

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
MARCH 10, 2026**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: STAFF DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

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The Staff Development Department Professional Development Opportunities report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Pat Rocca, Superintendent of Education  
Anthony Corapi, Coordinator of Staff Development

Presented by: Pat Rocca, Superintendent of Education

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: March 10, 2026



## **REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MARCHE 10, 2026**

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

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#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In alignment with Niagara Catholic's Multi-Year Strategic Plan, the Department of Staff Development, as an integral aspect of its mandate, acts as the point of co-ordination among various departments. Thus ensuring that all professional development opportunities for staff, both teaching and non-teaching, occur in a seamless fashion to minimize disruptions to the myriad services provided within our Niagara Catholic community. The following is a listing of activities occurring during the period March 10, 2026 through April 14, 2026.

#### **Healthy Choices: Substance Use & Digital Media Safety Training Modules – Grade 6 Teachers**

The Ontario government has introduced Healthy Choices: Substance Use and Digital Media Safety Modules for Grade 6 students, in collaboration with School Mental Health-Ontario. These modules provide many opportunities to highlight the connection between faith and safe and supportive decision-making within the Catholic context as part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Niagara Catholic will be implementing the Ministry of Education approved, teacher-led and culturally responsive Substance Use and Digital Media Safety modules. The modules will equip students with evidence-informed knowledge, skills, and strategies to make healthy choices that align with the Gospel values, while discerning the human dignity of themselves and others.

This proactive learning offers reliable information to help increase student safety making informed choices supporting student mental health and well-being. Training sessions will take place in the a.m. and p.m., on March 27 and April 17, 2026.

#### **Hello Math**

Interested educators are invited to participate in HELLO MATH, a professional learning network that provides a monthly subscription box of math manipulatives! Each month, a different math manipulative or model will be highlighted, and participating educators will receive the manipulatives and an accompanying “recipe” card of lesson ideas to try in their classroom.

#### **Participation includes a commitment to:**

- Using the materials in the classroom with students.
- Sending the feedback card back every month in the bag that shares the highlights of how it was used with students.

- Sending the HELLO MATH Bag back to the CEC each month in the courier so it can be refilled with the new materials and sent back to the teacher.
- Sharing the learning with school staff.
- Attend the in-person session in June and receive a free book—Mastering Math Manipulatives.
- Spaces are limited in each division.
- Spaces will be filled by a random draw of interested educators for each division.
- Registration for any interested teachers is currently available.

The Staff Development Professional Development Opportunities report is presented for information.

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Anthony Corapi, Coordinator of Staff Development

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Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: March 10, 2026

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
MARCH 10, 2026**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES 2025-  
2026 ANNUAL PLAN**

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The Niagara Student Transportation Services report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Sarb Sandhu, Executive Director NSTS

Presented by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Associated Director of Education, Corporate Services

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: March 10, 2026



## **REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MARCH 10, 2026**

### **NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES 2025-2026 ANNUAL PLAN**

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#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The 2025–2026 school year marks another pivotal chapter for the Consortium as NSTS approaches its 19th year of service and navigates a rapidly evolving student transportation landscape. Our priorities remain focused on workforce onboarding and development, procurement and funding readiness, safety excellence, technology modernization, and system resilience to meet the needs of Niagara’s communities.

At the forefront of our work is workforce renewal and capacity building, with effective onboarding, training, and integration of staff into new roles as a key operational priority. Through structured onboarding and targeted professional development, NSTS strengthens organizational capacity, accelerates role readiness, and reinforces long-term resilience, supporting service continuity, regulatory compliance, and operational excellence.

The Board of Directors is comprised of three representatives appointed by each member school board, for a total of six (6) Directors. The 2025–26 Directors are listed on Page 3. The Management Advisory Committee (MAC) is comprised of the Associate Director of Education, Corporate Services from each member school board.

NSTS maintains a staffing complement of fourteen (14) positions. The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors through the Management Advisory Committee and serves as Secretary to the Board. All NSTS staff report directly to the Executive Director. The organizational chart below outlines the 2025–26 staffing structure and assigned positions.

Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) plays a critical role in supporting student safety, well-being, and access to learning across Niagara. NSTS remains committed to responsible stewardship, strong governance, and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, NSTS will update its strategic path to support shared Board and stakeholder priorities while strengthening funding optimization, technology-driven efficiency, workforce sustainability, proactive contract renewal planning, organizational knowledge transfer, and partnerships. These priorities will enhance system resilience, improve safety outcomes, and support the sustainable delivery of high-quality student transportation services across the region.

