

HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Pupil Transportation Services

School Years 2026–2027 through 2027–2028

RFP Released: June 16, 2026

Questions Due: July 3, 2026

Responses Posted: July 10, 2026

Proposals Due: by 2:00 pm on July 16, 2026

Evaluation/Interviews: July 17 – July 18

Board Approval: July 21, 2026

Contract Start: Prior to the start of the 2026–27 school year

Term of AGREEMENT: The term of the AGREEMENT will commence with two (2) school years (26-27 and 27-28) ending July 31st, 2028 and is subject to applicable statutes and regulations.

Possible Extension of the Period of the AGREEMENT: Higher Ground Academy (HGA), at its sole discretion, will reserve the option, consistent with applicable statutes, to extend the AGREEMENT for two additional one-year periods, e.g. commencing with but not limited to school year 2028-2029.

Award of AGREEMENT(s): The issuance of an award of an AGREEMENT is contingent upon securing a written proposal acceptable at the HGA sole discretion. HGA may award one or more AGREEMENT(s) for these services, as provided by law. The AGREEMENT entered into will be evidenced and finalized upon the approval of the Higher Ground Academy(HGA).

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is seeking proposals from qualified and licensed pupil transportation providers to provide safe, reliable, and efficient transportation services for its students beginning with the 2026–2027 school year.

HGA reserves the right to renew the contract annually based upon satisfactory performance, compliance with contract requirements, and mutual agreement between the parties.

2. SCHOOL INFORMATION

Higher Ground Academy serves approximately 1,200 students in grades Kindergarten through 12.

The Academy operates two campuses:

Elementary and High School Campus

Higher Ground Academy
1381 Marshall Avenue
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104

Secondary Campus

Higher Ground Academy
1471 Brewster Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108

School enrollment and transportation needs may vary annually.

3. SCHOOL SCHEDULE

Regular School Year Schedule:

- Student Arrival: Prior to 7:30 a.m.
- School Start Time: 7:30 a.m.
- School Dismissal: 2:30 p.m.

The contractor shall ensure students arrive safely and on time for the beginning of the school day and are transported promptly following dismissal.

4. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The selected contractor shall provide transportation services including, but not limited to:

Regular Home-to-School Transportation

Transportation of eligible students between their homes and designated school campuses. HGA provides student transportation services throughout the metropolitan area.

- 26 Type C & D Buses

- Average Ride times 60-90 minutes
- Door to Door Stops

Inter-Campus Transportation

The contractor should anticipate that some routes may require service to both campuses.

Special Education Transportation

Transportation services for students with disabilities as required by their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

- 8-10 Type III Vans

Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities

The contractor shall provide pricing for optional transportation services for:

- Athletic events
- Academic competitions
- Field trips
- School-sponsored activities

Summer Programming

Optional transportation services for:

- Extended Year Programs
- Extended School Day Programs

Pricing shall be submitted separately.

5. CONTRACTOR QUALIFICATIONS

The contractor must:

- Be licensed and authorized to provide pupil transportation services in Minnesota.
- Maintain all required state and federal certifications.
- Demonstrate at least five (5) years of experience providing school transportation services.
- Have sufficient staffing and fleet capacity to serve approximately 1,200 students.
- Have experience serving charter schools and diverse student populations.
- Demonstrate a history of safety and regulatory compliance.

6. OPERATING REQUIREMENTS- EQUIPMENT

- Type C or D Buses for Regular Route Service and Charters/Co-curricular/Activity Trips
 - The majority of buses to be used for daily regular routes must have at least a manufacturer's capacity of 77 passengers and not less than 71 passengers.
 - Vehicles assigned to daily routes shall be no older at the start of each contract year than:
 - Type C or D buses - twelve (12) model years.
- Type A or B Buses for Special Needs Routes and Services
 - The majority of buses to be used for these services must have at least a manufacturer's capacity of not less than 29 passenger capacity.
 - Vehicles assigned to daily services shall be no older at the start of each contract year than:
 - Type A or B buses - twelve (12) model years.
- Type III Vans
 - The majority of Type III vans to be used for these services must have at least a manufacturer's capacity of not less than 6 passengers
 - Type III vehicles permitted include minivans, Suburbans or equivalent, but does not include passenger cars, pickup trucks, or other types without HGA approval.

All vehicles shall be equipped with:

- 2-way radios
- Back-up alarms
- An external P.A. system
- A Camera system (2 cameras minimum)
- A swing gate
- GPS system
- Bus tracking System for students and families

Preference will be given to vendors offering:

- GPS tracking
- Parent notification systems
- Electronic route management
- Real-time reporting capabilities

7. SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

The contractor shall:

- Comply with all Minnesota Department of Public Safety and Minnesota Department of Education transportation requirements.
- Conduct all required driver background checks.
- Ensure all drivers maintain valid school bus endorsements.
- Conduct regular vehicle inspections and preventative maintenance.
- Maintain a written safety plan.
- Provide annual driver training.

8. PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

The selected contractor/s shall:

Reliability

Maintain a minimum on-time performance rate of 95%.

