

**House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
HB 98 Written Proponent Testimony
Shannon Cox, Superintendent
Montgomery County Educational Service Center
May 6, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Minority Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 98. I am Shannon Cox, the Montgomery County Educational Service Center (MCESC) superintendent. We serve the needs of the school districts and private schools (and their respective students) in 140 locations in 20 counties in Ohio.

I begin by thanking Representatives Santucci and Williams for sponsoring this critical legislation. We see connecting students with a variety of career opportunities as a vital component of their success and also a key ingredient to a strong economy. HB 98 would support a more intentional focus on this effort within Ohio's education system.

For many years, MCESC has been working toward increasing students' awareness of the workforce opportunities within our region. Through our facilitation of the Business Advisory Councils (BACs) required of area school districts, we strive to connect local businesses with students who might fulfill their workforce needs. Noting that MCESC's BAC has received a four-star rating for the last three years, HB 98 would assist us in expanding our reach in these efforts.

HB 98 would not just support efforts in Montgomery County. Its statewide application would allow ESCs around the state to place supports for workforce connections closer to where the students spend their time. To truly succeed in connecting students with workforce opportunities, it is essential to have individuals in place (directors under HB 98) whose job is to wake up every morning focused on this service. While some school districts may already have the resources to provide this service to students, many others do not.

Utilizing ESCs, the state's regional service providers, to manage this system of workforce connectors/directors makes sense for efficiency and effectiveness, particularly since many are already actively facilitating positive relationships between schools and businesses through local BACs, as we do at MCESC. HB 98 will complement and strengthen this ongoing work.

We urge the committee to favorably report HB 98 as soon as possible. Planning for the 2025-2026 school year is already underway, so the bill must move quickly to establish the community connectors for the next school year.

This concludes my written testimony. Please feel free to contact us with questions.

Report: RideSmart Ohio & Transportation Pilot

Reporting Period: January 1, 2025 – May 13, 2025

Prepared by: Montgomery County ESC

Date: May 13, 2025

Program Summary

RideSmartOhio is continuing its mission to provide flexible, student-centered transportation solutions across the region. This quarter marks meaningful progress as we grow our pilot efforts into more sustainable, cost-effective, and community-driven models.

Highlights

- **Over 30 Student Trips Completed Utilizing the App:**
RideSmartOhio successfully completed more than 108 trips during Q3, serving a range of student transportation needs across multiple districts. With over 1399 local miles in addition to the consortium miles to Columbus weekly.
- **Active Driver Roster:**
 - 5 active, trained drivers are currently operating within the system.
 - One driver was released this quarter to maintain RideSmartOhio's commitment to high standards of safety and reliability.
 - We participated in an additional job fair on March 15, 2025
 - We have three new drivers in the pipeline for training.
- **New Partnership with Dayton Public Schools (DPS):**
RideSmartOhio secured a transportation contract with DPS. Through this partnership, the district identified two key populations to receive service:
 - Preschool students
 - Students attending the Ohio State School for the Blind and the Ohio School for the Deaf.
- **Expanded Services**
 - **Consortium Route for OSB and OSD.**
 - 3 new students from DPS starting on March 31st
 - **Foster Youth:**
 - We began transporting a student in foster care from the Trotwood area to their home school district in Mad River, aligning with McKinney-Vento supports and demonstrating the program's ability to serve high-need, mobile populations.

- **PreSchool Transportation:**
 - We are transporting a student on the autism spectrum to preschool services.

