

Return to Transportation Plan (Updated August 10, 2021)

Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay is a transportation consortium of Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique des Aurores Boréales, Lakehead District School Board and Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board. STSTB is responsible for transportation route planning and overseeing the daily provision of service for over 8,000 students to and from school on 179 shared school bus routes delivered by two contractors. The contractors are responsible for fleet ownership and employee management, including having sufficient number of school bus drivers trained to meet the service requirements set by STSTB and its member school boards.

In order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 through our community, STSTB continues to consult with the school boards, Public Health, The Ministry of Education, and local school bus companies and revises services as necessary to meet the current standards dictated by Health and Education experts. Any changes to transportation guidelines based on expert recommendation will be communicated online at ststb.ca/COVID19 and via social media.

In accordance with Ontario's COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools (2021-2022), buses can continue to operate a full capacity and remain shared between schools, with enhanced health and safety protocols that have been in place since September 2020. Families who have not opted for Remote Learning are encouraged to use other forms of school travel if they are not comfortable with the school bus environment. Families who decide to use school transportation services will be responsible for assessing their children for COVID-19 symptoms. Anyone showing signs of COVID-19 will not be permitted on the bus or at the school.

Safety Provisions for Transportation

Physical Distancing

Public Health recommends individuals stand two (2) metres apart to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Families are responsible for maintaining this distance at the bus stop. Students will be required to enter and exit the bus maintaining this distance. Buses may be delayed getting to the school or stop due to this revised un/loading procedure. Students must follow the direction of the driver when boarding the bus.

In order to support the Ministry of Education's goal of all students attending school five days a week, and without provisions for additional vehicles or drivers, physical distance cannot be maintained on the bus. School buses may operate near capacity with additional health and safety precautions in place, such as disinfecting regimes and the use of PPE. Buses will remain shared between schools.

Preparing Students for Their Trip to School

Every day, prior to leaving the house for the bus stop, families **MUST** perform a [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) for all children. All children who are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19 as identified in the screening tool must not ride the school bus or attend school.



Students are expected to thoroughly wash/sanitize their hands before and after riding the bus in the morning and afternoon. There will not be hand sanitizer on the bus for students to use while boarding/de-boarding. Students **MUST** wash their hands thoroughly and/or use hand-sanitizer prior to going to the bus stop.

Parents who provide hand sanitizer to their children must ensure they are well informed in its proper use. Misuse of hand sanitizer on the school bus shall be reported to School Administration for follow-up.

Families **MUST** ensure that each child in grade 1 to 12 have a non-medical mask to wear while riding the bus, unless unable to do so for medical reasons or due to special needs which must be communicated to the school prior to riding the school bus.

Families are encouraged to ensure that younger children in kindergarten have a non-medical mask to wear while riding the bus, unless unable to do so for medical reasons or due to special needs.

At the Bus Stop

Public Health recommends individuals stand two (2) metres apart to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Parents/guardians and students are responsible for maintaining this distance at the bus stop.

Reminder: Parents/guardians are responsible at all times for their children's safety and conduct at the bus stop (including walking to and from the bus stop).

Boarding the School Bus

Once the bus arrives, students **SHOULD NOT** crowd the front door. Students **SHOULD** line up while maintaining a 2-metre physical distance between them, where possible. No more than one student should be on the stairs at a time. Students **SHOULD** get to their assigned seat and sit down with their school bag on their lap as quickly as possible. Buses may be delayed getting to the school or stop due to this revised un/loading procedure.



Number of Students Per Bus

As per the Ministry of Education COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools (2021-2022), in order to support the return to school 5 days a week, the utilization of school buses operating at full capacity may be required, however the seat directly behind the driver should remain empty. This means that loading capacity will be as normal less one 2-3 passenger seat, with a full load equaling 46-67 students, depending on the number of eligible students and their grade level.

The maximum seating capacity of a full size school bus with only Kindergarten to grade 6 students is 70 based on three children to a seat and 48 with only students from grade 7 – 12 based on two to a seat. School buses are manufactured and school bus transportation across the country has been scheduled based on these capacities for decades.

Many of our current bus routes have less than 46 students riding at a time, which is still at least two to a seat. Some bus routes however, have more than 46 students currently assigned which would make it necessary for some younger students to be seated together three to a seat on those routes. Families who have other means of getting their children to and from school are encouraged to do so and opt-out of busing so that we may plan for a reduced number of students on the buses and allow more room for eligible students who have no other means of getting to and from school.

Due to the number and frequency of passengers, families should note that school buses are not sterile environments and physical distancing will not be possible aboard the bus.

Seating Assignments and Contact-Tracing

Starting with the first day of school and until they are assigned specific seats by their School Administrator, students living in the same household on the same bus are to be instructed to sit together. If there are no other children in the same household on the bus, then they are to sit with a classmate to the extent possible while still using school buses to their capacity. Drivers will remind students of this as they board the bus and may direct students to sit in specific seats based on household first/classmate second criteria and their instruction must be followed.

Seating plans will be developed and maintained by School Administrators within the first few days of school. While School Administrators are responsible for bus seating assignments, they may work together with Bus Drivers for their creation and implementation. Drivers will be responsible for ensuring students sit in their assigned seat and reporting to School Administrators any students who do not follow assigned seating or other school bus safety protocols.

Seating plans will need to be modified every time there is a new application for transportation and therefore applications may take longer to complete. Families who submit their application at the beginning of the school year may need to make alternate arrangements for the first few weeks of school.

