School Bus Driver Handbook

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SCHOOL BUS DRIVER HANDBOOK

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Note: The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is committed to providing access to all individuals seeking information on our website. Some changes to the layout and design of this document have been made in order to make it compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the OSPI Accessibility Policy.

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Notes on Usage

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has provided this handbook for distribution to every authorized school bus driver in the state. It is intended to be a resource for school bus drivers that are in their initial training and for school bus drivers that have years of experience. It can be used to provide supplementary information to the complete school bus driver training program, but is not intended to fully cover the school bus driver training requirements required by Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-144 School Bus Driver Qualifications.

There are many sections of this handbook that emphasize material that is covered in WAC 392-145 Transportation – Operations Rules. There are many requirements in the WAC that deal with the responsibilities of school bus drivers. An example is always having the headlights on while operating a school bus (WAC 392-145-050(8)). This requirement is not included in the main text of this handbook, since no further discussion seems necessary. However, school bus drivers must be aware of and comply with the requirements of the WAC, regardless whether or not a particular requirement is included for additional discussion within this handbook.

Because this handbook is intended to be used in conjunction with the Commercial Driver Guide published by the Department of Licensing (DOL), a significant amount of material that the guide covers regarding defensive driving and the operation of a commercial vehicle is not repeated here. Every school bus driver should also have a current copy (paper or electronic) of the Commercial Driver Guide and routinely refresh their knowledge of its contents.

Introduction

Every day in the United States, over 400,000 school buses transport approximately 25 million students between home and school. Collectively, school buses travel 4.3 billion miles each year. In Washington State, school buses provide over 700,000 student trips per day and travel over 100 million miles per year. When you consider field trips or activity trips, nearly every student rides a school bus at some point during the school year. Student transportation has the best safety record for any mode of ground-based, passenger transportation. The intent of this manual is to provide the school bus drivers of Washington State with the information necessary to continue to provide every student with a safe ride to and from school every day.

This manual provides some of the baseline information you learned when you were first trained to become a school bus driver. When encountering situations that raise questions, drivers should look to their local district school bus driver instructors and/or supervisor for additional assistance.

In Washington State, the majority of school bus drivers are employed directly by school districts, however, a significant number are employed by private companies contracting transportation services to school districts. Regardless of the employer, all school bus drivers operating school buses transporting public school students in the state of Washington are held to the same stringent qualifications, with the goal of ensuring that only the “best of the best” are allowed to transport our students. We hope this handbook will enhance your skills; our State’s dedicated, school bus drivers. Thanks for the great job you do!

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER REQUIREMENTS

School Bus Driver Authorization

Before you can drive students for a public school in Washington State, the school district you are going to be working for must have you authorized as a school bus driver by OSPI. The authorization is separate from any requirement related to your driver license issued by DOL, including the school bus endorsement. You are not issued any card or certificate indicating that you are an authorized school bus driver. The school district will make the application once you meet all the requirements. The district is notified when the authorization is approved.

You must be authorized by each school district you work for as a school bus driver. You may be working as a substitute driver for a couple of local districts, for instance. In that case, each district must have you authorized separately. Some districts are set up as cooperatives and they may choose to handle authorizations in a number of different ways. While the school district will complete the application process for your school bus driver authorization, it is your responsibility to ensure you meet the authorization requirements.

The authorization requirements for school bus drivers are found in WAC 392-144. A link to all the current rules and regulations can be found in the resource section at the end of this handbook and is also available on the OSPI Student Transportation webpage at http://www.k12.wa.us/transportation/

Initial Requirements

The initial authorization requirements for a school bus driver are found in WAC 392-144-101, and are summarized here:

- Have at least five years of experience driving a passenger car.
- Complete a Washington State Patrol and a Federal Bureau of Investigation background record check that does not indicate any disqualifying conditions.
- Complete a school bus driver training program overseen by an authorized school bus driver instructor.
- Meet all the continuing requirements for holding a school bus driver authorization, including a review of a five-year school bus driver abstract of your driver record.

Note that you are required to meet all the continuing requirements.

Continuing Requirements

The continuing requirements for maintaining a school bus driver authorization are found in WAC 392-144-102 and are summarized and described here:

- Have a valid, appropriate driver license for the type of vehicle you are operating. In some school districts, standard motor pool vehicles are used to transport some students to and from school. In this case, the driver of the vehicle may not need a commercial driver license, since it is not required for the vehicle. The driver still has to be an authorized school bus driver.
- Complete the annual school bus drivers in-service training, no later than November 1st of each school year. This training is provided by the school district or contractor.
- Have current first aid training. Typically, the school district or contractor provides this training. The district determines what first aid training is acceptable. Note that while CPR is included as an integral part of many first aid training programs, CPR is not required training. Remember that there is specific CPR training necessary for children. Use of adult CPR on small children may result in injury to the child.
- Complete and submit to the school district, an annual disclosure form of crimes against children and other disciplinary actions.
- Be able to demonstrate the physical ability to perform the job functions of a school bus driver.
- Have a current, valid medical examiner's certificate. Medical examiner's certificates are valid for not more than two years, but can be required more often by the medical examiner. Always carry the medical examiner's certificate with you when driving a commercial vehicle. As of May 21, 2014, the physical examination must be conducted by a medical examiner listed on the National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners.

Disqualifying Conditions

A complete list of the disqualifying conditions for a school bus driver is found in WAC 392-144-103. However, the most common disqualifications are:

- Having your personal driving privileges revoked or suspended as a result of a moving violation or having your commercial driver license disqualified, suspended, or revoked within the preceding five years.
- Having three or more speeding tickets or other serious motor vehicle violations, including any alcohol related offense within the preceding five years.
- Having refused a drug or alcohol test or had a positive drug or alcohol test.

There are many other disqualifying conditions listed in WAC 392-144-103, primarily dealing with the convictions for various crimes. If you have concern about the other disqualifying conditions, please see full text of the current WAC 392-144.

Diabetes Waiver Program

Diabetes is an increasingly common, serious medical condition. While a full discussion of all aspects of diabetes is beyond the scope of this handbook, proper diet and adequate exercise can reduce the risk of developing diabetes.

Individuals with diabetes who are treated with insulin are allowed to be authorized school bus drivers, depending on the stability provided by their treatment. There are a number of additional requirements provided in detail in WAC 392-144-020(9)(d). This is a waiver process implemented by OSPI and managed by the school district. It is a separate process from any medical waiver required by DOL. There is also a separate waiver process available from the federal government. The main difference (besides the longer waiting period for the federal waiver) is that with the DOL/OSPI process, you are only allowed to operate a school bus within Washington State. For instance, you would need a federal waiver to be able to drive a field trip to Portland.

For an individual with diabetes, following your doctor’s recommendations is extremely important. You should discuss with your doctor the requirements for a school bus driver with diabetes being treated with insulin. Make sure that your doctor is aware that when you initially beginning treatment with insulin, you will not be allowed to drive a school bus for a period of at least 90 calendar days. Working with your doctor, it may be possible to have this coincide with the summer break.

Professional Misconduct

For a school bus driver, professional misconduct refers to acts that are in violation of the rules and regulations for operating a school bus that put your passengers or co-workers at risk. Professional misconduct can result in the revocation of your school bus driver authorization.

One example of professional misconduct is failure to ensure that there are no students left on the bus at the end of your route. Checking your bus for students at the end of each route is required by WAC 392-145-041 and failure to do so can result in serious risk to the well-being of a student under your supervision.

Only an administrator of the employing school district can report a charge of professional misconduct to OSPI. Typically, OSPI will require a pattern of behavior with more than a single incident of professional misconduct before the school bus driver authorization is revoked. However, a single occurrence may result in revocation if the act results in personal injury or a single occurrence may result in a suspension of the authorization for an act resulting in significant risk of personal injury.

