



School Bus Seat Restraint Grant

Application Package – FY 2025-26

Tennessee Department of Education | August 2025



General Information

Overview/Purpose

The General Assembly appropriated \$3 million in non-recurring funds in fiscal year 2018 for the school bus seat restraint grant program. The Tennessee Department of Education (department) will continue to provide the school bus seat restraint grant program until the earmarked funds are no longer available. The funds are available to help districts, charters, and management organizations address the extra costs associated with retrofitting current buses and/or purchasing buses equipped with seat restraints. The department is tasked with the implementation of the grant program through the School Safety and Transportation Team.

In previous fiscal years, applications and reimbursements have been managed via the ePlan Local Education Agency (LEA) Document Library. To streamline this process and provide a faster reimbursement method, the department has transitioned to a grant management process that is facilitated in the Funding Application section of the platform. This guide will provide information on the updated process, along with grant requirements, deadlines, and grant administration.

Use of Funds

Each Tennessee school district, charter school, and charter management organization that provides or contracts for transportation services is allowed to apply for these funds.

This grant will be used to support the Tennessee district and charter school efforts to retrofit current buses and/or purchase buses equipped with seat restraints that are three-point lap/shoulder belts and/or integrated child restraint systems. Before requesting seat restraint assemblies for buses in service for five (5) years, the grantee will need to receive approval from the bus manufacturer.

Applicants will be responsible for purchasing the bus(es) or approved seat back replacement assemblies. Applicants are also responsible for ensuring that the seat restraints are approved by the manufacturer. The department will reimburse education agencies for eligible costs of adding school bus seat restraints. Seat restraint costs must be listed in a separate line item. **Eligible expenditures must be incurred or obligated before June 30, 2026.**

If you are unsure of requests or expenditures in this area, please contact Mark.Bloodworth@tn.gov or Bennett.Wilson@tn.gov before submitting an application.

The intent of these grant funds is to retrofit current buses and/or purchase buses that are equipped with seat restraints that are three-point lap/shoulder belts and/or integrated child restraint systems. For items that fall outside the realm of eligibility, please consider utilizing other funding sources such as the [Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement \(TISA\) Base Fund](#) or potential federal grants.

Districts and charters will be reimbursed up to \$15,000 per new bus to assist with the cost of adding the seat restraints. Retrofitted buses may be awarded additional funds based on projected parts and labor costs.

Grant Program Qualifications

Grant applications must meet the following qualifications for grant funding consideration:

1. Eligible Buses:

- a. New buses purchased with seat restraints.
- b. Buses already in service that are five (5) years old or less and designed/manufactured to allow for replacing an unbelted seat back frame with a seat back frame equipped with seat restraints (a three-point or integrated child restraint seat). Seats with seat restraints cannot be retrofitted into existing buses that are in service for six (6) years or longer. These older buses are not eligible for the program.
 - i. *Note: The district or charter is responsible for contacting the original manufacturer to determine if an existing bus qualifies for being retrofitted with seat restraints.*

2. Fully Equipped:

- a. Buses must be fully equipped with seat restraints from the front seat to the back seat. With the exception of specially equipped buses, no partial-bus seat restraint proposals will be considered.
 - i. *Note: Seat restraint use for all riders is mandatory on buses equipped through the school bus seat restraint grant program.*

3. Federal Standards:

- a. All [child safety restraint systems](#) and [seat belt assemblies](#) must meet the [Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards](#).

4. Driver Training Policy/Procedures:

- a. All grant submissions must include a policy and/or procedures for annual driver training on the proper use of seat restraints and implementation with regard to student management, including consequences for noncompliance. Policies and/or procedures must include the agency name and contact information.

- i. *Note: Seat restraint use for all riders is mandatory on buses equipped through the school bus seat restraint grant program.*

5. Parent/Student Training Policy/Procedures:

- a. All grant submissions must include a policy and/or procedure for annual parent and student training on the proper use of seat belts and implementation with regard to students' usage expectations, including consequences for noncompliance. Policies and/or procedures must include the agency name and contact information.

- i. *Note: Seat restraint use for all riders is mandatory on buses equipped through the school bus seat restraint grant program.*

6. Appropriate Reimbursement Documentation:

- a. The School Bus Seat Restraint Grant is a reimbursement grant, meaning the agency purchases the seat restraints and then is reimbursed for the approved expenditures. Adequate documentation must accompany each reimbursement request; this includes an original invoice and proof of payment (copy of check, etc.). Seat restraint costs must be listed in a separate line item. Grant funds will be released on a reimbursement basis after the district or charter submits a final invoice with supporting documentation.

Funding/Match Requirements

Funds are allocated to LEAs based upon the submitted and approved reimbursement requests and are **NOT subject to a local match**. Districts and charters will be reimbursed up to \$15,000 per new bus to assist with the cost of adding the seat restraints. Retrofitted buses may be awarded additional funds based on projected labor costs. Buses must be fully equipped with seat restraints.

