

Student Transportation Fact Sheet – 2020-21 School Year

Last Updated: August 21, 2020

We know that there have been a number of changes to student transportation for the 2020-21 school year in light of COVID-19. This fact sheet has been created to ensure that you have the latest information and to assist in answering questions from parents/guardians. The fact sheet will continue to be updated and shared as the situation evolves.

Transportation Eligibility

- As in previous years, transportation is provided for students who meet the following criteria:
 - Junior Kindergarten-Grade 5: More than 1.6 km from the school and within the catchment area
 - Grades 6-8: More than 3.2 km from the school and within the catchment area
 - Grades 9-12: More than 4.8 km from the school and within the catchment area
 - Special Needs: Home pickup for any student not attending their local school and meeting distance requirement (based on student cognitive level)
 - French Immersion: School stops for students attending a regional immersion program and meeting distance requirement.

Empty Seat Policy

- The TDSB's [Empty Seat Policy](#) (PR504) has been put on hold for the 2020-21 school year.
- As you know, this is not a typical start up to the year. The decision to put the Empty Seat Policy on hold was made to help promote physical distancing on school busses, as well as to help the Toronto Student Transportation Group (TSTG) and bus operators effectively plan bus routes and seating arrangements in light of the new COVID-19 health and safety precautions.

Phased Start to Student Transportation

- This week, it was announced that the first day of school (for elementary, secondary and virtual school) will be moved to Tuesday, September 15, given the amount of time needed to prepare for the return to school. The TDSB will also stagger the entry of grades over a few days.
- TSTG, which provides bus services for the TDSB and the TCDSB, will continue to move forward with a phased start for student transportation to ensure that students with special education needs are prioritized and receive bus service beginning the first week of school.
 - **During week 1 of the school year only students with special education needs, excluding those in the gifted program, will be provided with student transportation.**
 - **Starting Week 2 of the school year, all other eligible students will be provided with student transportation, unless there is a significant driver shortage or other unforeseen issues related to COVID-19.**

- Due to the Board's goal to reduce class sizes and improve physical distancing, some elementary students may be reallocated to other locations. Therefore, there may be a delay in providing transportation to these students, depending on the number of new locations and changes to the bus routes.
- Given continued school bus driver shortages across the province, this staggered approach provides TSTG additional time to identify and address any potential start-up issues related to the driver shortage, and to ensure when full transportation services are in place, they are running as smoothly as possible.
- Students with special needs include those on mini-buses, mini-vans and WC Accessible vehicles.
- This information was originally sent (when school was set to begin on September 8) to parents/guardians through school messenger and the transportation portal, and posted on the TDSB and TSTG website and social media accounts.
- An update will be sent to transportation parents/guardians informing them that the phased start for student transportation will continue with the new start date (September 15). It continues to be necessary to phase in transportation as the actual impact of the driver shortage will not be known until school starts and we want to ensure our special education students receive full transportation immediately.
- Parents will receive a phone call from TSTG the week before school starts confirming their start date (Week 1 or Week 2).
- As always, [active transportation](#) is recommended when possible.

Bus Driver Shortage

- School boards across the province continue to face a school bus driver shortage that has caused start-up issues for the past several years.
- This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the driver shortage issue because approximately 20% of the driver pool is over 60 years of age.
- Over the summer, bus operators were directed to increase recruitment efforts.
- All TSTG bus operators have indicated that they will have sufficient driver availability. However, the actual impact of a driver shortage is typically not known until the end of August/early September when operators actually go through their route sign up.

COVID-19 & School Bus Safety

- To help ensure the safe start-up of student transportation services for students and drivers, the Toronto Student Transportation Group, working with the school bus operators, has put a number of COVID-19 protocols and precautions in place. These include:
 - Requiring that all students (K-12) wear non-medical face coverings (exceptions will be made for students with medical conditions or special needs).
 - Requiring that all bus drivers wear medical masks. Face shields may be worn in addition to the medical mask when necessary.
 - Assigning seats for students with siblings and classroom cohorts seated together.

- Enhanced cleaning of high touch surfaces (e.g. seats, inside hand railing, interior windows and walls, etc.) before and after each shift, as well as in between runs.
- Please see the full list of [health and safety protocols and precautions](#) to ensure the health and well-being of all students and drivers on bus.
- Please also note that parents/guardians who have to secure their special needs child(ren) on the bus will also be required to wear face coverings.
- Assigned seating plans will be created by TSTG for every school bus run but will be provided to schools to refine and update as needed over the first few weeks of school.

Late Buses

- Buses may run late for a number of different reasons. School bus operators are required to update the Late Bus Portal which will generate an email notifying schools and parents/guardians signed up for the portal of the delay.
- Constant and regular delays should be reported to the TDSB's Transportation department for investigation and resolution.

Parent/Guardians Questions and Communication

- Parents/guardians can access their children's information by signing up on the [Transportation Portal](#) and can subscribe to the email notification for late buses.
- We anticipate that students' specific route information will be available during the week of August 24. However, we encourage parents/guardians to check back regularly as routes may change before the start of school.
- To access your child's transportation information, please visit the [Transportation Portal](#), email transportation@torontoschoolbus.org or call 647-790-3829.
- General transportation information is located on TSTG's website at www.torontoschoolbus.org and answers to many questions can be found on the [FAQ](#) page.