Reference: WAC 392-144-020(8) Professional Misconduct

Reporting Requirements

Every authorized school bus driver is required by WAC 392-144-140, to notify his or her employer in writing within 20 calendar days of:

1. The filing of any criminal charge for conduct that is a disqualifying condition in WAC 392-144-103.
2. Any disqualifying traffic convictions or license suspension or revocation orders issued by the Department of Licensing.

The written notification must include the driver’s name, driver license number, the court where the action is taking place and the case number assigned. Failure to notify can result in revocation of the school bus driver’s authorization regardless of the result of the court process. This is important and worth repeating: if you fail to notify your employer, it can result in you losing your job, even if you are found not guilty or if the traffic violation is later amended to a non-disqualifying infraction.

Commercial Driver License (CDL) Requirements

Washington State law requires that anyone driving a school bus must have a commercial driver license (CDL) Class B or C (depending on the size of school bus), a passenger endorsement, a school bus endorsement and the air brake restriction removed (if you are driving a bus with air brakes).

Obtaining a CDL requires written tests (administered by DOL) on such topics as general knowledge, passenger management, knowledge of air brakes and school bus operations. The skills test (demonstrating your ability to safely operate a school bus) includes pre-trip and post-trip inspections and behind-the-wheel driving tests in a school bus.

There are separate legal requirements for drivers of commercial vehicles that are not included in WAC 392-144:

- You are required to notify your employer if your license is suspended, revoked, or cancelled or if you are disqualified from operating a commercial vehicle. You are required to notify your employer before the end of the business day following the day you received notice of the action.
  Note that under WAC 392-144-103, you will lose your authorization if you drive a school bus with a suspended, revoked, cancelled or disqualified commercial driver license, and there is no provision to allow you to drive until the end of the day following your notification.
- You must notify your employer, in writing, of all traffic convictions within 30 days. This includes those in a private automobile as well as while driving a commercial vehicle.

There are other requirements for commercial drivers. See the introductory chapters of the Commercial Driver Guide published by DOL.

Drug and Alcohol Testing Requirements

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 49, Part 382 contains the requirements for the drug and alcohol testing of commercial drivers. The purpose of the drug and alcohol testing program is to help prevent accidents and injuries resulting from the misuse of alcohol or the use of controlled substances by drivers of commercial motor vehicles. This part applies to all drivers and to all employers of drivers who operate commercial motor vehicles subject to the CDL requirements. In Washington, this includes school bus drivers and all other safety sensitive positions (such as being a school bus mechanic or technician).

As part of the initial training process, a school bus driver is required to be given specific training on the requirements of the drug and alcohol testing program. This manual does not meet the requirements for that training, but provides an overview of the main concepts that the training covers.

The Federal Highway Administration's drug and alcohol testing rules include:

Pre-Employment Testing for Controlled Substances

Prior to the first time a driver operates a school bus on a public roadway, the driver shall undergo testing for controlled substances. No employer shall allow a driver, who the employer intends to hire or use, to perform safety-sensitive functions unless the driver has received a controlled substances test result from the MRO (medical review officer) indicating a verified negative test result. While there are some CFR exceptions to pre-employment testing (having been tested recently by a prior employer, for instance), most school districts require testing of anyone applying for a safety-sensitive position.

Random Drug and Alcohol Testing

When notified, employees must proceed immediately to the collection site. Immediately means that after notification, all the employee's actions must lead to an immediate specimen collection. Remember that if you leave the collection site for any reason, your test will be an automatic "positive" by default.

Post-accident Drug and Alcohol Testing

Each employer shall test a school bus driver for alcohol and controlled substances as soon as practicable following an accident if:

1. The accident involved the loss of human life.
2. The driver received a citation under state or local law for a moving traffic violation if the accident involved:
    - Bodily injury to any person who, as a result of the injury, immediately receives medical treatment away from the scene of the accident.
    - One or more motor vehicles incur disabling damage as a result of the accident, requiring the motor vehicle to be transported away from the scene by a tow truck or other motor vehicle.

After an accident, a school bus driver must remain available for testing until notified by supervisory staff. Failure to remain available may result in a refusal to be tested, which is treated as a positive test.

Nothing in the post-accident drug testing requirements shall:

- Require the delay of necessary medical attention for injured people following an accident.
- Prohibit a driver from leaving the scene of an accident for the period necessary to obtain assistance in responding to the accident or obtain necessary emergency medical care.

Some districts require testing after any accident. Be sure you are familiar with all of your school district policies regarding post-accident procedures. The results of such expanded testing are treated differently by the Department of Licensing than the testing required under the CDL program.

Reasonable suspicion drug and alcohol testing

Specific training is required in order to be able to determine reasonable suspicion. The determination to conduct reasonable suspicion testing must be based on specific, contemporaneous, articulable observations of employee conduct, behavior, appearance or body odors. The observations must be made and documented by a supervisor who has participated in training on the signs and symptoms of alcohol misuse and drug abuse and the requirements for reasonable suspicion testing.

Refusal to Submit to a Drug or Alcohol Test

A refusal to submit to a CDL required drug or alcohol test (pre-employment, post-accident, random, or reasonable suspicion) is required to be reported to DOL and is treated as a positive test. Employers are not allowed to let a school bus driver who refuses a test to continue to drive their route. In particular, drivers should remember that if they are applying for work with another CDL employer and there is a pre-employment test required, the driver must complete that test. For instance, if you are applying for a summer job in between your AM and PM routes, make sure you have enough time to complete any requested drug test prior to your PM sign on.

These requirements are independent of the legal status in the state of any of the drugs included in the testing process. Specifically, a positive CDL drug test for marijuana will result in your CDL being disqualified by DOL and you will be subject to fines and other administrative action. In addition, you are subject to potential revocation of your school bus driver authorization by OSPI, regardless of the legal status of marijuana within the State of Washington. Finally, under current DOL procedures, three positive tests within a five year period will result in a lifetime disqualification of your CDL.

School District Employee Requirements

Policies and Procedures

Employee requirements are based on school board policies that are based on federal and state laws and regulations.

These policies provide a framework under which a school district operates.

- Policies are established by the district's school board.
- Under terms of employment, district employees are required to follow these policies.
- Policies ensure direction and uniformity in decision-making for all school district employees.

Procedures specifically describe the "way" or "manner" that school board policy is put into practice.

- Procedures provide information and detailed directions for school system employees.
- Procedures can affect all school district employees or a specific department or group of employees.

Transportation department policies and procedures are necessary to reduce risk and ensure the safety of all district employees, as well as passengers. It is the school bus driver's responsibility to be continuously aware of and read all of the information that is made available to you. Information may be posted on a transportation bulletin board, or given to you at meetings as handouts. These are just a few ways that information is communicated to transportation department employees.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect

School bus drivers have a unique opportunity to get to know their students. Often the same driver will be assigned to a route transporting the same students for several years. This gives drivers the chance to develop relationships with students that other district staff may not have. Because of the level of trust that may develop, it is possible that a student may disclose information to a driver or the driver may observe behavior leading to suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

As a school bus driver you are required to report incidents of suspected abuse by state law:

RCW 26.44.020(19) states that “Professional school personnel include, but are not limited to, teachers, counselors, administrators, child care facility personnel, and school nurses.” School bus drivers are included in professional school personnel.

RCW 26.44.030(1)(a) states “When … professional school personnel has reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect, he or she shall report such incident, or cause a report to be made, to the proper law enforcement agency or to the department as provided in RCW 26.44.040.”

Each school district and/or transportation department should have specific policies and procedures that must be followed to facilitate reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect. This may include specific forms for documentation or a designated contact person. Know your district’s policies and procedures for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. These requirements also apply to school bus drivers working for a company providing contracted school transportation service.

Whether you are reporting through district channels or directly to Child Protective Services (CPS), the following information is needed to the extent available:

- Name, address, and date of birth of child.
- Name, address and phone number if available of custodial parent/guardian.
- Nature and extent of injury/injuries (if any).
- Nature and extent of neglect (if any).
- Nature and extent of sexual abuse (if any).
- Evidence of previous injuries, including nature and extent (if any).
- Any other pertinent information supporting the reasonable suspicion of abuse, neglect, or the perpetrator.

