



Dear School District Administrator –

As you know, school bus companies in Minnesota are a critical part of the school system. Our industry has had great concern for school bus drivers who may find themselves struggling because of the financial impact of the Coronavirus shut down. School Bus contractors carry heavy fixed costs such as insurance, equipment loans, building and maintenance costs as well as carrying full time employee support staff. Undoubtedly, contractors will suffer revenue loss due to the cancellation of the many school field trips and the sports schedule that has been disrupted. Many school districts in Minnesota and throughout the Nation have already made agreements to continue paying school bus contractors during the shutdown to ensure that school bus drivers and fleets are ready when school is open again. Some schools have been waiting for guidance on how to proceed. Fortunately, the Minnesota Department of Education and the Federal CARES Act provide that guidance.

On March 28, 2020, President Trump enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES Act) that includes a \$30.75 Billion "Education Stabilization Fund" with \$13.5 Billion specifically allocated for elementary and secondary education schools, flowing through states. Section 18006 of the new law states that as a condition of receiving funding:

“A local educational agency, State, institution of higher education, or other entity that receives funds under “Education Stabilization Fund”, shall to the greatest extent practicable, continue to pay its employees and contractors during the period of any disruptions or closures related to coronavirus.”

The overriding intent from Congress in the CARES Act, and in Section 18006, is to ensure the viability and stability of America’s school bus fleet by assuring that schools will continue to pay its school bus contractors during the period of any disruptions or closures related to coronavirus so they can seamlessly resume operations.

In Minnesota, Governor Tim Walz delivered a press conference on March 10th in conjunction with Education Commissioner Mary Ricker where they promised schools would receive their full funding so that they could take care of everyone down the line including their hourly workers.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) issued guidance for distance learning on March 31st. https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE032188&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

Notable sections include: SPECIAL EDUCATION (Page 5)

Special Education Executive Order 20-19 would allow school districts and charter schools to continue reporting all state funded special education staff and contracted costs, including special education transportation costs, using the same UFARS funding string they would have otherwise been reported in, regardless of work performed during distance learning planning or the distance learning program.

The expectation is that school districts and charter schools maintain collaboration and contracts with bus transportation providers. These professionals are instrumental in supporting the efforts of distance learning specifically for transporting the students of our critical workers and food to our students throughout the community.

In a recent MN School Bus Operator's survey, our members indicated with a 100% response rate that they are helping with meal delivery, transportation of critical care worker's children as well as delivering distance learning materials. We feel incredibly proud to be able to do our part during this crisis. We feel grateful to the Education Commissioner who has laid out guiding principles for us as we navigate these uncertain times:

1. Practice servant leadership
2. Treat everyone with respect and dignity
3. Do the right thing, especially when it is difficult
4. Ask how your actions are reinforcing or removing structural inequity
5. Promote the common good over narrow special interests
6. Be accessible, transparent, and accountable
7. Include voices from communities who will be most impacted

It is clear from the guidance that school contractors are to remain whole during the pandemic. Working together, we can maintain the stability of the current student transportation system so when classes resume, we can be ready to re-engage immediately and fully. Given the CARES Act and the MDE Guidance, we request that the Districts fully honor any student transportation contract that it may have with contractors.

Sincerely,

Shelly Jonas

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Executive Director

Minnesota School Bus Operators Association