

Community Resources for Science

Alameda County Field Trip Transportation Survey Report

Prepared for:
The Alameda County Office of Education
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663 13th Street, Preservation Park
Oakland, CA 94612

Alameda County School Field Trip Transportation Survey Report

Summary

The Bay Area offers a rich array of educational resources that are ideal for use by school groups as enrichment and support for required classroom curriculum. Science, arts, history, and environmental education programs offer teaching opportunities that cannot be replicated in classrooms, as well as offering new perspectives and approaches for kids of all backgrounds and learning styles. Most teachers are eager to take advantage of these resources. However, teachers frequently indicate that they have problems with transportation to off-site activities, citing explicit barriers such as cost, limited bus availability, inconvenient public transportation, paperwork, and time constraints. Many informal and outdoor education programs realize that more school groups would use their programs if transportation were not a barrier. Community Resources for Science was asked by the Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) to conduct a survey of transportation policies and procedures in the eighteen districts in the county, to

- Identify and describe transportation alternatives for teachers in each district
- Analyze these alternatives in terms of the barriers described by teachers

In addition, CRS has undertaken to identify some specific alternative transportation models provided by funders, independent programs, or districts outside of Alameda County.

The purpose of researching and reporting on transportation policies county-wide is to develop a broader understanding of the real work of organizing a school field-trip: teachers perceive field trip transportation to be expensive, difficult, and time-consuming to arrange. How do these perceptions relate to district policies and procedures, admission costs of field trip destinations, and the teachers' enrichment budgets? Are there obvious accommodations to be made to alleviate the expressed hardships?

The overall findings of the research indicate the following major trends:

- 1) *Transportation policies vary widely across the county.* The data presented indicate that every district in the county has a specific transportation policy, and no two are identical. They are driven by many factors, including in particular whether or not the district owns buses it uses to support field-trip transportation, and how it allots bus and monetary resources for field trips. Teachers' complaints of expense and difficulty are fairly consistent from district to district, however.
- 2) *Districts that own buses manage field trips in a significantly different way from districts relying on charter bus services.* Districts that own buses have centralized request and authorization systems. Most districts that own buses offer low-cost field-trip transportation to school groups, although most are constrained by home-school transportation schedules. This means that there is a relatively short period in the day during which buses are available, constraining the length/distance of the field trip. However, several of these districts also offer support if teachers need to charter a bus. Districts that do not own buses rely heavily on

private charter companies. All require teachers to use SPAB-certified buses; most provide recommendations of specific bus companies; some offer centralized booking services. Teachers prefer buses to public transportation due to management and safety issues.

- 3) *Bus transportation is the most desirable solution for both teachers and the districts.* In addition to asking about bus transportation, CRS asked districts about transportation alternatives. Many districts cited public transportation as a possibility, but acknowledged its relative inconvenience. Many districts reluctantly allow parent carpooling as an alternative, with clear policies regarding insurance and safety precautions.
- 4) *Transportation expenses are high but not prohibitive based on existing information about teachers' enrichment budgets* The average transportation cost for a field trip using a district-owned bus is \$222. The average transportation cost for a field trip using a charter bus is \$360. While admission prices for field-trip attractions range from free to more than \$10 per student, the average per-student admission is just over \$2. Information from teachers in 5 districts indicates that the average elementary classroom enrichment budget varies from "nothing" to upwards of \$1000 per year, but averages between \$300 - \$400 per year, indicating that at least one off-site field trip would be possible. (See Tables 1 and 2 for detail.)
- 5) *Teachers are eager to find funding and logistical support for field trip transportation.* Frequently-asked questions in CRS teacher workshops are: "Can you help us get funding for buses?" and "can you sign up for the bus for me?" We have compiled resources for teachers of organizations that provide grants to teachers, yet few are specifically geared towards funding transportation. Thus, despite clear attempts by most districts to create systems, budgets, and accommodations for field-trip transportation, teachers still find it prohibitively expensive and time-consuming.