The law protects any person reporting or testifying regarding suspected child abuse and neglect. You are immune from any liability resulting from such reporting/testimony.

Child Abuse or Neglect Disclosure

Below are some guidelines to be followed if a child discloses information to you, leading you to suspect child abuse or neglect.

- Listen carefully.
- Remain calm—be aware of your body language.
- Believe the child—even if the initial information is inaccurate, it is still a cry for help.
- Thank the child.
- Do not try to get unnecessary details.

- Assure the child of your support.
- Outline to the child what you need to do—assure the child that you will help.
- Follow district policies and procedures for reporting.

Reporting Harassment

Each school district has been required to adopt the model Washington anti-bullying policy and procedure. School bus drivers are required to report incidents of bullying or harassment in accordance with district policy and procedure.

Student Information and Confidentiality

School bus drivers often have access to student information that must be kept confidential. For example, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act specifically requires drivers to maintain the confidentiality of homeless student information. All student medical information also must be handled with strict confidentiality. In general, you are only allowed to share the student information necessary for you to do your job and to protect student safety.

In Case of Civil Emergency or Natural Disasters

In a civil emergency or natural disaster, school buses are occasionally needed to transport people that are unable to evacuate themselves. A school bus can be used to evacuate elderly residents of an assisted living facility, for instance. But each school bus needs a driver to operate it and the normal driver of a bus is the most qualified individual. Professional school bus drivers should realize that if the governor issues an emergency proclamation requiring the use of school buses for evacuation, they are the individuals that should be driving the bus if requested. Typically, there is no other group of drivers out there trained in the operation of your bus.

Generally, you will not be asked to drive in an emergency situation when your main concern is the safety and well-being of your home and family. Instead, you may be asked to drive when there is an emergency in a neighboring county or community. In the case of medically fragile individuals, there will be trained staff to assist the driver.

Because the communications systems used in school buses are so varied, law enforcement or emergency responders typically do not have access to the district's frequency. Typically, during an emergency situation, you may find yourself working with your normal supervisory or dispatch staff. In any case, always make sure you know where you are going and to whom you are supposed to report.

Finally, only perform those duties specifically authorized by the emergency manager.

Expectations and Responsibilities

Driver Appearance

The way a school bus driver dresses and looks will affect many aspects of their job; most importantly, it may impact safety and respect. What is considered appropriate appearance is geographically and culturally based. However, there are some guidelines that apply in general to all school bus drivers.

Dressing as a professional driver shows that you respect your job. That same respect will help you to develop and maintain good student management. Dress in a way that will be respected.

Dress codes are necessary in most work situations. Most school districts have dress codes that encourage an acceptable degree of modesty for drivers. If you have a question about your attire, ask your supervisor. Your district can answer questions about what your dress code is regarding shorts, tank/halter tops, skirts/dresses, logos and advertisements, etc.

Avoid wearing clothing that is:

- Excessively worn, torn, dirty or stained.
- Immodest, suggestive, or risqué.

Dress for safety. Wearing appropriate clothing can help you minimize your risk of injury while performing duties related to operating a school bus.

Shoes should comply with district safety recommendations. This typically includes a prohibition against wearing open-toed shoes, sandals, clogs, wooden-soled shoes, or heels more than two-inch in height. The best driving shoe is one that has a flat sole, covers the entire foot, and fastens securely. The type of shoe you wear could affect your ability to safely respond during an emergency situation.

Public Relations

The school bus driver is a representative of the school district and is responsible for maintaining good public relations. This includes school bus drivers working for a company providing contracted school transportation. The responsibility as a representative of a school district is an implied part of the school bus driver’s role, as it is for all school district staff members. Being a representative of the school district requires a positive, professional attitude.

Attitude and Image Building

There is no magic formula for developing a positive, professional attitude. It is a matter of understanding the work and its responsibilities and consistently doing the best job possible.

Develop a positive attitude about yourself and your job. Personal appearance as discussed in the previous section affects self-image and attitude. Take a moment to mentally reflect how important you are. The job of a school bus driver is one that requires consistent attention to safety procedures. Parents rely on your ability to get their children to and from school safely each day. Riding a school bus is the safest way for a student to get to and from school, because of the professional actions of each school bus driver, each and every day. Be proud of that safety record and help to maintain it.

Become involved with your work and the schools. Be pleasant and helpful toward fellow drivers. Establish good relationships with school principals and staff. Take part and be active in driver meetings. Perform your daily tasks to the best of your ability. Do your best in performing the task of driving your school bus. Present a courteous attitude toward the motoring public. Show consistency and fairness in handling discipline problems.

Driver Liability

Liability occurs when a school bus driver is negligent in his or her bus driving duties. A school bus driver can avoid liability by knowing and obeying the motor vehicle laws, school bus driving rules and regulations, and school district policies.

Criminal Law

For a school bus driver to be criminally liable, a law must have been broken. Some laws require active commission of an offense; other laws are broken when someone fails to act as required. Examples:

- Failure to stop at stop sign.
- Exceeding the legal speed limit.
- Slapping a student.
- Failure to report the harassment of a student on your bus.

Guilt must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt before a jury can convict the defendant. If convicted of breaking the law, the individual may be subject to a fine, be sentenced to time in jail, and/or have his or her license suspended or revoked.

Civil Law

For civil liability, a jury evaluates your actions according to what a “prudent person should or should not have done.” The offense is not required to involve breaking a law, but can be failure to comply with administrative rules, district policy or even commonly accepted best practices. The failure must result in some damage or harm to someone else. Examples:

- Not detecting inoperative brakes, because no pre-trip was performed, resulting in an accident.
- Not checking the bus at the end of a route and having a sleeping student remaining on the bus, resulting in injury to the child (emotional, physical, etc.).

In civil proceedings, guilt does not have to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. There only needs to be a “preponderance of evidence” (51 %). However, the preponderance of evidence could find an individual to be 5 % at fault. As part of the court proceeding, there may be a determination of monetary damages.

Negligence and Liability

There are four aspects of negligence. The driver may be held personally responsible (liable for injuries to school children, for instance) after being proven negligent. A jury determines negligence. There are four essential elements that must be present for a driver to be found negligent. Generally, these elements are:

- An obligation to perform to a standard of conduct.
- A failure to perform to the standard.
- An actual or virtual loss or damage (injury) resulting to someone.
- A reasonably close, causal connection between the failure to perform to the standard of conduct and the resulting injury.

Other considerations that most courts would use in determining driver negligence are:

- The district and the driver are both accountable for maintaining a safe vehicle.
- Most cases involving student injuries while getting on or off a school bus use the concepts of “reasonable care” and “safe places” in determining negligence.
- The driver is expected to keep order on a bus and should use normally accepted means in line with district policies and procedures. A school bus is expected to be a “safe place”.
- The driver may generally be held accountable for his or her acts separately from any decision regarding district liability.

While the responsibility of being a school bus driver carries with it some risk of being involved in court proceedings as described here, a school bus driver can minimize their chances of being involved in any such action by:

- Obeying the laws (RCWs) governing the operation of motor vehicles and the interaction of school district employees (or contracted employees) with students.
- Complying with the rules (WACs) related to student transportation.
- Following district policies and procedures.
- Performing their jobs in the manner they were trained.

Many individuals worry needlessly about the liability they are assuming by driving a school bus. Avoiding liability is straightforward and easy to understand:

Learn your job. Do your job. The result will be that you will not be negligent and you can avoid liability.

SCHOOL BUS DRIVING REQUIREMENTS

School Bus Construction and Standards

The school bus industry includes not only school bus drivers and the local administrative staff, but dedicated professionals from many other government agencies and private companies. The complete history of school transportation is beyond the scope of this handbook. It is important for drivers to appreciate the vehicle they operate and their place in the system that provides safe transportation for students to and from school each day.

