

FAQS - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

about the School Bus Driver Retention Program (DRP)

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General Information

1. What is the DRP?

Answer: The DRP is the School Bus Driver Retention Program. It is a pilot project initiated by the Ontario Ministry of Education and being administered by the School Bus Association of Ontario (through its division the Ontario School Bus Association) (“SBO”).

The purpose of the DRP is to enhance school bus driver recruitment and retention rates by providing a financial incentive for school bus drivers to stay on the job throughout the school year.

2. What are the bonus payments based on?

Answer: Drivers must meet all of the eligibility criteria in order to receive a bonus - certain exceptions will be granted for criteria #6 (95% attendance). As a summary only, DRP eligibility involves the following major requirements:

- (a) **“Continuous Employment”** – this is the period of time during a Payment Period that a school bus driver must be continuously working for a school bus operator or driving substantially the same route. The eligibility criteria require “continuous employment” from the last school calendar day of the first month of the Payment Period through to and including the last school calendar day of the final month of the Payment Period. See criteria #5.
- (b) **“Attendance”** – this is the minimum number of days that a school bus driver must work during an employment period (95%). See criteria #6. The attendance requirement applies from the date that the driver began work in the first month of the Payment Period to the last school calendar day of the last month of the Payment Period. By way of example for Payment Period #6, if your start date as a driver is September 8, 2020 or earlier, you could be absent from work for up to 4 days and still meet this criteria.

If a school bus driver does not meet criteria #6, it is *possible* that the school bus driver may nonetheless qualify for a bonus. In that case, the driver should apply for an exception using the [Exception Application Form](#). Only absences above the school bus driver’s allowable 5% of days off should be recorded on the Exception Application Form. The school bus driver must meet all the other eligibility requirements to receive a bonus.

- (c) **“Primary Employment Responsibility”** – individuals receiving a bonus must either have an agreement with a school bus operator that states that they are employed as a school bus driver, or work in the capacity of a school bus driver for the majority of their working time for the school bus operator each week. See criteria #2.

3. What does a school bus driver need to do to receive a bonus?

Answer: A school bus driver is required to sign a [consent form](#) and provide it to their employer, prior to the employer's claims submission deadline (for Period #6, the employer's deadline is Monday, January 11, 2021). The signed consent will allow personal information to be shared with SBO, the Service Provider (Deloitte) and the Ontario Ministry of Education. However, consent forms collected for Payment Periods #4 and #5 continue to be valid. Thus if a driver submitted a consent form to his or her employer using that form, it will not be necessary to submit a new consent form. New consent forms need only be collected from drivers who did not participate in Payment Period #4 or #5 or who changed employers.

If the driver does not meet criteria #6 (95% attendance requirement) the driver must also complete an [Exception Application Form](#) and submit it to their employer in order to be considered for a bonus payment (Exception Application Forms for Period #6 are due to employers by Monday, January 11, 2021 or the deadline set by the employer).

4. How much is the DRP bonus payment?

Answer: The bonus for each Payment Period is \$1000 per driver. The \$1,000 bonus payment is subject to \$100 of personal income tax withholdings and therefore the net amount of the bonus is \$900 per driver.

5. Is the DRP an "entitlement" program for all school bus drivers in Ontario?

Answer: The bonus payments are not an entitlement based on employment as a school bus driver. The purpose and intent of the DRP is to enhance school bus driver recruitment and retention rates by providing a financial incentive for school bus drivers to stay on the job throughout the school year. It is a reward for meeting specific eligibility criteria, including continuous employment, during the DRP Payment Periods and not an entitlement based on historical work as a school bus driver.

Questions Specific to COVID -19

6. *How will the eligibility criteria be applied in light of school closures due to COVID-19?*

Answer: Where a driver does not drive their route because the school to which they drive students is closed due to COVID-19, this will not impact a school bus driver's ability to meet criteria #6. School bus operators should not count such days as absences. If the day that a school was closed due to COVID-19 was a normal workday for a school bus driver, then the day will be counted as if the driver worked.

7. *How will the eligibility criteria be applied in light of route cancellations due to COVID-19?*

Answer: Where a driver does not drive their route because the route is cancelled due to COVID-19, this will not impact a school bus driver's ability to meet criteria #6. School bus operators should not count such days as absences. If the day that a route was cancelled

due to COVID-19 was a normal workday for a school bus driver, then the day will be counted as if the driver worked.

