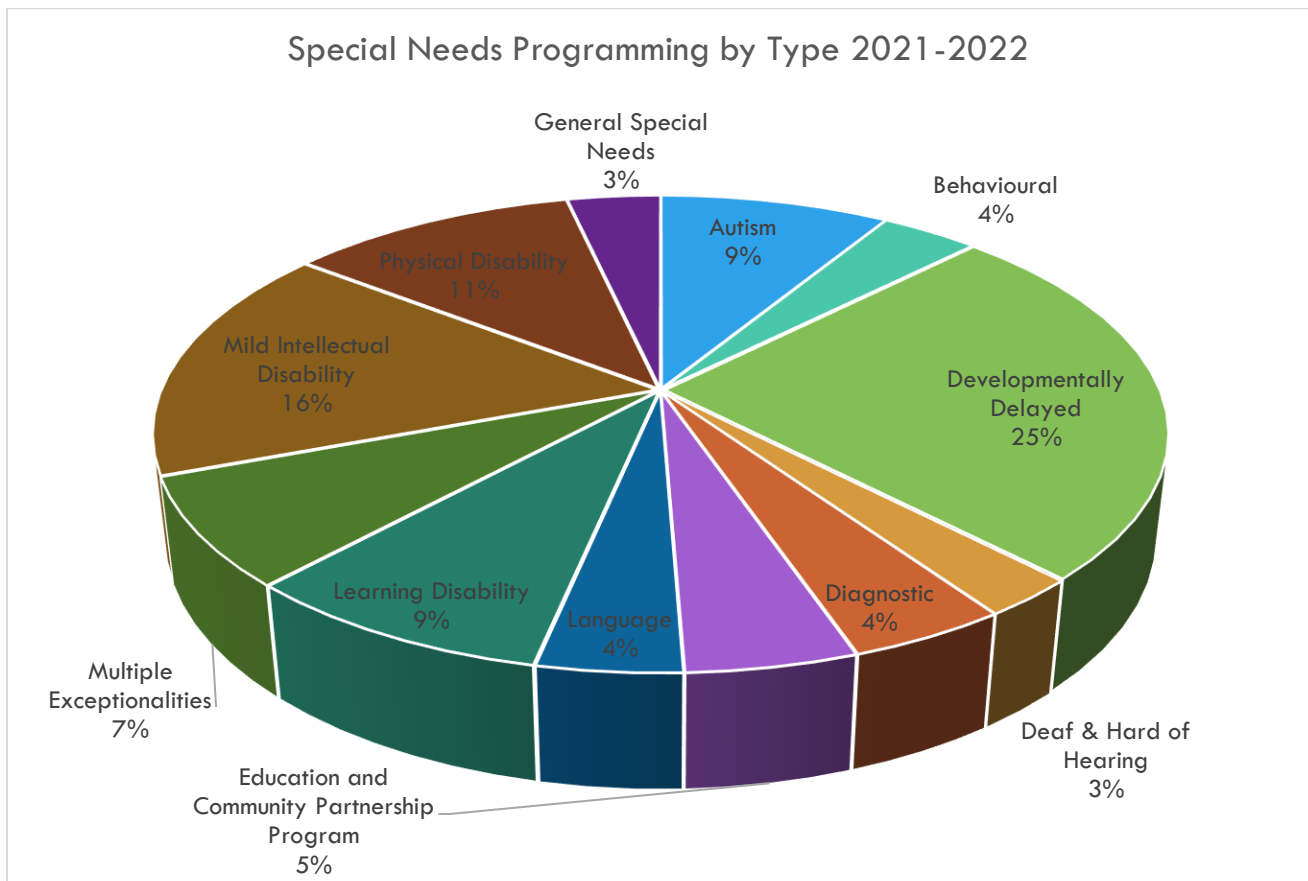
## Programming

The TSTG services a large and dynamic student population within the City of Toronto. A majority of funding dollars is directed towards the student transportation services for students with special needs. Unique needs, geography, and modified program hours are just some of the factors impacting the delivery of transportation services for students with special needs. French Immersion, Gifted, and specialized withdrawal programs also contribute to the complexity involved in transporting students.

## Special Education

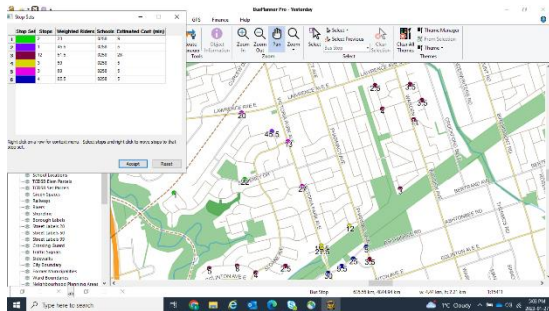
Transportation for students with special needs has continued to grow from year to year. Given the geographic diverseness of this student population there is a significant expenditure required to ensure the safe and timely delivery of these students to their program locations. The following graph shows the percentage of students receiving transportation by program.

