



## TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS UNDER COVID-19

The Arizona School Risk Retention Trust, Inc. (the Trust), prepared this advisory document to assist school districts with transportation recommendations related to school district reopening. Staff understands that there is not a “one size fits all” approach that will work for each district. We encourage you, therefore, to review the information in this document with your administration team to determine the best approach for you.

In addition to the guidance presented here, you are encouraged to review all current federal, state, and local guidelines regarding social distancing, cleaning, and daily operations. These include (but are not limited to) guidelines from:

- the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#),
- the [Occupational Health and Safety Administration \(OSHA\)](#),
- the [Arizona Department of Education](#),
- the [Arizona Department of Transportation](#),
- the [Arizona Department of Health Services](#),
- the [Trust](#), and
- neighboring school districts.

Districts are also encouraged to review and update their emergency preparedness plans; district pandemic plans (if they exist); and transportation department safety plans and continuity of operations plans.

### Health and Safety Protocols: Bus Transport

#### Social distancing and bus ridership

*General considerations.* Social distancing for transportation will be a challenge.<sup>1</sup> New guidelines may mean fewer bodies on the bus at any given time, as well as physical distancing at bus stops. (Sending letters of intent to parents as early as possible will

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<sup>1</sup> A six-foot social distancing rule means approximately 13 students can ride a 78-passenger bus. On an 84-passenger bus, allowing 3 passengers per row where there is a passenger at each window and one at the aisle, with the middle passenger alternating sides by row, results in a 62% reduction in ridership. Allowing 2 passengers per seat and 4 per row on an 84-passenger bus reduces ridership by only 30%.

help determine the number of students to plan for.) Considerations for your department to meet social distancing guidelines include the following:

- Use the largest bus available to accommodate social distancing, and repurpose and make use of white fleet vehicles to allow school buses to meet social distancing guidelines.
- Identify and prioritize critical trips and routes, and cancel other services such as field and activity trips, where feasible.
- Consider instituting measures to physically separate or place distance of 6 feet between the driver, bus aide, and passengers.

*Bus stop logistics.* Establish recommendations for how students and parents congregate at bus stops. Will you require waiting passengers to remain in parent vehicles at the stop, or will you allow students to stand together while still observing social distancing guidelines?

Additionally, districts should consider posting clearly visible signage on the outside of buses that communicates to parents that students exhibiting symptoms should not enter the bus.

A bus driver or aide, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), should visually check each student prior to the student loading on the bus. If a student exhibits visible symptoms,<sup>2</sup> the district should consider taking the following steps:

- If the parent is at the bus stop, have the student return to their parent.
- If the parent is not at the bus stop, provide the student with a mask if they do not have one already and—if possible—ensure that the student is socially distanced.

If a student has a chronic condition such as allergies or asthma, parents should inform bus staff of that condition. If that has occurred, those students should be permitted to board the bus.

*Seating.*<sup>3</sup> Below are some items districts may consider regarding how to implement social distancing on buses:

- Keep the seats immediately behind the driver and around the bus aide empty in order to protect them both.
- Mark seats that are unavailable by utilizing colored tape to block or place “Xs” on them.

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<sup>2</sup> Visible symptoms include runny nose, cough, shortness of breath, or vomiting.

<sup>3</sup> For safety reasons, seats may not be removed unless seat spacing meets the requirements in Arizona Administrative Code § R13-13-107 (26) (C) Minimum Standards for School Bus Body.

- Use floor decals, signs, and visual aids to help students, drivers, and bus aides follow seating and social distancing guidelines. (You may also want to use visual aids to remind passengers not to stand too close to the bus driver.)

Keep in mind that siblings and those quarantined together can sit together. Also consider special needs and bus aide seating proximity to allow for one-on-one attention.

*Route and scheduling considerations.* Transportation departments, district administrators, and governing board members should evaluate the options given below for making social distancing requirements more manageable. Not each of these options will be feasible for each district, but all are included for districts to consider.

- Plan for additional routes.
- Establish separate drop-offs and pick-ups by zones, grades, or the physical location of the classroom.
- Divide existing routes into smaller/shorter routes.
- Change bell times.
- Split schedules by grade, class, or between online and in-person learning.
- Stagger arrival and departure times as much as possible.
- Limit the number of buses in the loading zone during pick-up and drop-off.

*Loading and unloading.* Where feasible, districts should create maximum space in loading and unloading zones so that social distancing guidelines can be adhered to. If helpful, use signage, stickers, and ground markings to instruct both riders and non-riders as to where it is appropriate for them to stand, how much distance they should keep between them, etc. For passengers who are unloading on campus, consider providing immediate access to a supervised and secured “sanitizing station” that includes hand sanitizer or soap and water; toweling; and no-touch waste receptacles to be used before entering the school. Finally, work with the district’s back-to-school task force to determine if a single point of ingress will be established in order to facilitate health checks. If so, loading zone planning will need to incorporate such a change.