The following report attempts to gather and analyze information that can shed light on these trends and provide insight into alternative approaches to field-trip transportation. The report is organized in 4 sections, as follows:

I. Description of Teachers' Transportation Barriers

- 1) Cost
- 2) Availability
- 3) Convenience
- 4) Time

Data: Table 1-- Program Price Comparison; Table 2-- Transportation Price Comparison

II. District Transportation Policies in Alameda County

- 1) Districts operating district-owned buses
- 2) Districts relying on charter bus services
- 3) Parent carpooling policies and public transportation alternatives

Data: Table 3-- District Transportation Policy Data

III. Alternative Transportation Models

The original report contains memos and descriptions of the following alternative transportation models that were offered or under development at the time of the research for this project in 2000. Please contact CRS at (510) 273-0290 or annej@crscience.org if you would like to receive a hard copy of these attachments.

- 1) Chabot Observatory and Science Center Plan
- 2) Rocky Road Bus
- 3) Specific funding programs
- 4) East Bay Regional Parks: Parks Express

IV. Analysis and Recommendations

- 1) Helping teachers overcome real and perceived barriers
- 2) Supporting cooperative transportation agreements

I. Description of Teachers' Transportation Barriers

Overview of field-trip process for teachers: There is some variation around the process teachers must go through to arrange for a field trip, but the steps are broadly as follows:

- 1) Determine field trip destination matching curriculum enrichment needs
- 2) Determine budget for field trip and approximate costs of transportation and admission fees
- 3) Get principal/district approval
- 4) Make reservations with field-trip destination program; submit district-approved payment
- 5) Arrange transportation; submit district-approved payment
- 6) Arrange needed chaperones; get permissions; collect fees from participants
- 7) Take trip

Cost: Teachers tell CRS that the cost of taking students on field trips prohibits them from doing as much science enrichment as they would otherwise choose. CRS has collected several kinds of data to help understand this barrier: information about teachers' enrichment budgets, the cost of field trip programs, and the cost of bus transportation (see Tables 1 and 2).

Availability: Whether teachers are using district-owned buses or working with charter companies, difficulties arise around coordinating bus availability with the dates a field trip is scheduled. Since many popular field trip programs have limited scheduling flexibility and complex reservation processes, teachers must arrange for transportation *after* confirming a reservation for a specific date, and can run into trouble if there is not enough lead-time to schedule a bus, or the hours do not coincide with bus availability.

Teachers also tell us that convenience and time factor into their perception of barriers regarding field trip transportation. It is CRS understanding that these factors apply primarily to using public transportation as an alternative to costly buses, requiring teachers to add the time and complication of walking with students to and from nearby bus or BART stops, and also destinations that are not easily reached by public transportation.

Table 1: Field Trip Cost (admission per student)

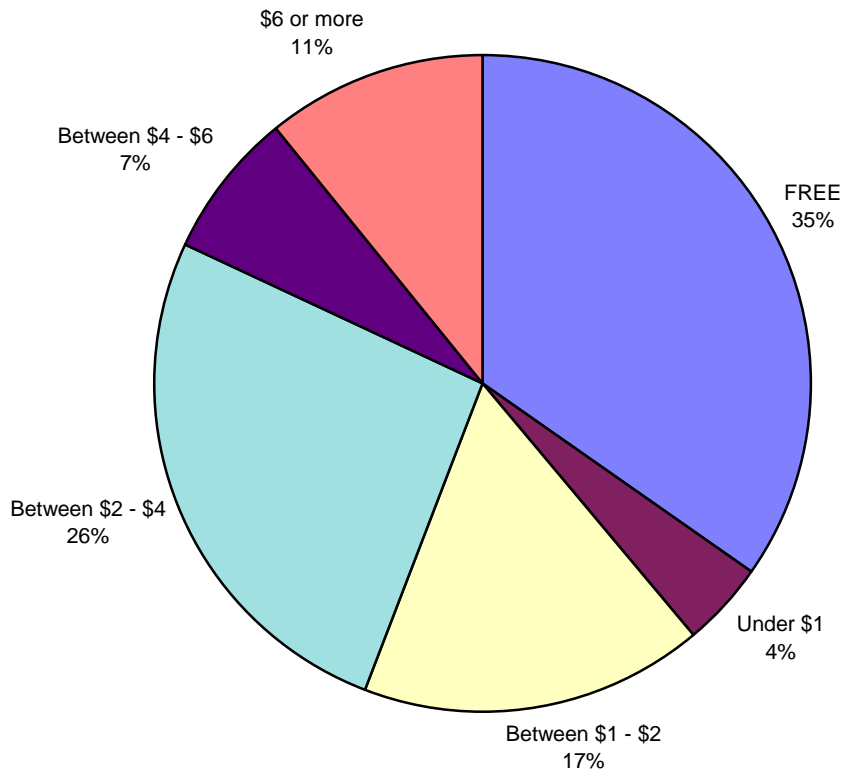


Table 2:
Computing Average Costs for Field Trip Transportation in Alameda County
Based on 5-hour trip, 50 miles from school site