### 4. Transportation of special needs students by programming type



## Operations

The transportation operations unit is responsible for the on-road delivery of transportation services. Staff facilitates the communication of planning changes, monitors school bus operations, evaluate operator qualifications and performance, and resolve operational problems.

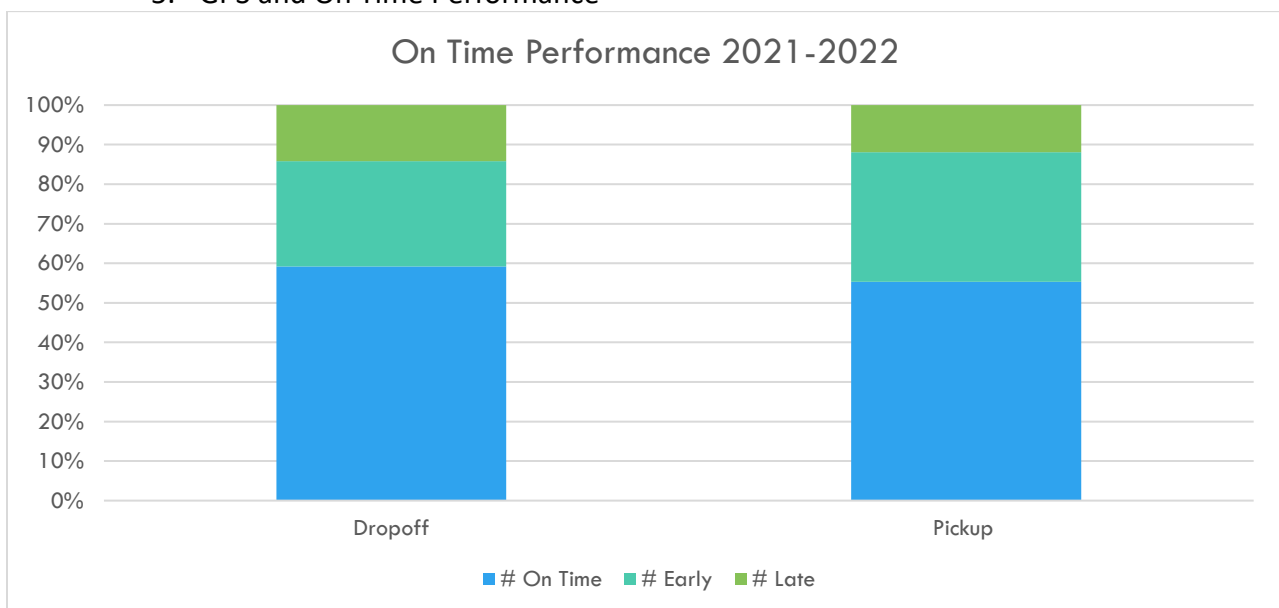


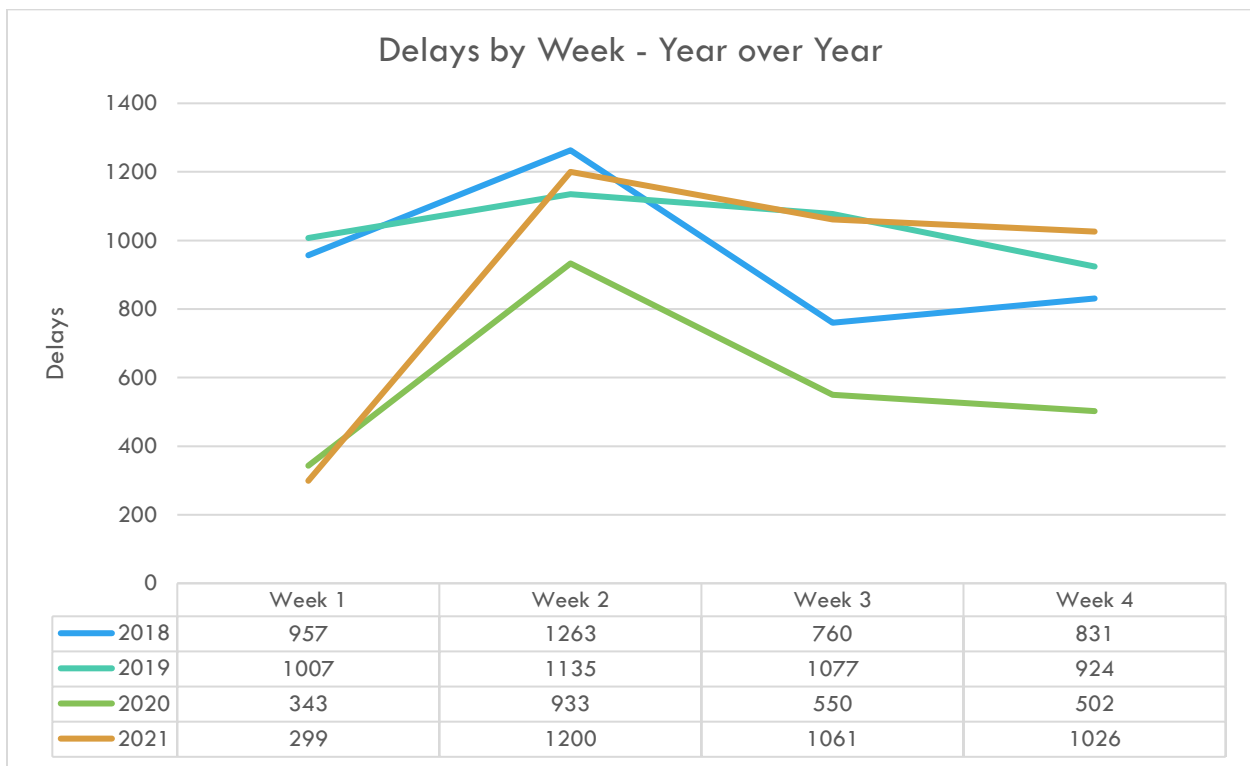
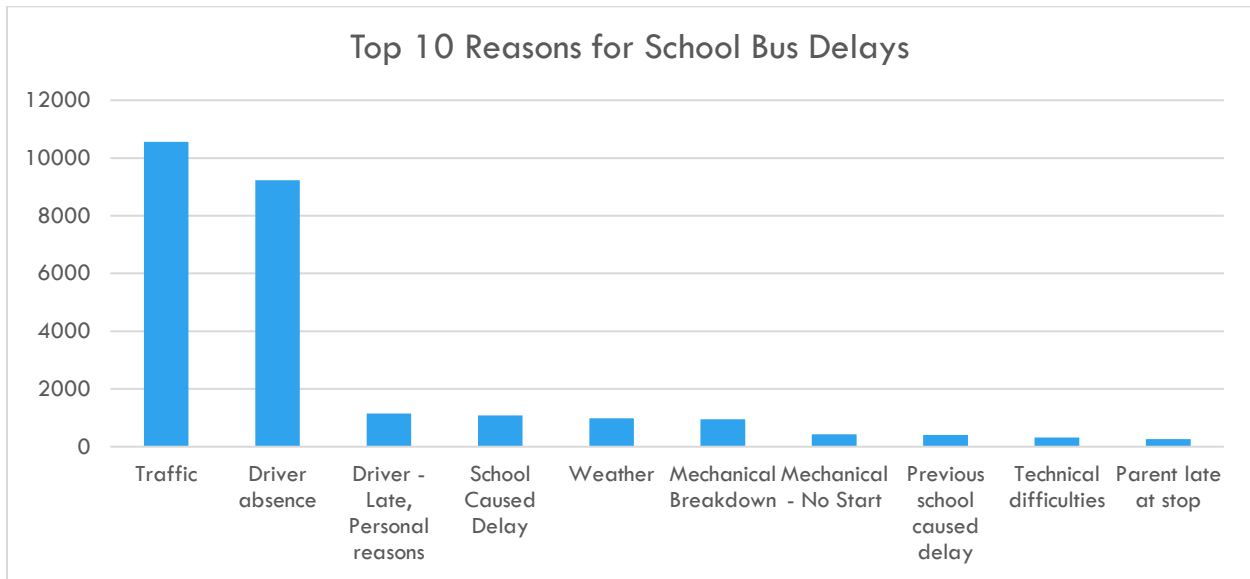
Operational staff uses several resources to help monitor the integrity of the transportation system and our performance.

## Level of Service

As part of the Consortiums annual review of routes, statistics are collected that identify trends in terms of how well services