8. *How will the eligibility criteria be applied if I am unable to drive because I have been diagnosed with COVID-19 ?*

Answer: This should be treated as any other absence. If the days you are absent from work because you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and the days you were absent for other reasons exceed 5% of your permitted days of absence and you wish to qualify for a bonus, complete the [Exception Application Form](#) and submit it within the permitted time period. Include the days you were absent while diagnosed with COVID-19 in Part 2 A (Personal Illness or Medical Leave). Be sure to answer all of the questions posed as failure to do so could lead to the application being rejected.

9. *How will the eligibility criteria be applied if I am unable to drive for any other reason relating to COVID ?*

Answer: This should be treated as any other absence. If the days you are absent from work due to COVID-19 (for example because you have been ordered by a doctor or a public health official to self-isolate or because you were caring for a child with COVID 19) and the days you were absent for other reasons exceed 5% of your permitted days of absence and you wish to qualify for a bonus, complete the [Exception Application Form](#) and submit it to your employer within the permitted time period.

Include the days you were absent under the appropriate categories of Part 2. For example, the first 3 days looking after a child could be in Part 2A (Family Responsibility Leave)). Additional days absent or any other days absent that were approved by your employer should be included in Part 2B (Absences Previously Approved by Employer). Any other days should be included in Part 2D (Absences that don't fit into any other Category). Be sure to answer all of the questions posed as failure to do so could lead to the application being rejected.

Questions About Driver Eligibility and Receiving Bonus Payments

10. How should school bus operators count snow days when determining if a school bus driver meets the 95% attendance requirement?

Answer: Snow days do not impact a school bus driver's ability to meet criteria #6. School bus operators should not count snow days as absences, but they should count them towards the total days in the period. In other words, the 95% attendance requirement, and 5% allowable absences, will still be calculated based on the total number of the days in the period, and snow days will not be taken into account as absences. If the day that was a snow day was a normal workday for a school bus driver, then the snow day will be counted as if the driver worked.

11. If a school bus driver thinks he or she was eligible to receive a bonus for a completed Payment Period but did not receive a cheque when other drivers did, what should the driver do?

Answer: Contact their school bus operator employer. All questions about eligibility should go to employers. The DRP Call Centre cannot answer questions about school bus operator employer claims submissions. If a driver did not receive a cheque and the employer has advised that the driver was eligible to receive a bonus, the employer should follow up with the DRP. The DRP Call Centre cannot accept address or name changes directly from drivers.

12. Do drivers need to report bonus payments as income for income tax purposes?

Answer: Yes. A T4A slip will be issued to each school bus driver from SBO by the end of February in the year following the payment of the bonus.

13. If a DRP Bonus is received by a school bus driver in July or August of a year, will that affect the driver's ability to obtain employment insurance (EI) in the month it is received?

Answer: Since DRP bonuses relate to services provided by school bus drivers during the school year, their payment in the summer months should not affect the ability of school bus drivers to obtain employment insurance in those months. Furthermore, based on a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) ruling received by the DRP in 2018 with respect to payments made in the first three payment periods, the DRP bonus payments represent income derived from government financial assistance and, therefore, arguably should not be income arising out of any employment for employment insurance purposes. Nonetheless, drivers concerned about this issue are encouraged to obtain their own tax and legal advice.

14. Can a driver who did not receive a bonus for one of the previous Payment Periods due to failure to submit a consent form or Exception Application Form, or other error, apply later to receive a bonus for that previous Payment Period?

Answer: No. Unfortunately, the DRP cannot accept late submissions for a school bus driver who did not complete a consent form or submit their Exception Application Form prior to the deadline for claims submissions.

It is a mandatory requirement of the DRP that a school bus driver complete a consent form in order to receive a bonus payment. A consent form is required in order for a school bus operator to share the driver's personal information with the DRP. This information is required to enable the DRP to pay a bonus directly to the driver. An Exception Application Form is required for any driver that does not meet criteria #6 (95% attendance requirement).

15. How will drivers who submit an Exception Application Form know if their exception has been approved?

Answer: School bus operator employers who have submitted Exception Application Forms on behalf of their drivers will be notified in advance of cheque mailing as to whether the Exception Application Forms were approved or not. The employers are required to notify applicable drivers of the outcome of the review process. Drivers who

have not been notified by their operator about the outcome of their Exception Application Form should contact their employer.

