



Southwestern Ontario
Student Transportation Services

Ready to Roll:
A roadmap for safely
returning students to school by
bus.



Southwestern Ontario Student Transportation Services (STS) is a non-profit incorporation jointly owned by the London District Catholic School Board and the Thames Valley District School board. The STS service area encompasses more than 7,000 square kilometers, in Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford counties and within the cities of Woodstock, St Thomas and London.

There are 100,000 enrolled students in the service area, 50,000 of which are eligible for bussing based on distance, program, or students who have special needs. STS is responsible for transportation route planning and overseeing the daily provision of service delivered by 7 contractors. The contractors are responsible for fleet ownership and employee management, including having sufficient of bus drivers trained to meet service requirements set by STS.

As a result of COVID 19, STS will make considerable changes to the transportation system in the area so that guidelines released from public health and the Ministry of Education can be met.

The intent of this document is to outline the key operational areas for consideration when planning school bus operations for fall of 2020 and beyond. The document may be periodically amended from time to time, based on updates from the appropriate authorities.

This document was revised on July 31, 2020 to incorporate the latest Guidance document released by the Ministry of Education.

On August 7, 2020, the document was reviewed with members from the Southwest Public Health Unit and the Middlesex London Health Unit. STS would like to thank the participants for their input.

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1. Infographic


Designed to provide an overview of the service parameters for the bussed community, it will be in circulation beginning the week of August 10.

READY TO ROLL SCHOOL BUS SAFETY PROTOCOLS


Making the ride a safe space for everyone

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1 SHARED SPACES

School buses are shared spaces & strict physical distancing is not possible on board. Students should be encouraged to practice good hand hygiene before boarding & respiratory hygiene while riding the bus. Typically, students will sit two per seat on a full sized bus. Students from the same household must sit together. Seats will be assigned and the seating plan must be followed.
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2 BUS STOPS

Community bus stops are designed to pick up multiple students. Bus stops are located at parks, corners and community mailboxes where there is ample space for physical distancing. Bus stops are not supervised. Maintaining physical distancing at bus stops is the responsibility of the students and caregivers.
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3 VEHICLE CLEANING

Buses will undergo additional cleaning with disinfectant, normally after the morning and afternoon routes. Between runs, special attention will be paid to the handrails, which students should hold on to when entering and exiting the bus for safety reasons.
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4 HAND HYGIENE

Transport Canada recommends students wash their hands before boarding the bus and when they get off the bus. Caregivers should incorporate handwashing into morning and afternoon routines before getting on and off the bus. Caregivers may also want to provide hand sanitizer for their student to use at the bus stop or on board.
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5 FACE COVERINGS


While on board the school bus, bus drivers and attendants will be wearing a mask. Masks are mandatory for students in Grades 4 - 12. We encourage students in JK- Grade 3 to wear a face covering. Families should instruct their student how to do so properly. Masks must be on prior to getting on the bus.
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6 HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Students must not board the bus in the morning if they are sick. If a student falls ill during the school day, the school will contact the caregiver to pick the student up as the student will not be allowed on board the bus in the afternoon. Caregivers should have an emergency plan in place.

SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

PREBOARDING HEALTH CHECKS FOR STUDENTS




Transport Canada's report states, in part: All children and drivers who experience symptoms, including mild cough or low-grade fever (37.3 C or more), need to self-isolate and stay home. If another member of a child's or driver's household develops symptoms of COVID-19, it is recommended that the child or driver stay home and self-isolate.

Parents/guardians must check their student for symptoms each morning before boarding the school bus.

Bus contractors are responsible for establishing daily health check procedures for Bus Drivers and Bus Attendants prior to starting work.

STAY INFORMED




Student Transportation Services will undertake significant route changes for September in response to COVID 19. Bus routes and school bus stops are under review. Expect changes from prior years. Bus schedules will be posted in the [Parent Portal](#) in late August.

Monitor the [mybigyellowbus](#) website, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and check your emails frequently.

Weekly STS New Updates will be posted on the website using the STS News Update link from the [homepage](#).

Resources



Transport Canada

Report: [Federal Guidance School Bus Operations during COVID 19](#)

Report: [Guidance for transit agencies and passengers in response to COVID 19](#)

Province of Ontario

Report: [Reopening Schools 2020 2021 School Year](#)

SickKids

Report: [Covid 19 Recommendations for School Reopening](#)

Local Public Health Units

[Middlesex London Health Unit](#)

[Southwestern Public Health](#)

Southwestern Ontario Student Transportation Services

Website: [mybigyellowbus.ca](#)

2. Physical Distancing on the School Bus

School buses have only one entrance - the back door is for emergency use only. Each student will pass within approximately 1 meter of the bus driver while getting on or off the bus. Strict physical distancing of 2 meters is not achievable on a school bus and therefore other strategies to mitigate risk must be used.

