

TRANSPORTATION



SCHOOL REOPENING TOOLKIT: TRANSPORTATION

Providing the first and last school-related experience of each day for many students, school transportation plays a key role in school operations and the opportunities to support student wellbeing. As districts weigh various strategies related to how best to structure the school day from an operational lens, transportation may prove the enabler and the boundary setter for what types of school days, nutritional services, and distancing strategies may be employed based on local context, needs, and risk tolerance. This toolkit provides an overview of considerations, strategies, and resources to help districts ensure that student transportation continues to play a support role to students in keeping them as safe as possible going to and from school.

All information in the document is non-regulatory guidance issued for general informational purposes only. This document is not intended to constitute legal advice. Because local school board policy and unique facts make dramatic differences in analyzing any situation, the Tennessee Department of Education advises each school district to consult with the local school board attorney for specific legal advice regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school operations.

II. Checklist

Survey Transportation Needs

While districts collect student transportation needs every year, ensuring the robustness and accuracy of that information will be even more important for school openings for 2020-21 as families' needs and risks tolerances will vary drastically. Districts should aim to collect transportation needs as early as possible through multiple mediums, such as online surveys, robo-calls and school call-ins, and enrollment events or school hours. If student demand for bus transport has evolved substantially from prior years, transportation leads will need as much time as possible to alter bus routes and schedules. If more students are going to be car riders, then school sites must plan to revise any drop-off and pick-up procedures to account for increased numbers of cars each day. This information will also permit transportation and operations leads to plan for the optimal social distancing strategies that are feasible for each site.

Note: If districts collect multiple data points from parents, transportation survey questions should be included in a single outreach point rather than a separate contact.

Communicate Procedural Shifts

Regardless of the extent to which transportation procedures may vary from prior years, districts should plan to communicate early and often with families. As families make decisions about student transportation, they will need information on how and to what extent bus transportation protocols are different. Key topics for communication include:

- Updated protocols for social distancing on the buses
- Safety precautions, including cleaning processes, that have been used over the summer and will be used on a daily/weekly operating basis
- Student/family responsibilities at the bus stop and on the bus ride
- Any limitations or requests for limiting of bus transportation demand should a district's transportation strategy require fewer riders
- Any changes to routes or timing

Communications of these changes should complement any shifts in other school protocols so that families glean a sense of the daily experience for students.

□ **Daily Protocols**

As districts determine their school operations strategies, shifts in transportation protocols may be required to align to the goals of the overall student experience. This may include considerations on bus routing, bus stops, ridership, and cleaning protocols.

Routing

To the degree a district determines to set social distancing expectations for student transportation, various strategies may be employed to reduce the number of students on a given bus at one time. These strategies, however, require robust family outreach and planning time to implement effectively.

- Reduce Ridership: Through a pre-opening family survey, transportation leads may learn that fewer families plan to use bus transport in the upcoming school year. The survey and enrollment communications are also opportunities to encourage alternative modes of transport if feasible for students so that the pool of students needing bus transport may be minimized. This change would also require the revision of routes. (Note: If bus transport is required in a student's 504 plan/IEP, the service must be provided.)
- Staggering Start/End Times: Transportation and district/school leads may consider staggering the start/end times of various schools across the district if they share bus service or within a school by grade bands to minimize students on the bus at one time. For example, early elementary grades may start at 7:30 and later grades at 8:30, providing a window for a second run of routes. Districts would need to consider how to handle siblings and the cost of an additional run of routes.
- Shorten Routes: While requiring additional adjustments to pick-up times and longer personnel shift hours, transportation leads may opt to chunk existing routes into smaller runs to accommodate fewer students on the bus at a single time.
- Additional Buses: If feasible from a bus, staff, and fiscal capacity lens, districts may look to employ the use of additional buses to provide the same student coverage with fewer students on any one bus.

The above strategies are not mutually exclusive, and may be combined with one another or alternative approaches to meet the local expectations for student transportation. Each of these strategies requires various capacity, both fiscal and personnel to implement. They may also be influenced by any additional cleaning/disinfecting protocols. Districts should account for these capabilities when selecting a transportation and overall operations strategy.