16. Do drivers who participated in previous Payment Periods need to complete a consent form for another Payment Period?

Answer: All drivers participating in DRP are required to have signed and returned the consent form to their respective operator/employer. All forms are to be kept in the operator's file and not sent to DRP. The consent form was updated for Periods #4 and #5 – Period #1-#3 consent forms will not be accepted. If a driver completed the new consent form for Period #4 or Period #5 and are still working for the same employer, they do not need to sign a new consent form.

As a reminder to operators, consent forms are requested during DRP audits.

17. If a school bus driver became employed in the second month of a Payment Period or later and did not miss a single day of work through to the last school calendar day of the Payment Period, will the driver qualify to receive a bonus payment?

Answer: No. In order to qualify for a bonus payment, a driver must be employed as a school bus driver on or before the last school calendar day of the first month of the Payment Period. For a fall Payment Period ending in December, this means the driver must be an employee with a school bus operator employer on or before the last school calendar day in September. For a winter/spring Payment Period ending in June, this means the driver must be an employee with a school bus operator employer on or before the last school calendar day in January.

18. If a driver was participating in unpaid training on the first day of the second month of a Payment Period or later, will the driver be eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: No. In order to be eligible a driver needs to have been a paid employee of a school bus operator (not an unpaid trainee) on or before the last school calendar day of the first month of the Payment Period.

19. Are part time drivers, who have other employment, eligible to receive a bonus?

Answer: Yes. The eligibility criteria is concerned with the period of time the driver works for the school bus operator, not the time the driver works for other employers.

20. If a driver changes employers during a Payment Period, will the driver be eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: Maybe. A driver may still be eligible as long as the driver continues driving substantially the same route(s) throughout the Payment Period. See criteria #5(b). If a driver transfers from one school bus operator employer to another due to the first employer losing routes in an RFP process or the employer returning routes to a consortia or education organization, but the driver continues driving substantially the same

route(s), the driver will be eligible to receive a bonus payment (assuming the driver meets the other eligibility criteria).

However, if a driver changed employers due to personal choice or circumstances or otherwise, the driver will not be eligible to receive the bonus.

21. If a driver works every day as a school bus driver but also works in the employer's office doing other jobs, will the driver be eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: Yes, if the time the driver spends each week driving to Eligible Education Organizations (listed [here](#)), constitutes the majority of the time the driver works for the school bus operator, and the driver meets the other eligibility requirements, then the driver would be eligible to receive the bonus.

22. Are spare or on-call drivers eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: Yes. As long as they meet all other eligibility criteria. If the majority of the driver's working time for the school bus operator employer is driving students to and from schools under one or more of the Eligible Education Organizations (listed [here](#)) then the driver will qualify to receive the bonus.

In order to meet the 95% attendance requirement (criteria #6), spare or on-call drivers must work 95% of their scheduled or requested shifts.

23. Can drivers who are not employed by a school bus operator under a contract with an Eligible Education Organization still be eligible to receive a bonus if they drive students to schools under one or more of the Eligible Education Organizations?

Answer: Yes. A driver will be deemed to meet criteria #1 if the driver drives a school bus covered by an Ontario Ministry of Transportation Commercial Vehicle Operator's Registration (CVOR) that transports students to schools under one or more of the prescribed Eligible Education Organizations (listed [here](#)). Drivers who meet this requirement should ask their school bus operator employer to email SBO at info@schoolbusontario.ca in order to receive a participation agreement.

24. If a driver misses a morning or afternoon shift, does it count as a half or full day off?

Answer: If a driver regularly drives an am **and** pm shift (e.g. 5 days per week) for a school bus operator employer, but cannot drive either the am or pm shift on one day, it will count as half a day off. However, if the driver's employment agreement or regular work week schedule is to ONLY drive the am shifts, for example, and the driver misses one am shift, then it will count as a full day off since that am shift is the driver's full day of work.

25. Why are monitors excluded from the DRP?

Answer: The DRP is subject to conditions established by the Province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Education in order to achieve the goal of improved school bus driver recruitment and retention. Monitors are not within the scope of this program.

26. Are van or mini bus drivers eligible to receive a bonus?

Answer: Yes. Drivers who hold a valid Class G licence and meet all other eligibility criteria, will be eligible to receive a bonus. See criteria #4.