Emerging Requests & Expanding Need

RideSmartOhio has seen a growing number of additional transportation requests that highlight the gap in accessible options for students and families:

- **Parent Requests:**

Several families have inquired about transportation to **preschool extended services**, particularly in households where guardians are working during the day, lacking personal vehicles or public transit access.
 - **Industry & Workforce Partners:**

Local businesses and industry partners have reached out to request transportation solutions for **student internships**, aiming to ensure students without reliable transportation are not excluded from career-readiness opportunities.
 - **Adult Education:**

RideSmartOhio has also been approached to support transportation for **adult reading classes**, where learners often face the same barriers as K-12 students in reaching critical services.
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Strategic and Financial Progress

- **Long-Term Pricing Model Developed:**

A long-term pricing structure was developed this quarter, designed to reduce transportation costs for school districts by nearly 50% compared to traditional options for most trip types. This pricing model has been shared with partner districts and is being refined based on use case scenarios and route demand.
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Policy Engagement

- **Legislative Outreach and Recommendations:**

Based on early outcomes from the pilot, RideSmartOhio presented a set of policy recommendations to local legislators. These recommendations focus on:

 - Sustainable funding models
 - Flexible driver pools

- Simplified compliance for non-traditional routes

Looking Ahead to Q4

- Recruit additional drivers to meet growing district demand.
 - Support implementation of new contracts and continue outreach to new districts.
 - Continue discussions with state legislators and explore funding/grant opportunities for scaling the program.
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TRANSPORTATION PILOT

- ◆ Funding Period: Aug 13, 2024 – May 13, 2025
- ◆ Prepared by: Montgomery County ESC
- ◆ website: ridesmartohio.com
- ◆ contact: ridesmartohio@mcesc.org



RIDE SMART
OHIO

Powered by MCESC



The Montgomery County Educational Service Center (MCESC) has been actively engaged in the Pupil Transportation Pilot Program, working to address student transportation challenges through innovative solutions. The RideSmart Ohio initiative and Consortium Transportation routes have promise as cost-effective and efficient alternatives for school districts struggling with driver shortages, rising costs, and compliance issues. This legislative update highlights the program's progress, key challenges, and recommendations for sustaining and expanding its impact.

CONSORTIUM ROUTE SUCSESSES

A consolidated route was established to transport students from two districts to the Ohio State School for the Blind and the Deaf.

Districts have seen cost savings by consolidating student transportation needs rather than maintaining separate routes.

Scaling this model can save districts thousands.



	Typical Route to Columbus from Dayton Area (1 -2 students per district per bus)	Consortium Route to Columbus from Dayton Area (up to 9 students)
Miles one way	75	97*
Number of Weeks in a School Year (estimated)	36	36
Number of one ways/week for the driver (trips)	4	4
Number of hours/week for driver	6	6
Hourly rate for driver (estimated)	\$25	\$25
Standard mileage rate (estimated)	\$0.67	\$0.67
Cost per year in Miles (number of miles one-way x number of trips x standard mileage rate)	\$7,236.00	\$9,358.00
Driver Cost Per Year (number of hours per week x hourly rate x number of weeks)	\$5,400.00	\$5,400.00
Total Cost to operate the Route	\$11,124.00	\$14,758.00
Cost for 2 districts (1 Student Each)	\$22,248.00	\$14,758.00 (\$7,379 per student)
Cost for 3 districts (1 Student Each)	\$33,372.00	\$14,758.00 (\$4,919 per student)
Cost for 4 districts (1 Student Each)	\$44,496.00	\$14,758.00 (\$3,690 per student)
Cost for 5 districts (1 Student Each)	\$55,620.00	\$14,758.00 (\$2,952 per student)
Cost for 6 districts (1 Student Each)	\$66,744.00	\$14,758.00 (\$2,460 per student)
Cost for 7 districts (1 Student Each)	\$77,868.00	\$14,758.00 (\$2,108 per student)
Cost for 8 districts (1 Student Each)	\$88,992.00	\$14,758.00 (\$1,845 per student)
Cost for 9 districts (1 Student Each)	\$100,116.00	\$14,758.00 (\$1,640 per student)

***Shifts slightly as more districts add students to this route, with only minimal cost increases.*

FLEET AND DRIVER DEVELOPMENTS

- Acquired minibuses; 9 passenger and 5 passenger wheelchair accessible minibus for larger consortium routes.
- Hired and retained 5 new drivers through targeted recruitment efforts.
- Implementation of safety measures that match and exceed the van driver requirements by the state including CPR:First Aid certification, strict vehicle inspections, and drug testing.



OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACT

	COMPETITOR	RIDESMART			
Scenario 1	1 STUDENT	1 STUDENT	2 STUDENTS	3 STUDENTS	4 STUDENTS
Passenger 1	15	15	15	15	15
Passenger 2			8	8	8
Passenger 3				7	7
Passenger 4					5
	15	15	23	30	35
Minimum Trip Cost	\$77.00	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25
Number of miles included in the base cost	12	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25
Per mileage cost beyond that initial fee	\$2.58	\$2.50			
Cost To District	\$84.74	\$46.88	\$92.00	\$150.00	\$192.50
Pay to Driver		\$24.90	\$55.20	\$90.00	\$105.00

RideSmart operates currently at no costs to districts. This has allowed us to evaluate and build a more cost effective alternative models to single passenger traditional bus transportation and private carriers. Creating a better option for unique transportation situations.

Goal 1: provide the safest transportation options for students.

Goal 2: return CDL licensed drivers to the driver pool reducing shortages.

Goal 3: reduce district cost by decreasing the reliance on expensive private transportation

Cost analysis models predict approximate savings on routes run through the ESC vs. Private Companies.

Extended time and funding needed to ensure sustainability and build a replicable scalable model.

Current Ex. Ride Smart

Round Trip Cost	\$169.48	\$93.75
Number of Days Trip is Made	176	176
Annual Cost	\$29,828.48	\$16,500.00
Cost Savings		44%

Feb. 2025 estimates given this 20-mile scenario and current costs. Subject to change. Does not apply to consortium routes.

Recommendations

- **Extend Pilot Program:** Provide additional funding to allow time for optimizing operational efficiencies, refining replicable models, and expanding reach.
- **Expand Work Based Learning Transportation:** Recognize transportation to career training sites as an eligible service under the pilot program
- **Increase State Support for Transportation Costs:** Investigate a reimbursement system similar to Oregon’s model to reduce district transportation burdens for unique and specialized school placements.
- **Extend Transportation Responsibility:** Allocate funding to enable school choice, charter schools, private schools, etc. to manage their individual transportation, improving efficiency and flexibility.

Request for FY26

This model aims to establish a cost effective ridership system for school districts, significantly reducing expenses compared to current single rider options. Without a major overhaul of school transportation funding, we continue to recommend that ridership funds follow the student to their enrolled school. This program would operate as a substantially lower cost fee for service option.

Additional Investment Costs FY26-27		
Transportation Consultant/Subject Matter Expert (as needed)	\$30,000.00	Provides specialized expertise on transportation regulations, efficiency, and strategy to optimize program operations.
Lead Administrator Salary and Benefits	\$100,000.00	overseeing operations, compliance, and strategic direction
Technical Support (multiple personnel part time)	\$40,000.00	IT and software support to ensure the smooth operation of routing systems, driver applications, and communication tools.
Driver Recruitment and Training	\$40,000.00	Efforts to attract and vet qualified drivers, ensuring safety, compliance, and readiness for various transportation needs.
HR and Onboarding	\$25,000.00	Managing hiring, background checks, compliance paperwork, and initial training for new employees.
Expansion Strategy	\$30,000.00	Planning and executing growth into new rapid response, workbased learning partnerships, and creating a replicable model.
Vehicles	\$200,000.00	Acquisition, maintenance, inspections, insurance, and operational costs of fleet vehicles used for transportation services.
Indirect	\$35,000.00	administrative support, legal support and other general expenses necessary to grow operations.
Total Additional Costs		\$500,000.00

Driver's Ed Update

Lesson Learned: We originally aimed for schools to have more ownership of driver education programs. However, due to overwhelming logistical challenges and staffing constraints, we quickly realized that Educational Service Centers (ESCs) are uniquely positioned to deliver a seamless, cost-effective solution for getting driver's ed back into schools. By leveraging existing ESC partnerships, DriveSmart becomes a turnkey, plug-and-play service, eliminating months of planning and reducing additional staffing costs for the district.

