

An Open Letter to the Bowie ISD Community

Bowie ISD values positive relationships with our neighboring school districts and respects every parent's right to choose the educational setting they believe is best for their child. Recently, questions have been raised about Bowie ISD's request that neighboring districts enter into an agreement and provide \$1,000 for each transfer student transported from within Bowie ISD. We want to explain the reason for this request clearly and respectfully.

Senate Bill 204 in 2021 amended Texas Education Code §34.007 and established requirements for a school district operating buses outside its own boundaries. One option is for the transporting district to enter into an interlocal agreement with the district whose boundaries it enters.

A district may operate outside its boundaries without an interlocal agreement if it follows the alternative requirements established by SB 204. To use this option, the district must adopt an active board policy prohibiting the screening of transfer students based on academic performance, disciplinary history, or attendance record. In practical terms, the district cannot selectively accept only certain transfer students based on those factors. The district must also satisfy the law's accountability-rating requirements, make its compliance information publicly available, and meet all other applicable legal requirements.

Therefore, Bowie ISD is not attempting to prevent another district from transporting students. Each neighboring district has a choice: enter into an interlocal agreement with Bowie ISD or change its transfer policy and demonstrate that it satisfies the alternative requirements established by SB 204.

Because neighboring districts have been operating bus routes within Bowie ISD attendance boundaries, Bowie ISD asked each district to follow the law and formalize the arrangement through a written interlocal agreement or memorandum of understanding. This protects all participating districts by clearly defining responsibilities, expectations, student-safety procedures, liability, and the terms under which transportation will occur.

As part of the proposed agreement, Bowie ISD requested \$1,000 annually for each transfer student picked up within Bowie ISD and transported by another district. This amount was not selected arbitrarily.

Based on preliminary Texas Education Agency 2025–2026 state funding reports, the neighboring districts receive significantly more per student through the state's Small School Adjustment than Bowie ISD receives. Bowie ISD receives approximately \$1,066 per student through this adjustment, while the neighboring districts receive approximately \$3,443 to \$4,134 per student. This represents an estimated difference of approximately \$2,377 to \$3,068 per student.

The requested \$1,000 is substantially less than this funding difference. It allows the transporting district to retain most of its additional Small School Adjustment funding while recognizing the financial effect on Bowie ISD when students residing within our boundaries are actively transported to another district.

Although enrollment may decline when a student transfers, Bowie ISD's fixed costs do not decline at the same rate. The district must continue operating campuses, maintaining facilities, providing transportation routes, employing teachers and support staff, meeting safety requirements, and offering academic and extracurricular programs for the students who remain. Bowie ISD has also experienced decreases in its fund balance during each of the last two audited years, making responsible financial stewardship especially important. Bowie ISD is also looking at cost saving measures as it prepares for the upcoming school year.

The \$1,000 request is not a fee charged to parents, nor is it an effort to prevent families from transferring. It is a proposed district-to-district financial provision connected specifically to a neighboring district operating a bus route inside Bowie ISD's boundaries. Parents remain free to exercise the transfer options available under Texas law.

Bowie ISD's position is based on three straightforward principles:

- Follow the transportation requirements established by Texas law.
- Put agreements in writing so responsibilities are clear and students are protected.
- Establish a reasonable and fair financial arrangement when another district chooses the interlocal-agreement option to transport students from within Bowie ISD.

Bowie ISD remains committed to working professionally and cooperatively with every neighboring district. Our goal is not conflict. Our goal is legal compliance, transparency, fairness to Bowie ISD taxpayers, and responsible stewardship of the resources entrusted to our district.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide this explanation.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is Bowie ISD trying to stop students from transferring?

No. Bowie ISD respects a parent's right to request a transfer under Texas law. The issue is not whether a student may transfer. The issue is whether another district may operate a bus route inside Bowie ISD's boundaries and under what legal conditions that transportation may occur.

2. Can another district operate a bus inside Bowie ISD without an agreement?

Yes, but only if the transporting district satisfies the alternative requirements established by SB 204 and Texas Education Code §34.007. These include:

- Maintaining a board policy that prohibits screening transfer students based on academic performance, disciplinary history, or attendance;
- Meeting the required state accountability standards; and
- Publishing information demonstrating compliance on the district's website.

If a district does not use this option or cannot satisfy these requirements, it may operate outside its boundaries through an interlocal agreement.

3. Does SB 204 require districts to accept every transfer student?

SB 204 prohibits a district using the alternative transportation option from screening transfer applicants based on academic performance, disciplinary history, or attendance. This means the district cannot select only the students it considers most desirable based on those factors.

The law should not be described as eliminating every transfer requirement or requiring acceptance when a district lacks instructional capacity. However, a district using this option must maintain the nonscreening policy required by Texas Education Code §34.007.

4. Why did Bowie ISD propose an interlocal agreement or MOU?

A written agreement establishes clear expectations for both districts. It can address transportation routes, student safety, communication, responsibilities, and financial terms. It also provides transparency and helps ensure compliance with state law.