### Personal protective equipment (PPE) on the bus

PPE may take the form of having drivers and bus aides wear a mask/faceguard or a Plexiglas sneeze guard. (Any bus alteration considerations will need to follow [DPS guidelines for use and installation](#).) Districts may also consider providing cloth or disposable masks to students and other passengers if available.

### Cleaning the bus

*Introduction.* When establishing standards for cleaning school buses, be sure to refer to the CDC [Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) document. Don’t forget, too, that all employees working with chemicals must be appropriately trained per [OSHA guidelines](#). Additionally, ensure that only district- and [EPA-approved](#) cleaning products are used.

*Cleaning process.* School buses have numerous “high-touch” surfaces that should be cleaned and disinfected after each morning, mid-day, and afternoon route and after each route between schools. These surfaces include seats, windows, and step rails. Districts should also consider sanitizing these surfaces thoroughly each evening. After disinfection activities are completed, windows should be open to allow the bus to ventilate and air-dry.<sup>4</sup>

Remember that cleaning products and hand sanitizers should not be stored or transported on a school bus due to exposure and fire risks. Because of this, you may wish to consider instituting supervised “cleaning stations” at all school bus and district facility loading zones. Consider including the following items:

- trash receptacles or buckets to hold supplies,
- disinfecting wipes and wash rags,
- spray bottles filled with approved cleaning solution,
- gloves and masks, and
- no-touch trash receptacles for discarded materials.

Cleaning stations should be supervised by a school staff member to ensure that students, visitors, and unauthorized staff members are not exposed to cleaning solutions unnecessarily.

### **Health and Safety Protocols: Employees**

#### Hand-washing

Transportation departments should make a priority of increased hand-washing by employees: (1) before and after routes, shifts, and breaks; (2) after coming in contact with “high touch” surfaces such as buttons and switches, the hand rail, and bus seats; and (3) after putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings. If soap and water are not readily available, employees should use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol.

#### Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Determine the PPE required for each staff group. Your district may decide that any of the following may be used by staff: gloves, face masks, goggles, face shields, and disposable gowns. Next, decide whether staff must arrive onsite wearing such equipment, or whether equipment can be worn after arrival. Finally, be clear on the circumstances under which equipment is required vs. optional (when interacting with others, for example, vs. working in isolation).

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<sup>4</sup> Remember to use only EPA-approved products if your district is considering utilizing: (1) “spray bomb” products that fully engulf the bus; (2) mist or fog machines designed to kill viruses; or (3) third-party vendors who specialize in sanitizing workplace environments.

If your district chooses to supply staff with PPE, establish a process for storing and disseminating the equipment, and for training staff on proper use, cleaning, and disposal. It is also recommended that you consider starting the procurement process for the items four to six weeks in advance of need.

### Sanitation and hygiene

Your department is responsible for keeping facility surfaces clean and disinfected, and having handwashing facilities or sanitizing stations available. Develop and educate staff on specific cleaning and disinfecting procedures, relying on [CDC guidance](#). Post, in areas visible to all staff and students, required hygiene practices and information about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Finally, remember that any employees working with chemicals must be appropriately trained per [OSHA guidelines](#) and should follow the instructions on the labels of cleaning products.

### Illness protocols

Though it is unlikely, you should prepare for the eventuality that one or more of your employees will experience a virus exposure. The district back-to-school task force should determine what the response protocol is, and then discuss it with staff. Elements of that protocol will likely include the following:

Staff should report to their supervisor if they develop symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle aches, or new loss of taste or smell). If symptoms develop during a shift, the staff member should be immediately sent home. If symptoms develop while the staff member is not working, he or she should not return to work until evaluated and cleared by a healthcare provider.

Employees should inform their supervisor if they have a family member at home who is sick with COVID-19, or if they have been in close contact with a confirmed positive case. In such instances, the employee should follow the isolation/quarantine requirements established by the [CDC](#).

Discuss with staff your reporting process when an employee is confirmed to have a COVID-19 infection. If you do inform fellow employees of a colleague's infection, maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). When instructing employees on how to proceed following a confirmed workplace exposure, draw on the [CDC Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure](#).

Explain your district's position on employees who do not believe it is safe to come to work. You will likely want to confer with your HR department and become familiar with the benefits non-working employees may be entitled to, such as unemployment benefits, FMLA, paid time off, or any other form of paid leave available at the worker's discretion. Make sure your department is following the expanded family and medical leave requirements included in the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#).

Finally, convey that failure of employees to comply with established protocols and policies may result in their being sent home and asked to remain there.

## **Health and Safety Protocols: Considerations for Testing and Driver Training**

### Introduction

Before administering any training to a student or employee, all transportation training departments should consider developing, posting, and providing in writing (upon request) a plan that demonstrates conformity with the CDC's social distancing and [workplace sanitation](#) guidelines. The plan should also include policies regarding PPE utilization and COVID-19 safety training.

