

June 11, 2020

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Managing Buses May Be the Hardest Part of Reopening Schools



A worker disinfects school buses in Nanjing in east China's Jiangsu province. Schools in the province reopened in April after a prolonged shutdown due to COVID-19. —FeatureChina via AP Images

By **Madeline Will**

June 10, 2020

Buses. Of all the complicated puzzles to solve for in how to reopen schools safely in the pandemic, transportation may be the most complex, district leaders say.

Millions of students—about half of U.S. schoolchildren—ride the school bus, according to the National Association of Public Transportation. For them, the bus is the first point of contact with schools in the morning and the last point in the afternoon, making it a crucial part of the conversation on reopening schools. Yet maintaining six feet of distance between students on a bus will be extraordinarily difficult.

"The days of two-to-three children to a seat are not going to be acceptable in the current climate," said Curt Macysyn, the executive director of the National School Transportation Association.

School Buses and Social Distancing: A Downloadable Guide

To ensure social distancing, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has suggested one child per seat, every other row. But that would require significant

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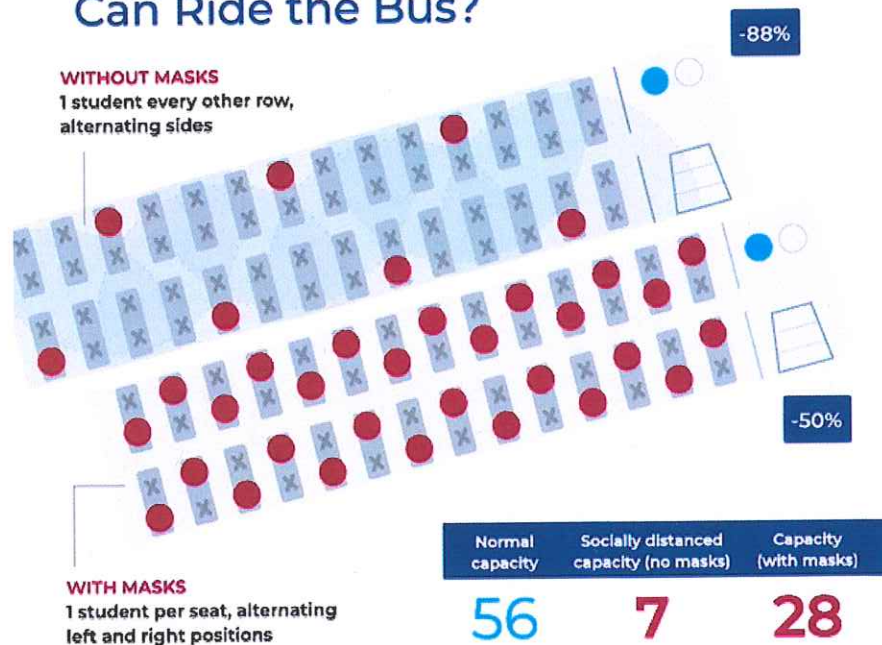
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How Many Students Can Ride the Bus?



SOURCE: National Council on School Facilities and Cooperative Strategies

Enforcement of social distancing. Officials can place tape on the bus seats to mark where students should sit, but they should also prepare for the reality that students might not listen when the bus is in motion.

"We have to understand what the children's behaviors are, COVID or no COVID," Macysyn said. "I just think in certain age groups, to think that there's going to be no contact is not exactly realistic."

Some district leaders are considering adding bus aides or attendants to enforce the rules, which would come at an additional cost. The Missouri School Boards' Association also suggested that districts tap volunteers to serve as social distancing monitors.

Encourage students to find alternative methods of transportation. The Missouri School Boards' Association has suggested that districts consider minimizing their transportation zone and not providing transportation to students that live within three and a half miles from their school building. Instead, the association suggested districts provide bicycle racks and locks to encourage students to ride their bikes to school and provide additional crossing guards to encourage students walking to school.

A significant number of students do already use private means to get to school. However, this could pose equity and safety concerns, as some parents might not be able to drive or escort their children to school.

Consider alternatives for medically vulnerable students. The Missouri School Boards' Association suggested reserving a specific seat for a student who might be at higher-risk for COVID-19. That seat would not be used for any other student during the day, and staff would take special precautions to disinfect it. Alternatively, the district might choose to transport high-risk students in separate vehicles or pay parents or staff members to transport them separately.

Assistant Editor Denisa R. Superville contributed to this report.

Education Week spoke to many experts for this installment. In alphabetical order, they are: Elizabeth Allen, the president of the National Science Teachers Association; John

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Bailey, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute; Nathaniel Beers, a pediatrician at Children's National Hospital in Washington; Andrew Buher, the founder and managing director of Opportunity Labs; Grace Cheng Dodge, the deputy head of school for the Taipei American School; Sharon Danks, the CEO and founder of Green Schoolyards America; Dan Domenech, the executive director of AASA, the School Superintendents Association; Mary Filardo, the executive director of 21st Century School Fund; Georgina Harrisson, the deputy secretary of educational services at the New South Wales Department of Education; David Hornak, the executive director of the National Association for Year-Round Education; Larry Kraut, the chief operating officer of the Taipei American School; Sandy Mackenzie, the director of the Copenhagen International School; Curt Macysyn, the executive director of the National School Transportation Association; Rob Miller, the superintendent of Bixby Public Schools in Tulsa, Okla.; Ali Mokdad, a professor at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington; Scott Muri, the superintendent of Ector County Independent school district in Odessa, Texas; Mario Ramirez, an emergency medicine physician and the managing director of Opportunity Labs; L. Oliver Robinson, the superintendent of Shenendehowa Central Schools in Clifton Park, N.Y.; Monica Rogers, the information systems manager for the Tulsa Health Department.

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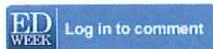
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