Communication

Provide timely communication regarding:

- Delays
- Incidents
- Student concerns
- Maintain a dedicated customer service contact during normal business hours for transportation-related inquiries and concerns. Respond to parent, guardian, and HGA inquiries within established timelines

Customer Service

- Respond promptly to parent and school concerns
- Live dispatch support
- Dedicated transportation manager

Preference will be given to vendors offering:

- GPS tracking

- Parent notification systems
- Electronic route management
- Real-time reporting capabilities

9. INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS

The contractor shall maintain:

- Commercial General Liability Insurance
- Automobile Liability Insurance
- Workers Compensation Insurance
- Full-service providers shall maintain a minimum excess liability limit of \$4,000,000.
Vendors submitting proposals for Type III services only may maintain a minimum limit of \$2,000,000

Proof of insurance shall be submitted with the proposal.

10. PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Proposals shall include:

Company Information

- Company name
- Address
- Contact person
- Years in business

Experience

Description of school transportation experience.

References

At least three current or recent school district or charter school references.

Staffing Plan

- Number of available drivers
- Recruitment plan
- Retention plan

Fleet Information

- Number of buses and/or vans available
- Bus capacities
- Average fleet age
- Accessibility capabilities
- School bus inspections for the last three years

Technology Capabilities

Description of transportation management systems.

Safety Program

Detailed description of safety practices and training.

Pricing Proposal

Provide separate pricing for:

- Daily regular school bus transportation
- Daily regular van transportation
- Special education transportation
- Inter-campus transportation
- Field trips
- Athletics
- Summer programming

11. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

Criteria	Weight
Safety Record	30%
Experience and Qualifications	20%

Reliability and Service Plan	20%
Cost	20%
Technology and Communication Systems	10%

Higher Ground Academy reserves the right to conduct interviews and request additional information from proposers.

12. RESERVATION OF RIGHTS

Higher Ground Academy reserves the right to:

- Reject any or all proposals.
- Waive informalities or irregularities.
- Negotiate with one or more proposers.
- Award a contract in the best interest of the Academy.
- Cancel this RFP at any time.

13. PERFORMANCE GUARANTEES AND LIQUIDATED DAMAGES

Higher Ground Academy expects the highest standards of safety, reliability, and customer service. The selected contractor shall be subject to the following performance standards and financial penalties for failure to meet contractual obligations. Performance penalties shall not apply when delays result from severe weather, road closures, traffic incidents, law enforcement activity, student-related emergencies, or other events beyond the contractor's reasonable control.

A. On-Time Performance

The contractor shall maintain an on-time performance rate of at least **95%** for all regularly scheduled routes.

A route shall be considered late when:

- A bus arrives at a school more than **10 minutes after** the scheduled arrival time; or
- A bus arrives at a designated stop more than **15 minutes after** the scheduled pick-up time without prior approval or notification.

Financial Penalties

- \$100 per occurrence for any route arriving 10–20 minutes late.

- \$200 per occurrence for any route arriving more than 20 minutes late.
- If monthly on-time performance falls below 95%, the contractor shall incur an additional penalty equal to **2% of the monthly invoice**.
- If monthly on-time performance falls below 90%, the contractor shall incur an additional penalty equal to **5% of the monthly invoice**.

B. Missed Routes

A missed route is defined as any route that is not completed as scheduled due to contractor error, driver absence, vehicle failure, or other contractor-related causes.

Financial Penalties

- \$500 per missed route.
- The contractor shall be responsible for all reasonable costs incurred by the Academy in arranging alternative transportation.
- Three (3) missed routes during a school year shall constitute a material breach of contract and may result in contract termination.

C. Driver Shortages

The contractor shall maintain adequate staffing levels to ensure uninterrupted transportation services.

Financial Penalties

- \$250 per occurrence when a route is delayed due to lack of a qualified driver.
- \$500 per occurrence when a route cannot be completed due to a driver shortage.
- Repeated staffing shortages may be considered grounds for non-renewal or termination of the contract.

D. Vehicle Breakdowns

The contractor shall maintain all vehicles in safe operating condition.

Financial Penalties

- \$150 per occurrence when a vehicle breakdown causes a delay exceeding 15 minutes.
- \$300 per occurrence when a breakdown results in students being transferred to another bus.
- \$500 per occurrence if a breakdown causes students to arrive more than 30 minutes late.

The Academy reserves the right to waive penalties for events beyond the contractor's reasonable control.

E. Safety and Compliance

Student safety is the Academy's highest priority. The Contractor shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and industry standards governing pupil transportation.

Safety concerns may include, but are not limited to:

- Failure to comply with state or federal transportation regulations.
- Failure to complete required inspections or maintenance.
- Driver misconduct.
- Use of unqualified or improperly licensed drivers.
- Failure to maintain required licenses, certifications, or insurance coverage.
- Failure to report accidents or incidents in a timely manner.
- Preventable accidents.

