



**Department of
Education &
Workforce**

CDL Requirements and Ohio's Pre-Service School Bus Driver Training Program

All school bus drivers in Ohio are required to hold a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) with appropriate school bus (S) and passenger (P) endorsements. This is a federal (FMCSA) mandate designed to ensure the safety and competency of drivers transporting students.

To meet this requirement, Ohio's Pre-Service School Bus Driver Training Program is structured to fully align with the federal [Entry-Level Driver Training](#) (ELDT) standards. Every Pre-Service Instructor in Ohio is a certified ELDT trainer and is listed on the federal [Training Provider Registry](#) (TPR).

This means the Ohio Pre-Service Program satisfies all federal CDL training requirements by completing theory, range, and behind the wheel training to obtain their CDL. This ensures that all new school bus drivers receive federally compliant, high-quality training—right here in Ohio. *Prospective drivers **do not** have to go to a truck driver training school; Average cost of a truck driving school in Ohio ranges from \$3,000 to \$7,000; The Pre-service training program cost is \$150. The cost of the CDL skills test ranges from \$50 at a state-owned site, to \$115 at third party site.*

Ohio's program doesn't just meet the CDL training standards—it *is* the CDL training standard for school bus drivers in our state. It's a seamless system that ensures every driver is trained, tested, and certified to the highest level of safety and professionalism.



Ohio's Pre-Service classroom instruction satisfies all ELDT theory requirements for CDL

All newly hired school bus drivers are required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of classroom instruction, delivered by a qualified Ohio Pre-Service Instructor, prior to transporting students. This training fulfills the ELDT requirements established by the FMCSA and the personnel training requirements established pursuant to OAC [3301-83-10\(A\)\(2\)](#).

Pre-Service classroom instruction covers key topics including:

- Federal and state CDL and school bus regulations, including FMCSA Clearinghouse and DOT drug/alcohol testing;
- Defensive driving, vehicle operation, and railroad procedures;
- Pupil management and bullying prevention;
- Safety, emergency procedures, and first aid;
- Transporting preschool and students with disabilities;
- Communication protocols (radio/cell phone);
- Environmental awareness, fuel conservation, legal responsibilities, and district/local policies; Pre-trip and post trip inspections;
- Ohio traffic laws related to school buses (4511. chapter of the Revised Code).



Ohio's Pre-Service program satisfies all ELDT requirements for range training

Drivers must complete a minimum of 12 hours of range and behind the wheel training with a certified on-bus instructor (OBI) pursuant with OAC [3301-83-10 \(A\)\(1\)](#).

Range Training Includes:

- Pre-trip and post-trip inspections procedures
- Mirror usage and managing blind spots
- Straight-line backing
- Offset backing
- Alley dock
- Parallel parking

Range training is typically conducted in a controlled environment, such as a closed parking lot or driving course. ***Behind the wheel*** training introduces the driver to actual roads under real traffic conditions.



Ohio's Pre-Service program satisfies all ELDT requirements for behind the wheel training

Behind the Wheel Training includes:

- Pre-trip and post-trip inspections procedures
- Hands on safe driving techniques, vehicle controls, and maneuvering (steering, braking, backing, turning)
- Mirror usage and managing blind spots
- Highway, rural and city driving (merging, lane changes, turns)
- Emergency stops and evacuation procedures
- Pupil loading/unloading and railroad crossing procedures
- Route driving practice and special driving situations
- Student management and school bus security
- Environmental compliance and fatigue awareness

This training prepares the driver for the state skills test to obtain a CDL, while equipping the driver to safely operate a school bus.



Connecting the Completed Pre-Service Training and the ELDT Process

Drivers receive a theory/classroom affidavit when they attend their regional pre-service class. Drivers are to complete the form and return to the instructor before the end of class. After completing the classroom training written test, their driver's license is scanned as it is required for the affidavit, and their test score is recorded on the document. The pre-service instructor enters the training information into the ELDT registry within 48 hours of completing class; Affidavit forms are saved digitally.

Districts/employers scan and email the ELDT range and behind the wheel affidavit to the pre-service instructor to be entered in the ELDT registry. Once verifying the affidavit is complete, the pre-service instructor enters the information into the registry within 48 hours of the final training date. Once entered, the pre-service instructor notifies the district/employer that the driver can schedule the skills test to obtain their CDL license.

[Ohio Pre-Service Instructors](#) are strategically located across eight regions throughout the state, ensuring accessible training opportunities for all districts.



Completion of School Bus Driver Certification Requirements

After a driver has obtained their CDL and completed all required Pre-Service training, the driver will receive a school bus driver training certificate (Pre-service certificate). Before transporting pupils, the driver is required by [Ohio law](#) to observe a route with an experienced bus driver with students onboard, then drive a route with an experienced bus driver and students onboard. Once these steps are completed, the driver may drive solo with students onboard.

Recapping the Ohio School Bus Driver Certification Process:

1. Apply with a school district or transportation contractor
2. Obtain a Commercial Learner Permit (CLP)*
3. Complete BCI/FBI background checks (Rapback)
4. Complete T-8 physical examination
5. Pass a DOT pre-employment drug test (must be negative)
6. Complete ***Pre-Service classroom training***
7. Complete ***Behind-the-Wheel and Range training*** with on the bus instructor (OBI)
8. Pass CDL skills and road test
9. Register with FMCSA Clearinghouse*; Grant employer consent to run query
10. Receive Pre-Service training certificate after completing state testing with OBI. (Valid for six years)
11. District/employer issues annual local certificate (verifying all qualifications are met)
12. Begin transporting students safely to and from school and related events



FMCSA Clearinghouse: Pre-Employment Consent Requirement

The FMCSA Drug & Alcohol Clearinghouse is a secure, online database that provides real-time information about CDL drivers' drug and alcohol program violations. It is a critical tool for ensuring safety in the transportation industry.

Before hiring a CDL driver, employers are required by federal law to conduct a full query in the Clearinghouse. This query reveals whether the driver has any unresolved drug or alcohol violations that would disqualify them from performing safety-sensitive duties.

- For pre-employment checks, drivers must provide electronic consent directly through the Clearinghouse portal.
- Without this consent, the employer cannot proceed with the hire. *Pre-employment consent is not optional.*
- If a driver refuses to provide consent, they are ineligible to operate a commercial motor vehicle or perform any safety-sensitive functions.



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