**APPENDIX A** Niagara Student Transportation Services 2025-2026 Annual Plan

The Niagara Student Transportation Services report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Sarb Sandhu, Executive Director NSTS

Presented by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Associate Director of Education, Corporate Services

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: March 10, 2026



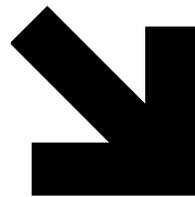
# NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

2025-2026 ANNUAL PLAN



**NSTS.ca**

**Driven By Safety**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Introduction .....	3
1. Executive Director's Message .....	4
2. Key Consortium Milestones.....	5
3. Inclement Weather Cancellations.....	7
4. Organizational Overview .....	8
5. 2025-26 Priorities .....	12
6. Advancing Student Safety .....	15
7. 26-27 & Beyond Priorities.....	17



# INTRODUCTION

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## Who We Are

Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) is a transportation consortium formed by the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) and the Niagara Catholic District School Board (Niagara Catholic). Established in 2007 and incorporated as a not-for-profit organization, NSTS is responsible for the planning, coordination, and delivery of student transportation services across the Niagara region.

NSTS reports to a Board of Directors comprised of senior leaders from both partner school boards. Funding for student transportation is provided by the Ministry of Education, and the school boards collaborate to establish harmonized transportation policies that define eligibility, service levels, and operational standards. NSTS implements these policies, manages the approved transportation budget, and oversees service delivery in alignment with legislative requirements and industry best practices.

## Our Mission

NSTS is committed to student success by providing safe, effective, reliable and efficient transportation services to the learners of Niagara.

## What We Do

Each school day, NSTS safely transports approximately 35,631 students to and from 152 schools and 40 specialized education sites using a fleet of more than 566 school buses and 175 specialized vehicles. Collectively, these vehicles travel over ten million kilometres annually, supporting equitable access to education for students across urban, rural, and specialized program environments.

## How We Deliver

To achieve our mission, NSTS:

- Apply harmonized transportation policies to determine eligibility and service levels.
- Implements policies, procedures, contracts, and operational practices aligned with legislation, regulations, and industry-leading standards.
- Utilize specialized transportation management software, communication portals, and GPS technology across 100% of service vehicles to ensure safe, reliable, and transparent operations.
- Collaborate with school boards, safety partners, and community organizations to deliver safety education programs that promote responsible student travel and active school transportation.
- Pursue continuous improvement initiatives to enhance safety, efficiency, service reliability, and environmental sustainability.

## Our Commitment

At NSTS, safety, service excellence, and accountability guide everything we do. Through strong governance, trusted partnerships, and innovative transportation solutions, NSTS remains dedicated to delivering dependable, high-quality student transportation that supports learning, well-being, and community confidence.



# 1. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE

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The 2025–2026 school year marks another pivotal chapter for the Consortium as NSTS approaches its 19th year of service and navigates a rapidly evolving student transportation landscape. Our priorities remain focused on workforce onboarding and development, procurement and funding readiness, safety excellence, technology modernization, and system resilience to meet the needs of Niagara’s communities.

At the forefront of our work is workforce renewal and capacity building, with effective onboarding, training, and integration of staff into new roles as a key operational priority. Through structured onboarding and targeted professional development, NSTS strengthens organizational capacity, accelerates role readiness, and reinforces long-term resilience, supporting service continuity, regulatory compliance, and operational excellence.

Looking ahead, NSTS will monitor provincial procurement practices, funding frameworks, and policy shifts to inform post-2027 service contracts while integrating emerging best practices to enhance safety, cost efficiency, workforce sustainability, risk mitigation, and service stability. In parallel, we remain committed to advancing a comprehensive driver recruitment and retention framework, supported by safety leadership, technology enablement, and professional development initiatives to strengthen engagement, workplace safety, and service reliability.

NSTS continues to leverage strong partnerships with school boards to enhance administrative support, business continuity planning, cybersecurity resilience, and emergency preparedness, reinforcing organizational readiness and operational excellence.

Reflecting on NSTS’s journey, I am filled with pride and gratitude. I extend my heartfelt thanks first to our dedicated NSTS staff. Your professionalism, adaptability, and commitment form the foundation of everything we do. I also recognize our drivers, monitors, dispatchers, safety personnel, maintenance staff, and bus operator leadership. Your dedication ensures Niagara’s students travel safely and reliably while strengthening public trust in our system.