Bus Stops

Transportation leads should provide careful considerations to any new expectations of students/families while waiting on buses for pick-up or drop-off at stops and plan to communicate often and robustly to families. Districts should explain to students and families all new and existing protocols, including:

- Health Screenings: Will the district conduct health screenings at bus stops? Doing so may require additional staff and equipment, and families will need to be prepared for the morning process.
- Family Responsibility: Should families be expected to wait with students at pick-up locations? If screenings are used, families need to be informed of the expectation should a student exhibit a fever or other signs related to illness (e.g. must take student home from bus stop).
- Social Distancing: Should students socially distance themselves from peers while waiting for the bus or lining up to board? Expectations should be shared with both families and students.
- Bus Loading/Exiting: Are there any new protocols for how students board/exit the bus? Should students wait until the student in front of them is fully seated / off the bus before proceeding to board or exit?

Bus Ride

Central to any revisions to the transportation strategy must be the desired goals and feasibility of changes to the bus riding experience. If districts opt to require social distancing on the bus or other safe guard measures, these expectations should be communicated to students and families, in addition to transportation staff members and drivers. CDC guidance encourages bus transit operations to limit close contact with others by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet, when possible. Recognizing the feasibility of social distancing relies heavily on strategies for demand listed above, there are still important considerations that may factor into bus riding protocols:

- Spacing Seats: Consider as much spacing among students as possible by taping off every other row and placing one student per seat. If possible, consider having the first two rows behind the driver remain vacant to ensure proper distancing from the driver, even if student distancing is less feasible.
- Assigned Seats: In collaboration with the state health department and to support any contact tracing needs, consider having assigned seats on the bus, making it easier to note when a student is not present for a bus ride (especially for districts without electronic ridership logs).
- Face Coverings: Determine whether masks or other face coverings will be required or not for students and/or drivers.
- Siblings: Consider having siblings share seats while other students maintain individual

- seats, noting that families are already regularly in contact with one another.
- Air Circulation: Weather permitting, lower the windows on the bus to increase fresh air flow.
- Personal Hygiene: Provide hand sanitizer on each bus for use of students boarding/exiting, as well as drivers.
- Additional Support: Consider using a bus monitor or additional staff to ensure students are following protocols. Any additional support staff should be trained on protocols and expectations along with drivers.

Cleaning

In following robust cleaning protocols, districts and transportation leads may consider adjusting expectations on school bus cleaning/disinfecting to be more frequent. To do so, districts should consider a feasible schedule and defined checklist of types of cleaning required (e.g. high touch areas of the bus), cost and securing of additional EPA-approved cleaning supplies, and defining who will be responsible for conducting the protocols (e.g. outsourced or drivers). These procedures should be mapped onto daily schedules, but also include contingencies for additional protocols for if a student or driver on a bus has a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19. Districts should communicate any updated protocols to families as well, informing them of any precautions being taken to ensure as clean environments as possible. (See Resources section below for links to cleaning recommendations.)

□ ***Driver and Bus Aides Training***

As transportation staff return to work, districts should ensure they are properly trained and supported on any new policies and operations.

- Consider training for drivers to ensure they are prepared to communicate with parents or connect parents to the proper resources regarding the district's re-entry plan specifically as it relates to policies and expectations for transportation.
- In consultation with the health department and CDC guidance, consider policies and procedures surrounding cleaning the school bus:
 - Consider the number of cleanings per day. CDC guidance (available [here](#)) encourages a routine of increased frequency of cleaning and disinfecting daily, and the Tennessee Department of Health recommends cleanings between each routes.
 - Consider who will do the cleaning. If it is not contracted out, consider training staff on proper cleaning protocol. Consider the additional personnel-hours required to keep this cleaning schedule. Consider what personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g. gloves, masks, etc.) might be required to do the cleaning.

