

## **NAPT Webinar – Going Back to School Before the Kids**

### **Question and Answer**

1.) Safe distancing is 6'. How are you going to put 2 in a seat? 6' would be every 3rd seat. This forces split classes and teacher and Driver OT:

**Accurate point. As the health experts advice adjusts, as we expect it will as states go through the phases, this will hopefully be addressed. JR**

**I anticipate that when we return to a “normal” state that spacing will not be an issue. JOSH**

2.) What kind of discussions are happening in the school districts to address special needs challenges in light of the impact of disabilities on the school bus ride?

**Most Committees on Special Education (CSEs) are doing all they can to stay in compliance with their annual reviews by remotely connecting with parents to review their child(ren)'s Individualized Education Program (IEP). As we know our students with special needs are our most vulnerable population in a school district in many ways. I highly recommend that transportation professionals reach out to their director of special education or CSD teams to work collaboratively with them to brainstorm ideas and ways to help keep these students safe when we return to school. Peter**

3.) Where does the Community Schools, Non-Public Schools come into this as well?

**Regardless of the type of school, the transportation challenges remain the same. If they have a school bus, we can expect the same obstacles as public schools. Institutions of higher learning that have transportation services can expect to deal with some of the same issues. JR**

4.) Will NAPT create general guidelines for Social Distancing for School Bus Transportation? Or will we up with our own guidelines based on our Governor's orders?

**This is an evolving issue. I will bring this up to the NAPT leadership team to see if we can put together some best practices for the industry. Peter**

5.) What methods of training are you currently using to help train new drivers?

**For existing staff, we have moved to online instruction utilizing Zoom that is Supervisor-led. For new drivers, we continue to train them, we just moved to a 1-on-1 format with the driver trainers. JOSH**

6.) During the social distancing are employees still being paid without working?

**Varies from district to district but most public school districts (at least in Texas) have been paying minimum hours guaranteed in the job description. They are on a standby status and must be available to come in if needed. JR**

7.) Is anyone using Zoom to interview candidates?

**Yes, we are using this platform for interviews, as well as staff training, and admin meetings. It has been a great platform, and our district moved forward with purchasing a license, so it wouldn't limit us to number of users, meeting times, etc. It also allowed us to provide conference calling. JOSH**

8.) Have you all started discussing training, both new and ongoing? Dexterity, classroom, and driving? What technology or online interfaces are you all considering?

9.) Is it my understanding that all schools – nationally, will not return this school year?

**I have not heard a decision at the national level. I would assume that they will leave that up to each state to make a decision. I know Texas has cancelled classes for the 2019-20 school year. JOSH**

**While this has not been addressed as a national decision, it appears that most states are heading in that direction. Those that have not made the final decision seem to be leaning toward a complete closure for the remainder of the year. Barry**

10.) With distancing, what do your training programs look like following the recruitment?

**Adjusting to a distance learning blended model is becoming a reality instead of a classroom environment. Behind the wheel training cannot be done online but steps can be taken to keep everyone safe. Difficult, but possible. JR**

11.) In my town I am a volunteer first responder. We are looking at technology that will take our temperature before entering our station. Any thoughts of doing this for staff? Or on the bus or before entering school?

**Some districts are currently doing this for anyone having to come into work. Screening everyone, to include answering questions, at the entrance is a practice that is growing. JR**

**We do this for our staff that drives the buses for food service and the food service workers have their temperatures taken each day before the start of their shifts. Supervisors also take their own temperatures upon arriving to work. As for the logistics of doing this at a school or on the bus, this would require some creative technologies as time entering the building in the morning is a fast paced event. Depending on the geography of the road, this could be a safety issue if this required school bus drivers to manually take the temperature of a student or students. Not to mention the diversion of**

their focus on the safety aspects of the bus stop and loading students that could involve crossing students and controlling traffic. Peter

This has been a discussion I have had with my colleagues in the office, as Peter mentioned this could pose logistical issues especially if students are being checked as they enter the bus. Many of our stops are large and the driver has to be focused on the loading process. Barry

12.) Does your online enrollment have a request or a sign up for bus service?

