



# COVID-19 Considerations for Reopening Schools: Pupil Transportation

September 4, 2020

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Pupil transportation is a vital component of the education system. There are many facets and hurdles that must be addressed in order to provide the safest transportation possible. In some cases, it may seem almost impossible to transport students during the COVID-19 pandemic but implementing some changes at the district and school level may allow for transportation.

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## Pupil Transportation

### Optimizing the Number of Students on the Bus

#### *Polling Parents*

Districts should poll parents to better understand the number of students that will require pupil transportation. Many parents may choose to transport their students to school until a time when social distancing on the school bus no longer is required. See the sample survey questions at the end of this section to help determine which questions to ask parents. Each district may choose which questions are pertinent to their operations.

#### *Bell Times*

Districts should evaluate their current bell times to see if changes can be made that will allow fewer students to ride the bus at the same time. For example, having middle and high school students picked up after elementary students and dropped off before them would allow the older students to be home to watch younger students when needed.

#### Example:

- Elementary students picked up first and dropped off last
- Middle school students picked up second or last and dropped off first
- High school students picked up second or last and dropped off first

#### *Walking Distances*

School districts should evaluate student walking distances to schools to determine if an extension of the distance will decrease the number of students on the school bus.

#### Example:

- Elementary school students – 1 mile
- Middle school students – 1.5 miles
- High school students – 2 miles

#### *Walking and Social Distancing*

Parents will be responsible for ensuring students who are walking to school are maintaining safe practices, including social distancing and face masks, during their walk.

Schools should designate a person in charge of a Safe Route to School, utilizing the national guidelines for planning. The [Safe Routes to School](#) website has guidance on how to start and maintain a SRTS program.

School districts also may implement “walking school buses,” which have an adult chaperone who has been vetted by the school. The walking school bus has designated stops and pickup



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times when children can join the chaperone and other students walking to school. This may eliminate some of the anxiety parents have about students walking to school if they have not done so in the past.

Information regarding the walking school bus can be found on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#) and on the [Walking School Bus](#) website.

## **Mitigation Strategies**

Parents should monitor the bus stops and help remind students of the social distancing requirements. Schools may need to teach and remind students what six feet looks like. Bus stops need to be marked where students should stand to give a good visual of the distance. As students are not used to social distancing when around friends and classmates, patience will be needed by the adults inside and outside of the bus.

Students who ride the bus must comply with these mitigation strategies:

### *Wearing a Mask*

All students in first grade through twelfth grade shall wear a face mask to the extent possible while riding a bus. School districts may choose to require masking for students in pre-school or Kindergarten in accordance with CDC guidance. Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis when wearing a face mask would compromise the health and safety of the student. It will be more difficult to have younger students comply with mask-wearing, but it will become the norm as they transition back into school. Monitors and drivers will need to remind them often and remember that it is new for them, too.

It also is recommended that school districts work with families during the summer to help implement strategies to acclimate students to wearing a mask. All students should have a mask and explained how to properly wear one. Districts may have to provide masks to students who do not have access to one from home. Each bus should have a supply of masks for those students who do not have one.

Districts may create videos to provide to the media and post on the school district website. In addition to providing instructions on how to properly wear a mask, parents should be encouraged to have their children practice wearing the mask each day, increasing the length of time incrementally until the child can tolerate the mask for the length of time the child will be at the bus stop and riding the bus. This will help acclimate the students to wearing a mask before the start of school.

Some students might not be able to wear masks for a variety of reasons. For those who are unable to wear a mask, it is more important to maintain social distancing. Monitors and drivers



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who encounter students shall always wear a mask or a face shield, unless a medical waiver is granted.

### *Seating*

Each rider shall have an assigned seat. To the extent possible, seats will be filled from back to front when boarding. Each bus will have a roster of eligible student riders (passenger manifest) and document the assigned seats for contact tracing. At morning routes, rider attendance will be documented on the manifest before unloading at school. For afternoon routes, rider attendance will be documented on the manifest before the bus leaves the school.

### *Temperatures of Students*

Parents should be encouraged to take their students' temperatures before they go to the bus stop. Children exhibiting a fever should be kept at home.

All students shall have a temperature screening prior to school entry each day. The district may choose to have a bus monitor do the temperature screen for each rider as the student boards the bus. In this case, riders do not need to have the temperature screening done again at school. Another option is to have an affidavit of home screening by the parent for each rider and do the school required temperature screening for all students, bus riders and non-riders, as they enter school building.

If a district utilizes bus monitors to do the temperature screening, the monitor will take the student's temperature prior to boarding the bus. The monitor also can look for other signs of illness prior to the child getting on the bus. To ensure the safety of students and staff, when a student presents at the bus with a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees, school districts will need to put policies and procedures in place to have the child return home or another designated place of care.

If a student with a fever must be transported on the bus, the student should be seated at the front of the bus, door side, apart from other students as much as possible. Upon arrival at school, the ill student should be escorted to the office where the student will be monitored until the parent or guardian can arrange to pick up the child. During the wait period, the student should continue to wear a mask and be isolated from other students and staff as much as possible until released to the parent or guardian. It is recommended the school have a room separate from the regular health room to isolate students with fever.

