

Transfinder-NAPT Webinar

Questions

1.) Is this seemingly insurmountable problem being discussed with political leaders? Can PPE provide relief?

John - Way above the level of most transportation administrators. I suggest talk to your state transportation associations for political issues.

Tim – the science is certainly there on the helpfulness of masks (<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2004.13553.pdf>) so PPE will be an important component of any strategy. The issue of insurmountability is I think related to trying to solve the problem rather than developing an approach to manage and mitigate the risks. I think the best that transportation staff can hope for is to set forth a good plan for mitigation and go from there.

Jim- I believe people in transportation need to be at the table discussing what the future looks like on a bus. People need to know what is realistic and what is not possible.

Our drivers will be asked to wear gloves and a face shield or mask. We find the face shield offers protection for the eyes and eye glasses do not fog.

2.) If all the students and driver are wearing masks, do we need to adhere to the social distancing recommendations?

John - What does your district health coordinator say?

Tim – I think John is right. Health Policy folks will provide guidance there in terms of best practice recommendations. The procedural question of what that means for operations will be the much bigger deal.

Jim- Yes, that will be a decision executive teams and school task force will need to decide.

3.) Has anyone talked with DOT to see what kind of barrier can be placed between students that is safe and DOT approved?

Jim- I reached out to the PA State Highway Patrol, they inspect our buses each year. The trooper I talked to said nothing would be approved unless it has been approved by the National Highway Safety Administration.

4.) Is it wrong to plan for 2 to a seat? Also, what are your thoughts on surrounding the driver with a clear screen?

Tim – My opinion is that the issue of right and wrong will be fraught with a bunch of things well outside the control of transportation staff. What I think you should focus on is the consequence of seating kids one, two, or three to a seat. What those load figures will mean to the number of buses required, the route timings, wait times, and ride times seem to be a more useful discussion to everyone than assessing the right or wrong of a particular approach.

Jim- I agree with Tim, you need to show concrete figures how something could work and the amount of time, number of buses, number of drivers. We can make it work, but here is what it will cost.

5.) The option raised for our district is 1/2 students attend in AM and other half attend in PM. How would sanitizing work for the mid-day run where AM kids are being dropped off while PM kids are picked up?

John - You will have to build in time at the campus to spray down and dry. About fifteen minutes for most aerostatic sprayers.

6.) Will drivers be responsible for taking students temperatures while loading?

John - Up to each district to decide. Better question is can you find enough thermometers to do that?

Tim – the other thing that you are all much more aware of than me, but I think needs to be part of the discussion, is proposals like this will be a major distraction to drivers. With illegal passing a significant industry concern already, it is my sense that we should be focused on minimizing not increasing the driver distractions.

Jim- Anything that distracts the driver's attention from the road is dangerous. I am simply asking the parents to be responsible for taking the child's temperature before leaving the house.

7.) Shouldn't there be some type of district transportation supervisor/directors task force set-up to give input to those who are making policies?

John - Many districts are doing that with district leadership.

Tim – Yes. Please see the industry literature on the STARTS task force <https://stnonline.com/news/starts-task-force-looks-to-provide-insight-into-school-transportation-post-covid-19/>

8.) For Jim: What about Charters and Non Public - will you schedule according to what they want?

Jim- We are told we need to provide like services. But if the parochial schools do not have a plan to reduce their population, then they will need to know we cannot provide social distancing on the school bus. We also are asking that parents provide their own transportation, if they do not agree with our services.

9.) Do you think many experienced, senior-citizen drivers will not return as they are statistically much more at risk? How do you maintain adequate driver staffing, given that school bus drivers in many cases fall into older or at-risk groups? How is everyone handling driver shortages?

John - I am assuming that we will see an increase. We are continuing recruiting and restarted hiring and training in anticipation of the loss. You will never have enough drivers, even without the Covid-19 issue.

Tim – I have a significant concern about the driver shortage getting worse to much worse as a result of this. The longer we take to provide an applicant certainty about expectations (e.g., will you have to wear a mask, will you have to wear a gown, what expectations will you have to manage sick kids, etc.) the more likely it is we will lose them to other organizations that have already established workplace guidelines. The sooner you can define those expectations and the sooner you can get to full time recruiting (because I think it will take that) the better.

10.) John, What training issues are you dealing with considering we cannot get into the DMV?