The manufacturer's capacity of a full-sized school bus is 72 passengers. This assumes a portion of the riders are in junior grades, sitting three to a seat, and senior grades at two per seat. The bus has two rows with twelve bench seats per row. At two riders per bench seat, a full-sized bus would accommodate 48 passengers. Assuming each rider sat properly in the aisle seat and window seat, approximately 1 foot of space would exist between the riders, depending on their size.

The Ministry of Education's Approach to Reopening Schools in 2020-2021 school year originally suggested that consortia consider "Supporting physical distancing between students on school vehicles by considering planning parameters of one student per seat (unless the students are in the same household)" which would reduce capacity on a full sized school bus by more than 50% in many cases.¹ In the revised document released July 2020, the Ministry acknowledges that in order "to support return to school 5 days per week, school boards may be required to increase the utilization beyond one student per seat and operate closer to capacity".²

Since the original release at one per seat, other mitigations strategies have been confirmed, such as PPE for the bus driver and masks on students. It is the combination of controls which assist with the higher number of students assigned to the bus.

Action Items:

- The bench seat immediately behind the school bus driver will be left empty.
- The windows on the vehicles will be kept open, weather permitting, to support increased ventilation.
- STS will ensure contractors comply with mandatory mask usage for bus drivers and attendants.
- STS will promote mandatory masks for grades 4 – 12 and encourage JK- grades 3 to wear a mask through public education.
- STS will recognize those who cannot mask because of underlying health conditions.
- STS will ensure hand sanitizer is available on vehicles.
- STS will, wherever possible, not have actual loads which exceed 46 students, or 2 per seat.³

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/approach-reopening-schools-2020-2021-school-year>

² <https://www.ontario.ca/page/guide-reopening-ontarios-schools>

³ 60% of elementary runs for September already meet this target without registrations being finalized and without remote learners removed.

3. Time on the School Bus

When considering physical distancing constraints, another key consideration for the number of students assigned to a bus run is ride time.

It should be noted that for many urban bus runs, 15 minutes or less is the norm. For specialty program runs or county runs, ride times are typically 30-45 minutes long.

The number of students assigned to a vehicle will be higher in city runs based on density, with mitigation factors being mask use, sanitizer, ventilation, and short trips.

Based on preliminary planning for the 2020-2021 school year, approximations of ride time are:

Ride Time	Percentage of Riders
0 – 15 minutes	62%
16 – 30 minutes	26%
31 – 45 minutes	9%
More than 45 minutes	3%

4. School Bus Stop Locations

Parent/guardians are responsible for student safety to, from and at the school bus stops.

In rural areas, bus stops are typically located at the student's residence and therefore pose limited risk. In urban areas and especially in high-density residential areas, community bus stops serve multiple students, ranging from 5 – 60 assigned students.

As part of its planning process for 2020-2021, STS reviewed community bus stop assignments and adjusted where it was practical to do so. The distance students travel to a bus stop may be longer than in prior years. This provides two benefits: increased physical activity and a shorter ride time on the bus.

Bus stop locations are not supervised. Located at community mailboxes, parks and greenspaces and neighborhood corners, school bus stops are open-air environments. Physical distancing at school bus stops will be a shared responsibility amongst students in the community who use it and caregivers who accompany younger students.

Bus drivers will not perform health checks prior to students getting on the bus. The responsibility for daily health checks rests with the family. If your student is unwell, do not send them to the bus stop.

Action Items:

- STS will promote the need to maintain physical distancing at school bus stops through public education.
- STS will promote that masks should be worn at bus stop locations and/or in place upon bus arrival, prior to getting on the bus.

5. Vehicle Cleanliness Standards

Buses and minivans will undergo additional cleaning measures. The vehicles will be cleaned between morning and afternoon routes. Between runs, high-touch areas like the handrail will be treated with disinfectant.

Students are reminded there is no eating or drinking on the bus and should remove any personal garbage when they get off the bus.

Action Items:

- When possible, the windows of the bus should be kept open to promote air circulation.
- Protocols to be established regarding additional cleaning requirements.
- Disinfectant has been provided for every vehicle in the district.

6. Transporting Students with Special Needs

Students with special needs will require an enhanced level of care in coordinating transportation based on underlying health conditions. Transportation for these students is already highly individualized. Additional communication protocols between the school board and STS have been developed to provide a greater level of care given the uniqueness of returning students with special needs to school safely.

STS will assign siblings from the same household to the specialized vehicle where possible to minimize outside contact. This will be a change in practice from prior years and will be communicated to affected families.