Once assigned, students MUST stay in their assigned seat during every ride in order to maintain cohort bubbles to the extent possible. Assigned seating aims to reduce virus transmission and will facilitate contact tracing for public health.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Where a distance of two metres between individuals cannot be maintained, Public Health recommends wearing facemasks. The Ministry of Education has made masks mandatory for all bus riders in Grades 1 - 12. STSTB strongly recommends everyone on the school bus wear a mask including those in Kindergarten, unless exempt for health reasons.

- All drivers must wear medical grade (surgical/procedure) masks when students are on board the bus and don eye protection while unmasked students are loading or off-loading.

- Any parent/guardian or school staff required to board the bus to load or unload a student MUST be masked.
- All students in Grade 1 - 12 MUST wear non-medical masks at a minimum to board and ride the bus.
- All students in Kindergarten SHOULD be encouraged to wear masks similarly.

As students board, drivers will be wearing a mask, and possibly a face shield or goggles as recommended by health officials. This can be frightening for children, who may not recognize their friendly face. Parents/guardians should consider talking about this aspect of the ride with their children before their first trip on the bus, and supervise them at the stop until they board the bus.

Families are responsible for equipping their children with masks before sending them to school.

Cleaning Requirements & Ventilation

The Ministry of Education has provided anti-viral cleaning supplies as well as Personal Protective Equipment for drivers. Bus Operators are obligated to ensure proper protocols are maintained on all vehicles servicing STSTB routes.

Where weather permits, according to Public Health direction, windows should be left open to increase ventilation. Only drivers should touch the windows.

YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES

At the end of morning runs, there will be a high touch area cleaning of handrails and tops of seats that will be treated with anti-viral spray.

At the end of afternoon runs, there will be a deeper cleaning - hand rails, tops/front/back/bottom of seats, side walls under window, window sills, safety latches that will be treated with anti-viral spray. Garbage will be collected from the floor.



WHEELCHAIR BUSES

In addition to the protocol above, all hard surface equipment will be treated with anti-viral spray.

School Bus Operator Responsibilities

School Bus Company

Bus Operators are to:

- Ensure all school vehicles are cleaned/sanitized under the requirements stipulated in this document.
- Provide available PPE to any driver requesting it.

- Keep the same driver and bus on the same run, every day, to the extent possible based on driver and vehicle availability.
- Maintain accurate daily (AM and PM) records of driver and vehicle route assignments.

School Bus Driver

Bus drivers must self-assess for illness daily and not board the bus if they show symptoms of COVID-19. This may result in the start of the run being delayed or cancelled.

Masks and face shields will be provided to the bus companies to distribute to all drivers. Masks shall be worn at all times when students are on board the school bus. Eye protection for school bus drivers should not interfere with the safe operation of vehicles and is intended to protect drivers during close contact with students, such as during boarding and exiting.

Student & Family Responsibilities

Obligations from Public Health

PHYSICAL DISTANCE

Individuals must stay 2 metres apart whenever possible.

HAND HYGIENE

Students are expected to thoroughly wash/sanitize their hands before and after riding the bus in the morning and afternoon. There will not be hand sanitizer on the bus for students to use while boarding/deboarding.

Screening for Signs of Illness

Students in households where contamination is suspected must not ride the bus. Students must be kept home if showing signs of COVID-19.

Students will not be permitted on the bus if they develop symptoms at school and will need alternative transportation home.

While only students in Grades 1-12 and adults are mandated to wear masks, families should encourage younger-aged students to wear them as well.

Student Behaviour

Drivers will use the Student Behaviour Form to inform schools of any student who:

- Boarded without a mask or took it off during the ride (Grades 1 – 12)
- Did not sit/stay in their assigned seat

- Put others at risk by touching, or spreading bodily fluids to other people in the vehicle

Severe misconduct with respect to COVID-19 safety may result in semi or permanent suspension from the bus.

Additional Service Modifications

On Time Service

Due to the pre-existing and on-going driver shortage and the responsibility of all individuals to isolate if transmission is suspected, there may be times when a driver is unable to operate their route. The bus company is responsible for finding a replacement driver for the day. Runs may be delayed getting to the school or stop. Runs may be cancelled if a replacement driver is not available and families should be prepared to provide alternate means of transportation on short notice should this occur. Late or cancelled buses will be posted under delayed reporting at www.ststb.ca and through the Bus Status App.

Application Process

Processing of transportation applications by STSTB will take longer than usual due to the importance of seat assignments. Families may need to make interim travel arrangements if they apply for busing in September.

Temporary Emergency Transportation

There will be NO emergency bus transportation permitted while there is a requirement to physically distance, cohort students, and facilitate contact tracing. If a child needs travel to/from school from a different address on a temporary or emergency basis, families will be responsible for providing their own transportation.

Transportation Opt-Out

It is always the parents' choice on whether to put their child on the school bus. If you are not comfortable with your child riding the school bus this year, you can opt-out here:

<https://forms.gle/wn2tww2wg158skpH9>

Eligible students who opt-out will always be able to opt back in at a later date.

Resources

Local Public Health Unit

Thunder Bay District Health Unit

www.tbdhu.com

Board Websites and Communications Channels

Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay

www.ststb.ca/covid19

Follow us on [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#) @ststhunderbay, [Twitter](#) @tbaybus

Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique des Aurores Boréales

www.csdcab.on.ca

Lakehead District School Board

www.lakeheadschoools.ca

Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board

www.tbcschools.ca

Province of Ontario

[COVID-19 school and child care screening](#)

[COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#)

[COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms –Version 7.0](#)

SickKids

[Covid-19 Guidance for School Reopening report](#)

Transport Canada

[Federal Guidance for School Bus Operations during the COVID-19 Pandemic report](#)