Together, we continue to build a safe, resilient, and student-centered transportation network that supports the success of every learner in Niagara and exemplifies excellence in student transportation.

**2025-26**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Camillo Cipriano**  
Chairperson

**Kelly Pisek**  
Vice-Chairperson

**Stacy Veld**  
Treasurer  
Vice-Chairperson of the Management Advisory Committee

**Giancarlo Vetrone**  
Director  
Chairperson of the Management Advisory Committee

**Simon Hancox**  
Director

**Pat Rocca**  
Director

**OFFICER**

**Sarb Sandhu**  
Executive Director  
Secretary to the Board

*S Sandhu*



## 2. KEY CONSORTIUM MILESTONES

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### Key Accomplishments:

School Year	Milestone Achievement
2006—2007	DSBN and Niagara Catholic signed Consortium Agreement to form NSTS and filed as a corporation under the Corporations Act of Ontario.
2007—2008	Integrated the student database of both school boards for transportation planning purposes to start planning as a single entity.
2008—2009	First school year operating as a single entity with staff serving students of both school boards in specific geographic areas.
2009—2010	Implement harmonized policies and administrative procedures for both school boards and ranked Moderate-High on first Effectiveness & Efficiency Review.
2010—2011	Implemented new planning and routing software by Georef to support enhanced data management, route planning and secure web portals.
2011—2012	Implemented competitive procurement in West Niagara, harmonized all service offerings and implemented major efficiency projects across Niagara.
2012—2013	Achieved High rating on Effectiveness & Efficiency Review.
2013—2014	Achieved full compliance with BPS Procurement Directive, equipped 100% of vehicles with GPS.
2014—2015	Modernized First Ride program for students new to the bus and for students with individualized transportation needs.
2015—2016	Implemented Intertrain in presentations for school bus safety and behaviour management program in schools.
2016—2017	Office moved to St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Elementary School and commenced initiatives to support driver recruitment and retention.
2017—2018	Added two new staff positions to recognize increasing demands on resources from alternative education, special programs and driver shortage challenges.
2018—2019	Hosted first Niagara School Bus Professionals event and negotiated contract solutions to improve driver recruitment and retention.



<b>2019—2020</b>	Implemented extended contracts on 70% of routes, camera program on 25% of routes and experienced service disruption due to COVID-19.
<b>2020—2021</b>	Implemented competitive procurement on 30% of routes, modified services to respond to COVID-19, and business continuity measures, including SaaS, and added new position to support Executive Director.
<b>2021—2022</b>	Seamless transition of the organization to a new leadership team with focus on business results, continuity and building on key stakeholder relationships. Collaborated with Bus Operators to ensure all school buses were compliant with new Eight Lamp Amber-Red Warning System, further enhancing student safety measures.
<b>2022—2023</b>	<p>Developed a new Individual Student Transportation Plan (ISTP) form that will help ensure we have all the information for successfully transporting students with exceptional needs.</p> <p>Hosted the first Professional Development Event for Local Bus Professionals since 2019.</p> <p>Awarded the 2023 Wheels of Change Award: Organization for institutionalizing Active School Travel within the region and supporting the development of Heart Niagara to encourage more families to cycle to school (Bike Rodeo).</p> <p>Updated NSTS website to ensure compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 Level A and Level AA.</p> <p>Consortium Agreement and By-laws were updated ensuring legal compliance and incorporated best practices.</p>
<b>2023—2024</b>	<p>Reached an agreement to extend current contracts with our existing school bus operators, securing 70% of the routes through 2027.</p> <p>Applied the new funding framework released by the Ministry of Education for student transportation including the Recruitment and Retention Bonus for drivers.</p>
<b>2024—2025</b>	<p>Commenced transportation services for the Niagara Children's Centre School Authority, starting with 11 dedicated routes and added a new Area Transportation position to recognize increasing demands on resources.</p> <p>Implemented a revised transportation policy that increased the eligibility distance for secondary school students to 3.2 kilometers.</p> <p>Updated NSTS Parent Portal access to offer a more secure, accurate, and user-friendly experience. Portal Access is now based on contact email addresses in the student SIS record</p>
<b>2025-2026</b>	Three new employees were successfully onboarded, bringing the total to five staff members appointed to new positions as part of NSTS's workforce renewal strategy, following natural attrition through retirements.