### Setting expectations

When testing or training is scheduled, staff should set expectations for participants: Health and safety are paramount, and training will be rescheduled if necessary. Participants should be asked to follow basic infection prevention measures before and during training or testing. Specifically, trainers, trainees, and test subjects should:

- skip training or testing and stay at home if they are sick;
- undergo temperature checks with a no-touch thermometer before being permitted to participate;
- observe frequent and thorough hand washing or, if soap and running water are unavailable, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wipes containing at least 60% alcohol;
- cover coughs and sneezes;
- maintain social distance and wear cloth face coverings (training organizations can facilitate the former by staggering training schedules, dividing trainees among multiple trainers, etc.);
- use tissues and discard them in no-touch trash receptacles; and
- limit use of cellphones and electronic devices during training.

### Additional safety considerations

When trainees or test subjects arrive, they should be asked if they have exhibited any symptoms of illness within the past 72 hours. If a student or test subject indicates having experienced symptoms or appears to be exhibiting symptoms of illness at any time during the training or test, he or she should be dismissed. The training or test can be rescheduled as appropriate.

During the on-road portion of in-cab testing and training, the windows of the vehicle should be rolled down sufficiently to create airflow through the cab of the school bus. Social distancing should also be observed whenever practical—for example, during the pre-trip inspection and range driving portions of training and testing.

For in-cab training and testing, trainees and test subjects may clean and disinfect the interior of the vehicle with disinfectant or sanitizing wipes, if available.

## **Department Management**

### Transportation department: the new look

Think about your current dispatch, routing, and transportation office logistics. What needs to change under new social distancing guidelines? Do you need to put up cubicles, partitions, or panels? Do you need any special markings or signage to encourage social distancing? Now is the time for discussions with your HR and maintenance departments to determine what supplies will be needed and what additional steps will be taken in preparation for the school year.

### Third-party vendors

Districts may review Joint Use Agreements and leases with any third party; identify rights and obligations; and make amendments as needed. For example, you may experience increased cleaning fees to keep facilities at desired cleaning levels, or you may need to review a contracted transportation vendor's social distancing and cleaning protocols to ensure they meet your new, stricter guidelines. It's also important for you to communicate with your vendors regarding any updated protocols, including screening or health checks.

### Hiring and retention

*Recruiting in today's world.* Even during normal times, it can be challenging to find interested, qualified bus driver candidates. Under current circumstances, your department may need to be recruiting continuously, using both traditional and alternative approaches. Districts can analyze the feasibility of holding job fairs and drive-the-bus events, as well as advertising on social media if you haven't already. Also, transportation departments can coordinate with the district's HR department to consider restructuring benefits packages to be more "a la carte." Examples may include higher hourly rates if the employee rejects healthcare coverage, or new-hire bonuses. These may be attractive to prospective bus drivers.

Finally, when you do find an interested candidate, consider using online platforms such as Zoom and Google Hangouts, as well as standard teleconferences.

*Retention and incentives.* When it comes to keeping the staff you've got, consider retention incentives for things such as attendance, longevity, and accident-free driving. Bonuses or extra incentives may be just the thing that keeps your bus drivers willing to show up every day and do their jobs under new, stricter workplace guidelines.

## Staying connected

*Communicating with staff.* Where feasible, directors of transportation can involve transportation staff in conversations about existing health practices and any needed changes, and then communicate those changes before they are implemented. Staff will appreciate being included, and they may be more likely to return to work, and stay there, if they believe the district is taking health and safety seriously. Remember, too, that you will need to train your staff on any new health and safety guidelines your department has instituted for the new school year.

*Communicating with parents.* Before school starts, you may want to survey parents—even informally—to assess their wants and needs regarding transportation safety. Then, be sure to keep parents and guardians informed on steps you're taking to protect their children. For example, if your district is going to screen students for COVID-19 symptoms and history of exposure, you should consider communicating the process to parents, including how you'll respond to any adverse results.

Parents will want to know about the steps you have taken to mitigate the spread of germs on school buses. Such information might include:

- how frequently your buses are cleaned and disinfected (note that some parents will want to know if you are using green and safer products);
- what steps you're taking beyond cleaning and disinfecting the bus—for example, providing hand sanitizing stations at unloading zones, or providing protective equipment for drivers and aides; and
- whether you'll continue any new measures once the crisis begins to subside.

Be sure to remind parents of things they can do at home, e.g., reinforce hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, monitor symptoms, etc. Remember, parents and guardians are extremely important partners in promoting safe, healthy practices. This makes open, frequent communication with them essential.

## Budgetary concerns

Finally, remember that any changes you make to your facilities, your routes, or your daily operational flow may affect your overall budget. Consider how adding cubicles, offering driver incentives, and other needed changes will impact your budget, and prepare to answer those tough questions now. For example, if you can meet daily routing needs under the new social distancing guidelines but only at a higher daily operating cost, do you need to consider eliminating field trips and extra-curricular activities? Thinking about such logistics before school starts will help avoid problems as the year progresses.