are provided. The most direct information is from schools and parents through surveys but there are also indicators that can be used to better understand service levels. On time performance was marginally lower in 2021-2022 then it was in 2020-2021.

### 5. GPS and On Time Performance



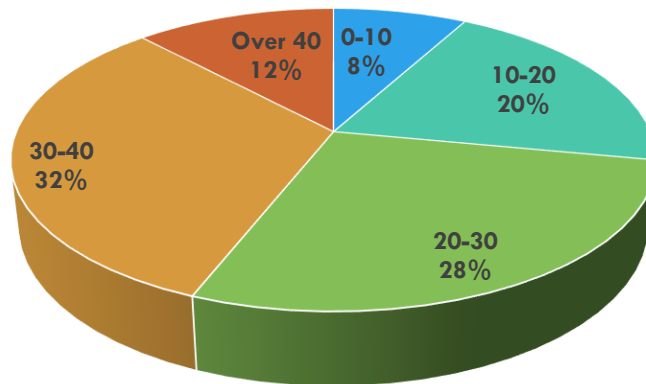




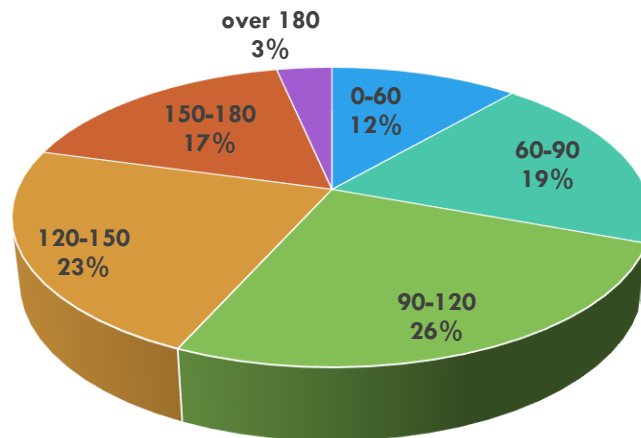
## 6. Service Level Indicators

Travel time and distance for students with special needs provides a picture of how services are provided for that group. Although we utilize almost two thirds of our buses to accommodate these students, most students use the large conventional school buses. The daily route time and distance travelled by this mode of transportation is highlighted below.