While the federal government provides basic construction standards for school buses, several national organizations are involved in developing additional specifications for school buses and their operation. The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS), the National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) and the National School Transportation Association (NSTA) all work closely together with the major school bus manufacturers to ensure that school buses are constructed with the primary focus being on the safety of students. The National Congress of School Transportation (NCST) meets every five years to revise the "National School Transportation Specifications & Procedures."

It is worthwhile for school bus drivers to know some of the safety features that are included in the design of school buses. Two of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) that apply to school bus construction are FMVSS 220 and 221. These deal with rollover protection (220) and school bus body joint strength (221). These two standards are designed to ensure the bus will provide as safe an environment as possible, in the event of a collision. FMVSS 222 is titled "School Bus Passenger Seating and Crash Protection". This is the standard that describes the design, construction and installation of school bus seats and is the key to enabling school buses to provide a high level of safety for passengers, without requiring the installation of seat belt systems for students. See the "Student Seating" section of this handbook for additional comments on this key safety system.

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Bureau (CVEB) inspects all new school buses coming into the state prior to their carrying students. In addition, CVEB school bus inspectors conduct an inspection of every public school bus in the state at least once per year and 25% of each district's school bus fleet during an unscheduled inspection each year.

Driving Requirements

Pre-Trip Requirements

The driver is an important part of a successful maintenance program. Drivers are the individuals most acquainted with the operation and performance of their bus. They should be the first to recognize something wrong with their bus. The pre-trip and post-trip inspections are the first step in extending equipment life.

State and federal laws require a pre-trip inspection by the driver of any commercial vehicle, including school buses. There are many versions of pre-trip inspections used by school districts across Washington. During the CDL licensing process, a very specific process is used to ensure that drivers are aware of all the mechanical systems of the vehicle they will be driving. Local procedures may vary from the CDL requirements. However, the driver should carefully follow local procedures in order to ensure the vehicle they operate is safe. Drivers should review this material on a regular basis to ensure they are correctly performing the pre-trip inspection.

The general requirements for pre-trips for school bus drivers are found in WAC 392-145-041 Pre-trip and Post-trip Requirements. The WAC requires that all emergency equipment is present and in good condition, that all the lighting systems are operational, that all emergency exits are operational, and that the bus aisle is clear of any article that creates a tripping hazard. Obviously, a thorough check of the brake system is critical. In addition, the driver should be aware of the normal condition for the bus and report any suspicious or unusual packages.

The key to performing a reliable, thorough pre-trip inspection is to develop a routine. Within your district's written procedures, develop your routine for conducting the inspection. By performing your inspection the same way each time, you are more likely to check all of the required items.

Post-Trip Requirements

The post trip inspection is an essential part of the school bus driver's job. Depending on district policy, leaving a student on a school bus could result in termination. Opening emergency doors will aid in seeing around the heaters and wheel wells. The bus should be checked after each trip, between routes, any time the bus is left unattended or before going off duty. Always conduct a post-trip inspection. Always check for students left on board.

Reference: WAC 392-145-041(7) Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Requirements

Driver Seat Belt Use

As transportation professionals, you can be proud of the fact that Washington State has one of the highest seat belt compliance ratings in the nation. Make sure you are properly wearing your belt, even if you are just driving across the bus lot to the fuel station or to the shop. There have been school bus drivers injured even on the bus lot, when the unexpected has thrown them from the driver seat.

Reference: WAC 392-145-031 General School Bus Driver Requirements

Student Seating

A key safety system of school bus construction is the passenger seating system called "compartmentalization". This seating system is the reason that school buses over 10,000 lbs. are not required by federal regulations to have seat belt systems installed for passengers. Compartmentalization includes the padding on the back of student seats, the construction standards for the seats, and the height of the seat backs. In order for this seating system to work the way it is designed, the students must be seated, facing forward, within the seat space. This means students should not be turned sideways, not facing the rear of the bus, not half in the seat and half in the aisle, and certainly not standing.

Enforcing proper seating is a key responsibility for school bus drivers. Some overly active students will require considerable reminding and patience on the part of the driver. It is the driver's responsibility to make sure that students stay properly seated. Making sure they understand how compartmentalization works may help, depending on the age and maturity of the students.

An increasing number of states are installing seat belts on their school buses. One of the reasons is that parents and students are used to wearing seat belts on motor vehicles. In Washington, seat belt systems may be installed as a school district option. Washington school bus specifications require that any seat belt system on a bus built after September 2006 is a lap-shoulder system. After that point in time, if lap belts are installed to accommodate the use of CSRS or safety vests, they must be able to be removed at other times. Drivers should never describe or use seat belts as "punishment". This may create a lasting negative association in the student's mind with this critically important safety system.

According to Washington State law, anyone sitting in a seat equipped with seatbelts must use them. School bus drivers are required to tell their students that they must wear the seat belt and to take reasonable action to ensure proper use. The typical legal standard would be that if the driver had taken reasonable measures to ensure seat belt

usage, the driver would not be liable. However, in Washington there is no explicit legal protection for school bus drivers if a student were to unbuckle their seat belt and then be injured in a collision. Reasonable measures would not involve continually walking the aisle to monitor seat belt usage. However, if a driver were to inform students that seat belt use was ‘up to them’, this may put the driver at risk of liability in the case of a collision related injury of an unbelted student.

The good news from other states installing seat belt systems is that students are typically wearing seat belts properly and encouraging others to do the same. This behavior drops off some in middle school and high school age groups. Also, the fear of students using the buckle of the belt system as a weapon does not appear to be warranted.

Cell Phones and Music Players

The use of hand held cell phones by school bus drivers while driving is strictly prohibited. Texting while driving is prohibited.

If the district uses cell phones as their communication system between dispatch and the buses, there has to be a hands-free option and use of the cell phone must be strictly related to information necessary for the successful completion of the route.

School bus drivers should not listen to personal music devices (mp3 players such as iPods, etc.) while driving the bus. The use of headphones while driving is prohibited.

Prohibited Items

As a school bus driver, your job includes ensuring that in case of an emergency situation, the students on your bus are able to safely evacuate the bus in a quick orderly manner. Across the country, many fatalities in school bus emergencies have occurred because the students either did not understand how the emergency exits operated or their access to the exits was blocked.

For any evacuation to be successful, nothing must be blocking the aisle or exits. Make sure students understand that they will not be allowed to bring items on the bus that block the aisle. Music trips can be a challenge, especially if the music teacher is used to having large instruments carried on the bus. Make sure everyone knows in advance what the expectations are. Make sure that larger items are secured to seats in a way that does not block the aisle and keeps the item from becoming airborne during a collision. Make sure you are aware of your district’s established procedures for transporting musical instruments and make sure you follow those procedures.

Another challenge for bus drivers is younger children bringing ‘science projects’ or ‘show and tell’. A fairly common situation is having a young student come to the bus stop with a large glass jar (for instance) with a frog inside. Both breakable containers and non-service animals are prohibited on school buses. Making sure your students and their parents know the rules in advance will keep you from having to be the ‘big meanie’.

Reference: WAC 392-145-021(3) General Operating Requirements

Loose Items

Loose articles in the driver compartment are an area of concern for our transportation industry and school bus inspectors with the Washington State Patrol. Loose items such as clipboards, route books, clothing, bags or purses and other personal items can fall and distract the driver. Loose items can become projectiles in the event of a sudden stop or collision. In addition, items can roll down and under foot controls and impede a driver’s ability to stop or accelerate as needed.