Stakeholder Surveys

After implementation and use of buses with seat restraints, stakeholder surveys must be administered to the transportation supervisor and school bus drivers/aides impacted by the grant. Surveys are due on or before **June 30 of the first year of implementation** to the department. **This can be completed by completing the [School Bus Seat Restraint Grant - Stakeholder Survey](#).**

Grant Administration

The School Bus Seat Restraint Grant is administered via [ePlan](#), the department's online grant management system. To complete the application in ePlan, each Tennessee public/charter school will need to ensure that they have the following ePlan user access roles:

- o LEA Safe Schools Director
- o LEA Fiscal Representative

- LEA Authorized Representative

As a reminder, a single user cannot have both Fiscal Representative and Authorized Representative access. Tennessee public/charter schools that do not have all access roles will need to complete an ePlan user access form and email it to ePlan.Help@tn.gov.

ePlan User Access Forms:

- [LEA ePlan user access form](#)
- [Charter School ePlan user access form](#)

Grant funds are distributed by submitting a reimbursement request in ePlan. With this being a reimbursement grant, please make sure that you attach proper documentation (*invoices, receipts of purchase, etc.*), providing proof of payment of allowable expenditures that align with the school’s approved submitted budget.

Funding is available as the result of a one-time appropriation and is limited to the current grant period. Please note that reimbursements for grant funds may only be requested within the current fiscal year. Participation in the school bus seat restraint grant program is voluntary.

Applications that meet all grant program requirements and criteria will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. If an applicant submits an application that exceeds the remaining available balance, the award will be allocated based on the remaining funds.

The School Bus Seat Restraint Grant is subject to audit and monitoring. Each LEA should maintain appropriate documentation of expenditures.

Timeline

<p>October 16, 2025</p>	<p>Grant Information Released – The <i>School Bus Seat Restraint Grant</i> application package will be published.</p>
<p>October 23, 2025</p>	<p>Pre-Recorded Webinar on Grant Application Requirements & Navigating ePlan – A pre-recorded webinar to guide applicants through the grant application requirements and the department’s grant management program will be provided to districts/charters.</p>

<p>October 29, 2025, and ALL Monthly Office Hours</p>	<p>Office Hours for Grant Support – Department staff will be available for questions/support during the regular grant monthly office hours on Wednesday, October 29, and each monthly office hours throughout the fiscal year for any needed support or inquiries.</p> <p><i>Office Hours will begin at 9 a.m. CT/10 a.m. ET</i></p>
<p>October 31, 2025</p>	<p>Tennessee public/charter schools can begin submitting application requirements in ePlan – Completed applications that meet all established requirements will be reviewed and approved by the department starting November 3, 2025.</p>
<p>November 3, 2025</p>	<p>Review and Notification to districts/charters will begin – The department will start reviewing completed applications that meet all established requirements. Award Letters will be sent to the district upon approval of the applications.</p> <p>The department will notify each district/charter of the awarded grant funds no less than 30 days after the grant application has been submitted.</p>
<p>December 5, 2025</p>	<p>Grant Applications Due No Later Than This Date – The application deadline for all applicants to submit all required information to the department.</p>
<p>June 30, 2026</p>	<p>Stakeholder Surveys, Bus Driver Training Policy/Procedures, Student/Parent Training Policy/Procedures, and Required Reimbursement Documents/Requests - The department will obligate and/or disburse grant funds to grantees via ePlan. All eligible expenditures must be incurred or obligated by June 30.</p>
<p>July 1, 2026</p>	<p>Final Expenditure Report (FER) Opens – Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-3-316(a)(3) establishes that, “Each LEA shall, on or before October 1 of each year, submit to the commissioner a correct and accurate financial report of the receipts and expenditures for all public school purposes in the LEA during the school year ending on June 30 next preceding the October 1 set forth in this part.”</p>
<p>October 1, 2026</p>	<p>Final Expenditure Reports (FER) Due</p>

Application Instructions

A complete grant application package includes the following items:

1. **Cover Page:** Please provide the name, email address, and phone number of the point of contact within the organization (Transportation Director), the LEA Fiscal Representative, and the LEA Authorized Representative that our team should contact regarding the grant application.

2. **Program Details:** The following items should be provided in the budget details of the ePlan funding application:
 - a. Bus type (A-2 \geq 10,000 lbs., Type C, and Type D) and # of buses for each type and size.
 - b. Bus Size Maximum Capacity (# of seats) for each bus.
 - c. Total number of three-point belts (lap shoulder belts) for each bus.
 - d. Total number of Integrated Child Restraint Systems for each bus.Refer to the revenue and expenditure account codes information provided below to code revenues and expenditures properly.

3. **Budget:** As a reminder, the budget period for this grant is from the date the application is approved until **June 30, 2026**. This means that only approved expenditures between the date your application is approved through June 30, 2026, will be reimbursed. This section will outline the costs of the seat restraint product that is being purchased.

Revenue Account

Funds received should be coded as 46980 – Other State Grants.

Expenditure Accounts

Expenditure(s) should be coded as 72710 729 – Transportation Equipment.