Daily Distance (km) Travelled by Conventional School Bus



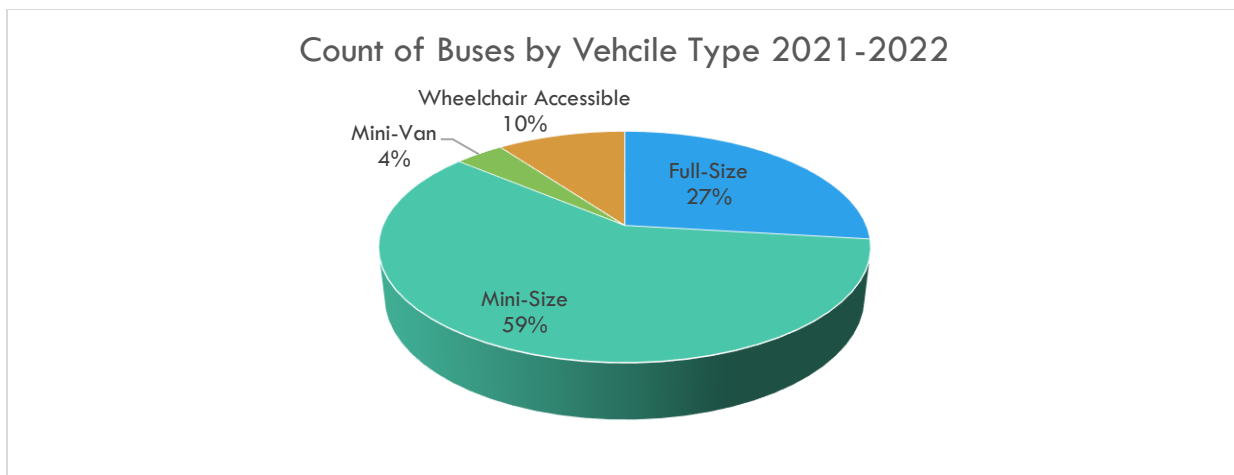
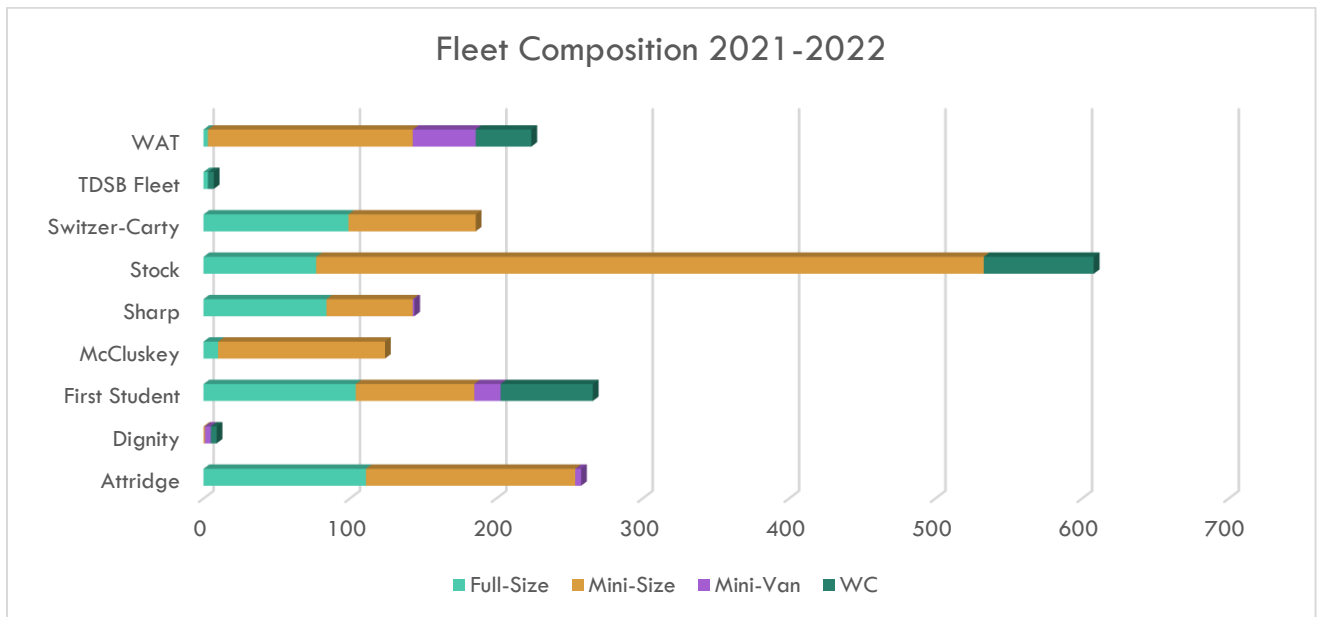
Route Time (min) for a Conventional School Bus



## Operators

The Toronto Student Transportation Group secures transportation through a competitive procurement process. The 2016-2017 school year was the first year of a new contract with a term of six years plus two one-year options. The following chart highlights the number of Operators that are providing service for the TSTG in 2021-2022.