During school bus inspections, the Washington State Patrol checks for loose and dangerous items in the driver compartment. It is important to ensure the proper storage and/or containment of necessary equipment. Keep personal items to minimum and store them securely**.**

Use of Strobe Lights

In some districts, school buses are equipped with strobe lights. These optional lights can be helpful in areas where frequent fog or other conditions restrict visibility. Washington State Patrol code governs the allowable use of strobe lights. WAC 204-21-210 allows the use of strobe lights on school buses only when students are on the bus and one or more of the following conditions exist:

- Inclement, sight obscuring conditions, including but not limited to rain, fog, snow and smoke.
- When increased visibility is needed when the bus is stopping, standing or starting onto a highway.
- When limited visibility is caused by geographic hazards such as winding roadways, hills, trees, buildings, etc.

The WAC also specifically prohibits the use of the strobe solely because of darkness.

Two-way Radio Procedures

If the vehicle you are operating is equipped with a radio, you are encouraged to use it. However, sensible use of the radio is required if the communications system is going to be effective. If the information you are about to transmit will assist you in doing your job or will provide assistance to someone in need of help, it may rightfully be broadcast. Otherwise, you should not transmit.

All laws, rules, and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should be strictly adhered to, which includes a requirement to avoid all unnecessary transmission.

It is against federal law to:

- Transmit unnecessary or unidentified communications of any kind.
- Use profane, indecent, or obscene language.
- Cause intentional interference with any other radio communication.
- Intercept and use or publish the contents of any radio message without the express permission of the proper authorities in your department.

Remember to:

- Listen on the frequency before transmitting, so as not to interfere with others using the radio at that time.
- During an emergency situation, do not transmit unless you have information of equal or higher priority; keep your transmission to the point and follow the directions of the dispatcher.

Arrange your information before transmitting. Speak slowly and clearly. Keep your voice as natural as possible. Acknowledgment of a transmission indicates not only that the information was received, but also that the action to be taken is understood. Be sure to become familiar with all of your district’s communications policies and procedures.

Fuel Conservation

Diesel Emission and Anti-Idling Policies

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has asked school districts to voluntarily establish idling restrictions for school buses. According to the EPA, some health studies have shown that exposure to diesel exhaust may increase the risk of lung damage and severity of asthma attacks as well as a possible increase of cancer risk. Other studies indicate that there may be little increased risk to drivers and their passengers. Testing will continue to determine the effects of diesel use. Children's respiratory systems are not fully developed, and that means they breathe twice as much air as adults per pound of body weight. Restricting idling could greatly reduce the possibility of harmful exposure. Until conclusive results are available, the EPA has made the following recommendations that drivers should be aware of:

- Drivers should turn off engines upon reaching the school or as soon as engine specifications permit.
- If severe climate conditions require idling, drivers should idle buses off school grounds and only as long as necessary.

Your district may have already instituted an idling policy or procedure. Know your district's guidelines and follow them. The good news is that newer diesel engines have technology included that reduces dangerous emissions.

Limit Warm-Up Time in Place

Drivers can complete most of their pre-trip inspection without the engine running. The pre-trip time with the engine running should take no more than five minutes and will allow drivers to complete the electrical portion of the inspection and any brake check. Air-brake equipped school buses need only be run long enough to build air pressure prior to departure from the bus garage (three to five minutes at most). School buses with hydraulic braking systems need no more than a 30-second warm-up. Time must be allowed for inspection of necessary items.

Continue Warm-up Time Driving at Low Speed on the Road

While a cold engine doesn't get the fuel mileage it will when warm, it gets much more than the zero miles per gallon when the bus is sitting and idling. When using minimal warm-up time, drivers should drive slowly until the temperature gauge reads 140 degrees or "normal operating temperature". After the three- to five-minute warm-up, drive at low speeds (25 to 35 mph) for the first few blocks to warm the rest of the bus. (Only when it is very cold will a longer warm-up distance be needed.)

Driving for Fuel Conservation

Acceleration

Accelerating too slowly or too fast wastes fuel. As a bus begins to move, inertia and surface rolling resistance must be overcome. This requires a great deal of fuel—as much as three times the amount needed to maintain a cruising speed. Also, lower gear ranges used in acceleration (and low speeds) use more fuel. Therefore, the most fuel-efficient practice is accelerating briskly and steadily (without flooring it), and shift up through the gears to cruising gear as soon as possible without lugging the engine. This reduces the time driving in the lower, less fuel-efficient gears. A bus accelerating in higher, more fuel-efficient gears is your goal.

Moving up Hills

Starting out from a stop on level ground requires one acceleration technique; moving up a hill requires another. The steeper the hill to climb, the more power is needed to gain and maintain speed. By accelerating just before ascending a hill, better momentum is gained for less fuel than if one accelerates while going uphill. By easing off the accelerator near the top of the hill, one allows the bus's momentum to carry it over the crest and use less fuel. Generally, your goal is to maintain higher rpm's while going uphill to avoid lugging the engine. Follow the engine manufacturer's guidelines and your district's policies.

Maintaining Fuel-Efficient Speed

All vehicles have a speed range in which they can achieve their best fuel economy. The fuel-efficient speed range varies from vehicle to vehicle, but most are efficient at speeds between 25 and 45 mph with smooth and steady driving. Remember that unnecessary or excessive braking or accelerating wastes time and fuel. Speed fluctuations generally mean that a driver accelerates unnecessarily, has an unsteady foot on the throttle, is indecisive, or all of the above. Pumping the throttle is especially wasteful, whether starting the vehicle, just getting underway, going up a hill, or trying to maintain driving speed.

Anticipating Traffic Conditions

Anticipating traffic conditions can save more fuel than any other driving behavior, particularly in urban rush hour driving. You can avoid unnecessary braking and acceleration by looking 12 to 15 seconds ahead. By anticipating traffic slowdowns as early as possible, you can decrease your speed, conserve fuel and save money by simply taking your foot off the accelerator. Anticipate lane changes or braking by other

commuters. Avoid driving in a “pack” that constantly slows and speeds. This decreases fuel mileage. Looking ahead reduces fuel usage and the stress caused by being trapped behind slower moving vehicles.

Student Management Can Save Fuel

Practicing good student management adds to fuel efficiency.

- Students loading onto the bus should immediately go to their respective seats to avoid prolonged waiting time at bus stops.
- Depending on the district, students may be taught to anticipate leaving the bus at their stop. They should gather their belongings ahead of time and not delay coming down the aisle or crossing the street. If it is safe to do so, at the preceding stop, drivers might have the students for the next stop move up to the front seats. This can be helpful when there are larger groups and the bus is stopping in the travelled portion of the roadway where other vehicles must stop. As always, follow district procedures.

Rules for Substitutes

Substitute driving has been called the most difficult job in student transportation. Sub drivers are often driving an unfamiliar route, in an unfamiliar bus, with unfamiliar students.

Because of the extra challenges that sub drivers face, they will find that some additional preparation will help them complete their route with the minimum amount of stress. Regular route drivers can make their job easier, if they do their part to ensure that route directions are current and provide all necessary information. How route data is maintained varies from district to district, but one thing is constant: neither school staff, students, parents nor the subs want the school bus late due to poor route instructions.

Each district should have a process in place for substitute drivers. As a general guideline, the following items should be included:

- The substitute driver is an authorized school bus driver.
- All authorized drivers are held to the same standards and must meet all the same regulations and requirements.

The sub driver may want to take actions to address the challenges he or she will face. These might include:

- Arriving early to become familiar with the route and bus assigned.
- Being sure to check in with the dispatcher/supervisor before and after the route, in case there are any changes. **This is important, sometimes critical.**
- Leaving the bus in a condition that is consistent with your district's procedures.
- Keeping notes on each route you drive. The notes will help you remember the idiosyncrasies of a route, the next time you are assigned to drive it.

Special Trip Requirements

Field Trip and Extra-curricular Trip Requirements

A school bus driver's regular routine of home-to-school transportation may occasionally be broken up by the opportunity to drive a field trip or extra-curricular trip. Field trips are generally during the school day and are academically related. The classic example of an extra-curricular trip is a sporting event. Each school district determines how many of these types of trips are provided and how the work is assigned. Most drivers take trips occasionally and enjoy them. However, there are a few differences between trips and the normal routine of home-to-school route driving.