- Consider what disinfectants will be used, limiting to EPA approved cleaners (information available [here](#)). Consider the fumes that may be left behind, how to mitigate them, and how that might affect students.
 - Consider training to ensure drivers are prepared to enact possible district social distancing policies, temperature checks, or other new protocols on the bus.
 - In collaboration with the state health department, deliberate around protocols and training for staff to ensure appropriate communication regarding student health, personal health, HIPAA, and medical confidentiality:
 - Consider trainings around recognizing and reporting signs of illness, both of students and selves.
 - Develop protocols for communicating with parents, school staff, and communities around positive test result for a student or driver.
 - Conduct inventory of necessary supplies, especially cleaning and hygiene supplies, and where necessary, fast track purchase orders for essential supplies to ensure drivers and staff have time to familiarize themselves with new products/equipment. Plan for possible delays in delivery timelines as supplies are currently in high demand.
- ***Driver and Bus Aides Safety***
 - In partnership with the state health departments and district policies, consider developing driver self-screening and wellness checks, illness reports, and quarantine protocols.
 - As with all employees, consider training drivers on district expectations for self-screening, illness reporting, and mandated time-off/quarantining.
 - Consider policies in partnership with bus companies around the wearing of cloth face coverings and other personal protective equipment (PPE) for bus drivers, including potential protocols in event of personnel non-compliance:
 - Consider whether or not drivers should wear masks or other cloth face coverings, what type should be worn, and whether or not the district will be able to provide them to drivers.
 - Consider whether or not students should wear masks or other cloth face coverings, what type should be worn, and whether or not the district will be able to provide them to students.
 - Consider guidelines to drivers around the appropriate use of additional PPE, including face shields for drivers who may have close contact with children who are prone to spitting or otherwise spreading respiratory droplets. Consider how these additional measures might affect standard operations, or the driver's ability to safely navigate driving and other bus operations.
 - Consider policies in partnership with bus companies around hand sanitizer and plexi-glass or other bus dividers, including considering divider impact on bus safety:

- Consider making hand sanitizer available on the bus as students enter and/or exit.
 - Consider these dividers as an alternative or additional precaution to social distancing on the bus.
 - Consider the implications related to Tennessee bus specifications and driver safety requirements.
- In consultation with district financial and procurement teams, discuss policies and practices related to the district financial capability and procurement processes to purchase necessary cleaning supplies and PPE for drivers and staff.

III. Best Practices

Develop Clear Protocols around Communication and Prepare for Flexibility

As school operations resume, leveraging district partnerships including with the state health department and bus companies will be critical in providing the necessary infrastructure for re-opening. In planning the schedule of the next school year, consider how transportation infrastructure will be impacted by various decision points. As district leaders make decisions around normal operation, alternative scheduling, school sports, and remote learning, consider the district's capacity to transport students to and from school safely and effectively, as well as the transportation's role in delivering school nutrition services to students. In order for this to be done effectively, strong engagement with parents, bus companies, drivers, and school staff will need to be ongoing, reinforcing messaging around the need for flexibility as local health conditions make impact decisions throughout the course of the school year.

Plan for Driver Shortages

As transportation demand across the county lessened, so too did many of the companies that districts partner with to provide student bus transportation. Additionally, many drivers may be in high-risk categories, hold additional jobs/responsibilities that prevent them from absorbing additional hours, and/or come in frequent contact with a high number of individuals on a daily basis. These factors combined create a risk of bus driver shortages to occur both before and throughout the school year. Districts should consider this possibility, factoring in contingency plans when or if a bus is unable to run on its expected schedule. In cases where transportation is contracted with an external vendor, districts should ensure the company's protocols and expectations are clearly defined in advance of the school year. In models where transportation is handled internally to districts, leads should consider ways to increase the substitute driver pools with vendors or

internally, and to increase communication mechanisms to families should a route time need to shift. In either case, districts and schools should plan for how potential driver shortages may impact school operations and the best way to ensure students are still able to receive instruction.

Do Not Overlook Adjustments in Car Ridership

While much attention is dedicated to adjusting bus transportation, districts and schools should likewise devote time to analyzing expected car ridership and the logistical impact on student drop-off and pick-up. If a district expects significant increases in car riders, then schools may need to rethink protocols of how, when, and where car lines should be formed and operate. Building on early communication with families to develop a sense of scale, schools may opt to use adjusted entrances to the building to ensure there is more capacity for vehicles to drop of students without blocking roads or consider staggering drop-off times by grade bands. District may also partner with local law enforcement who are experienced in traffic control strategies. While multiple options exist, schools must account for these shifting logistics in order to maintain efficient and safe school openings and dismissals.

IV. Recommended Schedules and Procedures

Site Re-Opening Checklist

The table below provide an overview checklist of action items to consider as districts begin to consider re-opening and implications on transportation. Districts should utilize this checklist as an additional resource, complementing internal school opening protocols that are currently in place.