### 3. INCLEMENT WEATHER CANCELLATIONS

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NSTS uses a structured, safety-first framework to assess real-time and forecasted weather, road conditions, and operational readiness to determine transportation service levels. Decisions are made early each morning to support safe, reliable operations and timely communication with school boards, shareholders and families.



	Schools	Transportation
<b>2014-15</b>	1	2
<b>2015-16</b>	0	2
<b>2016-17</b>	0	0
<b>2017-18</b>	1	1
<b>2018-19</b>	3	9
<b>2019-20</b>	0	1
<b>2020-21</b>	1	1
<b>2021-22</b>	2	5
<b>2022-23</b>	2	3.11*
<b>2023-24</b>	0	0.22**
<b>2024-25</b>	1	2.11*
<b>2025-26<sup>1</sup></b>	1	1.22**

\* Includes Partial route cancellations impacting student transportation in Fort Erie.

\*\*Includes Partial route cancellations impacting student transportation in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Wainfleet.

<sup>1</sup> Current school year; data reported through February 2, 2026.



## 4. ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

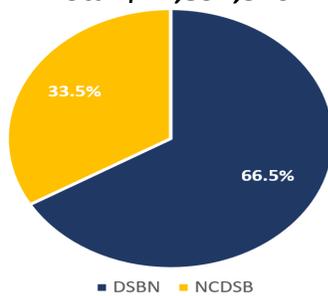
### Financial & Student Information:

In the 2025-26 school year, there are 37,254 students eligible for transportation and 35,631 students transported with projected expenditures of \$44.85 million. Not all eligible students are riding the bus, 1,623 are Opted-Out of transportation.

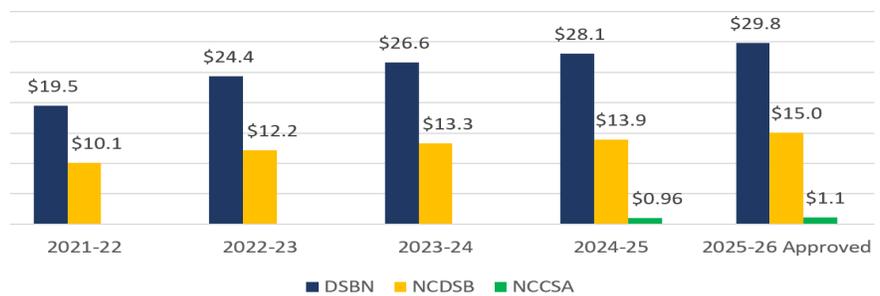
Both school boards are projected to have expenditures greater than the student transportation Grant.

In the 2025-26 school year, the cost per student transported for DSBN is projected to be \$1,379 and for Niagara Catholic \$1,076. For historical context, the following charts represent the previous five years:

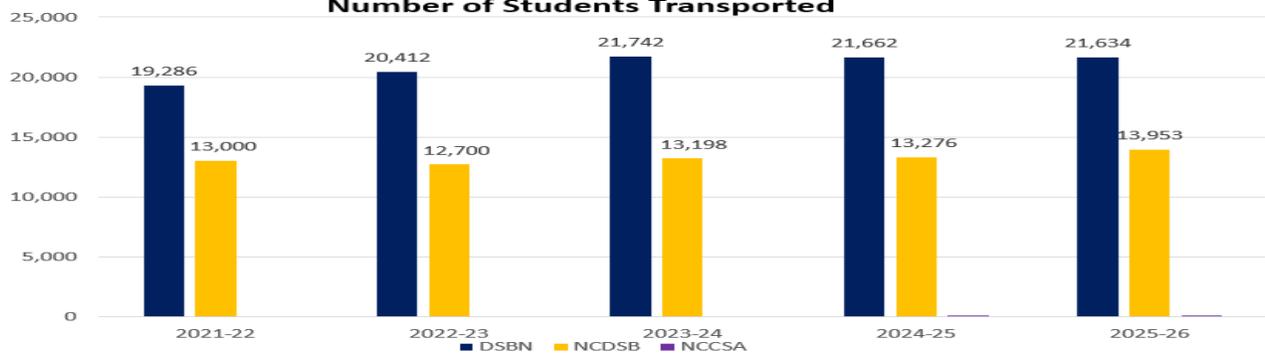
**Approved Budget per Board**  
Total \$44,852,340



