



SPECIAL NEEDS GUIDELINES --- AN FAQ FOR PARENTS

Dear parents:

As we move through these uncertain times, we understand that you have many questions.

Right now we are working through what school is going to look like. In the Transportation Department, we have been hard at work to ensure the safety of your students when they are being transported to and from school. We are following the guidance provided to us by many organizations, among these organizations are: CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Department of Health, and NAPT (National Association for Pupil Transportation.)

As part of this process, we have developed a list of items (questions) you may have regarding how your student is being transported. Though this list is exhaustive, it is not meant to be complete because, like the situation with this pandemic, new questions and answers are being brought to light every day.

1.) What is Bremerton School District (BSD) doing to help ensure a clean bus environment?

Hygiene and sanitation are very important in order to maintain a safe bus environment. Prior to the pandemic, drivers were already keeping the bus interiors clean by sweeping, removing trash, and cleaning areas where students have had accidents on the bus. We will continue to do so, and we have also added the following items on top of our process:

Working with our custodial department and guidance from the Department of Health, we will be using two different disinfecting agents on our buses. The first disinfecting agent will be applied at the end of every run, and only after all students have left the bus. This is a hand spray bottle that the drivers (and/or bus para-educators) will use on the "high touch" areas on the bus (seats, child safety systems, etc.) When the buses return to the Transportation Facility, the driver (and or other transportation personnel,) we will be using a different disinfecting agent to complement the one used while the buses are in the field.

If you have any questions regarding what type of sanitizer is being used, please contact this department, and we will provide you with this information.

2.) Will BSD have hand sanitizer available for people on the bus?

The short answer is yes. However, we understand that many students with disabilities and special needs may have disability-related health and/or behavior issues if hand sanitizer is used. We are asking that every person boarding the bus uses the provided hand sanitizer. However, if it has been determined by you and your student's IEP team that your student cannot use hand sanitizer, we will respect that decision. We only ask that this be communicated to the Transportation Department in order to make sure our staff is fully aware of this issue.

We currently use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel, and as this runs out, we will switch to an alcohol-based liquid hand sanitizer. The dispenser will be located at the front of the bus. As before, if you have any questions regarding the content of the hand sanitizer, please contact this department, and we will provide this information to you.

3.) How will the buses maintain adequate ventilation within the bus seating area?

Per guidelines provided by OSPI, we are to maintain maximum air circulation throughout the bus as a mitigation strategy to help bring clean, fresh air into the bus. On our buses, this will be done through opening various windows and hatches, and operating our fans as much as practically possible.

Again, guidance for this will come to Transportation from your student's IEP team, and we will implement the recommendations to the best of our abilities.

4.) Who is required to use a cloth face covering while on board the bus?

Again, the short answer is: everyone is required to wear a cloth face covering while on the bus. These face coverings has been shown to slow down the transmission of the virus. In addition, wearing of face coverings is mandated by law in the State of Washington.

However, we understand that our special needs and disabled population might be either unable, or at worst, unwilling to wear face coverings while on the bus. We will never exclude a student from riding a bus for not wearing a face covering. However, this is where your partnership with your student's IEP team is most crucial. If your student can wear a face covering, please make sure they do so. If your student has a reason to not wear one, as determined by you and your student's IEP team, then Transportation will be made aware of this by the IEP team.

5.) How does physical distancing work in the Special Needs environment?

This question gets posed quite a bit, too. The good news is, due to the unique nature of Special Needs transportation, we have both fewer students and more unique stops. As a result, we should rarely have to work on physical distancing at our pickup and drop-off points.

In the bus environment, we also have the luxury of having Special Needs buses that are, on the whole, larger than those in other school districts. As a result, we can plan for more space on our buses, depending on the number of students assigned to the route.

6.) As a parent, what can I do to help my student be successful while on the bus?

We ask that you help your student understand that there are things that they can do to not just keep themselves safe, but also keep others around them safe while on the bus. Things like using safe hands, keeping distance from others, wearing face coverings, and staying in their seat at all times are all lessons you can do to help your student understand what is going on.

In particular, with respect to face coverings, please start working with your student now. It can be as simple as wearing a face covering for 10-15 minutes a day, and gradually increasing that time every week until school starts.

Some students, as a part of their IEP or Section 504 plans, have difficulties in maintaining safe distances from others and/or have difficulties with safe touching behaviors. This is another area where decisions and plans will need to be made between yourself and your student's IEP team. Again, we will not deny a student transportation based on these behaviors, but please also bear in mind that there are other students who use transportation. We still need to be able to strike a balance that keeps the bus environment safe for everyone on the bus.

Another big item is helping your student understand that things are going to look differently when they are on the bus. Due to a requirement for face coverings on our part, too, it may make it difficult for students and adults to read each other's emotions and expressions. These changes, however, are necessary to help keep both your student and our employees safe.

Please know that, as soon as we are able to remove these restrictions, we will do so.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and thank you for helping your student understand the changes going on around here. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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