Action Items:

- Specialized vehicles will have reduced capacity. Where possible, students from the same household will ride on the vehicle with siblings.
- Parents/guardians who assist students at the vehicle will be asked to wear a mask.
- Additional PPE may be provided to bus drivers and attendants where circumstances warrant.

7. Parents and Guardians & School Bus Safety

Parents and guardians will play a critical role in keeping the bussed community safe. Transport Canada guidelines establish that:

Parents/guardians complete a health check each morning before putting their student on the bus. Students with new symptoms of COVID 19, including a fever of 37.3 degrees or higher, should not be put on the bus and will be sent home from school without transportation if they become symptomatic during the school day. ⁴

Further, these guidelines establish that the student should wash their hands each morning before boarding the bus and wash their hands each afternoon upon returning home from their

⁴ <https://www2.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/federal-guidance-school-bus-operations-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>

bus ride. Parents/guardians are encouraged to provide hand sanitizer to older students for their own use and apply hand sanitizer to younger students in the morning before they board the bus.

Using the school bus is an experience beyond the time on the bus. Parents/guardians should actively educate their students with respect to the core activities: getting to and from the school bus stop, getting off the bus at school and riding the bus safely. A series of public education messages for parents/guardians will be developed promoting the key messages that follow.

Action Items:

- STS will promote parent/guardian responsibilities through public education. (See Appendix B – Key Bus Safety Messages for Parents and Guardians)

8. Bus Drivers and Bus Attendants

Personal Protective Equipment has been ordered for contractors to distribute to staff. A summary is provided below:

Bus Drivers and Bus Attendants:

- 2 procedural masks provided per day
- Reusable face shield provided

Bus drivers and attendants who assist students with special transportation needs may require access to gowns, gloves, and goggles in addition to the masks and face shields.

Bus drivers and attendants are employees of the individual bus contractor. The contractors are responsible for establishing policies and procedures to protect the health and safety of their workers and monitoring compliance.

PPE will be distributed to the contractors based on route assignments. The contractors will be responsible for inventory control protocols and developing appropriate employer policies for proper use of PPE, storage, and disposal.

Wherever possible, bus drivers are assigned to the same route each day using the same vehicle. However, substitute drivers are used for absences when required.

Bus drivers play a vital role in the transportation system and the successful return to school by bus is dependent on drivers choosing to return to work. To support their return, STS is providing each bus driver a backpack to carry their PPE, disinfectant and hand sanitizer.

Action Items:

- STS to review contractor policies related to PPE.

9. Bus Registration System

To allow for contact tracing and help manage the number of students assigned to each bus, STS implemented a bus registration system. Only registered students will be assigned to a bus seat.

This approach is consistent with the Ministry of Education guidance document, recognizes that the student data from the school board will be delayed and acknowledges some families may choose to provide their own transportation.

Bus registration closes on August 14. Those who miss the deadline for registration should prepare for a delay in accessing transportation and may be waitlisted in some circumstances.

Bus registration will also allow schools to create seating plans based on the in-school cohorts (grouping) of students and allow for proper arrival and departure protocols to be developed at each school site.

Bus registration has been promoted on the STS website, by direct email, on social media, through paid advertising and radio and TV news spots and through board communications.

10. Bus Seating Plans

Schools will create seating plans with assistance from STS. STS will establish a common seat numbering system. Schools will be provided a template with directions to load by grade (and cohort where possible). Siblings from the same household should be seated together, regardless of grade.

Attendance on the bus will not be taken, but for contact tracing purposes, health units will be provided the bus list with registered students and the school attendance records to cross-reference.

Action Items:

- STS will organize seat numbering systems and templates for schools.
- STS will develop public messaging about seating for information purposes.

11. Behavior on the Bus

Student behavior on the bus is vital to the overall safety of the bus driver and passengers alike. Students are expected to use the same good behavior on the bus as they would in the classroom.

On the bus, students should remain seated, facing forward and in their seats for the entire ride. This is especially critical this year.

Behavioral concerns are subject to Principal action and, as transportation is a privilege, students who are unwilling to behave on board may lose transportation for the safety of other students.

12. Active Travel and School Zone Safety

Ministry guidance documents recommend encouraging active travel to reduce demand on school transportation because of potential capacity issues. Further, more parents than usual may choose to drive their students to school. School zones are already rife with congestion issues in the morning and afternoon and increased private transportation will exacerbate this problem.

To reduce congestion, promote active travel and to assist school communities, STS met with municipal partners throughout the district to arrange community-based central drop off sites

which are a 5-minute walk from school. Parents will be encouraged to use these sites to drop off and pick up their students to divert traffic away from school property.

Walking maps have been generated for school sites which show logical locations to coordinate pick up and drop offs for students who can walk 5 minutes independently to school property.