Corrective Action Process

Except in cases involving serious safety concerns or imminent risk to students, the Academy will generally provide written notice of the concern and allow the Contractor an opportunity to investigate and implement corrective actions.

The Contractor shall submit a written corrective action plan within five (5) business days of receiving notice, unless otherwise agreed upon by the parties.

Performance Credits and Remedies

For repeated or unresolved safety concerns, the Academy may assess performance credits as follows:

- Repeated minor safety violations: Up to \$250 per occurrence after written notice and opportunity to correct.
- Significant safety violations: Up to \$1,000 per occurrence, depending on the severity of the violation.
- Preventable accidents involving property damage: Up to \$1,000 per occurrence.
- Preventable accidents involving student injury: Up to \$2,500 per occurrence.

The Academy reserves the right to require additional driver training, corrective action plans, temporary driver reassignment, or other reasonable measures necessary to protect student safety.

Nothing in this section limits the Academy's right to terminate the contract for material breaches involving student safety.

F. Parent and School Concerns

The Contractor shall maintain a responsive customer service process and work collaboratively with the Academy to address parent and school concerns.

The Contractor shall:

- Acknowledge complaints within one (1) business day.
- Provide a status update or proposed resolution within three (3) business days whenever reasonably possible.

Performance Review

The Academy will monitor complaint trends and discuss recurring concerns with the Contractor as part of quarterly performance reviews.

If complaint patterns indicate ongoing service deficiencies, the Academy may require a corrective action plan.

Persistent failure to address recurring concerns may be considered during annual contract renewal evaluations.

The Academy's goal is to work collaboratively with the Contractor to resolve concerns promptly and improve service quality for students and families.

G. Contract Review and Termination

The Academy shall conduct quarterly performance reviews.

The Academy reserves the right to terminate the contract for cause if any of the following occur:

- Monthly on-time performance below 90% for two consecutive months.
- Five or more missed routes during a school year.
- Repeated driver shortages.
- Significant safety violations.
- Failure to implement corrective action plans.

The Academy may also decline to renew the contract based on unsatisfactory performance, regardless of whether financial penalties have been assessed.

H. Corrective Action Plans

The Academy may require a written corrective action plan whenever performance standards are not met. The plan shall include:

- Root cause analysis.
- Specific corrective measures.
- Implementation timeline.
- Designated responsible personnel.

Failure to implement an approved corrective action plan may constitute a material breach of contract.

14. SERVICE CATEGORIES AND PARTIAL BID OPTIONS

Higher Ground Academy recognizes that transportation providers may specialize in particular types of transportation services. Therefore, vendors may submit proposals for the entire transportation program or for one or more specific service categories.

The Academy reserves the right to award contracts to a single provider or to multiple providers, whichever arrangement is determined to be in the best interest of the school.

Vendors may submit proposals for any of the following categories:

Category A – Full-Service Transportation

Comprehensive transportation services including all regular education routes, special education routes, inter-campus transportation, field trips, extracurricular activities, and summer programming.

Category B – Regular Education School Bus Transportation

Transportation of regular education students using full-size school buses for daily home-to-school and school-to-home routes.

Category C – Special Education Transportation

Transportation of students receiving special education services, including students whose Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) require specialized transportation.

Category D – Regular Education Van Transportation

Transportation of regular education students using vans or other approved smaller-capacity vehicles.

Category E – Special Education Van Transportation

Transportation of students with disabilities using specially equipped vans or smaller-capacity vehicles as required by student needs and IEPs.

Category F – Inter-Campus Transportation

Transportation of students between the Academy's campuses located at:

- 1381 Marshall Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55104
- 1471 Brewster Street, Saint Paul, MN 55108

Category G – Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities

Transportation for:

- Athletics
- Academic competitions
- Educational field trips
- School-sponsored activities

Category H – Summer Programming

Transportation services for:

- Extended Year Programs
- Summer School Programs
- Other Academy-sponsored summer activities

Proposal Requirements

Vendors submitting partial-service proposals shall clearly identify:

1. The service category or categories for which they are submitting a proposal.
2. Their available fleet and staffing capacity for each category.
3. Any limitations on service area, vehicle type, or scheduling.
4. Pricing specific to each category.

Right to Award Multiple Contracts

Higher Ground Academy reserves the right to:

- Award all transportation services to a single vendor;
- Award separate contracts for regular education transportation, special education transportation, van transportation, field trips, or other specialized services;
- Negotiate with one or more vendors regarding service combinations;

- Reject any proposal that does not adequately meet the Academy's transportation needs.

The Academy's goal is to secure the safest, most reliable, and most cost-effective transportation services for its students and families.

15. SUBMISSION INFORMATION

All proposals must be submitted no later than:

Date: July 16, 2026

Time: 2:00 pm

Submit proposals electronically to:

Samuel Yigzaw
Executive Director
Higher Ground Academy

Questions regarding this RFP shall be directed to the Executive Director at samuel@hgacademy.org or the Chief of Operations Maxamed Ahmed at maxamed@hgacademy.org

Higher Ground Academy
“How are the children? The children are well and learning.”