Cost for districts with buses allowing out of town trips					
<i>District</i>	<i>Hourly Rate</i>	<i>* 5 Hours</i>	<i>Mileage Rate</i>	<i>* 50 miles</i>	<i>Total Cost</i>
BUSD	\$25.00	\$125.00	\$1.50	\$75.00	\$200.00
CVUSD	\$21.00	\$105.00	\$2.50	\$125.00	\$230.00
HUSD	\$18.00	\$90.00	\$2.50	\$125.00	\$215.00
SLUSD			\$5.25	\$262.50	\$262.50
NUSD	\$25.00	\$125.00	\$1.00	\$50.00	\$175.00
SGUSD			\$5.00	\$250.00	\$250.00
Average					\$222.08
Cost for charter buses					
<i>Bus Company</i>	<i>Standard Rate</i>				
Alpha Omega	\$365.00				
Champagne	\$400.00				
Durham	\$265.00				
Fairway	\$360.00				
Grosvenor	\$397.00				
LJD	\$390.00				
Pacific State	\$350.00				
Silverstar	\$350.00				
Average	\$359.63				
Total Field Trip Cost: Average Bus Cost plus Average Admission Price (30 @ \$2.18)					
	<i>Bus cost</i>	<i>Admission</i>	<i>Total</i>		
District-Owned bus	\$222.00	\$65.40	\$287.40		
Charter Bus	\$360.00	\$65.40	\$425.40		

II. District Transportation Policies in Alameda County

There is a clear division in the County between districts operating their own buses and districts that do not operate buses. For the most part, districts with their own bus system have developed procedures to accommodate field-trip transportation. Most of these districts set their scheduling priorities around home/school transportation, which sets clear time constraints on the availability of buses for field trips. That is, buses are available for field trips between the time kids are delivered at schools and the time they must be picked up at schools for the afternoon route. Times vary but are generally between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Some districts will allow for longer field trips under certain circumstances (such as additional cost, and whether there is a replacement bus available). These buses are available to teachers at costs which range from free (the district absorbs the cost for a limited number of trips) to \$60/hour or around \$5/mile. To arrange for district buses, most districts have teachers call the transportation or business office to make a request; all districts can provide teachers with a list of SPAB-approved charter companies, and several districts provide the support of helping teachers arrange for a charter bus if the district cannot accommodate their request.

Some interesting exceptions to these general trends suggest the complicated nature of fitting field trips into a district-run bus system. In one district, the available time for using district buses is 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. and after 2:45 p.m. In another case, a district that provides several buses for the sole purpose of field trip transportation assigns specific field trip dates to each school at the beginning of the school year.

Districts relying on charter services have a wide variety of approaches to facilitating field trip transportation. For the most part, the district office provides a list of SPAB-certified and district-approved bus companies to the school site. Some districts centralize the process and make arrangements for teachers. While teachers are less constrained by district bus schedules and availability, the cost of charter buses tends to be quite a bit higher. The cost varies widely depending on the bus company and the length of the trip, ranging from \$265 to \$400 for a 5-hour trip. These costs are often based on a combination of time and distance.

Many teachers look to parent carpools and public transportation as cheaper and sometimes more convenient alternatives to using either district or charter buses. However, most districts have firm policies around carpooling, requiring at least proof of insurance and in some cases vehicle inspection and fingerprinting. Several districts state that they discourage parent carpooling, and some allow parents to drive only their own children. Public transportation provides an alternative for schools and destinations on transportation lines. BART was most often cited as the convenient public transportation service, while AC Transit, UC Transit, and Wheels are seldom used. Several districts mentioned that their busing program allows teachers to use district buses to transport student groups to and from BART stations.