If your district currently uses digital registration, it is highly likely that a section for bus registration can be easily added then integrated into your routing software. JR

In New York State, every student who lives outside the minimum walking distances (K-8 = 2 miles, 9-12 = 3 miles). However, boards of education can vote to adjust the walk distances to be less. In Fairport, we have K-6 = ¼ mile, and 7-12 = ½ mile. With that being said, we do not have the option of signing up for bus service. However, what we do to maximize ridership is to work with our high school to remove transportation requirements for students who drive to school or ride to school with a friend based on parking pass data. We also send out a mailing to high school families asking if they are not planning to utilize the school bus to let us know and we will remove their transportation requirements for that school year. If they find they end up needing a ride, they just need to contact us and we will assign buses. We have received a good rate of return for families whose students either walk, ride their bicycles, or catch a ride in with their parents to and from school. Peter

13.) Should masks be worn by all riders? And dividers on the bus between the students?

There are no overarching mandatory requirements for school buses. This will ultimately be determined by conversations and research by you, your district leadership, health officials, and government guidelines. JR

Masks are a good tool in helping to contain the spread of germs as we all know. However, ensuring that all students (K-12) wear them will require a culture shift. It is possible and a practice that has the potential to reduce the spread of germs (COVID-19 and others). As for dividers on the seats for students, this becomes problematic as it will most likely negatively affect compartmentalization and Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) for seats as we know it. As for the driver's compartment, districts should work with their school bus manufacturers and Department of Transportation, State Education Department, and Department of Motor Vehicles to make sure they approve of the modification. The flimsy barriers that are in place in many stores are not acceptable in a school bus as they will become projectiles in the case of sudden stops where these shields continue at the moving speed rate while the vehicle drastically decelerates. Caution needs to be exercised on this subject. Peter

14.) For my NYS colleagues, do you see the closure of DMV offices as having significant negative effects on our operations? What can be done to get NYS DMV opened again? In NYS we are facing a serious issue dealing with DMV. DMV offices are closed, they are not taking appointments. We can't continue training of new bus driver applicants because we can't have them go get CDL Permits. The longer DMV stays closed the worse the problem will be. We are facing some retirements, if we can't have new employees trained and licensed for school opening in September, we will be forced to reduce services or provide very untimely services.

**New York State does not utilize third-party testers as many other states do. While operations can legally train their driver candidates on their own property (non-highway), this becomes an issue when they are ready as getting a permit or road test is going to be severely hindered by delays once we are back to business as usual. This is a good opportunity for the New York Association for Pupil Transportation (NYAPT) and local chapters across the state to lobby their elected officials to put pressure on the DMV to make changes that work for school districts and contractors across the state. Peter**

15.) We went through split schools with the flood in 2016. It takes a toll on the drivers as well as the buses. How will this extra mileage and cost affect the bus replacement and school system budget?

**These are important questions to ask when these discussions occur. It is critical that we learn from each other's successes and failures. There definitely is a major cost associated with maintaining a split school system as your costs will at a minimum double for mileages, fuel, and maintenance costs for most operations. This also can affect operations that utilize contractors as this is not what either party agreed to upon signing their original contracts. Cost adjustments and negotiations would be necessary to make this happen. Peter**

16.) Do you think it would give parents peace of mind to send their students back to school if all staff members are COVID tested, and can show the schools are safe to reopen and serve our students safely?

**While it will give peace of mind, keep in mind that you will also have to determine how often do we test? It can be negative today and positive tomorrow. JR**

17.) Is taking temperatures of our students going to be a reality for our drivers?

**It may be, most districts do not have the luxury of assistants on every bus, but that may be part of the conversation. JR**

**I cannot see this as a viable option as the drivers have so many other responsibilities. Barry**

18.) What are the states education agencies offering as far funding or extra funding for the schools to return?