Additionally, Ohio's School Plan insurance has not increased for any ESC or school district that has added driver's education, allowing cost savings to be passed directly to students.

Our DriveSmart Stats:

After eight months of startup (despite being told we couldn't do it in less than a year):

- The DriveSmart website officially launched on September 26, 2024.
- As of February 6, 2024, at 9:18 AM, DriveSmartOhio.com has been open to the public for 4.5 months.
- **192 students** are currently in our system (including five summer pilot students).
- **83 students have secured their spots since Jan. 1st!**
- **46 students** have completed their full training. (as of 2/7/25)
- **44 students** have earned their driver's licenses from the BMV. (as of 2/7/25)

DriveSmart continues to demonstrate its effectiveness in providing accessible, high-quality driver education to Ohio's students.

Our Model: If a district provides a rental agreement for a room with access to a working restroom, filing cabinet that locks, and a clean fire inspection, we will supply the car and instructors and take care of all the rest!

- **Minimal disruption** – ESCs handle all logistics.
- **Cost savings** – No increase in Ohio's School Plan insurance.
- **Rapid implementation** – Schools avoid extensive planning and training.

DriveSmart empowers schools with a streamlined, affordable driver education program, ensuring more students gain essential driving skills without burdening districts.

Recommendation:

In some regions of the state new driving school creation, especially through an ESC model is ideal. This creates access, reduces wait time, and establishes high-quality driving schools.

In areas where there are multiple established driving schools an approach focusing on reducing wait time (by hiring/training drivers and purchasing cars) and reducing costs for students may be a better approach.

Regional Training Managers:

Create a regional training manager position that eliminates the competition between businesses, creates consistency and fidelity of new programs, and reduces the strain on an existing business. ESCs could employ these people for the state

State Funding Needs for Startups to Partner with K12: To support the expansion of DriveSmart and similar initiatives, state funding is essential to cover initial startup costs. This includes:

- **Vehicle Acquisition:** Initial costs for at least four vehicles to support four drivers, with an additional vehicle required for every two additional trainees.
- **Staffing Training Costs:** A simplified staffing model includes hiring and training instructors on a per-session or full-time basis, ensuring sustainability without overburdening districts.
- **Software:** Covering the startup costs for software that can help manage student registrations can help a new start-up create and organize paperwork and scheduling creating a customer-friendly experience. Not only is this a sustainability step for new companies, this can reduce long-term staffing costs, as well as, the burden on school personnel.

Cost Reduction Strategies for Existing Companies and Partnerships with K12:

- **Bulk Insurance Agreements:** Negotiating statewide insurance coverage to lower per-driver policy costs.
- **Software Integration:** Not only is this a sustainability step for new companies, this can reduce long-term staffing costs, as well as, the burden on school personnel.
- **Incentives for Partnerships:** Offering financial incentives for existing driver education companies and school districts to collaborate in areas with established driving companies. This can reduce operational costs for existing companies and expand service accessibility.
- **Free Rental Space:** Utilizing school facilities for after-school and summer training programs to minimize overhead expenses..

Start-Up Financial Summary	
Instructor Training (x6)	\$10,000
Administrator Salary/Benefits	\$100,000
Supplies (cones, brakes, decals, etc.)	\$10,000.00
Software Start-Up	\$5,000
4 Vehicles (for 6 instructors)	\$90,000
Online Driver Education	\$10,000
Total	\$225,000

Additional costs to consider:

State Fees (Enterprise Fee, New location, New Instructor Fees, etc.)
Insurance
Bond/Escrow
Fuel
Vehicle Maintenance
Credit Card Fees
Advertising
Facilities