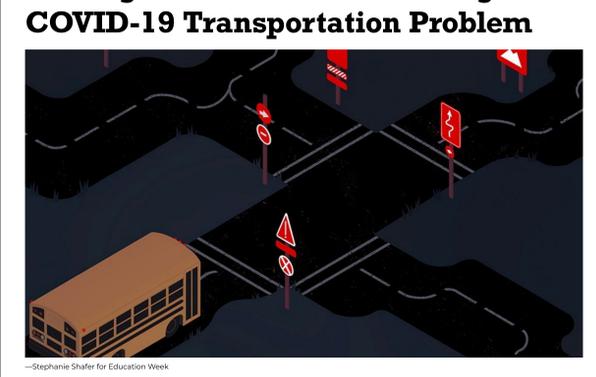


Getting Kids to School: Tackling the COVID-19 Transportation Problem



Of all the complex decisions education leaders face as they plan to reopen schools for the 2020-21 academic year, the toughest one might be the most basic: how to get students to the buildings in the first place.

It's not a question districts and schools can punt. Federal law requires transportation for certain groups of students, namely those with disabilities and homeless children. And districts-provided transportation is a necessity for many of the estimated 15 million children who ride a school bus each weekday.

How districts handle the question of student transportation will depend on the scheduling option they choose, whether it's remote instruction, traditional in-person classes, or a combination of the two.

The choices are likely to be costly at a time when school budgets are shrinking. Following physical distancing guidelines means it will take more buses to transport the same numbers of students to school each day. Students' health may need to be monitored before they even step on the bus, and personal protective equipment must be available when students don't wear their own.

To make it all work, some districts will reduce the numbers of students who ride the bus, so they can concentrate on those who require it. That could require complex changes in scheduling and added attention to the needs of both the high-priority bus riders and the children who must find their own way to school.

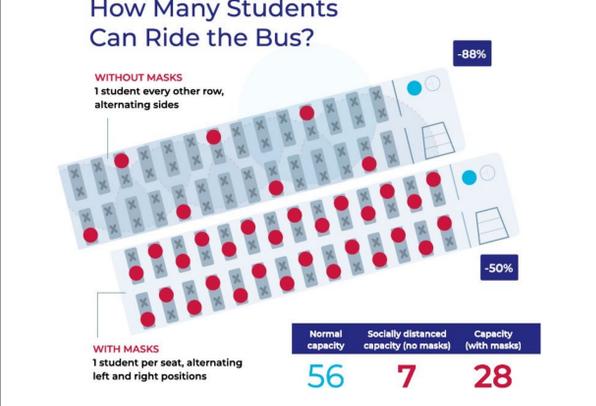
About this Project

HOW WE GO BACK TO SCHOOL

Third in a series of eight installments.

These times are unprecedented. Through these eight installments, we will explore the steps administrators need to take to ensure the safety of students and faculty.

- **Full report:** [How We Go Back to School](#)
- **Part 1:** [Socially Distanced School Day](#)
- **Part 2:** [Scheduling and Staffing](#)
- **Up next:** [Remote Learning](#)



Finding drivers, a perennial headache for districts, could get harder. Most school bus drivers are at an age that puts them at heightened risk for severe illness from coronavirus infection. Will they want to return?

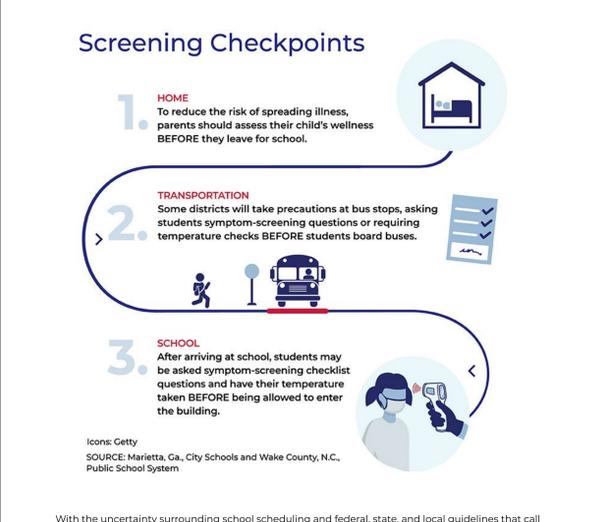
Education Week writers Corey Mitchell and Evie Blad interviewed school superintendents, district transportation directors, national experts, and others across the country. They also reviewed district and state planning documents and guidelines from state and national agencies for reopening schools to identify strategies schools are using in response to the coming transportation challenge.

They found a wide range of creative approaches to assuring students headed back into the nation's long-shuttered school buildings get there safely and efficiently with a well-supported transportation staff even as the pandemic continues to make planning difficult and uncertain.

—The Editors

LOGISTICS

Screening Checkpoints



With the uncertainty surrounding school scheduling and federal, state, and local guidelines that call for some combination of physical distancing, health screenings, and personal protective equipment to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, school leaders planning for a return to in-person instruction face crucial questions about student transportation. With limited and shrinking resources, should schools put a higher priority on providing transportation for some students than others? Where will students sit? What does the schooling schedule look like? Bus schedules and staffing will hinge on the district's chosen instructional strategy, whether that's remote learning, traditional in-person classes, or a hybrid model.

