

Driving the School Bus During COVID-19

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The other issue we faced was making sure that our work conditions are safe. That was a challenge. You have drivers who are wearing both caps. They're concerned about their own kids, and they're concerned about the kids that they provide services to. This has been a situation where things have changed rapidly.

Even now they're still changing, because now we're talking about how variants could affect children and young people. All of these things are constantly going through my mind as a parent, and as a bus driver, because my child rides the school bus.

I was concerned about getting it. I worried about what kind of impact it would have on my family. God forbid, if I contracted it, and was no longer around, then my 14-year-old daughter would

have to finish her young life without her father around. That was something that happened to me at a very young age, because my father had heart problems. I know what it's like to not have a parent that you can come to when you have issues or questions. And that's something I don't want for my daughter—not to mention the rest of my family.

My mother passed away in this process, in January. It was primarily due to COVID. It's something that you read about; you see on the news. You hear the voices, the naysayers around you, you hear people, "Oh, it's not real," you know, even some of the people that you come into contact with during the work day. But when it takes someone from you, it's a different thing. It changes everything for you.



One year after lockdowns began, the way out from under the COVID-19 pandemic is finally beginning to appear. Hospitalizations are dropping. The weather is warming. Most importantly, essential service workers throughout the country are lining up to get vaccinated. I've previously stated that it is of the utmost importance that every state throughout the country classify school bus and transit workers as essential so they are given priority for vaccine distribution. If you haven't done so already, please get vaccinated—for yourself, for your loved ones and for your community.

In spite of the pandemic, Teamsters have continued to keep up the fight for school bus and transit workers. We're organizing new yards, negotiating bigger and better contracts and stepping up our shareholder activism to hold companies with unethical, legally questionable and not-even-profitable business models accountable. The activities of rank-and-file members during the pandemic demonstrate what being a Teamster is all about—members have been

delivering meals-on-wheels to children, volunteering in their communities and most importantly, standing up for one another on issues related to safety.

Over the past year, Teamsters like you demonstrate the resolve, bravery and solidarity that embodies the values of our union by performing work that is essential to the American way of life. Your country owes you a debt of gratitude.

With Solidarity,

Rick Middleton

Check out our re-wamped website and Facebook page for news, updates and more!
<https://driveupstandards.org/> • <https://www.facebook.com/driveupstandards>

Drive Up Standards NEWSLETTER

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

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PARTS DRIVERS JOIN TEAMSTERS LOCAL 391

Workers Join Growing Ranks of Teamster Bus Workers in Tar Heel State

Drivers at National Express have voted to join Teamsters Local 391 by over a two-to-one margin. The workers are tasked by the Piedmont Area Regional Transportation System (PARTS) with providing public transportation for ten of the counties that make up North Carolina's Piedmont Triad.

"The drivers at National Express are now part of Local 391 and we will work together on creating a workplace with higher wages and safer working conditions," said Mike McGaha, Local 391 President. "Workers also want to be shown dignity and respect on the job."

"These drivers are essential service workers, like most of our members, so we couldn't let the pandemic stop us," said Moses Darden, Local 391 Organizer. "We are honored that they have chosen to join the thousands of school bus and transit workers represented by the Teamsters in North Carolina."

The drive for Teamster representation started in May. Much of the organizing happened remotely due to the pandemic, and the election was conducted via mail. Barbara Townsend has been a PARTS Driver for over three years.

"We wanted to form a union with the Teamsters so our wages, benefits and working conditions can be guaranteed in a contract, whereas before, they were not," said Townsend.



WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT, TEAMSTERS LOCAL 777 LEADER MADE LEMONS OUT OF LEMONADE

When the pandemic hit last year, Phyllis Pepper was one of many school bus monitors throughout Illinois who ended up losing out on work as a result of the move to online learning.

That didn't keep her down, though. With her newfound spare time, Pepper started taking online classes at Eastern Gateway Community College and applied for a scholarship through the Teamsters Joint Council 25 Women's Committee. After writing an essay on how her local union was there for her during the pandemic, she won third place. Phyllis Pepper is now pursuing a certificate in Business Management.

"Knowledge is power," Pepper said. "Why not learn as much as you can?"

Pepper has been an active Teamster member for quite some time; she serves as a shop steward and volunteers her time with Joint Council 25, the Local 777 volunteer organizing committee and political engagement of Teamster members every election season.