Particular attention should be taken during the pre-trip to ensure the bus has enough fuel to complete the trip with some to spare for the unexpected. See your supervisor for the process used in case of very long trips where fueling during the trip may be required. Fueling during a trip requires some planning. If you have to stop and refuel during the trip, all students must get off the bus during the fueling process. Plan ahead. If you can, get fuel while the students are at their event. Unloading 40 high school kids at a gas station / mini-mart with one cashier and small restrooms isn't a good plan.

In most districts, a teacher, coach or other staff member is assigned to accompany the students on the bus during trips. This provides someone to assist in managing student behavior, while allowing the driver to focus on driving and navigating. Remember that some staff members may not be aware of your expectations. For instance, take a minute at the beginning of the trip to ask the staff member to keep students seated properly and maintain an acceptable noise level. See the Emergency Exit Procedures section for discussion of additional trip requirements.

Reference: WAC 392-145-041 Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Requirements

Loading and Unloading

Authorized Stops and Passengers

Unless otherwise authorized, a student has precisely one place to get on and off the bus, their designated bus stop. New students are frequently driven to school in the morning by their parents, and their first ride on the bus is going home in the afternoon. You have to know (1) that you have a new student on your bus and (2) where he or she should be dropped off. This is especially critical with young and/or special education students. Check your passengers before you leave. If you are unsure of any student's correct stop, consult with the appropriate administrator before you leave the school.

Driver Responsibility

Statistics show most school bus related student fatalities occur at school bus stops during the loading and unloading process. The school bus driver can add to the safety of this process by approaching the stop carefully, loading with caution, unloading with the same caution, and carefully leaving the school bus stop. During the loading/unloading process the driver's attention should be focused on the safety of the students getting on or off the bus.

Make sure students understand the importance of remaining quiet and not creating a distraction during the loading/unloading process. This is when all your efforts at student management really pay off. Developing a routine for the loading/unloading process is the best way to ensure that each student stays safe each time they are getting on and off the bus. You should use the same techniques at each stop. The exact process will vary depending on if students are crossing or not crossing the street. You should use a routine … the same routine … each time you go through the loading/unloading process at a particular stop.

The loading and unloading system includes the red and amber alternating flashing lights (the 8 light warning system), the stop sign mounted on the side of the bus and the crossing arm mounted on the front bumper.

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Approaching the Bus Stop

Activate the amber alternating flashing lights ahead of the stop, depending on the posted speed limit:

- If the posted speed limit is 35 mph or less, activate the amber alternating flashing lights 100-300 feet before the school bus stop.
- If the posted speed limit is over 35 mph, activate the amber alternating flashing lights 300-500 feet before the school bus stop.

Throughout the loading or unloading process, continually check mirrors and monitor traffic. Is traffic slowing, stopping or speeding up? Look around parked vehicles and obstructions for hazards. Observe the bus stop area. In the AM, is anyone running for the bus? In the PM, is anyone waiting for students in a hazardous area?

Begin slowing and stay in the traffic lane. If the stop is off the traveled portion of the roadway, slow down prior to leaving the traveled portion. In the AM, keep watching the students at the stop.

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Stopping and Securing the Bus

At every school bus stop, set the parking brake and shift into neutral or place the bus in park (if so equipped). This prevents accidental bus movement if your foot slips off the pedal or if the bus is struck from behind. Keep checking your mirrors and monitoring traffic. Ensure that traffic has stopped and the area is safe with students in clear view.

Activate the red alternating flashing lights using the switch provided. The stop sign and crossing arm will extend. Do not use the door as a method to activate the red alternating flashing lights. Young students in particular will think that the door opening means it is safe to move to and get on the bus. You need to have time to check your mirrors after the red lights are flashing to ensure traffic has stopped before signaling students that it is safe to approach the bus. An additional danger with using the door to activate the 8 light warning system is in the afternoon, where closing the door will result in the red alternating flashing lights being cancelled. This may result in the lights being canceled prior to students getting safety across the roadway.

The bus should be completely stopped with the parking or emergency brake set prior to initiating the red alternating flashing lights.

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Crossing Students / Loading - Unloading Students

During the loading process, keep checking your mirrors for traffic and students running for the bus. Ensure all traffic has stopped. If there are a small number of students at the stop, count them so you can count them again as they enter the bus.

You should use a signal to indicate to students when it is safe to cross the road. In the afternoon, students should wait at the front of the bus until you signal for them to cross the street. Use your district’s procedure for signaling students. It is recommended that this signal not be a hand wave that can be mistaken by motorists for an indication that you want them to proceed.

Once all the students are on the bus, or clear of the roadway, check your mirrors again for any student you may have missed. Keep checking for traffic.

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Departing the Bus Stop

Once all students are off the bus, you should close the door. It is important to close the door as early as possible to avoid having any unauthorized individuals attempt entry. Check your mirrors and the door area again for any students that may be late to the bus or students returning to the bus for a left-behind item. In the afternoon, students who are

crossing the road should walk to the end of the crossing arm and wait for your signal that it is safe to cross. Students should walk to the center of the road, stop to check if it is safe to continue and proceed across the road.

Require all your students to pay attention while crossing the road, and do not allow them to be “too cool to look both ways”. You should also train students that do not cross the road to move quickly away from the bus and not stand near the bus to socialize.

Put the bus in gear, release the parking or emergency brake and cancel the 8 light warning system. Again, check your mirrors for students anywhere around the bus and slowly pull away from the bus stop while monitoring the area and checking for traffic.

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Stopping Off the Roadway

Stops off the traveled portion of the roadway require just as much attention to detail. Always use your turn signal to indicate you are moving off the roadway. Once stopped and after setting the parking or emergency brake and placing the transmission in neutral or park, activate the hazard warning lights. Keep checking your mirrors throughout the loading/unloading process.

Reference: WAC 392-145-060 Loading and Unloading Procedures

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Backing at Stops

Backing a school bus is one of the most dangerous maneuvers that a driver can make. The size of the bus creates a large barrier to visibility. As a result, there is a general prohibition against backing the bus at any time (WAC 392-145-050(3)). However, there are many routes that require a backing maneuver. All regular route school bus turn around locations are required to be authorized by school district administration.

If an approved school bus turn around location includes a bus stop, students should be on the bus during the backing maneuver. For instance, in the morning, the students should be picked up and on the bus prior to backing. In the afternoon, the school bus driver should make the turn around and then unload students.

Occasionally, even professional school bus drivers find themselves in unexpected situations where there is no alternative to backing. For instance, there may be emergency construction or a large vehicle with a mechanical breakdown blocking the roadway. Or, a substitute may get off-route and end up on a road where they do not have any other option. In these cases, the driver should use extreme care. A good process would be:

- Walk to the rear of the bus (while inside).

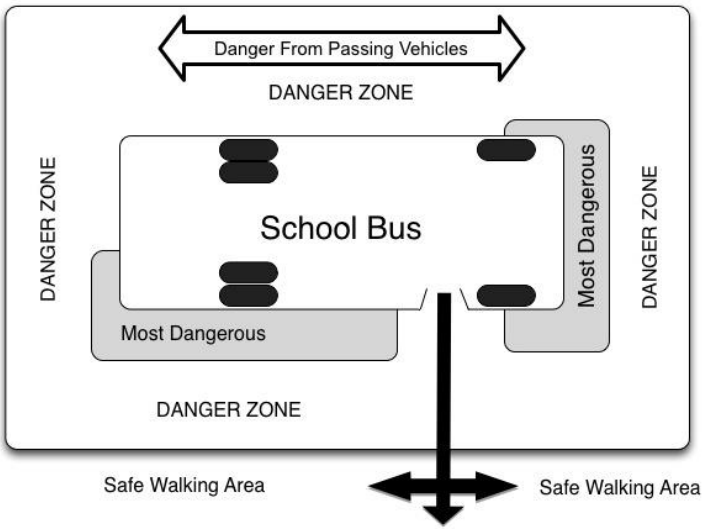
- Ensure that no vehicle is in the area directly behind the bus.
- Return to the driver seat while monitoring the roadway behind the bus to ensure that no vehicle pulls up behind the bus.
- Back into the least traveled section of the roadway.
- Do not back any more than necessary to complete the turnaround.

