



**NEW YORK ASSOCIATION
FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION**

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NYAPT TASK FORCE ON RESUMING TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

Abstract

Schools across our State will reopen soon, and school transportation services will play an important role in the reopening. This document, compiled by a NYAPT task of experienced school transportation leaders outlines considerations involved in resuming school transportation operations in the COVID-19 environment.

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**NYAPT Task Force on
Resuming School Transportation Operations
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NYAPT Task Force on Resuming School Transportation Operations

On March 16th, school buildings across New York State closed and in person instruction was discontinued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. School buses were parked, and transportation operations shifted gears from transporting students to and from school to delivering food, school supplies and providing Wi-Fi in support of educators promoting remote instruction to students.

Our state is now beginning the unprecedented process of reopening schools. At some time in the future, school transportation providers will be asked to resume transporting students to and from schools once again. The transportation process may look quite different in many ways.

The school transportation industry is asking what it will take to resume transportation operations once schools reopen. In simple terms, “what’s next”? These questions cannot be answered definitively. We go forward with the information we have today and accept that the information changes regularly as health professionals learn more about COVID-19.

NYAPT has convened a task force to research the issues involved in the school re-opening process from a school transportation perspective. The goal of this task force is to identify the issues that need to be addressed to safely resume transportation services. We have documented what we know at this point in time and have formulated action steps to address those issues.

We encourage all school transportation leaders to be part of their administrative school planning group. Get involved early in the process. We encourage school administrators to invite their pupil transportation manager to join discussions on school re-opening processes. The school transportation manager is best prepared to provide recommendations on matters of transportation of students. The last thing a school district wants to experience is to open schools and have the transportation department unprepared for that event.

As an industry we will need to be flexible and appreciate that we are living in uncertain times. We all are uncomfortable with uncertainty, but we need to embrace the unknowns and find ways to adapt our operations to function safely in this new environment.

This document does not promote a particular course of action over another. It is provided to initiate discussion and to help understand the issues. Our state is diverse, and each region of our state will likely adopt slightly different processes and procedures.

We have organized the issues and follow up actions steps in general categories as indicated below.

- Staffing
- Social Distancing and Bus Capacity
- Routing
- Cleaning and Sanitizing
- Special Education Transportation
- Communications
- Transportation Operations Center

In each category, we define issues, followed by suggested action steps to consider. The action steps are suggestions or considerations provided by the NYAPT task force, based on government guidelines and industry best practices. These action steps are not to be taken as requirements or mandates. What we can share to date follows:

I. **Staffing**

➤ **Issues**

- Driver shortages are anticipated
 - NYS DMV has been closed for several weeks – a backlog of testing is anticipated. (Phased in re-opening on a regional basis began on June 1, 2020).
 - Some drivers may choose not to return to driving duties if they have health [risk factors as defined by the CDC](#).
 - Some number of drivers may have moved on to other jobs during layoff. The “B” commercial driver’s license is a valuable license that can be used in the expanding package delivery industry.
 - Normal attrition may cause some unknown percentage of staff to leave the driving profession.
 - If COVID disease spikes during the school year, temporary staffing shortages might occur.
 - Loss of income for drivers due to suspension of extra-curricular activities may cause some drivers to leave the job.
- If instructional schedules are expanded, drivers/attendants/monitors may not be able to work additional hours other than those agreed upon when they were hired, due to other commitments.
- Additional driving staff may be needed to accommodate lowering density on school buses.
- Additional bus attendants/monitors may be needed to manage safety and social distancing for students riding regular route buses.

- Additional routes for students with IEPs, homeless, and foster care students may require more staffing.
- Action Steps:
 - Advise administration of the need to decide on instructional schedule as soon as possible so transportation staffing needs can be determined.
 - New driver training
 - Continue training new driver candidates to fill anticipated empty driving slots, even though DMV road test appointments may not yet be available.
 - Classroom train new driver candidates who do not have a permit in anticipation of the reopening of DMV permit testing.
 - Consider using the online [NHTSA nine module](#) school bus in-service curriculum to prepare new driver candidates
 - Cross train drivers to cover for absenteeism.
 - Driver/monitor/attendant safety
 - School districts must have a safety plan in place to open.
 - Communicate the safety plan to all staff to assure them of their safety while operating the bus.
 - Provide training to all staff on COVID-19 safety protocols as they relate to the district safety plan.
 - Have masks available for students who do not have masks as they board the bus if required.
 - Review driver 19-A files to determine number of drivers with health risk factors.
 - Provide PPE to all staff – [CDC guidance](#).
 - a. [Face masks](#)
 - b. Gloves
 - c. Face shields
 - d. Hand sanitizer
 - e. Gowns (bus attendant/monitor staff)
 - f. Train staff on use of cleaning and disinfecting practices
 - g. Train staff on proper use PPE.
 - Inventory and order PPE with sufficient lead time for use when schools open. Shortages are anticipated
 - Research proper face masks for driver use.
 - a. CO2 overload occurs with the use of certain face masks. This might be a health threat to some staff. Research face masks with CO2 mitigation design.
 - b. Proper masks are necessary to avoid vision obstruction for drivers.

