

School Bus Internet Access

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Tiara Auxier

Senate Sponsor:

LONG TITLE**General Description:**

This bill creates a grant program to provide internet connectivity on school buses in rural school districts.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- defines terms;
- creates a grant program for rural school districts to install and operate internet connectivity systems on school buses;
- establishes priority criteria for awarding grants;
- allows districts to combine grant money with district funds;
- requires grant recipients to commit to long-term operation of internet connectivity systems; and
- requires the State Board of Education to make rules for grant administration.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

This bill appropriates \$325,000 in operating and capital budgets for fiscal year 2027, all of which is from the various sources as detailed in this bill.

Other Special Clauses:

This bill provides a special effective date.

Utah Code Sections Affected:

ENACTS:

53F-2-402.5, Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section **53F-2-402.5** is enacted to read:

53F-2-402.5 . Rural school district transportation grants.

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Eligible school" means a public school within a school district:

- (i) located in a county of the fourth, fifth, or sixth class, as defined in Section 17-50-501; or
- (ii) with fewer than 3,000 students enrolled in the school district.
- (b) "Extended trip" means a school bus trip to a school-sponsored event, including an athletic competition, academic competition, or club activity, that requires a student in grades 7 through 12 to travel more than 60 minutes one-way.
- (c) "Rural school district" means a school district that operates one or more eligible schools.
- (2) Subject to legislative appropriations, the state board shall distribute grant money to rural school districts to install and operate internet connectivity systems on school buses used for extended trips.
- (3) A rural school district may apply to the state board for a grant under this section.
- (4) The state board may award a grant to a rural school district that:
- (a) operates one or more school bus routes that qualify as extended trips under Subsection (1)(b);
- (b) submits an application in accordance with state board rule; and
- (c) agrees to the requirements in Subsection (7).
- (5) In awarding grants under this section, the state board shall give preference to rural school districts that do not currently have internet connectivity systems on school buses used for extended trips.
- (6) Notwithstanding Subsection (5):
- (a) subject to legislative appropriations, the state board shall ensure each eligible rural school district receives funding for at least two school buses; and
- (b) the state board may not award a grant to a district in an amount that exceeds the total cost to:
- (i) retrofit two school buses with internet connectivity systems; and
- (ii) pay for internet connectivity services for two school buses for one year.
- (7) A rural school district that receives a grant under this section shall:
- (a) use grant money to:
- (i) retrofit school buses with internet connectivity systems; and
- (ii) provide internet access through a terrestrial wireless provider or a satellite internet service provider;
- (b) assume responsibility for the cost of internet connectivity services after the grant money for services described in Subsection (7)(a)(ii) is expended;

- (c) maintain internet connectivity systems and services on the retrofitted school buses for at least three years after receiving the grant;
- (d) where applicable, coordinate with the Utah Education and Telehealth Network in the implementation and operation of internet connectivity systems;
- (e) ensure that internet connectivity provided on school buses under this section complies with the same content filtering and internet safety policies that apply to internet access in the district's school buildings; and
- (f) comply with reporting requirements established by the state board in rule under Subsection (10).

(8) A rural school district may:

- (a) use grant money awarded under this section in combination with the district's own funds to:
 - (i) retrofit more than two school buses with internet connectivity systems; or
 - (ii) pay for more than one year of internet connectivity services for school buses; and
- (b) if the cost of internet connectivity systems and services is less than the grant award amount, use remaining grant funds to:
 - (i) retrofit additional school buses with internet connectivity systems;
 - (ii) pay for additional years of internet connectivity services; or
 - (iii) retrofit school buses other than those used for extended trips, after at least two school buses used for extended trips have been retrofitted.

(9) If a grant recipient fails to maintain internet connectivity systems and services for the three-year period required under Subsection (7)(c), the state board may require the district to repay all or a portion of the grant money.

(10) The state board shall make rules in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, to implement this section, including rules that establish:

- (a) the grant application process and timeline;
- (b) required elements of a grant application;
- (c) a methodology for determining:
 - (i) the total cost to retrofit two school buses with internet connectivity systems; and
 - (ii) the annual cost for internet connectivity services for two school buses for one year for purposes of the cap described in Subsection (6)(b); and
- (d) reporting requirements for grant recipients.

Section 2. FY 2027 Appropriations.

The following sums of money are appropriated for the fiscal year beginning July 1,

2026, and ending June 30, 2027. These are additions to amounts previously appropriated for fiscal year 2027.

Subsection 2(a). **Operating and Capital Budgets**

Under the terms and conditions of Title 63J, Chapter 1, Budgetary Procedures Act, the Legislature appropriates the following sums of money from the funds or accounts indicated for the use and support of the government of the state of Utah.

ITEM 1 To State Board of Education - Contracted Initiatives and Grants

From Public Education Economic Stabilization

Restricted Account, One-time 325,000

Schedule of Programs:

Contracts and Grants 325,000

Section 3. **Effective Date.**

This bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.