Topic & Action Item	Complete
<p>Driver and Bus Aides Training: Determine how and when to train bus drivers and aides. Consider the following:</p>	
<p>In consultation with health department guidance and district command center, consider policies and procedures surrounding cleaning the school bus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider the number of cleanings per day. CDC guidance (available here) is disinfecting the bus at least once a day, and the Tennessee Department of Health recommends cleanings after each route. ○ Consider who will do the cleaning. If it is not contracted out, consider training staff on proper cleaning protocol. Consider the additional personnel-hours required to keep this cleaning schedule. Consider what PPE (gloves, masks) might be required to do the cleaning. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider what disinfectants (available information here) will be used and the need to order well in advance of the start of school. Consider the fumes that may be left behind and how that might affect students. 	
<p>Consider training to ensure drivers are prepared to enact possible district social distancing policies, temperature checks or other new protocols on the bus.</p>	
<p>In collaboration with the health department and district command center, deliberate around protocols and training for staff to ensure appropriate communication regarding student health, personal health, HIPAA, and medical confidentiality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate around recognizing and reporting signs of illness, both of students and selves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider protocols for communicating with parents, school staff, and communities around positive test result for a student or driver 	
<p>Conduct inventory of necessary supplies, especially cleaning and hygiene supplies, and where necessary, fast track purchase orders for essential supplies.</p>	
<p>Site Preparation</p>	
<p>In partnership with the health department and local command centers, consider develop driver self-screening and wellness check, illness report, and quarantine protocols</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As with all employees, consider training drivers on district expectations for self-screening, illness reporting, and mandated time-off/quarantining. ○ Ensure any screenings include both a temperature check and the recommended questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 within the past 14 days? ○ Are you experiencing a cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, or stomach symptoms? ○ Have you had a fever in the last 48 hours? ○ Have you had new loss of taste or smell? 	
<p>In partnership with the health department and local command centers, develop contact tracing protocol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider having a system in place to provide documentation regarding ridership to assist the department of health with contact tracing. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Districts without electronic ridership tracking capabilities may consider the possibility of keeping ridership logs. 	
<p>Special Populations: Consider how to plan to ensure that IEPs and 504 plans are being met with fidelity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider additional PPE or training for staff working with high impact students who may be prone to coughing, spitting, or otherwise spreading respiratory droplets. ○ Consider additional PPE or training needs for staff who are required to assist with student seat restraints. 	
<p>Revise and Refine Discipline Policies: Consider training on how enforcement of social distancing/PPE use and other student behavior may be considered going forward.</p>	
<p>Communication with parents and community members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider training for drivers to ensure they are prepared to communicate with parents or connect parents to the proper resources regarding the district’s re-entry plan specifically as it relates to policies and expectations for transportation. ○ Consider developing clear protocols, communicating expectations with parents and guardians around signs of illness and sending students to school 	
<p>Consider bus social distancing policies including those proposed by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Consult families regarding their plans for the coming school year for getting students to and from school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider having students social distanced from the driver even if it is not feasible to have students social distanced from one another. ○ Evaluate feasibility of assigned bus seating and/or running more routes to ensure safe transportation of students. If buses cannot be socially distanced due to restraints, consider the communication implications for parents and the larger community. 	
<p><i>Driver and Bus Aide Safety</i></p>	
<p>Consider policies in partnership with bus companies around masks or other cloth face coverings, face shields, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) for bus drivers, including potential protocols in event of personnel non-compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider whether or not drivers should wear masks or other cloth face coverings, what type should be worn, and whether or not the district will be able to provide them. ○ Consider whether or not students should wear masks or other cloth 	

<p>face coverings, what type should be worn, and whether or not the district will be able to provide them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide guidelines to drivers around the appropriate use of additional PPE, including face shields for drivers who may have close contact with children who are prone to spitting or otherwise spreading respiratory droplets. 	
<p>Consider policies in partnership with bus companies around hand sanitizer and plexi-glass or other bus dividers, including considering divider impact on bus safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider making hand sanitizer available on the bus as students enter and/or exit. ○ Consider that these dividers are not currently allowable in TN school bus specifications. ○ Consider these dividers as an alternative or additional precaution to encourage social distancing on the bus. 	
<p>In consultation with district financial and procurement teams, discuss policies and practices related to the district financial capability and procurement processes to purchase necessary cleaning supplies and PPE</p>	
<p>Inform and train school community on any modified school procedures or best practices being implemented in response to the outbreak, leveraging the health departments as partners.</p>	

V. Resource List

Federal Considerations

- [What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19, Centers of Disease Control](#)
- [Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting, Centers of Disease Control](#)
- [Joint Guidance on the Application of FERPA and HIPAA to Student Health Records](#)

Additional Transportation Resources

- [COVID-19 Resources for School Bus Personnel, American Federation of Teachers](#)
- [8 Tips for Cleaning School Buses in the Time of Coronavirus](#)
- [National Association of Pupil Transportation COVID-19 Resources](#)