### 7. Breakdown of contracted fleet



## Drivers

When it comes to Student Transportation there may not be a more important person than the Bus Driver. We've never dedicated a section in the Annual Report to drivers, but we felt that their contribution to ensuring students get to and from school in a safe and timely manner is important to recognize.

Driving a school bus in the city of Toronto is no small task. Dealing with Toronto traffic in a personal vehicle is one thing, try to navigate a 40-foot school bus through some of the streets in this city is another. People ask about why Toronto is so concerned about heavy snowfalls. The reason is that the city cannot just push the snow to the side in many locals but must physically remove it. Drivers can attest that a one-way street with cars parked on one side after a snow fall likely means the road is impassable to a large vehicle such as a school bus. Where to park a school bus is one of the most significant factors impacting driver retention. You just can't park a bus anywhere given city bylaw regulations. Driving the bus back to the operator depot is in many cases not the best option given the distance away from where the bus is providing service. This is primarily why we open up our school parking lots at night to ensure that the drivers have a place nearby so that they can get to their bus and minimize time on the road getting to their first stop.



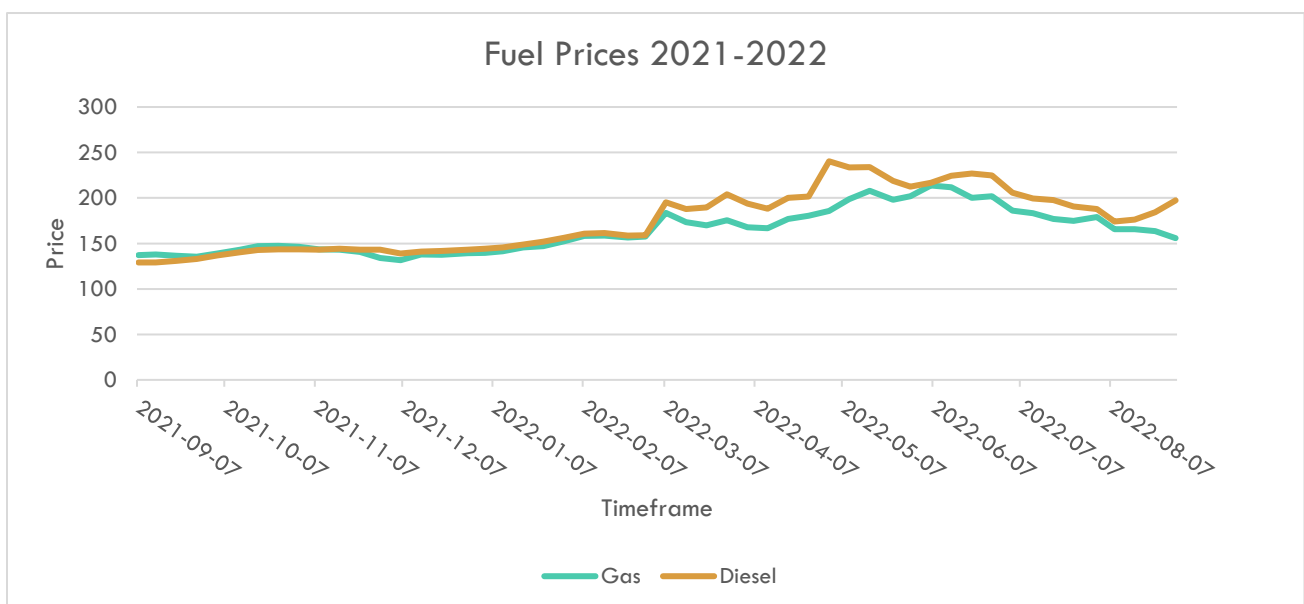
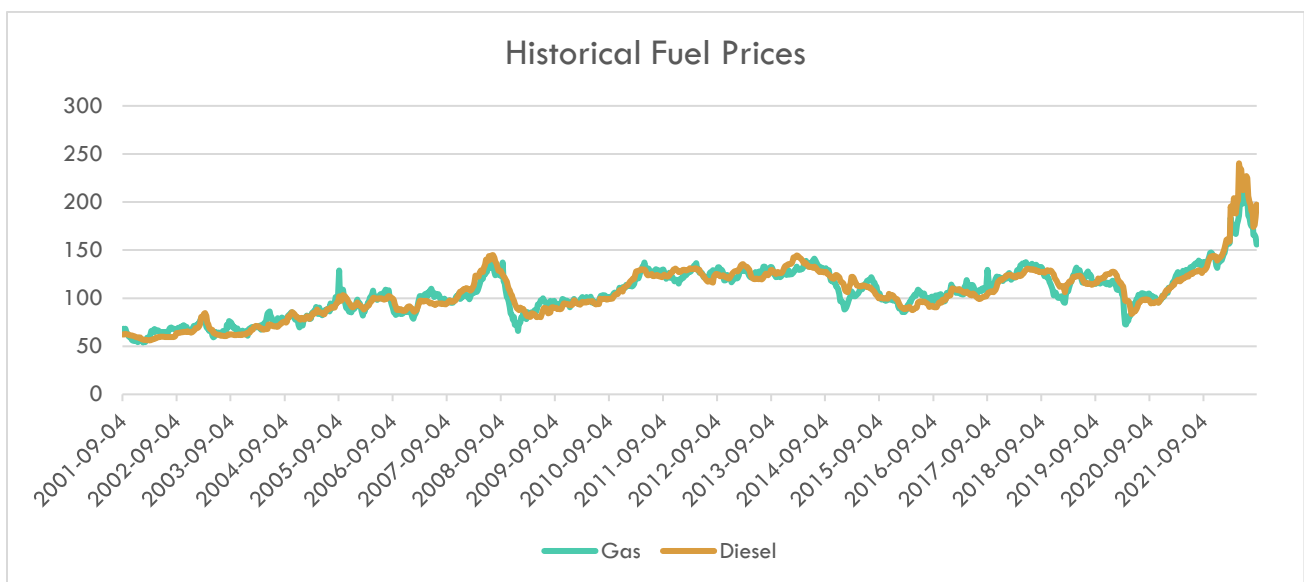
if not for the efforts of our school bus drivers.