Districts should have policies and procedures in place to isolate students who develop fever or other symptoms during the day. Temperature scans are not required for boarding the bus for the trip home. However, students who have been identified with a fever at any point during the school day should not be transported home on a bus.



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### *Hand Sanitizer*

Each student shall utilize hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol upon entry to the bus. Hand sanitizer must not be left in the bus during the hotter seasons due to temperature risk. Hand sanitizer stations may be mounted, and if mounted, shall be in an area that does not cause a distraction to the driver or hazard to the student. Each school bus model is different, therefore there is not one perfect mounting station area. The school bus dealer might be able to help with the best mounting area.

The chosen area cannot interfere with the view of the door, windows or access to emergency equipment. The mounting area also shall not be in an area where backpacks or coat strings can get caught. Mounted stations may leak; therefore, it is necessary to be mindful of trips, slips and falls. The monitor might have to clean up the area after each pickup. Do not mount the sanitizer stations in areas that receive direct sunlight due to potential fire hazards.

Another option is to have a handheld pump bottle of hand sanitizer that can be removed from the bus at the end of the route. The monitor or an older student can administer the hand sanitizer as riders board the bus.

A driver has many responsibilities, including watching for those who are illegally passing the bus, watching students crossing the road and watching students who may be standing around the bus waiting to be scanned. It will be difficult to achieve temperature scans without a monitor. The monitor may be a vetted volunteer, older student, teacher or other school personnel.

The duties associated with the mitigation strategies cannot interfere with regular responsibilities of the bus driver required for the safety of students. It is recommended to have monitors on all school buses in order to safely implement the mitigation strategies. If a monitor is not feasible, the only duty recommended for the driver is to check the passenger manifest once the bus is loaded or just prior to unloading.

Transportation staff may need to be increased and districts may want to explore hiring monitors and drivers through temporary agencies. School districts may train monitors and drivers hired through the temporary services and utilize them as needed.

### *Number of Students on The Bus*

Districts should work with local health officials to determine the occupancy rate to achieve an acceptable level of social distancing depending on the prevalence of COVID-19 in the community.

Upon implementation of the mitigation strategies listed above and acceptable health conditions in the community, buses may run at full capacity. Seating at the front of the bus should be reserved for any student with a fever who must be transported to school.



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If there is a public health need to increase the distance between students, fewer students can be transported. The below charts indicate seating arrangements that range from 10% occupancy to 70% occupancy. In any configuration, students who live in the same household may sit together.

It is obvious that achieving social distancing on school buses is a huge obstacle for districts to overcome during the pandemic. Acquiring additional buses or having existing buses make multiple runs to get students to and from school every day in a reasonable amount of time, is simply not feasible solutions either fiscally or logistically. Due to those logistical concerns and the desire to provide student access to educational instruction, concessions were made to allow almost fully loaded buses to transport students to and from school. That concession was made by the Department for Public Health only with the aforementioned mitigation strategies such as requiring face masks, taking temperatures, loading from back to front, and enforcing assigned seats. Fully loaded buses, even with the implementation of all these mitigation strategies is far from optimal from a public health perspective but, given the number of children impacted on a daily basis, was a concession that needed to be made.

With respect to travel for athletics, as well as for other extracurricular activities, the logistics while still challenging for some districts, are simply not the same. Districts will be transporting fewer students for an extracurricular event and thus should be more able to apply additional resources in terms of actual buses needed. The Centers for Disease Control has recommended that bus seating be limited to one student per seat using every other row. This reduced number of passengers will also decrease the number of contacts to be traced in the event of an outbreak related to the travel event.

As districts plan for the transport of students, whether to school or other activities, districts are encouraged to make a good faith effort towards the implementation of social distancing within their existing resources. Neither KDE nor DPH will be out counting numbers on school buses, but there is an obligation to the public to provide guidance that complies with the public health recommendations where possible. To the extent feasible and practical, local school districts should implement the practice of social distancing for transport of students for all extracurricular activities.

To assist districts in their calculations towards achieving social distancing of 6 feet between students, the following number of students would be able to ride the bus:

Rated Capacity	Number of Students
34	4
52	6
66	7
70-78	8



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84	9
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Decreasing social distancing to allow for one student per seat, every other seat, the following number of students will be able to ride the bus:

Rated Capacity	Number of Students
34	6
52	9
66	11
70-74	12
78	13
84	14

Decreasing social distancing to allow for one student per seat, not skipping any seats, the following number of students will be able to ride the bus:

Rated Capacity	Number of Students
34	12
52	18
66	22
70-72	24
78	26
84	28

Decreasing social distancing to allow for two students per seat, not skipping any seats, the following number of students will be able to ride the bus:

Rated Capacity	Number of Students
34	24
52	36
66	44
70-72	48
78	52
84	56

If health conditions indicate buses should not run at full capacity, the district should develop plans for alternative capacity levels or consider suspending bus transportation altogether. For example, a district may decide that transporting at 2/3 capacity could be feasible with some double runs whereas 50% capacity may not be feasible at all. Any decision to suspend transportation for a period of time will impact the instructional model.