- c. Use masks that provide a level of comfort for staff due to the need for long term use.
 - d. Some mask styles cause fogging of eyeglasses.
 - Avoid those mask styles.
- Establish protocols/processes to continually monitor the health of school transportation staff
- Create protocols to maximize staff compliance to those safety protocols.
- Determine how positive cases, both of students and staff, will be communicated to staff and what procedures follow.
- Provide access to mental health resources for transportation staff in crisis or under stress.
- Close off seats that students may not use to provide for social distancing from the bus driver.
 - Make the seat behind the driver off limits.
 - Use tape or decals to mark off 6-foot distancing in the aisle.
- Install sneeze shields around driver area. Note: This may not be possible in the short run as sneeze guards on school buses require FMVSS approval and local DOT approval. Prototypes are being evaluated.
- Provide temperature checks of staff and students – this will be a local decision.
 - Note: Bus drivers should not be required to take temperatures of students as they board the bus. This is a distraction to their primary responsibility.
- Students who identify as sick in school should be transported home by parents – not school transportation staff.
- Provide for hand sanitizing for school bus riders.
- Provide adequate supplies and cleaning materials and make readily available for bus drivers, e.g., soap, disinfectant wipes, paper towels, tissues.
- Encourage staff to self-screen before coming to work.
- Cross train bus staff to provide coverage in the event of extended absenteeism due to sickness.

II. **Social Distancing and Bus Capacity**

➤ Issues

- CDC considerations suggest creating distance between children on the school bus when possible.
 - [Seat one child per row, skip rows. This results in 6 students on a 66-passenger bus. \(90% capacity reduction\)](#)

- The industry is concerned about this guidance due to the cost and the lack of resources (drivers and buses) to implement.
- As a density reduction strategy, another consideration is to seat 1 student per seat, all students wearing masks. ([See “The Socially Distanced School Day” – Education Week.](#))
 - This results in 22 students on a 66-passenger bus. (50% capacity reduction)
- Density reduction on a van-type bus will be more difficult to achieve.
 - Consider when possible using a larger or full-size bus where a smaller van-type bus has been used in the past to accommodate density reduction.

➤ Action Steps

- Implement a process for parents of eligible students to request transportation to develop an accurate picture of students who will ride the bus.
- Provide additional adult supervision (monitors) on buses to manage social distancing.
- Encourage students to wear face masks while in transit when social distancing is not possible.
- Allow siblings to sit together.
- Take student attendance on every route, every day, to and from school. The attendance sheets should be documented in writing and retained for contact tracing.
- Students should be loaded in sequential route order. First on sit in the back on to school trips, last off sit in the back on take home trips.
- Adjustments should be made to allow buses to unload immediately upon arrival, and to depart immediately upon loading, to minimize riding time as much as possible.
 - This may require changes at school, for unloading and entry, and loading and departure.
 - Route timing will be affected by delayed loading/unloading processes.
 - All bus routes should not load/unload at the same time to maximize social distancing of students.
- Consider adding bus routes to reduce load levels on buses.
 - Consider retaining buses scheduled for replacement in the short term until actual student ridership is determined.
 - Consider short term bus leasing as an option until actual bus inventory needs are determined.

III. Routing

➤ Issues

- Routing personnel will likely need to develop multiple routing scenarios to provide to administration to analyze different instructional scheduling options.
 - Split sessions
 - Alternating days
 - Hybrid schedules – some grade levels in person learning at school buildings, others grade levels virtual remote learning.
- Increase in McKinney Vento homeless and foster care student transportation is anticipated.
- More stops may need to be created to reduce density at bus stops, causing routes to run slower.
- School site loading/unloading processes will need to be evaluated to reduce density at those sites during loading/unloading process. This will likely add time to bus routes.
- If district protocols dictate disinfecting in between bus tiers, more time will be added to bus routes.