Drivers do it all as well. Not only drive the bus but clean up spills on the bus and in some cases bodily fluids. They are tasked to manage the behaviour of students on the bus which seems to be escalating each year. They deal with parents at the stops which on occasion can turn into uncomfortable confrontations. In some cases, they are asked to assist with other bus routes on the fly as a means to ensure all students are serviced each and every day. Don't forget that before each trip each morning they are also performing their circle checks and system diagnostics to ensure the bus is in good running order for the day. So, we leave you with this thought. Where would our children be today

## Fuel

One of the most volatile and unpredictable elements to funding transportation services is the costing for fuel. Both gas and diesel type vehicles using various engines with different fuel economy travelling varying distances generate different costs to be funded. Perspective is everything. Looking at fuel trend line for the past ten years it shows a declining fuel trend. If we extended the time frame out over 30 years, we would see an increasing trend line. The following chart highlights the fuel costs over the years.

### 8. Fuel Trend over the last 30 years

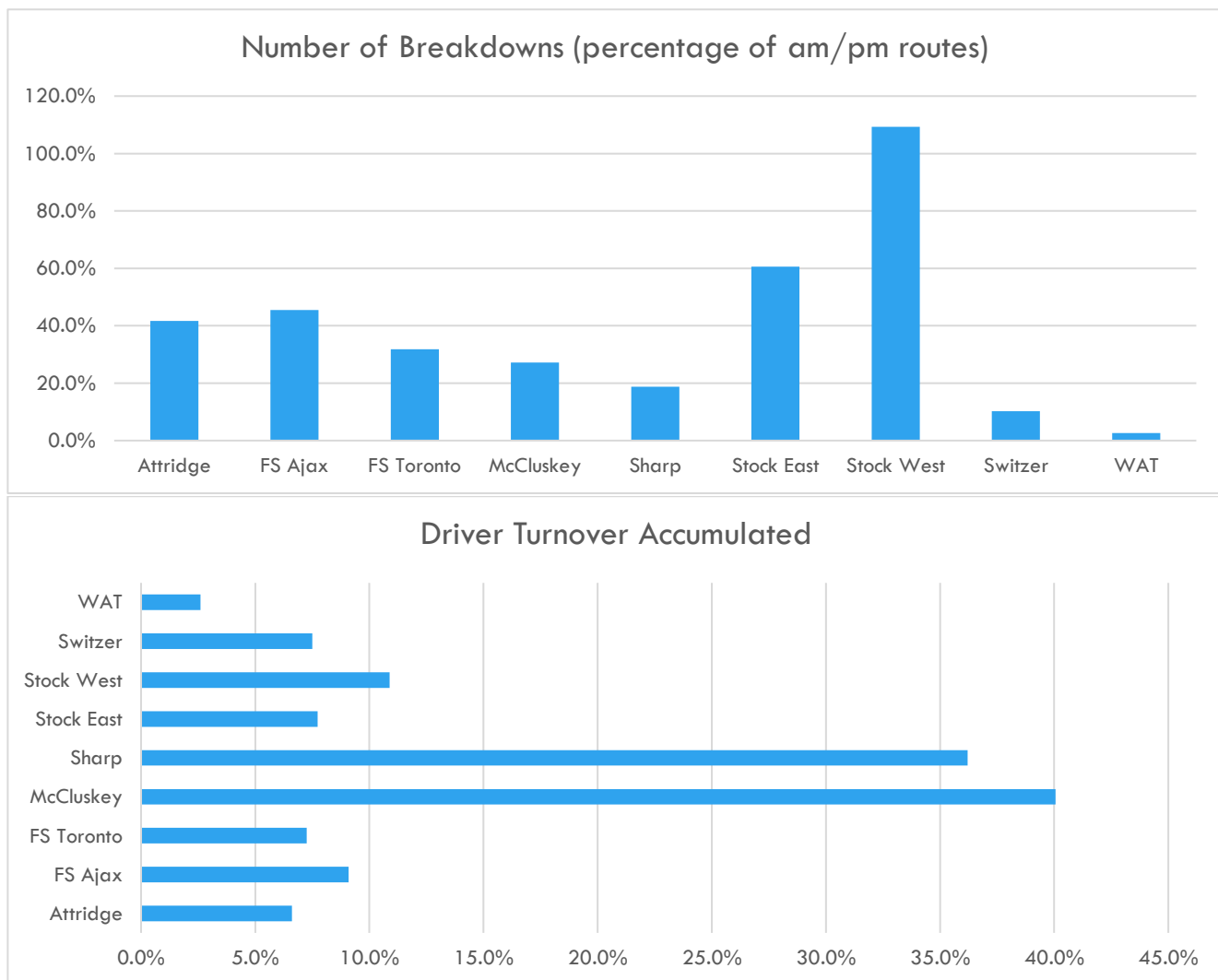