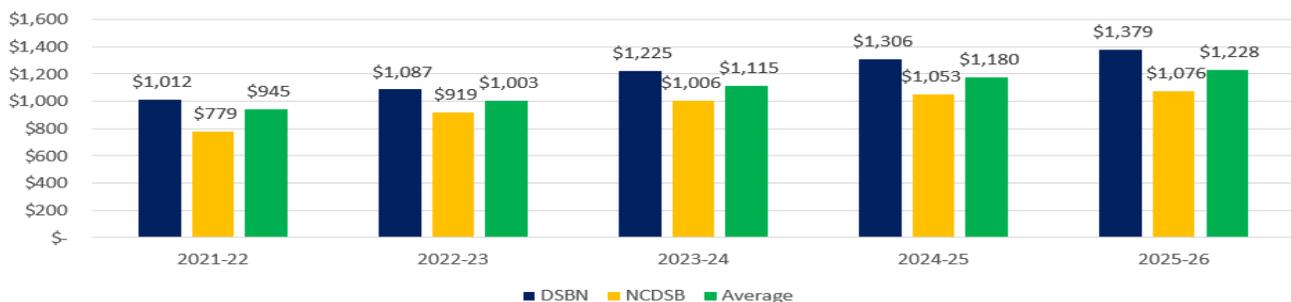
**Transportation Expenditure by Board**



**Number of Students Transported**



**Cost per Student Transported**





## Organizational Structure:

The Board of Directors is comprised of three representatives appointed by each member school board, for a total of six (6) Directors. The 2025–26 Directors are listed on Page 3. The Management Advisory Committee (MAC) is comprised of the Associate Director of Education, Corporate Services from each member school board.

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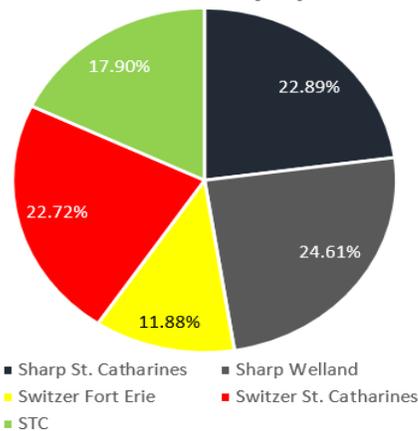




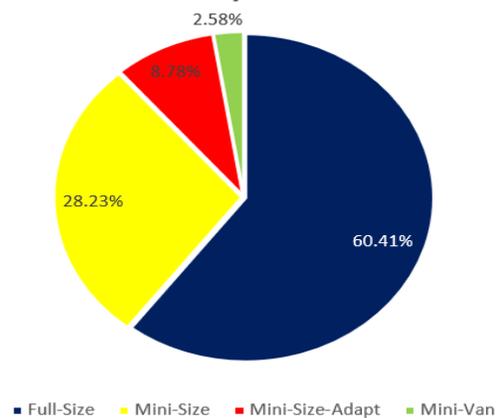
## Service Providers:

NSTS holds transportation service contracts directly with service providers on behalf of the member school boards. Approximately 70% of bus routes are under contract until August 2027, with three optional one-year extensions through August 2030, while the remaining 30% of routes are contracted through August 2030. In the 2024–25 school year, NSTS managed a total of 581 school bus routes, providing a high degree of contractual stability to support service continuity and operational planning.

**Bus Route Share by Operator**



**Bus Routes by Size of Vehicle**



## Driver Demographic & Years of Services

Year-over-year analysis of school bus driver experience and workforce demographics indicates a system undergoing significant structural transition, influenced by competitive procurement cycles since 2019–20 and persistent post-pandemic labour market pressures. The data reflects a growing proportion of newly recruited drivers and a strengthening mid-tenure cohort, alongside a continued decline in long-tenured bus drivers, resulting in a reduced average length of service. In response, NSTS is proactively partnering with transportation service providers to strengthen recruitment pipelines, enhance onboarding supports, and implement early-tenure retention strategies, supporting workforce stability, service reliability, and the long-term sustainability of student transportation operations.