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### *Ventilation*

Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, such as opening windows and roof hatches to the degree recommended by the Kentucky Department for Public Health. Do not open windows and roof hatches if they pose a safety or health risk (e.g., allowing pollens in or exacerbating asthma symptoms) to children using the school bus. Children with medical concerns, allergies, or asthma should be assigned seating at the front of bus with the windows up.

## **Employee Safety Considerations**

### *Drivers and Monitors*

Drivers and monitors will have temperature scans and complete any employee health screening per district protocol. A sample Employee Self-Assessment Health Screening form from the Kentucky Personnel Cabinet can be found at the end of this document. Drivers that start from their home shall follow the same protocol and report temperatures that are greater than 100.4 degrees to their designated supervisor. All drivers and monitors will wear a face mask or face shield unless they are unable to do so and have been provided with a doctor's excuse. Use gloves for any direct contact with a student.

### *Bus Garage Employees*

All employees will maintain social distancing to the extent possible. They should enter through one door and exit through a different door if available. All employee temperatures will be checked as they enter the work area and employees will complete any employee health screening per district protocol. Garage employees that also are bus drivers and monitors will be checked prior to driving a route. Employees shall wear a mask unless they are unable to do so and have been provided with a doctor's excuse. All garage employees will clean and sanitize surfaces and shared tools daily. Shared tools need to be sanitized between use by different people.

### *Idle Buses/Between Runs*

Employees will wear a face mask any time they are inside a bus, even if it is for maintenance or cleaning. Surfaces and high-touch areas should be cleaned and disinfected between runs. Check to ensure there is enough hand sanitizer for each run. Ventilate the bus to maintain air circulation when possible.

### *Gloves*

Nitrile gloves should always be worn when working the elementary runs or special needs routes. These students often need more assistance and there may be a requirement to touch students during strapping them into seatbelts or lifting them to the seat.



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### *Driver Barriers*

Installing barriers of any type, including shower curtains, is a modification to the school bus and is not allowed. Although school buses are specified by the Kentucky Board of Education, they are regulated by the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. There currently have been no changes to the standards. School bus manufacturers are looking at possibilities, but they have not been confirmed.

### *Bus Cleaning*

Buses shall be disinfected/sanitized between routes utilizing the manufacturer's recommendations. Wipe down all seats that were used and high-touch areas of unused seats. At the end of the day, the bus shall receive a thorough disinfecting/sanitizing and all surfaces wiped down. Manufacturer recommendations for cleaning may be found on their websites:

- [BlueBird](#)
- [IC Bus](#)
- [Thomas Built](#)

All drivers shall have sanitizing sprays and towels available to them, but do not store aerosol cans on the bus as they might explode in high heat. Districts also may use electrostatic sprayers to disinfect buses at the end of each shift. All cleaning supplies must be out of the reach of students.



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## Additional Resources

- [Opening America Up Again guidance](#), Pages 43 and 53
- [CDC guidance for transit operators](#)
- [National Association for Pupil Transportation](#)
- [National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services](#)

**Appendix A: Sample Survey**

**(District Name) District Sample Transportation Survey**

Students riding the bus to and from school and for school-related activities will be required to practice social distancing and wear a mask for the foreseeable future. Please answer the following questions regarding transportation for the 2020-2021 school year:

1.	When school starts back, and if your child(ren) are eligible, will you be utilizing school transportation services for your child(ren)?	YES                  NO										
2.	If no, why? Please check all that apply.	<input type="radio"/> I am concerned about exposure to COVID-19. <input type="radio"/> Parent/guardian will arrange for (transportation). <input type="radio"/> Other _____										
3.	If YES, please indicate the child's first name and school the child will attend for the upcoming school year 2020-2021.	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;">Student</td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;">School</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table>	Student	School	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Student	School											
_____	_____											
_____	_____											
_____	_____											
_____	_____											
4.	Did your child(ren) ride the bus during the 2019-2020 school year? Please indicate the child's first name and bus stop (last year).	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;">Student</td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;">Bus Stop (last year)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> <td style="border: none;">_____</td> </tr> </table>	Student	Bus Stop (last year)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Student	Bus Stop (last year)											
_____	_____											
_____	_____											
_____	_____											
_____	_____											
5.	Will your child(ren) be able to wear a mask for the duration of the ride?	YES                  NO										
6.	Do you have ideas or concerns that you feel need to be addressed prior to school starting back?	Ideas/concerns:										



**Appendix C: School Bus Seating Chart**

Driver Name:				Bus #:			
<b>DRIVER SIDE</b>				<b>PASSENGER SIDE</b>			
Seat #1				Seat #1			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #2				Seat #2			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #3				Seat #3			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #4				Seat #4			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #5				Seat #5			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #6				Seat #6			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #7				Seat #7			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #8				Seat #8			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #9				Seat #9			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #10				Seat #10			
Student name:				Student name:			
Seat #11				Seat #11			
Student name:				Student name:			