➤ Action Steps

- Computerized routing system will be an important tool that transportation departments must have access to in their operations.
- Routing personnel should work with their computer routing provider to train on creating multiple routing scenarios.
- Important to make decisions on instructional decision early to evaluate transportation cost and feasibility.
- Assign a driver to a single bus and specific routes to minimize the number of drivers using a particular bus and to allow the driver to get to know the students.
- Stagger pick up and drop off times to reduce density at bus stops and school loading zones.
- Districts are encouraged to limit student movement between bus routes.
 - Discontinue allowing students to ride different buses on different days of the week.
 - Consider how cooperative transportation contracts with a mix of students from different districts may impact tracking and tracing.
 - If possible, mirror AM and PM routes, so bus riders are the same group each day.

IV. **Cleaning and Sanitizing**

➤ Issues

- Bus sanitizing and thorough cleaning is important to prevent virus transmission. Parents will not use the service unless they feel it is safe.
- Determine cleaning/disinfecting/sanitizing intervals that are best for your operation?
 - Daily?
 - In between tiers?
 - How long does a cleaning process take?
 - Does a bus driver disinfect “high touch” areas in between major cleanings?
 - How often do you deep clean?
- School districts that use public transit and/or private contractor operations should be aware of the fleet disinfecting policies.

➤ Action Steps

- Refer to manufacturer’s recommendations on use of disinfectants/sanitizers. <https://nyapt.org/Resource>
- Use only [products that are approved by the EPA](#) for use against the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Inventory and order cleaning supplies early to avoid supply issues.
- Use same cleaning/disinfecting products as used in schools when possible.
- Be familiar with the Safety Data Sheets for cleaning products used.
- Thoroughly train staff on use of cleaning/sanitizing products.
- Require private contractors to provide school district with written documentation outlining cleaning protocols.
- Follow up with frequent inspections to be sure cleaning/disinfecting protocols are followed on district owned and contracted buses.
- Define what deep cleaning of buses means. Establish schedule and protocol for deep cleaning process.
- Define expectations for quick sanitizing processes for “high touch” areas.
 - Who does this?
 - When is it done?
 - What are “high touch” areas?
- Prohibit eating and drinking on the bus.
- Ensure proper ventilation during cleaning.
- Open windows, roof hatches, and turn fans on during route operation.

- Change heater filters on a more regular basis.

V. **Special Education Transportation**

➤ **Issues**

- Transportation for students with special needs must comply with student's IEP and FAPE requirements.
- How do we arrange bus wheelchair seating so students who use wheelchairs are properly seated far enough apart?
- Will students wear masks, specifically those with behavioral issues or those with a fear of wearing a mask?
- Will students understand the need to social distance?
- How are service animals transported?
- Will additional staff be needed to attend to individual student needs?

➤ **Action Steps**

- Partner with special education staff to determine best practices for face mask use, social distancing, and other safety considerations.
- Use buses with flat floors and tracked seating. This allow for more options to change floor plans in the event wheelchair stations and seat configurations need be altered. Adhere to NYSDOT approved floor plans.
- Increase training for staff to manage issues that arise on a bus transporting student with special needs.
- Purchase theme type masks that students may desire to wear if required.
- Medically fragile students may need separate busing arrangements.
- Provide air conditioning on buses transporting students with special needs.
- Properly maintain and regularly clean air conditioning and heater filter systems.

VI. **Communications**

➤ **Issues**

- Parents must understand that the transportation system is safe, or they will not allow their children to ride the bus.
- Communication is key to addressing these concerns.
- Transportation managers must communicate regularly with administration to explain challenges with transportation.

➤ **Action Steps**

- Communicate safe transportation expectations to parents.
 - Advise parents not to send their children to school or board the bus if sick or with temperature.
 - Consider asking parents to request transportation service or provide an “opt-out” process.
 - Advise parents that school bus COVID-19 safety protocols are in place and share those protocols with the community.
 - Provide parents with flyers, videos or other media to explain safety protocols in place.
 - School bus transportation is 70X safer than any other form of transportation for children to and from school, therefore, encourage parents to use the school bus.
 - Advise parents that school transportation is included in the district’s COVID-19 plan.
- Communicate with Administration.
 - Explain issues implementing transportation services in the COVID-19 pandemic era.
 - Explain challenges with social distancing on a school bus.
 - Explain cleaning and disinfecting processes to gain trust in safety of service.
 - Cost out service options so administration can make decisions based on facts.
- Do not make decisions in a vacuum. Involve all stakeholders.
 - Administration
 - Parents
 - Special Education Department
 - Students
 - Community

VII. **Bus Equipment**

➤ **Issues**

- Improved bus equipment should be considered going forward to address the COVID-19 threat.
 - Sneeze guards to protect the driver.