## Operator KPI

To monitor school bus operator performance a key performance indicator package is submitted by the operators to the Consortium each week. The statistics provide an overview of how well operations are proceeding at each individual division. Driver turnover remains a concern as it has risen year over year resulting in bus companies having to recruit and train more drivers at an accelerated pace. Where breakdowns are a concern impacting the level of service for schools and families, companies have been asked to review their maintenance programs to improve reliability.

1. Key Performance Indicators used to track Operator contract compliance and performance.



## Safety

One of the primary conditions for the transportation of students is that they are provided a safe trip to and from school. A dedicated safety officer oversees the deployment of various school bus safety programs, ensures schools and bus operators are following proper school bus safety practices, and audits runs and routes to ensure drivers have the proper qualifications and are following routes as planned.

### School Bus Safety Program

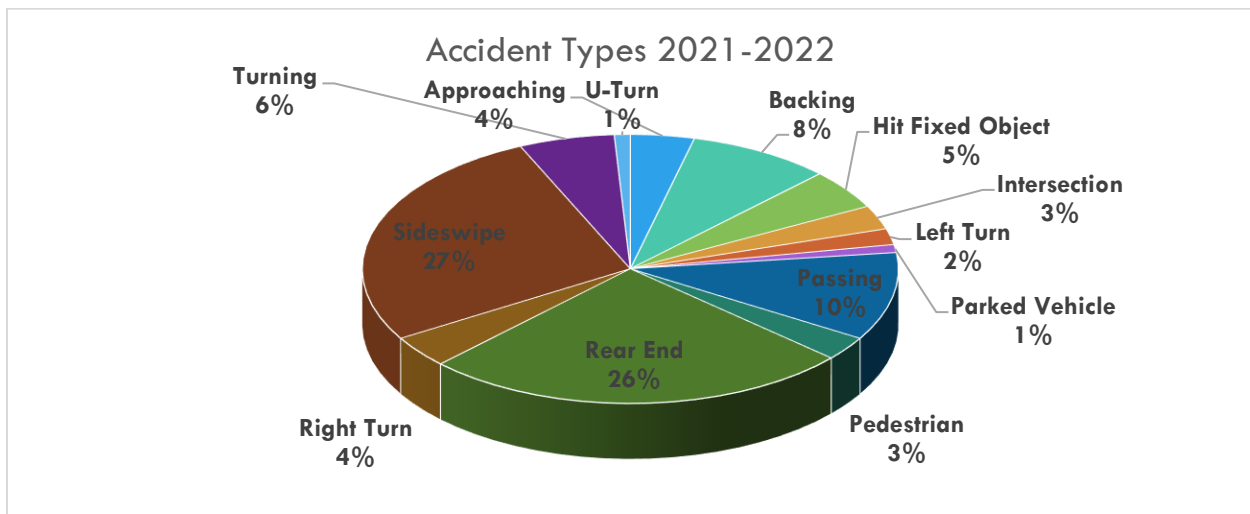
The Toronto Student Transportation Group provides several transportation safety programs to educate our students, families, and the general motoring public. A new program delivered by Intertrain using interactive media to help promote the school bus safety message with our students.



