

TO: Pupil Transportation Directors

FROM: Brian McGairty, Bureau Director
Office of Safe and Orderly Schools

Janice Grant, Pupil Transportation Administrator
Division of Pupil Transportation

DATE: June 5, 2020

RE: Bus Driver Certification

As a result of the impact of COVID-19 and the increased number of requests to certify new bus drivers, the Office of Safe and Orderly Schools, Division of Pupil Transportation is providing school districts with health and safety guidelines, as well as requirements to provide documentation to the bus driver instructors 72 hours in advance of the training to expedite the certification process of all new bus drivers to ensure the MDE meets the needs of all districts.

The district is responsible for ensuring all health and safety requirements prior to and during the certification process are met in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Mississippi Department of Health (MSDH) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in place at the time of the certification of new bus drivers.

The district shall be responsible for the following:

- Ensuring the maximum class size is 20 participants or less;
- Utilizing classrooms large enough to ensure social distancing guidelines of six (6) to 10 feet between each participant;
- Reducing the class size to ensure the social distancing guidelines are met, if the appropriate classroom space for 20 participants is not available;
- Cleaning and sanitizing all classrooms prior to the scheduled certification training;
- Ensuring all participants wear masks, and providing masks to participants that do not have a mask or face covering;
- Providing hand sanitizer for the bus driver instructor(s) and participants;
- Ensuring participants that have symptoms of COVID-19, have been exposed to an individual with symptoms of COVID-19, or that has tested positive for COVID-19 are not allowed to participate and are rescheduled for certification in the future;
- Cleaning and sanitizing all buses used for the 3rd party driving test prior to and following each driver; and
- Ensuring all drivers wear masks and gloves during the 3rd party driving test.

To expedite the certification process due to the increased number of requests for new driver certification, the district shall ensure the following:

- Each participant has been properly trained by the district regarding inspection, skills tests, road preparation, etc.;
- Each participant has a commercial driving license (CDL) or permit;
- Ensure each participant has possessed a permit for a minimum of 14 days, since the driver is not eligible for the 3rd party driving test until the 15th day of the permit being issued; and
- Provide a pencil (not pen) for each participant.

The following documents must be provided to the bus driver instructor(s) 72 hours in advance of the training:

- A completed *District Transportation Information Form* (attached);
- A completed *Participant Information Form* (attached) for each participant to verify possession of a valid CDL driver's license or a valid driver's license and permit (since all copies provided to the bus driver instructors are not of high quality);
- A copy of the participant's CDL license, if applicable; or
- A copy of the participant's driver's license and permit.

The bus driver instructors are scheduled to begin the certification process in districts for all new bus drivers beginning on June 15, 2020.

If a participant is unable to attend in your district on the day the certification is scheduled, a participant may attend the certification training as a guest participant in a neighboring district, provided both districts are in agreement. However, the guest participant will not be allowed to participate in the 3rd party driving test utilizing the school bus owned by the hosting district. It shall be the responsibility of the guest district to ensure that a bus owned by the guest district is on-site in the hosting district at the time of the 3rd party driving test.

On June 11, 2020, the Office of Safe and Orderly Schools, Division of Pupil Transportation will be seeking approval by the State Board of Education (SBE) for a one-year suspension of the requirement for certified bus drivers to renew the two-year MDE Bus Driver Certification Card. If approved by the SBE, this one-year suspension is applicable to all certified bus drivers with an MDE Bus Driver Certification Card with an expiration date of July 31, 2020, or July 31, 2021. Upon approval of this suspension, the district shall ensure each certified bus driver has a valid bus driver certificate and CDL license with a "P" and "S" endorsement on file in the district. The district must also have on file a yearly motor vehicle report on each certified bus driver and evidence that the driver has received two (2) hours of in-service training per year. In addition, the required two (2) hours of in-service bus driver training per semester provided by the district shall include bus driver safety regulations regarding loading and unloading (at home and on campus) and railroad crossings.

The two (2) required bus evacuation drills per year shall be conducted for the 2020 – 2021 school year under the MSDH and the CDC guidelines in place at the time the drills are conducted. If approval is granted by the SBE, the district will not be cited for noncompliance, if the bus evacuation drills are modified or the district is unable to conduct the drills within the specified timelines outlined in the *Mississippi Pupil Transportation Handbook* as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

If a bus driver instructor is not provided the required information 72 hours in advance of the scheduled training or they arrive in the district and determine that the health and safety requirements or any other district requirement outlined above have not been met, the bus driver instructor will not be allowed to conduct any portion of the certification process. It will be the responsibility of the district to contact the Office of Pupil Transportation and reschedule the certification of the new bus drivers.

We sincerely appreciate your prompt attention to the matters outlined above in an effort to expedite the new bus driver certification process as we strive to meet the needs of all districts. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at bmcgairty@mdek12.org or Janice Grant, jgrant@mdek12.org. The office number is 601.359.1028, but please be reminded that office hours may be limited due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and agency staff working on-site and telework schedules.

C: District Superintendent
School Principals
MDE Bus Driver Instructors