- Improved air circulation systems, such as air conditioning systems and power roof vents.
- Improved interiors to facilitate cleaning and sanitizing.
- Improved sanitizing systems.

➤ Action Steps

- Work with your bus distributor to understand all options currently available to provide the safest bus possible, given budget constraints.
- Stay involved in state and national associations to learn of improvements in school bus equipment and to understand current thinking.

VIII. Transportation Operations Center

➤ Issues

- How to establish health and safety protocols in the bus garage operations center.

➤ Action Steps

- Provide appropriate PPE and cleaning supplies to office and garage workers.
 - [Face masks](#)
 - Gloves
 - Face shields
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Gowns (bus attendant/monitor staff)
 - Train staff on use of cleaning and disinfecting practices
 - Train staff on proper use PPE.
- Consider split shifts to reduce the density of employees present in the office and garage at any one time.
- Develop density reduction protocols to maximize social distancing in the bus garage, office, and dispatch areas.
 - Eliminate lounge areas.
 - Create one-way walkways.
 - Appointments required to see management/office staff.
 - Eliminate gathering at dispatch area.
- Establish PPE protocols for training and 19-A testing.
- Cross train staff to provide coverage in the event of absenteeism.
- Bus staff to report directly to buses in bus yard.
 - Direct supervision will be required in bus yard as required under FMCSA.

- Limit non-essential visitors to transportation operations center.

IX. Conclusions

As an industry we were not prepared for this crisis. Many of the issues identified and action steps outlined above are best judgments based on health professionals' guidelines and government mandates available as of this date. Health care professionals are learning more about COVID-19 every day. New knowledge and understanding of the virus will cause the industry to amend current thinking and processes in transportation operations. Therefore, this document will be continually updated as new information comes forward.

Transportation officials are concerned that these new COVID-19 safety protocols might very well overwhelm the system. School transportation operations have finite resources in terms of equipment and staffing. Given the need to provide social distancing, increasing demands on staff, and the need to meet varying schedules based on instructional needs, efficiency may become a distant secondary consideration to safety. There is a chance that the resources available to your local transportation system may not be sufficient. We must be careful to balance the ability of the school district to meet new service requests with the need to address health risk mitigation with available resources.

It is also important to understand that the COVID-19 health risk cannot be completely eliminated on the school bus. As an industry, we will strive to provide the safest, most risk-free ride possible. However, we cannot guarantee that a student will not be exposed while riding the school bus.

This information may be shared with all stakeholders as necessary to provide insights into the complicated issues that the school transportation industry will face in resuming services. Understand, this is not a final product. As new information is learned about COVID-19, we will attempt to update this document accordingly.

In closing, always consider health department guidelines in your decision making and seek legal counsel where necessary when implementing a procedure or process.

X. **Resources**

1. Center for Disease Control “Considerations for Schools”
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>
2. What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/bus-transit-operator.html>
3. IC Bus Cleaning Guidance
<https://nyapt.org/resources/Documents/IK2200091%20-%20Cleaning%20an%20IC%20Bus.pdf>
4. Blue Bird Bus Cleaning Guidance
<http://www.newyorkbussales.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20-0326REV-A-SERVICE-UPDATE-Proper-Disinfecting-of-School-Buses.pdf>
5. Thomas Bus Cleaning Guidance
<https://thomasbuiltbuses.com/content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19-Cleaning-Instructions.pdf>
6. National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services
<http://www.nasdpts.org/Documents/NASDPTS%20Information%20Report-Coronavirus%20and%20Student%20Transportation.pdf>
7. Center for Disease Control “Assessing Risk Factors for Severe COVID-19 Illness”
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/assessing-risk-factors.html>
8. Center for Disease Control “People Who are Higher Risk for Severe Illness”
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>
9. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
<https://www.nhtsa.gov/school-buses/school-bus-driver-service-safety-series>
10. NYS DMV Reopening Guidance
<https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/dmv-reopening-guidance>
11. Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-emergency Transport Vehicles
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/disinfecting-transport-vehicles.html>
12. Cleaning Products Registered in NY by NYSDEC for Use Against COVID-19
https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/materials_minerals_pdf/covid19.pdf

13. EPA Approved Cleaning Products

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>

14. “The Socially Distanced School Day” - Education Week

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/reopening-schools/the-socially-distanced-school-day.html>