As Americans, we celebrate our independence and autonomy. States are no different in that they favor local control and unless the federal government allocates additional federal funds (historically they have not freely given money to schools as they do for mass transit and other modes of transportation). That being said, it is unknown at this point in time if any extra funding will be available. However, in New York State, at the beginning of April 2020, we face a \$10 billion budget gap. It is unlikely that any school district will get out of this crisis unscarred be it teachers, educational programming, or transportation services. Now more than ever it is important to network and lobby together as a group of like-minded individuals to promote education and transportation. Peter

Extra funding does not seem to be the reality in Virginia, in fact the discussions recently have focused more on cuts rather than extra funding. Barry

19.) Are you as a company supplying PPE?

Our district has made PPE available to staff if they request it. We are not requiring them to wear it at this time, outside of what they would normally do for the job. JOSH

We have purchased masks for our employees and plan to make them available for the upcoming school year (1 mask per person for the week). The cost is really minimal and it has the potential to help keep our employees from catching the normal germs in the beginning of the school year and into flu season. Peter

PPE is currently available to our food delivery drivers and attendants. Barry

20.) What suggestions do you have for recruitment and retention for those of us with mainly contractor owned buses?

As mentioned during the webinar, looking at the employee benefits packages (starting pay, dental, health insurance, perfect attendance incentives, parties, jackets, etc.), I recommend that operations shift their paradigm. Look at the total cost for these benefits and get creative on ways to differentiate them from the current way they are offered. As mentioned earlier, some employees might not need healthcare and would value more money per hour. Asking employees (current and former) what is important to them is one easy way to start the conversation. As an example, we offer a perfect attendance award twice a year. However, if an employee becomes ill after two months, they have no incentive not to take a sick day if they have a mild pain as they have already lost the opportunity to achieve the perfect attendance award. A more effective award would be to offer the award more often (every other month) and this allows employees who are sick to stay home and those that are on the fence of coming to work to show up and work to receive an additional day's pay. Peter

21.) Is anyone discussing using the summer months to help catch kids up before the 'new' school year?

I'm not sure how parents would take using summer months for catching up students, when most schools during this time have rolled out online learning, or provided paper packets. I would think parents would wonder why they have to make up days if they were required to provide the instruction during this time. JOSH

22.) Can Sneeze Shields be installed in front of each seat?

I would think that a school bus manufacturer or dealership can install any after-market item that you could think of. JOSH

23.) Are there State codes in place that prohibit changes in the school bus construction?

**School buses must meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS). States can exceed these federal FMVSSs, but cannot lessen them. Check out the National Congress on School Transportation for more guidance on school bus standards**

**<http://www.nasdpts.org/ncstonline/Publications.html> Peter**

24. So lots of rumors regarding going back to school including morning and afternoon classes. Will this require more drivers or will drivers work a full day rather than a split schedule?

**Conducting additional trips (four routes per school instead of two routes per day) could be handled with existing staff at an additional cost. However, not all drivers and attendants will want to work eight or nine hours a day. This could require additional drivers and/or overtime for some of the staff. This also has the potential to add to the existing driver shortage as many drivers might run into issues with working too many hours to safely be able to drive sports and field trips. Peter**

25.) How do you see protecting driving staff when they return to buses?

**I think we have all learned that we didn't keep things as clean as we should have. We are going to move to a system of wiping seats and touch points down weekly, as well as using backpack sprayers to disinfect the buses daily when students return. JOSH**

26.) Is anyone planning to install hand sanitizer dispensers on the bus or checking student temperatures before boarding?

**Depending on your state's regulations, it is wise to check with your regulatory agencies that oversee your school buses to make sure this is permitted. Most hand sanitizers contain alcohol and this can be a flammable substance in larger quantities. Peter**

27.) Is anyone considering setting aside a quarantine seating area for a student that boards and is clearly sick?

**This has not been a discussion that we have had. With the close quarters of a school bus I cannot imagine that this would be a viable option. Barry**

28.) Are you now looking at sneeze guards in the office between cubicles, over the counter etc?

**This is a good practice and one that should be discussed with your building and grounds department/school business official. Peter**

29.) Is the Maintenance staff still working and how are you keeping up with daily cleaning of the bus?

**Our shop staff has returned to work. We were able to clean and disinfect all of our buses during Spring Break when this hit everyone. However, we plan to redo each bus before putting students back on them next year. JOSH**