Please see [Table 3: District Transportation Data](#) for specific district information. The table is divided to show all the districts with their own bus systems in one group, and the districts relying on charter services in another group for comparison purposes.

Table 3: Transportation Policies by District

Section 1: Districts own buses that can be used for field trips										
DISTRICT	Berkeley	Castro Valley	Dublin	Fremont	New Haven	Hayward	San Lorenzo	Newark	Sunol Glen	Mountain House Elementary
District Phone	644-6147	537-3000	828-2551	657-2350	471-1100	784-2600	317-4600	794-2141	862-2217	(209) 835-2283
Trans. Mgr. Name, Title, Phone	Elaine Pecot, Mgr of Trans., 644-6182	Paulette Aguilar, Trans Sup'r 537-3000 x 1365	Lynn Bowman, business office x8042	Pam Bess, Dir. Trans., 657-1450	Wayne Harris 471-5559 x16	Vince Andrade x2540	Marilyn Mesirow, trans coord.	Kathy Hocker, facilities and trans 794-2655	Terry Janssen, Admin Asst	Mary Anne Griffith, School Board Member
Other Name, Title, Phone	Katherine James, Iona Williams (have policy) 644-6049	Jan Lieber, Curric. Office		Kurt Banks, Risk Mgr.						
Process for arranging fts	submit school form w/ budget, approvals, and/or check to trans. office	teacher sends request for use of school bus signed by principal	sites call maint. dept to reserve van, or arrange themselves for charter; send info to maint. for billing		teachers call re trans availability, get authorization fr site admin, district, trans.	call trans to reserve date, ft request goes to ass't supt Costa (Ed Svcs) for approval	teacher calls trans office	district assigns specific ft dates to school in summer; principals may trade if nec.	ft request goes to Terry Janssen	request
Are district buses available	yes	yes 5 large (78); 3 small (20)	4 vans (no buses)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes: district has 3 buses ONLY for fts	yes (2)	yes (1 bus)
Cost for district buses	\$60/hr in Berkeley; \$25/hr + \$1.50/mile outside city	large \$2.50/mi + \$21/hr; small \$1.50/hr		\$75 for in-town	free during avail. Times; 2 trips/year	\$2.50/mile; \$18/hr plus OT	\$25 local; \$5.23/mile out	\$25/hr; \$1/mi	\$5/mile paid out of student body fund at end of year	\$0
Time constraints	9 - 2; sometimes can cover with sub., can return next day	9 am - 2 pm or 4:30 pm - 6:30 p.m.		betw. 8:45 - 1:30; after 4:00	9:30 - 1:00; after 4 pm	9:30 - 10:30; after 2:45	whenever available	7 am - 4:30 p.m.	after 8:45 before 3:00	
Frequency allowed					2x year		first come/first served	as assigned to each school		as needed
Charter only										
Charter alternatives	if district buses not avail., Elaine will arrange charter	if school buses not avail., Paulette will arrange charter	yes	if no bus avail or for out-of-town trips	SPAB-licensed drivers	yes	list of SPAB certified buses	yes	Sierra Pacific, Pacific State	
Selection of bus company	Private companies; price/terms vary by company and by trip.	Paulette provides teachers with approved alternatives for their selection		must go through trans office; sometimes contract with East Side Union (cheaper than commercial charter)		school arranges through purchasing dept	up to teachers--though they often call Marilyn for advice	3 lines: Peninsula Charter, Royal Coach, Pacific State		
Charter costs	varies	varies	varies	varies	varies	varies	varies	varies	varies	
Parent/carpool drivers allowed	not encouraged	discouraged; ok w/ proof of insurance		allowed; regular form and proof of insurance on file at school	yes w/ insurance and vehicle check	allowed w/ inspections, insurance, fingerprints	yes with insurance; managed at school site	allowed with vehicle inspections, copy of d.l., insurance	no: parents may drive own children	
Public transportation alternatives	BART, AC transit	AC Transit - used by schools with nearby bus-stops		BART frequent (incl district bus p/u and d/o or one-way)	BART, (or BART-back); AC and UC used little	BART, AC	BART - school buses will d/o and p/u at BART station	AC, BART, used "a lot" because teachers want to do more fts	district buses will d/o and p/u at BART	
Other alternatives				District owns 2 9-psgr vans; can loan to employee/teacher			two small vans primarily for sp.ed., young mothers, sports			
District policies	manual available	manual available				no more than 100 air miles from district; bus required to have roster, go both ways, etc. Will send copy of policies.	overnights ok on weekends--mostly for sports		5 minutes safety check with kids before getting on buses	
Notes	Overnights can be arranged--if out of area driver would stay overnight (at extra cost?)			district vans convenient but not encouraged	one of few districts that allows for need; approx 1500 fts/yr. District field trip manual under review.		home to school the priority, but buses available till as late as 11 pm	1 main bus driver, 2 alternates; try to only use one driver/day	schools will fundraise to supplement student body funds for school buses; per mile cost based on real costs	1 school/52 students
Address	Elaine Pecot, BUSD Trans Dept. 1310 9th St., Ste 4, Berkeley 94710	Paulette Aguilar, Trans. Sup'r. CVUSD PO Box 2146 CV CA 94546		Pam Bess, 43770 Grimmer Blvd, Fremont 94538	Wayne Harris 3636 Smith Street, Union City 94587	Vince Andrade, Trans Dept., HUSD, 24400 Amador St/PO Box 5000, Hayward 94540	Marilyn Mesirow, 15510 Usher, San Lorenzo 94580 attn: transportation	Kathy Hocker, NUSD 37370 Birch, Bldg B, Newark 94560	Terry Janssen, Admin Asst, Sunol Glen USD, PO Box 569, Sunol 94586	

