STUDENT TRANSPORTATION · OHIO · 2026

Can We Use a 12-Passenger Van for Students?

Ohio's HB 54 changed what schools may operate. It didn't change federal sale rules or how these vans handle when they're full. Here's what to know before you decide.

Our advice: No.

A dealer can't legally sell you a **new** 12-passenger van for students, and loaded vans carry a well-documented rollover risk. **Start with a 9-passenger van** (plus the driver): it's under the federal school bus line and needs no CDL. **Have a CDL driver?** An MFSAB is the safest choice for 10+ students on activity trips.

01 · THE RULES

Ohio law (HB 54)

- Effective June 30, 2025 (ORC 4511.76).
- Allows vehicles **factory-rated for 12 or fewer passengers**, not counting the driver.
- Requires mechanic inspection twice a year, a qualified driver (no CDL) and no stops on the roadway to load or unload.
- Removing seats doesn't qualify a larger van. Only the manufacturer can change the rating.

Federal law

- A vehicle for **more than 10 people**, driver included, used for students is a **school bus**.
- Dealers can't sell or lease a **new** one unless it meets school bus standards (49 U.S.C. 30112). Vans don't.
- NHTSA says schools buying new non-compliant vans can face civil penalties too.
- State law can't override this.

Safety

- NHTSA: large vans are about **3× more likely to roll over** with 10+ occupants.
- A full load raises the center of gravity, so a sudden swerve is harder to control, especially above 50 mph.
- Vans lack school bus seating, rollover protection and body-joint standards.
- Ohio guidance cites the national directors' view that vans be used only "when completely necessary."

02 · WHAT WE RECOMMEND

Students per trip	What to use
9 or fewer	A **9-passenger van or minivan**, including accessible vans. Our default. With the driver that's 10 people or fewer, under the federal school bus line, and no CDL needed.
10 or more: field trips, athletics, activities	An **MFSAB, if you have a CDL driver**. Ohio requires a CDL for all MFSAB drivers (ORC 3327.10(M)). Meets school bus safety standards except lights and stop arm. No CDL driver? Split across 9-passenger vans.
10 or more: daily home-to-school routes	A **school bus**. MFSABs are limited to non-routine trips in Ohio (HB 96).

If you must use a 12-passenger van in Ohio, these are the main rules we know of. It's a summary, not a complete list: confirm current requirements with ODEW before you rely on it.

- ✓ **Buy used, not new.** A van can count as "new" until its first retail sale, even with low miles. Check its sale history.
- ✓ **Districts qualify;** charter and nonpublic schools only under ORC 4511.76(E).
- ✓ **Load and unload off the road.** Never stop on the roadway.
- ✓ **Tires checked every trip,** spare included.
- ✓ **Mechanic inspection twice a year.**
- ✓ **Factory label shows 12 or fewer** passengers. No removing seats.
- ✓ **Qualified driver** per Ohio school bus/van rules. No CDL needed.
- ✓ **Everyone buckled,** kids in the right child restraint.
- ✓ **Nothing on the roof;** seat riders ahead of the rear axle.
- ✓ **Confirm with ODEW,** your insurer and your counsel.

Let's Find the Compliant Fit

Tell us how many students you move, where and how often.

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BSI, 3153 Lamb Ave, Columbus, OH 43219. General information as of October 2026, not legal advice. Rules vary by state and school type. Sources: ORC 4511.76; NHTSA 15-