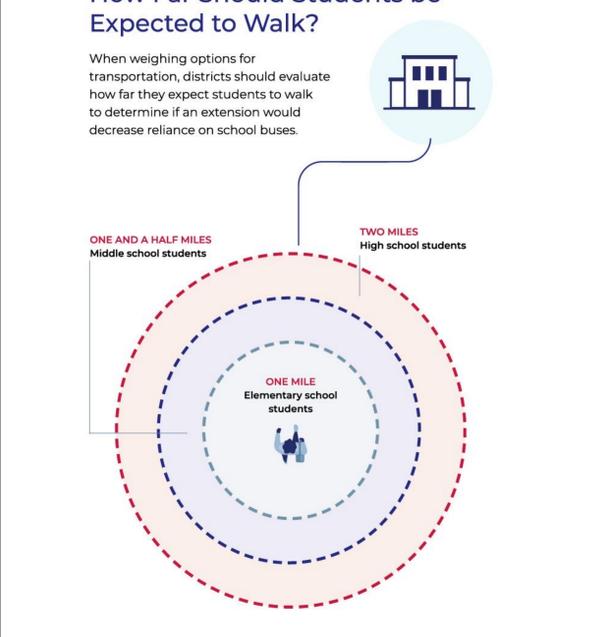
Explore all the transportation logistics here, along with a checklist of procedures districts plan to follow before students board the bus and while they're on the way to school.

- **Deep Dive:** [Solving the Student-Transportation Conundrum](#)
- **Downloadable Guide:** [What to Do When a Student Fails a Health Screening](#)
- **Downloadable Questionnaire:** [Screening Students for COVID-19](#)

RIDERSHIP

How Far Should Students be Expected to Walk?

When weighing options for transportation, districts should evaluate how far they expect students to walk to determine if an extension would decrease reliance on school buses.



About a third of the nation's K-12 students ride the school bus to school, but health and safety precautions due to COVID-19 means far fewer of them will find a seat when the 2020-21 school year starts. That has school officials scrambling for fair and consistent ways to meet the demand for district transportation.

Among the puzzles they're trying to solve amid the pandemic's uncertainty: how to reduce the ridership load, maximize the number of kids who can safely ride in each bus, and support families and vulnerable students. From attendance and transportation zone adjustments to car pools and "walking school buses," Education Week talked to school administrators seeing creative solutions to getting students to school.

- **Deep Dive:** [In a Pandemic, Who Gets to Ride the Bus? And What About Those Who Don't?](#)
- **An Unsolved Puzzle:** [Students Who Rely on Mass Transit](#)
- **Downloadable Guide:** [The "Walking School Bus"](#)

TRANSPORTATION STAFFING



Bus driver Antonio Fajardo Espinoza wipes down buses with antibacterial cleaner in Austin, Texas. —Julia Robinson for Education Week

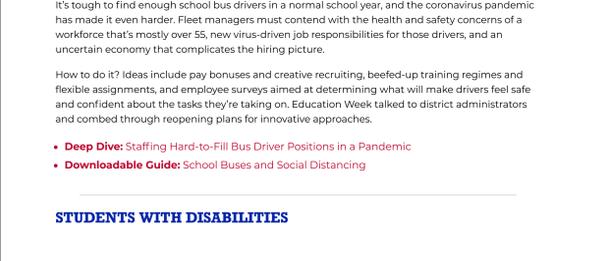
It's tough to find enough school bus drivers in a normal school year, and the coronavirus pandemic has made it even harder. Fleet managers must contend with the health and safety concerns of a workforce that's mostly over 55, new virus-driven job responsibilities for those drivers, and an uncertain economy that complicates the hiring picture.

How to do it? Ideas include pay bonuses and creative recruiting, beefed-up training regimes and flexible assignments, and employee surveys aimed at determining what will make drivers feel safe and confident about the tasks they're taking on. Education Week talked to district administrators and combed through reopening plans for innovative approaches.

- **Deep Dive:** [Staffing Hard-to-Fill Bus Driver Positions in a Pandemic](#)
- **Downloadable Guide:** [School Buses and Social Distancing](#)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Special Education Transportation Considerations



For many students with disabilities, access to education begins with transportation. Learning suffered for many of these students in the rapid shift to remote learning. And plans for getting special education-eligible students to and from school are spelled out in their Individualized Education Programs, the legal documents that govern their schooling.

But transportation requirements for students with disabilities, whether they involve a wheelchair lift on a special bus or aides to assist students on traditional buses, can be tough to navigate even during normal times. To cope with the new health and safety measures needed to prevent the spread of coronavirus, districts are exploring staggered bus schedules, reducing ridership, and providing "travel training" to teach students with disabilities how to safely use buses and other forms of transportation.

- **Deep Dive:** [How Students With Disabilities Can Get Back to Class](#)

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