August 14, 2020

Dear LEA Leaders,

This memo includes important updates to the busing and student transportation section on pages 16 and 17 of *Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island's Elementary and Secondary Schools* released on June 19, 2020. Highlights of the changes include:

1. A change to the maximum occupancy for school buses from one student per seat to a maximum of **50% of vehicle seating capacity** (not to exceed 36 passengers) for all vehicles used for student transport (e.g. school bus, van, or other vehicle).
2. Reformatted the section to reflect that that the guidance is the same for all reopening scenarios (Full, Partial, and Limited In-Person).
3. Added reference to a planning resource that can be used to determine the number of close contact passengers who will need to quarantine in the event of a passenger testing positive.

Busing and Student Transportation

It will be necessary for all LEAs to consider multiple solutions for student transportation, and no one solution will work statewide given the unique circumstances of each district and school. Each LEA will need to outline how it is going to address the transportation needs of its community.

For use of traditional school buses, the following required guidance must be followed for each of the three in-person reopening scenarios. To ensure student compliance with the health-and-safety guidelines for buses, additional bus monitors are strongly recommended for every bus.

In All Reopening Scenarios:

- All students on buses are required to wear masks (with the exception of children younger than age two and anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance).
- Students using the bus are scheduled as a stable group, and the bus group is considered its own stable group.
- Hand sanitizer must be available and used when entering and exiting the bus.
- Students are screened for symptoms when getting on the bus. Options for screening include screening by parents prior to students boarding the bus.
- All students have assigned seats on the bus and ride the same bus to and from school.
- Students are seated to physically distance as much as possible with a maximum occupancy of 50% of vehicle seating capacity (not to exceed 36 passengers).
- Students should— to the greatest extent possible— refrain from talking on the bus, in order to minimize respiratory droplets.
- Students on the bus all sit facing forward.

- Since each bus is its own stable group, the same group of students is assigned to the bus every day. Locations for drop-off and pick-up are the same every day, with the same group of students every day. As much as possible, drivers and staff helping with busing should be the same for each bus, each day.
- Bus windows should always remain fully open in order to improve air flow and ventilation; all passengers should dress for inclement weather so that windows can remain open regardless of weather concerns,
- LEA plans must include specific considerations for differently-abled students and specific protocols identified on a student's Individual Education Program (IEP).
- Along with mask-wearing, physical distancing at bus stops and during drop-off and pick-up is strongly recommended. All measures must be taken to physically distance to the greatest extent possible.
- Signs should be posted on buses to remind students of protocols. Reminders about screening prior to boarding buses should also be posted for families.
- Drivers, monitors, and other staff must be screened daily. Face coverings are required for all drivers and staff.
- High-touch surfaces such as handrails should be cleaned and disinfected between bus runs. All buses should be disinfected at the end of each day.
- To ensure student compliance with the health-and-safety guidelines for buses, additional bus monitors are strongly recommended for every bus.

Calculation Tool for Busing and Student Transportation Vehicles

When a passenger is confirmed to have COVID-19 (tests positive), close contacts of the person will need to quarantine for 14 days. On a bus, close contacts of a confirmed case are those who were seated in the same row as, two rows in front of, and two rows behind the infected person. In addition, anyone within 6 feet of the individual for greater than 15 minutes is a close contact and will need to quarantine.

It may be possible to arrange seating to minimize the number of close contact passengers who will need to quarantine in the event of a passenger testing positive. A spreadsheet tool has been developed to calculate the minimum number of riders who would need to quarantine for different seating arrangements. The tool shows two examples of seating arrangements for the same occupancy.

To use this tool:

- Determine the occupancy of the bus. The maximum occupancy is of 50% of vehicle seating capacity (not to exceed 36 passengers).
- Enter the number of people in each seat. Household members should sit together in the same seat.
- Seat people to allow for maximal space between riders.

- Column Q calculates the minimum number of close contacts who would need to quarantine if there were an infected person in that row. This is the sum of: (# people seated in the row with the infected) + (# people seated in the 2 rows in front of the infected person) + (# people seated in the 2 rows behind the infected person).

For a given occupancy, the tool can be used to compare the average number of close contacts for different seating arrangements

Best Practice Summary for Busing and Student Transportation

Reduce Demand

- Request students not requiring busing use alternative transportation
- Allow parents early drop off and late pick up from school
- Eliminate busing for any student that lives within a given radius of school
- Set up public-health compliant structures for walking school busing (supervised walking groups that as masked and socially distanced)
- Provide bike racks and locks to encourage biking for middle and high school
- Identify public transportation options

Increase Capacity

- Adding more runs for each bus by staggering school start and end times
    - Increasing from 2 runs to 3 increases total capacity by 50%
    - Increasing from 2 runs to 4 increases total capacity by 100%
    - Increasing from 3 runs to 4 increases total capacity by 33%
- Considerations when calculating the total capacity of busses:
    - Number of available busses
    - Number of runs each bus will make
    - Number of students the bus can hold given existing guidelines
    - Number of siblings/family members on each bus
    - Utilizing a central pick up/drop off location to reduce the number of bus stops allowing for increase bus runs

Other Ideas

- LEA's must survey families for the number of bus riders in their house
- Monitor number of daily riders via rider log
- Create method for families to communicate any change in busing need

- Use paraprofessionals as crossing guards and/or bus monitors
- Load students picked up first in the rear to reduce isle exposure
- Load students dropped off first in the front to reduce isle exposure
- Have hand sanitizer available, clean/sanitize bus after each run
- Parents screen students daily for symptoms
- Assign seating/RSVP- register for seats
- Increase ventilation on busses (windows down, fans)
- Group students by pod when applicable