John - At this district we are Third Party Testing internally, so only issue is actually getting the license from the office. We anticipate our DMV continuing service with appointment soon. Training size reduced to three per bus max, and reduced number allowed in classroom at a time. At the district I am going to we are at the mercy of the licensing office but I anticipate training will restart but testing is going to take much, much longer.

11.) How is social distancing possible while assisting SPED students with their personal securement? Transportation staff will have a mask but students are not able to wear one. There will be some personal contact with the students.

John - SPED should already have some protective measures in place, you will need see what you can do to protect the driver and assistant, put additional PPE on board if required), and give additional training on how to minimize contact but still provide the service the students require.

Tim – John is correct. Again, this is an issue of doing what is responsible for mitigation. We need to not think in binary absolutes of can't or can but in terms of what is reasonable and responsible for the health of everyone involved in each interaction.

12.) 2 districts I've worked with are talking about having the drivers take student temperatures BEFORE allowing the student to load. We think this will add a huge amount of time to routes. Also, what to do with students running a temp? Have any of your districts discussed this?

John - Bottom Line, we should not block the roads that long, we cannot turn away students. We always mention our constraints at the bus stops at our Task Force meetings.

Tim – similar to question 6. I think this will be a bad policy response that could have dangerous consequences.

Jim- Anything that distracts the driver's attention from the road is dangerous. I am simply asking the parents to be responsible for taking the child's temperature before leaving the house.

14.) What are the thoughts of having the students/parents signing a "Transportation Contract" so they understand and accept the risk of their child riding the bus?

John - Good Idea but I would not call it a contract. It should be an informative paper telling them what steps we are taking and that ultimately we cannot guarantee there will never be transmission but we will reduce the chances as much as we can.

Tim – I would agree with John, I think the idea of a contract, particularly as a mechanism to absolve or transfer liability, is unlikely to be enforceable. However, it does address the bigger issue which is building a communications campaign to make parents, students, and staff aware of both the risks and protocols. That seems like something else that we cannot start on too early.

15.) To all: if you only get 3 minutes to tell someone with decision making authority what they should do, what's do you tell them? In other words, what's your elevator speech?

Tim – Transportation is a vital service for both education and the economy. As such, it needs to have a role in assessing the consequences of each policy choice made by political and administrative leaders because we can do anything you want, but we are unlikely to be able to do everything you want.

Jim- The uncomfortable truth is there is no social distancing on the school bus. A child comes within 6 feet of the driver when they step on the bus. The school needs to create a plan to reduce the number of children attending school, parents need to drive if able, students need to drive, if able and parking around the school accommodates the number of cars. This is a team effort to keep everyone as safe as possible.

16.) Can schools convert to drop off learning?

Jim-Not aware of this term.

17.) How soon after spraying the bus you can use it? Is there a smell?

John - Check with the manufacturer of the product.

18.) Can we take guidance from public transportation? That is, what they are doing now with adults?

John - Good start for getting ideas, however, keep in mind that guidelines change for minors.

Tim – From the American Public Transit Association - <https://www.apta.com/public-transit-response-to-coronavirus/>

19.) In the end, who will be held responsible when the kids themselves do not keep the social distance while the bus is in motion?

Jim- The driver is responsible for maintaining student management on the school bus. Students should be seated while the bus is in motion even before the pandemic.

20.) And what if we are monitoring our school community but we share buses with other schools?

Tim – this would seem to necessitate a statement or agreement by the governing boards on the expectations for cleaning and mitigation and is also likely to require an agreement related to issues of liability, communications, inspections, and management.

21.) What about blue light / Ultra violet light to disinfect buses?

Tim – Probably a question for both the OEM's and public health folks. They are using it on airplanes so may be an option but I have no idea about the costs.

22.) Would it be unreasonable to have parents request transportation for their children, the same way we do for OOD schools?

John - I am recommending bus registration for the district I am leaving and the one I am going to. Much easier to plan for the ones that may need bus service as opposed to all students in the district.

Tim – I agree with John that it can be very helpful. If for no other reason than it gives you another touch point to talk to them about what you are doing for mitigation, how the service may look different than what they have experienced in the past, how the service may change if there is a local or broader outbreak, and how you will keep them informed.

23.) What about the liability of giving a student a mask?

Jim- What about the liability if you do not provide a child with a mask?

24.) Are your bus drivers receiving Unemployment and the \$600 federal funds?

Jim- Yes, they are all furloughed and collecting unemployment.

