



## For Immediate Release

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In acknowledgement that the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) will significantly alter the student transportation landscape, the three major organizations that advocate on behalf of pupil transportation have created the ***Student Transportation Aligned for Return To School, or STARTS Task Force***. STARTS promises to be a collaboration among the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation (NASDPTS), the National Association of Pupil Transportation (NAPT), and the National School Transportation Association (NSTA) to research, review, and report on matters relating to COVID-19 and student transportation.

The task force was launched last week, when the presidents of the organizations, Mike LaRocco (NASDPTS), Steve Simmons (NAPT), and John Benish, Jr. (NSTA), each sent letters to their respective members highlighting the proposed work of the task force, and asking for volunteers.

“Our goal is simple: we want to provide a variety of practical, tactical information to help school transportation service providers be ready when the time comes to get back to school,” according to NAPT president Steve Simmons.

The task force will be divided up into three subcommittees: Health and Safety (Students and Employees); Communications, Advocacy, and Public Relations; and Scheduling, Routing, and School Buses. As mentioned in last week’s letter, the overall objective of the task force is to develop specific recommendations, but also to encourage transportation professionals, at all levels, to insert themselves into the state and local working groups that are already considering, or about to consider, return to school proposals.

“All of us in NASDPTS extend our heartfelt thanks to the many essential workers, including student transportation professionals, who are working for the common good during the pandemic. We are excited by this initiative by the three national associations and their members in leading the STARTS Task Force. Those in the national student transportation community have always taken pride in our record getting students to and from schools and school activities safely. Now, as never before, our role has expanded to include within our ‘safety’ umbrella new procedures and equipment to keep our employees, students, and communities healthy. NASDPTS encourages all interested parties to help us in this task force. The task force will work expeditiously to establish best practices, guidelines, and resources that allow us to continue doing what we do best—ensuring that all students have access to

school, with confidence that their health and safety are being maintained,” said NASDPTS president Mike LaRocco.

The task force will convene immediately, with a proposed introductory meeting to be held within the next week, where co-chairs will be announced, and volunteers will be placed in one of the subcommittees and schedules will be decided, so work can begin expeditiously.

“The importance of the STARTS Task Force cannot be overstated. Student transportation is the largest transit system in the country, but the system that we left in mid-March will be dramatically different than the one we re-engage with in August and September. The professionals who will dedicate their time and expertise in this endeavor have the knowledge and experience to make sound judgements as we plan a return-to-school. We believe this information that comes from our collaboration will be embraced by policy-makers and the general public,” said John Benish, Jr.

Anyone interested in participating on the STARTS Task Force can send an email application to [STARTS@napt.org](mailto:STARTS@napt.org). Please be advised that due to size constraints, not all applications can be accepted.

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Copy of STARTS introductory letter attached

Copy of STARTS Organizational Chart attached

**About NAPT:**

The National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) is a diverse community of people that share a passion for safe and efficient student transportation. Our non-profit organization offers school districts and their transportation and transportation-related service providers a variety of communication, leadership, education, advocacy and research services.

**About NASDPTS:**

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation provides leadership, training, and assistance to state level and local leaders in student transportation and also partners with suppliers of equipment and services to support the nation’s student transportation community.

**About NSTA:**

National School Transportation Association has been the voice of private school bus contractors, manufacturers and suppliers since 1964. The association provides school transportation professionals with the tools and resources they need to make school buses safe, affordable, and efficient nationwide.