### Years of Driving Experience

Less than one year	24.48%
1-2 years	18.23%
3-9 years	42.71%
10-14 years	11.28%
15-19 years	1.91%
20-24 years	1.39%



### Driver Demographic

Age 20 – 29	4.17%
Age 30 – 39	14.24%
Age 40 – 49	16.67%
Age 50 – 59	19.44%
> Age 60	45.48%



## **Technology Deployed**

- BusPlanner suite of products is deployed for routing, managing and scheduling student transportation, including secure web portals and Software as a Service (SaaS) hosting and technical support.
- All school buses are equipped with GPS (Synovia).
- Twenty-five (25%) of vehicles are equipped with internal-facing and external-facing cameras (Gatekeeper).

## **Administrative Support**

- Both school boards provide financial services and procurement support, and other fee for service support, under the Service Level Agreement (SLA). Specific to DSBN SLA also includes human resources, payroll and benefit administration, and IT services and Niagara Catholic's SLA includes office lease, custodial services and phone service.
- DSBN Casual Secretary List, AnswerPlus and Interlock Issue Tracker provide support during back-to-school or other times of staff resource constraint.
- Insurance is purchased through OSBIE.

## **Community Partners**

- Niagara Region Public Health is the primary partner for Active School Travel (AST) programs, and the AST network includes all twelve (12) municipalities, Niagara's crossing guard committee, Safety Village, Heart Niagara and Niagara Regional Police Services.
- Niagara Regional Police Services is the primary partner in the external-facing video camera program.
- NSTS is a member of Niagara's geospatial group with reciprocal data sharing for local GIS-related data.
- Intertrain provides school bus student safety training in schools featuring Buster the Bus for Kindergarten to Grade 3 and Grades 4 to 8, including videos that are available on the NSTS website. These contracted services are through OECM, and in addition Intertrain has developed videos that are available on the NSTS website to support the First Ride program featuring Buzzy the Bee and a pedestrian safety program featuring Blue the Butterfly.



## 5. 2025-26 PRIORITIES

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The 2025–2026 school year marks another pivotal chapter for the Consortium as NSTS approaches its 19th anniversary and navigates the challenges ahead. Our priorities will center on training and onboarding NSTS staff, monitoring procurement and funding framework, retaining skilled bus drivers and staff to support ridership demands and improve continuity while maintaining rigorous safety standards, adopting best practices, and leveraging technology to enhance efficiency and adapt to evolving demands.

### **Key objectives for the school year:**

1. As NSTS advances its workforce strategy, the effective onboarding, training, and integration of staff into new roles remains the organization’s top operational priority. During the current school year, three new employees are being successfully onboarded, bringing the total to five staff members appointed to new positions following natural attrition and planned retirements. To ensure operational continuity, regulatory compliance, and service excellence, NSTS continues to invest in structured onboarding and targeted professional development. This includes participation in School Bus Ontario (SBO) safety and Ministry of Transportation regulatory training, role-specific BusPlanner system training, and formal education through the University of Guelph’s Certificate in Pupil Transportation Management and Diploma in School Board Administration programs. This comprehensive approach strengthens organizational capacity, accelerates role readiness, and reinforces long-term operational resilience.
2. Proactively monitor provincial procurement practices, funding frameworks, and policy shifts to inform the development of post-2027 service contracts. Integrate emerging best practices across Ontario to enhance safety, cost efficiency, workforce sustainability, risk mitigation, and long-term service stability, while ensuring alignment with evolving regulatory and funding requirements.
3. Continue to advance a comprehensive recruitment and retention framework that integrates safety leadership, technology enablement, and professional development opportunities, including conflict management and de-escalation training. These initiatives are designed to strengthen driver engagement, enhance workplace safety, improve service reliability, and support long-term workforce sustainability.
4. Leverage strong Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with partner school boards to enhance administrative and operational support functions. Build upon these frameworks to strengthen business continuity planning, cybersecurity resilience, service continuity protocols, and emergency response preparedness, ensuring organizational readiness across a range of operational risk scenarios.



### **Aug to December Priorities:**

- NSTS's priority for school start-up is the safe, reliable, and on-time delivery of transportation for all eligible students, with particular emphasis on ensuring that specialized and exceptional student transportation requirements are fully implemented, continuously reviewed, and adjusted as needed to support student safety and success.
- Complete August 31 year-end financials.
- Submit Operator Report and School Report at the beginning of September to the Ministry.
- Complete Student Transportation School Year Start-up Survey.
- Submit daily route cancellation and delays report to the Ministry.
- Prepare and complete year-end financial audit, aim for week prior to or after Thanksgiving to have draft financial statements to school boards by October 31.
- Submit Ministry Student Transportation Routing Simulation
- Complete Annual Report and Annual Plan for Annual General Meeting.