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Section 2: Districts do not own buses for field trip use								
DISTRICT	Alameda	Albany	Emery	Livermore Valley	Oakland	Piedmont	Pleasanton	San Leandro
District Phone	337-7060	559-6500	655-6936	925-606-3200	879-8171	594-2600	925-462-5500	667-3500
Trans. Mgr. Name, Title, Phone	Ina Ratto 337-7028		Dennis Campbell, Facilities Dir.	Betty Taylor 606-3200 in facilities	Wilhelmina Sims	Mike Bush 594-2619	Ron - 426-4400	Pat Kelly 667-3520
Other Name, Title, Phone	Carol Roby, Curriculum 337-7115 for approvals process	Mary Ann Camp, Dir of Curric. 559-6620		Donna Gerere 606-3200 or Mary Crozen			Deputy sup't has ft manual	
Process for arranging fts		submit school form signed by principal and Dir of Curriculum	ft request form, PO, trans form, signed by site admin, bus mgr, supt, then to Dennis C.	form signed by site administrators, supt's office	field trip request form submitted; accounts office handles bus reservations and admissions payments	sites make own bus arrangements: SPAB-certified charters	teacher does through school office	teacher does through school office
Are district buses available	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Cost for district buses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Time constraints	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Frequency allowed			2-3 year		according to budget			
Charter only	yes - through Ina		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Charter alternatives	Ina selects	selected at school site		SPAB certified list	District list; SPAB certified	Durham, Laidlaw, Peerless, a few others	list of charter cos SPAB/auth by district	list of charter companies authorized by district
Selection of bus company	Works mainly with Gray Line - for discounts, continuity		DNG in Brentwood	list of approved bus companies available at each site	handled by District Accounts office from list	principal advised to select SPAB-certified bus	teacher does through school office	teacher does through school office
Charter costs	varies		absorbed by district	varies	varies	varies	varies	
Parent/carpool drivers allowed	ok w/ insurance	yes w/release form, copy of insurance, seatbelt check	discouraged because of liability issues	yes with insurance/form	yes with proof of insurance and follow-car for possible emergencies	yes with proof of insurance		
Public transportation alternatives	AC Transit, BART - but connex difficult	BART - buy tix in bulk	infrequent; AC, BART	BART, Wheels	BART, AC Transit	infrequent--AC not convenient		
Other alternatives								
District policies	separate curriculum approval needed. Alameda does many fts/yr (300)	all transportation arranged at school site	all trans req. go thru Dennis	out of state trips must be reviewed by Board			manual available	
Notes	had trouble when teachers made own bus arrangements; centralize system standardizes and streamlines acctg and troubleshooting		recommends teachers make all bus requests by Jan 30			nearly all field trip and sports transportation parent-funded		
Address	Ina Ratto 2200 Central Ave Alameda 94501	Mary Ann Camp, Dir. Of Curric., AUSD, 904 Talbot Ave, Albany 94706	Dennis Campbell, 4727 San Pablo Ave, Emeryville 94608	Betty Taylor 685 East Jack London Blvd, Livermore 94550	Wilhelmina Sims, Interim Director State and Federal Programs, OUSD, 1025 2nd Ave., Room 308, Oakland	Mike Bush, 760 Magnolia Ave., Piedmont 94611		

