

# **Expanding Youth Transit Access in Nevada County: A Proposal to Provide Free Bus Passes for All Students Contingent on Grant Funding**

## **Summary**

This paper advocates for a comprehensive transit equity initiative in Nevada County, California, to provide free bus passes to all high school students. Building on existing programs at Sierra College and Ghidotti Early College High School, the proposal addresses transportation as a critical barrier to educational and recreational access. By removing cost-related obstacles and investing in targeted outreach, the County can enhance youth mobility, promote educational success, and support environmental sustainability.

## **Introduction**

Transportation plays a critical role in ensuring that youth can access school, extracurricular activities, employment, and community resources. However, many students in rural and semi-rural areas like Nevada County face significant barriers to mobility. This paper proposes that Nevada County expand its free student bus pass program to include all high school students, regardless of school type. The policy is grounded in equity, public health, and environmental sustainability goals and builds on the successful models already serving students at Sierra College and Ghidotti Early College High School.

## **Background and Rationale**

Currently, only a subset of students in Nevada County receives free bus passes : those enrolled at Sierra College and Ghidotti Early College High School benefit from programs funded through a combination of local transit partnerships and state funding initiatives (Nevada County Transportation Commission, 2023). However, the vast majority of high school students—particularly those attending traditional public, private, charter, and homeschool programs—do not receive the same level of support.

The lack of reliable and affordable transportation has been repeatedly identified as a major barrier to access, especially for recreational and extracurricular activities (National Recreation and Park Association [NRPA], 2020). Youth without transit options often experience social isolation, lower physical activity levels, and missed opportunities for academic and personal development.

In addition to equity and access, research highlights the importance of school attendance in long-term educational outcomes. The California Department of Education (2023) identifies

chronic absenteeism as a major concern, particularly in rural counties. Providing transportation has been shown to improve attendance and academic performance (Attendance Works, 2018).

From an environmental standpoint, increasing youth ridership on public transportation helps reduce car dependence, lowers greenhouse gas emissions, and cultivates sustainable travel habits early in life (American Public Transportation Association [APTA], 2019)

## **Proposal**

This initiative would provide free bus passes to all Nevada County high school students, including those attending public, charter, private, and homeschool programs. The program would be coordinated through the Nevada County Transit Services Division in partnership with local school districts.

To ensure that eligible students and families are aware of the benefit, the program should include a robust outreach and education strategy. Communication methods could include digital campaigns, printed materials distributed through schools, transit training workshops, and school-hosted events to build confidence in public transportation usage among students.

## **Implementation and Funding**

The County would identify funding sources including local transportation funds, state transit allocations, and potential grants such as the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP). A pilot period could be used to collect data on usage rates, student satisfaction, and attendance improvements.

## **Conclusion**

Providing free bus passes to all Nevada County students represents an investment in youth, education, equity, and sustainability. By expanding access to transportation and pairing the initiative with education and outreach efforts, the County can significantly improve student well-being and community engagement.

## **References**

American Public Transportation Association. (2019). *Public transportation's role in responding to climate change*. <https://www.apta.com>

Attendance Works. (2018). *Attendance works and student success: A national imperative*.  
<https://www.attendanceworks.org>

California Department of Education. (2023). *Chronic absenteeism data and statistics*.  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov>

National Recreation and Park Association. (2020). *Equitable access to parks and recreation*.  
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Nevada County Transportation Commission. (2023). *Transit services and programs*.  
<https://www.nctc.ca.gov>

## Summary: Free Bus Passes for Nevada County Students Contingent on Grant funding

- **Funding Options:**
  - State programs (e.g., Low Carbon Transit Operations Program)
  - Public-private partnerships
- **Current Inequity:** Only students at Sierra College and Ghidotti Early College currently receive free bus passes.
- **Transportation as a Barrier:** Lack of affordable transportation limits student access to:
  - Educational opportunities
  - Recreational and extracurricular activities
  - Employment and community engagement
- **Impact on Attendance:** Transportation access correlates with improved school attendance and reduced chronic absenteeism.
- **Recreational Access:** Inadequate transit contributes to lower youth physical activity and missed developmental opportunities.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Encouraging public transit reduces car usage and greenhouse gas emissions while fostering sustainable habits.
- **Proposal:** Expand free bus pass access to *all* K–12 students in Nevada County, including public, charter, private, and homeschool students.
- **Outreach and Education:** Program success depends on:
  - Effective communication through schools and youth organizations
  - Transit training and confidence-building workshops
  - Broad awareness campaigns
- **Broader Goals:**
  - Promote equity and inclusion
  - Support youth independence and mobility
  - Enhance educational and public health outcomes

## Guiding Questions

### Recreation

1. What barriers are currently preventing youth from accessing existing recreational programs (e.g., cost, transportation, awareness)?

2. **How can the County better align recreational programming with the interests and needs expressed by youth through survey data?**
3. **In what ways can the County leverage or expand the existing Recreational Master Plan to better engage youth across diverse areas?**