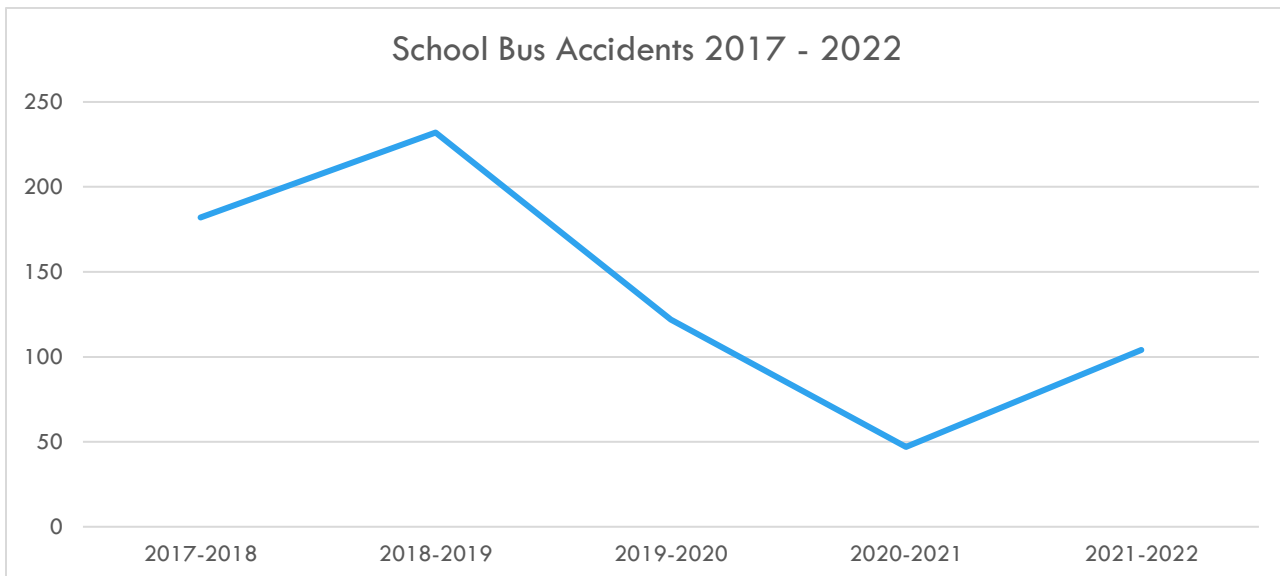
### Accident Statistics

School bus accident statistics provide an insight into the type of accidents taking place on the road along with the conditions from which these accidents take place. The reduction of accidents and improving the safety of students in and around the school bus can be achieved through the review of accident statistics.

#### 2. Conditions impacting school bus accidents.



### 3. Year over year summary of accident statistics

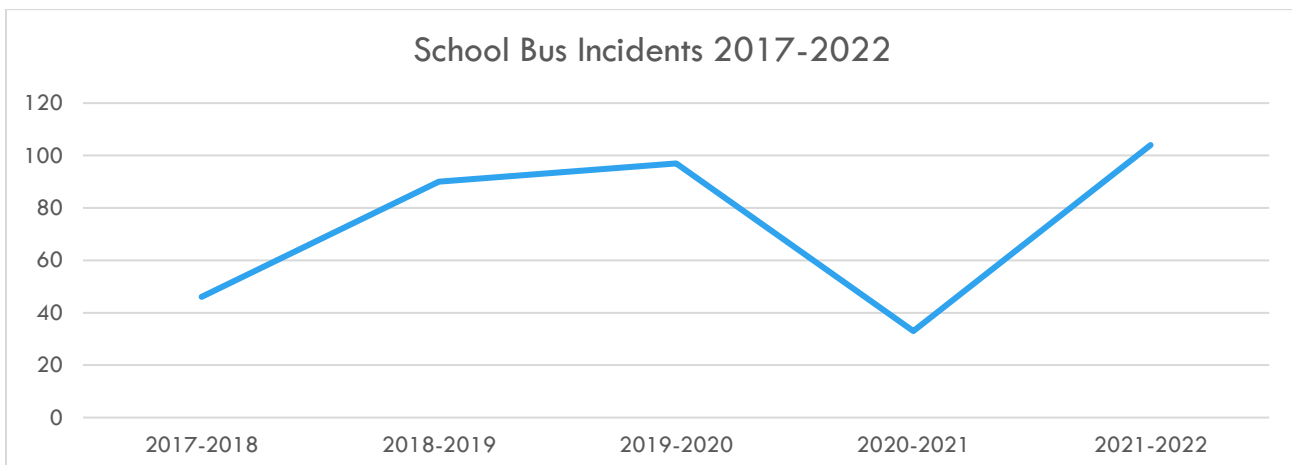


#### Incidents

In terms of dealing with behavioural or other small incidents on the school bus, a 'pink slip' system is used to communicate these issues to the school Principal so that they can be addressed. If a student continues to misbehave on the bus and they receive multiple pink slips the school Principal may remove the student from transportation for a defined period of time.

When something happens on the bus that is not considered a minor incident then the bus company will document the issue as an incident. This may include several issues including violence, vandalism, or some other act that needs immediate attention.

Incidents have rebounded this school year after a decline in years where the number of service days was reduced as a result of covid.





Students with special needs may not always understand the result of their actions which triggers an incident report to the school. As an extension of the classroom, behaviour on the bus is reported to the School Principal so they can address with the student/family.