Community participation is necessary for the above approaches to be successful. Families will have to actively choose to alter their routines instead of dropping off at the front door of the school. These measures, when adopted by parents, will improve school safety for staff, walkers and bussed students alike.

Action Items:

- STS will distribute central drop off sites and walking maps to schools for their use.
- STS will share the locations and maps on its website and through social media.

13. Potential Cases of COVID 19

The local public health units are responsible for contact tracing. STS will follow direction from the health units as required and will communicate with both the school board(s) and bus contractors in a cooperative manner, noting that medical information is both private and sensitive.

When requested by public health, STS can produce the bus registration list, student contact information, length of bus ride and seating plan.

Appendix A – STS Actions in Response to Ministry Guidance Document

Ministry Document (archived version)	STS Actions
Encouraging active forms of travel or private transportation by parents and caregivers, where possible, to ease pressure on transportation demand.	<p>Encouraging private transportation should be primarily messaged from the school boards.</p> <p>STS is coordinating “Drive to 5” locations district-wide, where feasible, to provide to each school and will publish maps for community use. “Walk a Block” sites are also being identified for each school site, where it is safe and practical to do so.</p> <p>STS will, through its partnership in ELMO ASRTS, coordinate messaging about active travel, school zone safety and congestion in school zones.</p>
Reviewing transportation eligibility policies (e.g., walk distances, courtesy rider) to focus available transportation capacity on students who would be unable to reach school without it.	No policy modifications were undertaken.
Surveying parent intentions to assess transportation service needs (e.g., through a transportation opt-in process).	STS released a mandatory bus registration process for September.
Supporting physical distancing between students on school vehicles by considering planning parameters of one student per seat (unless the students are in the same household) and having students from the same classroom cohort sit in the same area, where possible.	<p>This early guideline was replaced to support a return to school 5 days per week.</p> <p>STS will plan to two per seat (plus siblings) on yellow vehicles, where possible to do so.</p> <p>Seating plans will be developed at the school with support from STS.</p>
Where physical distancing is not possible, consider the use of non-medical face coverings or masks for students.	<p>This early guideline has been modified to:</p> <p>Mandatory masks grades 4 – 12 and optional (but recommended) for grades JK – 3.</p> <p>STS will introduce public messaging regarding masks for bus drivers, attendants, and students.</p>
Reviewing planning parameters such as limiting transfers and the number of students at a bus stop, to reduce exposure.	<p>The number of students at a bus stop is difficult to restrict in high-density areas.</p> <p>STS will develop public messaging that maintaining physical distancing at the bus stop location is the responsibility of the students and/or caregivers.</p>
Enhancing cleaning protocols for frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handrails, seatbacks) to at least twice daily.	STS is reviewing cleaning practices with the contractors.
Making alcohol-based hand sanitizer available on vehicles.	Hand sanitizer will be available to students upon request/need from the bus driver.
Assessing whether the use of personal protective equipment (e.g., surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (face shield or goggles)) for school bus drivers, school bus monitors, and student aides is necessary if they are unable to maintain physical distancing when transporting students.	Ministry guidance document sets out requirements.
Supporting accommodations for immunocompromised students, medically vulnerable students, and students with special transportation needs.	<p>STS will take direction from the boards on the development of the Individual Student Transportation Plan for such students.</p> <p>STS will provide recommendations and support to the boards in the development of such plans.</p>

Appendix B – Key Bus Safety Messages for Parents and Guardians

In addition to health checks and masks, STS will develop public messaging for the following topics:

Getting on the Bus in the Morning

Parents/guardians should talk to their student about how to properly wait for and get on the bus in the morning:

- Wait in an orderly, spaced line to get on the bus.
- Do not crowd each other to get on the bus.
- Use the handrail when boarding the bus.
- Fill the bus up from the back to the front. (secondary students)
- JK/SK students should sit near the front of the bus.
- Do not touch the tops of the seats as you walk past them.
- Keep your hands to yourself while on board.
- Sit facing forward, feet flat on the floor.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Stay home if you are sick.

Arriving at School in the Morning

Parents/guardians should talk to their student about how to get off the bus while arriving at school:

- Students at the front will exit first.
- Stay seated until at least three rows ahead have exited.
- Step into the aisle and keep a distance from the student ahead of you.
- Use the handrail when getting off the bus.
- Follow school arrival protocols, which may include handwashing and/or the use of hand sanitizer.

Leaving School by Bus in the Afternoon

Parents/guardians should talk to their student about getting ready to come home by bus in the afternoon:

- Follow school departure protocols, which may include handwashing and/or the use of hand sanitizer.
- Wait in an orderly line to board the bus.
- Use the handrail when boarding the bus.
- Go directly to your seat.
- Do not touch the tops of other seats as you pass.
- Do not crowd others getting off the bus at the end of the day.
- When you get home, wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer.