If the backing maneuver is going to be substantial, the best solution would be to call for assistance. Never allow a student to get off the bus to assist in controlling traffic or to assist by guiding you with directions. Make sure you follow your district policies and procedures.

Reference: WAC 392-145-050(3) Driving Requirements

Loading and Unloading Procedures: Danger Zones

There are six Danger Zones surrounding a school bus. The danger zone is a 12 foot area around all sides of the bus. These are areas where students are not easily seen. In the past, the danger zone was described as 10 foot area. Current practice uses a 12 foot area. Regardless of the exact distance, it is the driver's responsibility to know that students are clear of the danger zone before moving the bus.



Danger Zone areas are within 12 feet of the bus on all sides. However, there are particularly dangerous areas immediately in front of the bus and around the right rear of the bus. These are the areas that statistics show account for many student fatalities resulting from a student being hit by their own school bus. Remember to move back and forth in your seat, and side to side, to see around any "vision blockers".

Emergency Vehicles

If you are in the middle of loading or unloading passengers and you see an emergency vehicle approaching (operating their emergency light system), take whatever actions you need to in order to keep your students safe and to yield the right of way to the emergency vehicle. Make sure you cover your expectations with your students ahead of time, so they know what actions you will want them to take in these situations.

In particular:

- If unloading students and you have not yet opened the service door, keep the students on the bus until the emergency vehicle has cleared the scene. If your 8 light warning system is operating, leave the lights on. Make sure you watch for following emergency vehicles.
- If students have already unloaded from the bus and are waiting to cross the street, hold them until the emergency vehicle is clear. An option is to have the students get back on the bus … but this is sometimes difficult at stops where there are many students with some crossing and some not.
- If students are waiting to cross the street to get to the bus in the morning, the students should remain on the other side of the street until your signal, after the emergency vehicle is clear.
- Remember, the emergency vehicle driver may be expecting you to keep the students safe and will have their focus on responding to their emergency. They will appreciate your help.
- Your district administrative staff may have contacted the emergency service managers to clarify everyone's expectations. Make sure you follow any local procedures.

Reference: WAC 392-145-050(4) Driving Requirements

Violations of the 8 Light Warning System

The essential element keeping students safe during the loading / unloading process is the school bus driver. Most school bus drivers take personal offense at motorists that do not stop for a school bus while the loading lights are operating. The state legislature also takes seriously the risk to student safety of these violations and has responded by enacting several laws. RCW 46.61.372 allows law enforcement officers to issue a traffic citation to a driver based on the report of a school bus driver of a violation of the loading light system. School districts are allowed to use automated safety cameras to record violations. In both cases, effective implementation of these processes requires cooperative agreements between multiple government agencies.

The legislature requires OSPI to conduct an annual survey of stop law violations. This has been occurring in May and provides a one day snapshot of the extent of this dangerous driving behavior. School districts voluntarily participate in this survey. The data collected in this survey is extremely valuable in promoting enforcement efforts and generating news stories to educate the motoring public.

Establishing and Evaluating Safe Bus Stops

When establishing a new student stop, a thorough investigation should be done and this responsibility is usually placed on the transportation supervisor or other administrative staff. The safety of students is always the first priority. However, as roadway conditions change or a new stop is established, a school bus driver may become concerned about the safety of a particular stop. If a driver has concerns about the safety of a bus stop, they should bring it to the attention of their supervisor immediately. Here are the general requirements:

Visibility

Ideally, any other traffic should be able to clearly see the bus while it is at the stop loading or unloading students. If at all possible, bus stops should have visibility of at least 500 feet in each direction. If 500 feet of visibility is not possible, signs indicating "School Bus Stop Ahead" should be installed (WAC 392-145-011(6)). These signs are placed by the agency responsible for the road, depending if it is a city, county or state roadway. In cases where there is a long stretch of winding roadway, the decision may be to place one sign for a section of roadway rather than placing a sign at each stop. The reasoning is that too many repeated signs result in an increase in drivers not noticing the signs. When there is a stop with limited visibility, in many cases there are no good locations. Requiring students to walk a considerable distance along a dangerous roadway to a location with good visibility is not a satisfactory answer.

Stopping on Traveled Portion of Roadway

A question that will come up from time to time is: "Should I stop on the traveled portion of the roadway or not?" Any time students must cross the road, the bus **must** stop on the traveled portion of the roadway and control traffic with the stop sign and the 8-way light system. In addition, whenever students do not have to cross the road and the bus cannot be pulled completely off the roadway, stay in the traffic lane and control traffic with the 8 light warning system. The traveled portion of the roadway is defined as the portion of a highway improved, designed, or ordinarily used for vehicular travel, exclusive of the sidewalk or shoulder, even though persons riding bicycles use such sidewalk or shoulder. (RCW 46.04.500)

Blocking Intersections

Occasionally school bus drivers will decide that it is safer to control traffic in all directions by blocking an intersection with the bus during the loading/unloading process. Blocking intersections is prohibited by law (RCW 46.61.190) and places the driver in a

position of liability for any accidents caused by this action. The bus stop should be located so that students are waiting safely off the roadway and the bus can approach them without danger.

Other Bus Stop Situations

In some urban areas, multiple lane, one-way streets may require students to cross very busy streets. Typically, there are traffic lights available in these areas so that students may be unloaded and cross with the traffic signal. Sometimes there is no good solution. However, in no case should a school bus driver unload students while pulled over to the left-hand side of the street, with students loading or unloading in the traveled portion of the roadway. This is specifically prohibited by WAC 392-145-060(5).

Defensive Driving

Please see the Commercial Driver Guide for a thorough discussion of the essential elements of defensive driving for commercial vehicles. This handbook will primarily discuss concepts specifically important to school bus drivers.

Attitude

Defensive driving starts with a good attitude. A professional driver continues to learn during his or her career. The driver develops and maintains safe driving skills and learns from mistakes. The professional driver realizes that driving defensively is a basic tool of the trade. With a positive attitude, driving habits will improve. There will be respect for the inherent risks in driving a school bus. The limitations in the performance capabilities of the vehicle will be understood, and the importance of practicing the professional techniques of defensive driving will be apparent. For a professional driver, there is no room for error.

The area that often separates a “professional driver” from an “amateur” is defensive driving. A school bus driver must be a professional driver to provide for the safety of the students that are their responsibility, including:

- Having the necessary skills and being competent in using them.
- Knowing the correct thing to do and doing it accurately every time.
- Knowing and following the RCWs and the WACs.
- Knowing and practicing district policies and procedures.

Mistakes can result in injuries and fatalities. The professional driver needs to set aside emotions, mental stress, and frustration to arrive at the intended destination safely and comfortably. This often means bearing the brunt of other drivers’ mistakes. You can never allow the actions of others to affect the safety of your driving.

As a good defensive driver, you can improve your chance of driving collision free by:

- Keeping a positive attitude.
- Inspecting your vehicle carefully and correctly.
- Handling your vehicle skillfully and with patience.
- Knowing and using safe driving practices.
- Knowing how to drive on all types of roads, in all types of weather.
- Knowing the hazards of drugs, alcohol, fatigue, and stress when driving.