### **January to March Priorities:**

- Period 1 Recruitment and Retention bonus payments for eligible bus drivers, ensuring accuracy and compliance with established criteria.
- Ensure second semester Secondary program information is clear and that all corresponding transportation requirements are in place.
- Commence planning for following school year focused on capacity planning for increasing enrolment and transportation eligibility, and forecast new vehicles and drivers by March 31 to service providers.
- While planning for the following school year, determine if bell time efficiencies can offset new vehicle and driver requirements, to reduce strain on limited resources and engage the Management Advisory Committee in plans and preliminary budget.
- Submit actual annual expenditures for previous school year for (i) NSTS (ii) Bus Operators - bus driver's compensation, hours and Recruitment and Retention bonus payments.
- Reconcile year-to-date fuel escalation contractual requirement and funding provision.
- Engage staff in annual appraisal and development plan process.
- Project impact of CPI increases for equivalent contractual terms increase and Ontario minimum wage potential impact on driver recruitment and retention to engage Management Advisory Committee in planning for financial and contractual decisions.
- Plan Active School Travel "Spring in to Spring" campaign for pedestrian safety training.
- Align staff areas to alleviate capacity pressures of growth areas on specific Area Transportation Coordinators.
- Opt-In process for those eligible for transportation.
- Develop communication plans to more effectively communicate with schools and families for back-to-school for the following school year.
- Submit daily route cancellation and delays report to the Ministry.



### **April to July Priorities:**

- Complete March 31 year-end financial process and project total expenditures to financial year-end August 31 to report to Management Advisory Committee.
- Complete consultation on the new bell time changes and finalize budget submission to each school board.
- Hold meetings with planning departments on enrolment projections and special education consultants of both school boards to validate planning assumptions.
- Active School Travel (AST) Spring into Spring campaign for pedestrian safety training.
- Plan following school year Consortium driver engagement activities with newsletters, PD Event and additional learnings to support recruitment and retention.
- Review school board process and timelines for the following school year pre-registration and registration process and align resources accordingly.
- Assess allocated funding for student transportation to determine how formula updates may impact local school boards and present findings to Management Advisory Committee.
- Review and redesign processes and communication tools for schools and families to reduce demands on staff during back to school.
- Develop school secretary and administrator information, and establish training and/or meeting attendance, to ensure schools are prepared to be the first line of communication with families.
- Review alternate programs and sites with Management Advisory Committee for future student transportation delivery options including aligning resources and budget.
- Review leading practices for hazard designation procedures, adopt and apply leading practices to all schools to reset eligibility by hazard designation.
- Meet with all Operators' management teams and conduct Annual Compliance Audits, ensuring all key contract terms are met by each bus company.
- Reconcile year-to-date fuel escalation contractual requirement and funding provision.
- Complete documentation on contract compliance and performance management, and key performance and achievement reporting, to prepare for Annual Report once financials are complete.
- Reconcile other grant expenditures for reporting to school boards, including student rider safety programs.
- Negotiate any new or relevant contract addenda for service providers related to new/changed expectations for the following school year.
- Period 2 Recruitment and Retention bonus payments for eligible bus drivers, ensuring accuracy and compliance with established criteria.



## 6. ADVANCING STUDENT SAFETY

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### **BUZZY THE BEE**

Teaches the First Ride Program to Kindergarten students and their families.



### **BUSTER THE BUS**

Teaches Kindergarten to Grade 3 students school bus safety and behaviour expectations.



### **BLUE THE BUTTERFLY**

Teaches Kindergarten to Grade 3 students pedestrian safety skills.



#### **Current Program:**

NSTS delivers a comprehensive suite of student safety programs designed to promote safe travel behaviours, reduce risk, and support age-appropriate learning across all grades.

#### In-School Bus Safety & Student Behaviour Training (Intertrain):

Age-appropriate presentations delivered to Kindergarten–Grade 3 and Grades 4–8, focused on school bus safety, respectful conduct, and emergency preparedness.

#### First-Time Rider Safety Program:

Targeted education for JK–Grade 1 students and families, outlining expectations, procedures, and responsibilities related to safe bus travel. This program is also delivered throughout the school year for students with specialized transportation needs.