25.) If the district is going to alternate attendance days, couldn't we set those dates by the boundaries/neighborhoods instead of K- 2 on A days and 3-5 on B days. Seems like it would make more sense for routing.

John - Many different ways to do it. What can your resources support? JR

26.) Are adjusted synchronized Bell Times being discussed in any school district or on statewide level?

Jim- I have not heard any talk in Pennsylvania.

Tim – this is a conversation happening in a lot of places. Although, I will say that in many locations it is not the traditional bell time discussions. The conversation is more focused on how to expand the range of possible bell time options to support alternative day and split day schedules. However, many single tier and double tier systems may gain some flexibility by assessing more traditional two and three tier options.

27.) What is the level of additional training needed for the drivers and the aids? Should districts look into regarding COVID19 and what organization is providing that type of training?

Jim- I am not aware of any business going out and training. I plan to have my drivers' meeting in August to focus on cleaning and how we are going to try to protect drivers.

28.) Are most school systems having outside sources clean the bus or do they think bus drivers will do all of this hypothetical deep, continual cleaning? If drivers are expected to do this, will this just be one more item that will increase the driver shortage? If outside sources are used, can systems afford it?

John - What can your district support? You will need a cost-analysis to determine your own answer to that.

Jim- Our contractors are asking the drivers to clean and are adding an extra hour in their paycheck. The contractors are also increasing the in-house cleaning staff to assist drivers who may have a hard time cleaning in between runs.

29.) Knowing the acceptable distance of separation of 6' in generally open areas, is that really enough distance within a basically closed environment of the school bus with the possibilities of windows open and air flying all around, closed on buses with AC. Any thoughts or stories on this scenario?

Jim- The uncomfortable truth is there is no social distancing on the school bus. A child comes within 6 feet of the driver when they step on the bus. The school needs to create a plan to reduce the number of children attending school, parents need to drive if able, students need to drive, if able and parking around the school accommodates the number of cars. This is a team effort to keep everyone as safe as possible. However, now medical experts are saying more ventilation is better. So feel free to open those windows.

Tim – I think defining what is enough distance will be an unproductive discussion because there will not be a “right” answer for all conditions. My sense is that what we need to do is talk about the impact that particular expectations will have on our ability to deploy the buses under whatever bell schedule and academic schedule is established.

30.) How do you social distance wheel chairs? Any thoughts?

John - We are limiting to one per bus.

31.) Do you think that the reduced capacity at the schools and possible alternate day schedule will help with the issues of overfilling the buses above social distancing standards of standards? Also, do you think the plan should be that school districts release the plans of sanitizing and what they are doing to stop the spread of the virus? Kind of tell parents that they should be teaching their children to wear masks and the importance of that while riding the bus rather than politely telling parents that if their child is unable to wear a mask for the duration of the ride and keep their hands out of their mouths and away from others...then maybe they need to find another means of getting their child to school...that it's kind of their choice. Unless of course the child has a special need, to contact their case manager to perhaps look into additional services being provided in accordance with the child's disability.

John - First Question: there will be challenges no matter what options we consider, explore them all. Second Question: Communication to the community is highly important. Let the district exports help you with the message to the parents. The rest of it, you are going into the realm of giving your personal beliefs to the parent. Stick with the district message!

32.) What has been considered when using technology in your planning?

John - I fully believe live GPS, parent apps, and student ridership will need to be used to be able to find some semblance of efficiency in what is being expected of us. JR.

Tim – I think technology will be a massive enabler of support during the planning and execution phase of every start up in the nation. GPS will support real time dispatching and the management of staff, especially in the event that you disperse staff as part of a social distancing practice. Routing software will be used as part of scenario planning and business continuity in the event that there is a resurgence of the virus or issues in an office. Cameras can be a critical component of contact tracing if there is an outbreak that needs to be addressed. Districts and contractors need to be highly attuned to how to maximize the leverage of all these tools beyond their traditional roles as efficiency inducers.

33.) If there is an executive order to social distance, won't we be liable if we ignore social distancing guidelines?

Jim- In Pennsylvania, all directives from the Governor's office and the office of the Secretary of Education point to the CDC guidelines. The decision is on the shoulders of the Board of Directors in each school district, as to what they will tolerate and defend.

Tim – this is a state-by-state consideration.

34.) Will your district provide masks to the contractors?

Jim- No, this cost should fall on the contractor. The schools will need to supply their own cleaning supplies and masks for school personnel.