5. Why is Bowie ISD requesting \$1,000 per transfer student?

The \$1,000 is a proposed district-to-district payment for each transfer student picked up within Bowie ISD and transported by another district under the agreement.

TEA preliminary 2025–2026 state funding information shows that the neighboring districts receive approximately \$2,377 to \$3,068 more per student through the Small School Adjustment than Bowie ISD receives. The proposed \$1,000 payment is substantially less than that difference.

6. Does state law specifically require a \$1,000 payment?

No. SB 204 does not establish a required payment amount. The \$1,000 is a proposed term of the interlocal agreement. Interlocal agreements allow participating districts to negotiate responsibilities and financial provisions.

A neighboring district that does not wish to enter into the proposed agreement may instead use the alternative provided by SB 204 if it satisfies all applicable legal requirements.

7. Is the \$1,000 charged to parents?

No. Parents would not be charged this amount. It is a proposed payment from the transporting school district to Bowie ISD under a district-to-district agreement.

8. Does the \$1,000 apply to every transfer student?

The proposal applies only to a transfer student who is picked up within Bowie ISD's boundaries and transported by another school district under the interlocal agreement. It is not proposed for a student whose family provides transportation.

9. Why should Bowie ISD receive a payment if another district pays for the bus?

The transporting district pays its direct transportation expenses, but Bowie ISD continues to experience the financial effect of losing enrollment and state funding while maintaining many of the same fixed costs.

Bowie ISD must continue operating and maintaining its campuses, employing staff, providing local transportation, meeting safety requirements, and offering academic and extracurricular programs.

10. What is the Small School Adjustment?

The Small School Adjustment is part of the Texas school-finance system. It provides additional funding to qualifying smaller districts because those districts generally have higher operating costs per student.

Based on preliminary TEA 2025–2026 information:

District	Adjustment per student	Difference from Bowie ISD
Bowie ISD	\$1,065.68	—
Bellevue ISD	\$3,442.76	\$2,377.08
Montague ISD	\$3,908.63	\$2,842.96
Forestburg ISD	\$3,753.67	\$2,687.99
Gold-Burg ISD	\$4,133.68	\$3,068.00

The proposed \$1,000 payment would allow each neighboring district to retain most of its additional Small School Adjustment funding.

11. Why is Bowie ISD addressing this now?

Bowie ISD has a responsibility to ensure that transportation occurring within its boundaries complies with current state law. Addressing the issue through written agreements provides clarity, consistency, and transparency for the districts, families, taxpayers, and students involved.

12. Is Bowie ISD targeting a particular district or family?

No. Bowie ISD has approached the four neighboring districts operating or proposing to operate transportation within Bowie ISD. The same general legal expectations and proposed financial terms apply to each district.

13. What choices do the neighboring districts have?

A neighboring district generally has three choices:

1. Enter into an interlocal agreement with Bowie ISD and follow its negotiated terms;
2. Operate without an interlocal agreement by satisfying and documenting all alternative requirements under SB 204 and Texas Education Code §34.007; which prohibit the screening of transfer students based on academic performance, disciplinary history, or attendance record. In practical terms, the district cannot selectively accept only certain transfer students based on those factors.
3. Continue accepting eligible transfer students but require families to provide transportation rather than operating a district bus within Bowie ISD.

14. Will students lose transportation immediately?

Any transportation decision should be communicated by the district operating the bus. Bowie ISD's purpose is to establish a lawful and clearly documented arrangement—not to create unnecessary disruption for students or families.

15. Is Bowie ISD experiencing financial difficulty?

Bowie ISD maintains a fund balance, but the district's fund balance decreased during each of the last two audited years. A fund balance is not an unlimited source of money; it helps the district manage emergencies, cash flow, unexpected expenses, and future obligations.

Responsible financial stewardship requires Bowie ISD to examine practices that reduce revenue while the district's fixed operating costs remain.

16. Parents of transfer students pay school taxes to Bowie ISD. Why should another district pay \$1,000?

Property taxes and student enrollment serve different purposes in Texas school finance.

Property owners pay school taxes based on where their taxable property is located, regardless of whether they have children, where their children attend school, or whether they use the public school system. Paying Bowie ISD property taxes does not require a family to enroll its children in Bowie ISD, but it also does not entitle another school district to operate a bus route inside Bowie ISD without meeting the requirements of state law.

The receiving district generates state funding based on the student's attendance, including substantially greater per-student funding through the Small School Adjustment. Meanwhile, Bowie ISD continues to maintain facilities, staffing, transportation capacity, safety systems, and other services for the community it serves.

Parents will continue paying property taxes to the school district in which their property is located, as required by law. The request simply recognizes the financial impact created when another district actively transports students from within Bowie ISD while receiving the state funding associated with those students.

17. What is Bowie ISD ultimately asking for?

Bowie ISD is asking each neighboring district to select and properly document one of the legal transportation options provided by Texas law when a district buses into another district's boundaries.

The district's goal is legal compliance, transparency, student safety, fairness, and continued cooperation with neighboring school districts.