27. Are drivers who cover private school routes eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: No. Private schools are not eligible as they do not receive student transportation funding from the government to operate their institution, which is a requirement of the DRP.

28. Are drivers who cover both private and public school routes eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: Maybe. In order to qualify for the bonus, a driver must spend the majority of his or her working time for a school bus operator employer driving students to and from schools under the Eligible Education Organizations (see eligibility criteria for a link to such organizations).

If a driver covers both private school routes and routes for one or more of the Eligible Education Organizations and, for example, spends 90% of his or her working time for the school bus operator employer driving to and from schools under the Eligible Education Organizations, and 10% of his or her working time for the school bus operator employer driving to and from private schools, then the driver will be eligible to receive a bonus (assuming the driver meets the other eligibility criteria).

29. Are charter school bus drivers, who transport students to and from field trips, eligible to receive the bonus?

Answer: No. Only those school bus drivers who spend the majority of their working time driving students to and from schools under the Eligible Education Organizations (listed [here](#)), qualify to receive a bonus.

However, a charter driver who is assigned a route or routes to drive students to and from schools under one or more of the Eligible Education Organizations, who spends the majority of his or her working time for the school bus operator employer on the route or routes, may be eligible.

FAQs for School Bus Operators

- 30. How will school bus operator employers know if their employees meet the eligibility criteria?**

Answer: Operators must review the eligibility criteria, available [here](#), and these FAQs. Further information is also provided in the DRP Guide.

- 31. Should a school bus operator put a driver on Appendix C if they do not agree the driver should be paid a bonus?**

Answer: Appendix C is to be used only for Exception Application Forms that operators do not believe to be factually correct. For example, if a school bus driver has indicated on the Exception Application Form that they were away for pre-approved vacation, but the operator is specifically aware that the vacation was not previously approved, the operator must first discuss with the school bus driver so that the Exception Application Form can be corrected. If the disagreement cannot be resolved, the operator should put the school bus driver on Appendix C, and indicate on the Exception Application Form the basis on which the operator does not believe it to be true and the reason that the operator believes the driver was absent.

- 32. The Claims Submission Form requests the total number of school bus drivers that an operator employs in Ontario. Does this include only the drivers that are listed in the operator's Claims Submission Form Appendices, or all of the drivers that the operator employs?**

Answer: Operators should state the total number of school bus drivers that they employ in Ontario, including drivers who are not listed on their Claims Submission Form and Appendices (e.g. including drivers who do not meet the eligibility requirements and/or have not submitted an Exception Application Form). This information is to assist the DRP in understanding what percentage of drivers will be receiving a bonus.

- 33. What date does a school bus driver need to be 70 years of age for the purpose of completing the Appendices to the Claims Submission Form?**

Answer: A school bus driver needs to be 70 years of age or older by the claims submission form deadline.

- 34. When will school bus operators receive the administration fee payments?**

Answer: It is anticipated that cheques for the Period #6 administration fee payments will be issued **in May or June 2021**. Please note that these dates are anticipated only and could change.

- 35. How do school bus operator employers participate in the DRP?**

Answer: Operators must complete a Continuation and Amendment Agreement amending the Participation Agreement previously entered into with OSBA. If an operator has not previously completed a Participation Agreement with SBO (or OSBA) then the operator

must complete and submit to SBO a full Participation Agreement. All such signed forms should be submitted to info@schoolbusontario.ca. Operators who provide to and from school student transportation services under the Eligible Education Organizations listed [here](#), and who did not receive a copy of the Continuation and Amendment Agreement or the Participation Agreement, should email info@schoolbusontario.ca.

- 36. Can school bus operator employers change their contact person to someone other than the person who signed the Participation Agreement or the Continuation and Amendment Agreement or who is listed as the responsible person in either agreement?**

Answer: Yes. Operators should provide written notice including the name, title, phone number and email of a new contact person by email to info@schoolbusontario.ca.

Further Information

- 37. Who do operators or drivers contact if they have more questions about the DRP?**

If you are a school bus driver:

Email Address – schoolbusdriver@deloitte.ca; Toll-free Number – 1-833-346-6177

If you are a school bus operator:

Email Address – schoolbusoperator@deloitte.ca; Toll-free Number - 1-833-715-7360