"We're very lucky to have Phyllis Pepper as a member of our Teamster family," said Jim Gimco, President of Local 777. "Her commitment and selflessness have had an immeasurable positive impact on the lives of so many people, both in our local union and in our community."

The Teamsters "Drive Up Standards" newsletter is by and for school bus drivers, monitors and mechanics. This newsletter is published quarterly in print and online at www.driveupstandards.org.



Leaders of Local Unions Unanimously Endorse Tentative National Master First Student Agreement

Your First Student National Master Agreement (FSNMA) Negotiating Committee has reached a tentative agreement with the company that will cover all Teamster members employed by First Student through March 2026. Negotiations were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result, last year the parties negotiated a one-year agreement that ran from 2020-2021, and now we have a five-year agreement that will be in place until March 2026.

The contract ratified last year included protections for our members' jobs from outsourcing to ride-share companies, protections against reduced wages in the event that a driver is re-assigned to a job with a lower rate of pay, expanded

provisions for absences due to jury duty or other court appearances required by law, additional safety obligations on the part of the company and improved transfer rights in the event that a member changes bus yards. The new agreement includes all of those provisions, plus additional safety provisions added in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional stipend for company-required medical examinations and enhanced paycheck protections. Perhaps most notably, this agreement includes language that makes Teamsters at First Student eligible to participate in certain union health care and retirement plans.

"We have made working at First Student a better job with each successive national master agreement, and this latest contract is our best yet," said Rick Middleton, IBT Passenger Transportation Division Director. "In spite of the havoc wrought by the coronavirus, we adapted quickly and reached an agreement that improves our members' working conditions. This agreement reflects the value and service of First Student Teamsters, many of which demonstrated incredible heroism by continuing to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic."

First Student members eligible to vote in the upcoming ratification will be mailed ballots on June 7th. If you do not receive a ballot and believe you are eligible to vote, please contact your Local for assistance.



Teamsters Demand Greater Transparency of Uber's Political Spending

At Uber's May 10 meeting of shareholders, the Teamsters demanded that the company fully disclose the funds and organizations it uses to lobby to protect its controversial and unprofitable business model. Uber's business model is premised on exploiting gaps in employment and passenger transportation regulations around the world.

The demand, in the form of a shareholder proposal, comes as CEO Dara Khosrowshahi has declared his company will be even more vocal in advocating for laws like "Prop 22" around the country. Last November, Uber was among several so-called gig-economy companies that spent over \$200 million in support of Prop 22, a California ballot initiative. Prop 22 and similar laws present a serious and imminent threat to workers in the school bus and transit industries by making it easier for private companies to misclassify their workers as independent contractors rather than employees.

Zum, for example, is a student transportation start-up with a business model that relies on independent contractors just like Uber, Lyft and other "rideshare" companies. Zum has rapidly expanded its client base over the past years, and over the long term, the company could potentially imperil the job security of student transportation workers employed by both private school bus contractors and school districts. Student transportation workers would be replaced by so-called "gig" workers who have none of the traditional benefits associated with employment, such as worker's compensation and unemployment insurance, company-provided health care benefits, paid days off and much more.

In a letter to Uber investors, General Secretary-Treasurer Ken Hall warned specifically of the risks to workers and investors from Uber's funding of 501(c)(4), or social welfare groups — a form of "Dark Money" — which can entail corporate-funded advocacy posing as grassroots or community-led initiatives. Already, such groups are popping across the country in defense of a business model that is increasingly under scrutiny from politicians and regulators.

DRIVING THE SCHOOL BUS DURING COVID-19



by Eric Griffith, Teamsters Local 512

I've been driving a school bus in Jacksonville, Fla., for the past twenty years. When Duval County schools closed last year after the pandemic broke out, my fellow drivers and I delivered lunches and educational supplies to students until schools reopened in the fall. K-12 schools in Florida were required to offer in-person instruction, but until this month, teachers and staff weren't eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines.

I feel a sense of gratefulness that I was able to get vaccinated, but I still feel at some level that that shouldn't have been a difficult call in the first place. This is where the child's school day starts, at the bus stop. They're waiting for me as a driver to come and pick them up. They're looking for me. When I open that door, I'd like to feel as confident as I can that I'm not going to give them something, that they're not going to give me anything, either.

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SHARE YOUR VOICE!

Are you a Teamster school bus driver or monitor? Do you have an idea for a story or article that you'd like to see included in this newsletter? Contact Natalie Quezada at nquezada@teamster.org to let us know and we can publish it!