

'There's a ton of work that needs to be done': Safety a priority in school busing plans

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As some parents struggle to decide whether to send their children to school on Sept. 8 or opt for at-home learning, others have an extra choice to make – busing.

Parents have always had the option to use school board-provided transportation or their own, but the COVID-19 pandemic has created some extra concerns.

The Trillium Lakelands District School Board is already discussing busing with its providers. [Parents have been asked to pre-register their children to return to school by Thursday \(Aug. 13\)](#) so that estimates are available for busing.

Director of education Wesley Hahn encourages parents to choose carefully, as the board “can’t have parents opting in and out,” noting there needs to be “stability for contact tracing, cohorting and setting transportation manifests.”

Superintendent of business Tim Ellis added that “it wouldn’t be our intention to have students miss out on school because they can’t get busing, but we have to focus on safety right now.”

Trustee and former bus driver John Byrne suggested that drivers have input regarding seating after hearing one suggestion of loading buses from back to front to reduce interactions. Byrne said his experience has shown that younger children feel safer seated near the driver and older students should be seated near emergency exits in the event of an emergency.

“We know there’s a ton of work that needs to be done in the few short weeks we have left before school starts,” said Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board chair Diane Lloyd. “But our focus will remain on safety and ensuring that every precaution that can be put in place, is in place.”

The province has outlined a number of other suggestions regarding busing, many of which are echoed by the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit.

“If possible, families may want to consider ‘active’ forms of travel by getting students to walk or bike to school. Parents may also want to choose to drive students to school rather than have them ride the bus,” said manager of health promotion Lorna McCleary. “Physical distancing between students on the bus is important.”

Other suggestions include limiting one student per seat or having students in the same classroom sit in the same area, and that students wear face coverings if physical distancing is difficult. Busing companies will ensure that cleaning protocols are enhanced, especially on hand rails and other high-touch surfaces, and that hand sanitizer is available on school buses.