III. Alternative Transportation Models

The original report contains memos and descriptions of the following alternative transportation models that were offered or under development at the time of the research for this project in 2000. Please contact CRS at (510) 273-0290 or annej@crscience.org if you would like to receive a hard copy of these attachments.

1. Chabot Observatory and Science Center Plan
2. Rocky Road Bus
3. Dow Chemical
4. East Bay Regional Parks: Parks Express
5. Sierra Club Youth in Wilderness Transportation Mini Grants

IV. Analysis and Recommendations

1. Helping teachers overcome real and perceived barriers

While many teachers perceive transportation as the single biggest barrier to taking more field trips with their students, we would suggest that in the idea of transportation is contained several incremental barriers which, combined, comprise a complex problem:

- **Cost** On its own, the cost factor of bus transportation appears manageable. That is, the cost of one bus trip, whether using district buses or chartering a bus, seems to fit within the overall enrichment budgets of most elementary classroom teachers. However, it is important to note that most teachers would like to take multiple trips to make use of the many education resources in our area. This makes the costs unmanageable, putting undue pressure on “the one field trip” to be a singular and central experience in the school year.
- **Scheduling** For teachers in districts in which there are district-owned buses, scheduling can be a serious logistical problem given the requirements of the home-school bussing priority. Given that district buses are significantly less expensive than charter buses, the teachers have a strong incentive to use the district option, but are then constrained to shorter trips, which discourages the potential of one field trip to be the central experience implied by the cost constraints described above.
- **Alternatives** Many districts do allow parent carpooling within prescribed permission, inspection, and insurance practices. However, in the more urban districts (also the districts with the lowest enrichment budgets) teachers tell us that getting parent commitment as well as filling other private transportation requirements for insurance certificates, vehicle inspections, etc., is sometimes impossible.
- **Logistics** The process for requesting/arranging field trip transportation can be daunting. Whether or not there are district buses available, teachers must often play an iterative game of placing requests, submitting authorizations and purchase orders, confirming reservations, getting permissions, etc.

In summary, when teachers tell us they want help arranging for field trip transportation, they are telling us not simply that they need more money for field trips or lists of charter buses, they in fact would like support in streamlining any and all of the factors listed above.

2. Supporting cooperative transportation agreements.

In seeking creative approaches to reducing the field trip transportation barrier for teachers, we have uncovered a number of interesting local strategies (see Section III). The central feature of most of these approaches is cooperation: agreements between bus companies and/or funders and

specific field trip destinations. Informally, we know that teachers cooperate with colleagues to share costs by scheduling field trips for two or more classes on the same day in order to share bus expenses.

Some interesting features of cooperative agreements we would like to point out for replication in other settings include:

- Making free or low-cost bus eligibility contingent on teachers' participation in (free) training in preparation for the field trip (Parks Express).
- Corporate funding for local schools through a museum education program that leads tours of a wetlands restoration site (Dow Chemical).
- Developing a public "circuit" bus to promote a number of city-supported and/or cultural opportunities, which creates buses available for free to schools (Chabot).
- Funding a single bus whose only job is to provide free field trip transportation (Rocky Road).

Because of the complexity of the problem and, ironically, the wealth of field trip opportunities in the Bay Area, field trip transportation will probably never have a single or simple solution. New teachers and teachers new to their districts will continue to struggle to understand the constraints they must work within, and opportunities that are available. However, we would encourage creative collaborations among districts, companies, funders, and field trip destinations to develop more alternative opportunities for free or low-cost field trip transportation.