#### Online Learning Resources:

- First Ride Video for new Kindergarten riders
- School Bus Safety Videos for Grades 1–3 and Grades 4–8
- Pedestrian Safety Video for Kindergarten–Grade 3
- Pedestrian Safety Pilot in Niagara Falls and Fort Erie

#### Grade 2 Safety Village Transportation Support:

NSTS provides transportation to support curriculum-based safety programming delivered by police officers, including school bus safety, pedestrian safety, and cycling safety.

#### **Opportunity to Improve Programs:**

To further strengthen student safety outcomes, NSTS will advance a coordinated, scalable, and region-wide program model grounded in operational efficiency, equity of access, and best practices in student transportation safety, including hands-on bus evacuation drills delivered collaboratively with service providers and bus drivers, for elementary and secondary schools, resulting in improved emergency preparedness, increased student confidence, and enhanced compliance with recognized safety standards.



## Advancing Active School Travel

Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS), in partnership with Niagara Region Public Health, school boards, municipalities, and community organizations, will continue to advance Active School Travel (AST) programming to improve student safety, increase physical activity, and reduce traffic congestion around schools. Building on years of successful collaboration, a refined, scalable AST model will be implemented to support diverse school and community contexts, reduce barriers to walking, wheeling, and rolling, and embed active travel into everyday school culture.

### Program Goals (2026 and beyond)

- Increase student participation in active travel to and from school
- Improve safety and reduce congestion in school zones
- Support student well-being, equity, and community connection
- Establish sustainable AST practices that can grow region-wide



### Program Approach

AST will be delivered through two tailored implementation models:

- High-Capacity School Model
- Neighbourhood-Level School Model

A small number of pilot schools in each category will be identified based on school leadership, infrastructure readiness, municipal support, and community partnerships. These pilots will enable early success, practical learning, and strong evidence to support broader expansion.

### Key Strategies

- School administration engagement and capacity-building
- Walkability reviews with municipal and community partners
- Integration of AST into daily routines
- Student leadership through clubs and school-wide initiatives
- Family and community involvement through events and communication
- Ongoing collaboration with Public Health, municipalities, and local organizations

### Measurement, Sustainability, and Funding Context

Progress will be monitored using student travel data and participation tools aligned with OPHEA's Healthy Schools Certification framework to support accountability and sustainability. Program goals and rollout capacity will be influenced by the conclusion of Vision Zero funding following provincial changes to automated speed enforcement. As funding evolves, alternative government grants and municipal safety-based funding opportunities will be evaluated to support continued delivery and expansion. Through this focused, equity-driven, partnership-based approach, the Active School Travel (AST) program will strengthen school communities, enhance safety, and support long-term regional growth.



## 7. 26-27 & BEYOND PRIORITIES

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Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) plays a critical role in supporting student safety, well-being, and access to learning across Niagara. NSTS remains committed to responsible stewardship, strong governance, and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, NSTS will update its strategic path to support shared Board and stakeholder priorities while strengthening funding optimization, technology-driven efficiency, workforce sustainability, proactive contract renewal planning, organizational knowledge transfer, and partnerships. These priorities will enhance system resilience, improve safety outcomes, and support the sustainable delivery of high-quality student transportation services across the region.

### **Student Safety, Well-Being, and Success**

Student safety remains the foundation of all NSTS decision-making. Emphasis will continue to ensure specialized and exceptional transportation requirements are implemented, monitored, and adjusted to support equitable access, student well-being, and success.

### **Funding Alignment, Data Systems, and Financial Accountability**

NSTS will align data systems, reporting processes, and eligibility frameworks with Ministry of Education funding guidelines to ensure accurate access to transportation funding. Strong data integrity and audit readiness will support transparency and responsible use of public resources.

### **Operational Efficiency and Technology Enablement**

NSTS will leverage technology and process improvements to optimize routing, improve service reliability, and manage growth while reducing pressure on fleet and driver availability.

### **Workforce Sustainability and Governance Readiness**

NSTS will support operator recruitment, retention, training, and knowledge transfer to maintain service continuity and safety standards, while preparing for contract renewals in 2027 and beyond through proactive governance planning.

### **Partnerships and System Collaboration**

NSTS will strengthen partnerships to promote Active School Travel, enhance school zone safety, and support broader student and community well-being.

Through these priorities, NSTS reaffirms its commitment to collaboration, strong governance, and responsible stewardship in delivering a safe, efficient, inclusive, and sustainable student transportation system.



# NSTS.ca

Driven By Safety



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