Safety and Courtesy

Driving courteously is a part of driving safely. School buses are very visible to the public and should present a professional image. Show the public a professional image by:

- Staying to the right on multiple lane roads, except for turning or passing.
- Not creating a barrier to traffic by driving side by side with other large vehicles.
- Ensuring adequate following distance when traveling with other buses, and allowing other vehicles to use that space to access an exit ramp.
- Signaling intentions well in advance, maintaining the bus position properly in the lane, and allowing traffic to clear before you turn.
- Remembering that the rear of the bus will swing wide when turning and can interfere with pedestrians and/or vehicles in adjacent lanes.
- When safe, pulling completely off the road to allow traffic buildup to pass.
- Avoiding splashing pedestrians when driving on wet roadway.
- If necessary to avoid a problem, yielding your right of way.

Mirror Adjustment

Maintaining proper mirror adjustment is a critical piece of defensive driving. Most new school buses in Washington are equipped with electrically adjusted mirrors, which allow each driver to easily adjust the mirrors for proper visibility. It may be necessary to have shop personnel assist in adjusting manual mirrors. A professional driver won't hesitate to ask for assistance. Regular drivers, who return after a substitute has driven "their bus", should expect to readjust their mirrors. Mirrors can only be adjusted to an individual driver when they are sitting in the driver's seat. Appreciate the substitute adjusting the mirrors so they can safely drive "your" bus and keep your students safe.

The three mirror systems are the interior rearview, the exterior rearview and the cross view systems. The performance requirements for these systems tell what you should be able to see when the mirrors are properly adjusted. The performance requirements are:

Interior Rearview Mirror

You should have a clear view of students on the bus. Adjust the mirror so the view allows for the best visibility. Using this mirror for monitoring traffic is above and beyond its primary purpose of student management and observing student behavior.

Exterior Rearview Mirrors

You should have a clear view of the left and right sides of the bus; a clear view to rear of the bus for a minimum of 200 feet; a clear view of the rear tires at ground level; and, a clear view 12 feet out to the left and right of the bus at a point 32 feet

back from front bumper. These mirrors are your primary driving mirrors. These are the mirrors you use for monitoring traffic.

Cross View Mirrors

You should have a clear view from ground level directly below the full width of the front bumper, vertical and forward until direct vision is possible; a clear view from ground level around the left and right front corners of the bus, vertical and to the sides until direct vision is possible; a clear view of the left and right sides of the bus to include the front tires at ground level, including the service entrance area; and, a clear view rearward on each side of the bus to a point where coverage overlaps with the view provided by the exterior rearview mirrors.

Even with a properly adjusted set of mirrors, there will remain blind spots that can hide traffic hazards or pedestrians. The way to see around these “vision blockers” is to stay in motion in your seat by moving forwards and backwards and side to side. This action is frequently referred to as doing the “Rock and Roll.”

Fatigue

A driver is responsible to operate a school bus in such a way as to ensure a safe trip for all passengers at all times. Skill in driving is important, but so are alertness and the ability to react quickly in case of an emergency. The professional driver is always prepared for the unexpected.

Signs and Symptoms of Fatigue

- Forgetfulness.
- Slowed reaction time.
- Fixation or tunnel vision.
- Poor communication.
- Inability to pay attention to more than one thing at a time.
- Yawning, eyes watering, desire to rest or close your eyes.

Alertness Management Strategies

The following recommendations are intended to help you tailor alertness management strategies to your own needs. The best efforts may result from combining multiple strategies rather than relying on a single strategy.

At home—get the best sleep possible before starting a trip.

On a trip—try to get as much sleep per 24 hours as you would in a normal 24-hour

period at home.

Trust your own physiology—if you feel sleepy and circumstances permit, then sleep. If you wake spontaneously and cannot go back to sleep within 15–30 minutes, get up.

Strategic napping

- Napping can improve alertness.
- Limit a nap to 45 minutes, if right before a work period.
- If you nap too long or go into a deep sleep, it may take longer for you to become fully awake.

Strategies while driving

- Engage in conversation with others.
- Do something that involves physical action—stop the bus, stretch and/or walk around outside the bus for a minute or two.
- Caffeine—the use of caffeine can sharply increase alertness. However, caffeine takes about 30 minutes before it takes effect. Avoid caffeine near bedtime and/or at the end of your shift to avoid disrupting your sleep routine. Caffeine use should not be relied on for long durations or as a regular strategy. Its effectiveness can be unpredictable and it can mask the other symptoms of fatigue.
- If you find yourself dozing off … STOP DRIVING.

Maintain a balanced diet and eat appropriate snacks as needed. Be sensible about nutrition and stay hydrated. Sleepiness can have several consequences so take it seriously. People are different; tailor this information to your own needs. Remember, these are recommendations and there is no simple answer. Determine what works best for you.

Rail Grade Crossing Procedures

The following requirements apply to drivers of school buses during rail grade crossings:

(1) School buses shall stop at all rail grade crossings except where:

a) Traffic is controlled by a police officer or flagger.
b) A functioning traffic control signal is transmitting a green light.
c) The tracks are used exclusively for street car or industrial switching purposes.
d) The Utilities and Transportation Commission has approved the installation of an “exempt” sign.
e) The crossing is abandoned and is marked with a sign indicating it is out-of-service.

(2) In order to lessen the potential for collisions, school bus drivers shall use simultaneously flashing amber hazard lamps within two hundred feet prior to stopping for a rail grade crossing.

(3) The school bus driver shall open the door and driver window to listen for approaching trains.

(4) Drivers shall take reasonable action to insure that passengers are quiet and shall turn off all noise making devices such as fans and radios while listening for approaching trains.

(5) Drivers shall not proceed until the door is closed, visibility is clear, and the school bus can safely proceed across and completely clear the rail grade.

(6) Drivers shall not change gears of a school bus equipped with a manual transmission while the school bus is crossing a rail grade.

A school bus driver receiving a ticket for failing to make a proper stop at a rail grade crossing will have their CDL suspended for 60 days. For details, see the CDL Guide section 1.4. A CDL suspension is a disqualifying condition under WAC 392-144-103(2) and will result in the revocation of the school bus driver authorization.

Reference: RCW 46.61.350(3); WAC 392-145-070 Rail Grade Crossings

Emergencies

Emergency Exit Procedures

Emergency Exit Drills

All school districts operating or contracting for school bus transportation services are required to have written policies or procedures for bus safety and emergency exit drills. While emergency evacuation drills are required, there is no requirement for students to use the emergency exits during these drills. Use of the emergency exits for student drills should only be done in accordance with district policy. School districts typically have developed a specific approach to the emergency exit drill that incorporates all the required elements:

- One emergency evacuation drill shall be held within the first six weeks of school each semester.
- The first exit drill shall be followed by at least one verbal review of the emergency exit drill prior to the second exit drill. Typically, exit drills are scheduled by the district.
- Drills shall be held upon school premises. Emergency evacuations while on the roadway are only warranted under conditions necessary for “life and emergency safety.”

The proper training of students in emergency procedures includes use of the emergency brakes and other emergency equipment. In case the driver becomes incapacitated while driving, student knowledge of the emergency procedures can be critical to the safety of everyone on the bus. Repeated training is vitally important.

Please see: WAC 392-145-080 Emergency Exit Drills and Procedures

Emergency Exit Procedures Review for Trips

If you are driving a field trip or extra-curricular trip, you are required to review the emergency procedures with the passengers at the beginning of the trip. Remember many students do not take the bus to and from school and are not on the bus during the scheduled emergency exit drills. There have been student fatalities (in other states) directly related to students not being aware of the location and operation of the emergency exits.

Reference: WAC 392-145-080 Emergency Exit Drills and Procedures

Approaching Emergency Vehicles

If you are on route:

- Pull to the right and yield.
- Once the lead emergency vehicle passes, be alert for additional emergency vehicles.

Having an emergency vehicle approach the school bus in the middle of the loading/unloading procedure is something that is a concern to drivers. You need to take actions to clear the roadway so the emergency vehicle can pass the bus, while ensuring that the students remain safe. See the Loading and Unloading section for details.

Reference: WAC 392-145-050(4) Driving Requirements

Collision Procedures

Vehicle Collisions

The responsibility for the bus and students belongs to the driver. The driver must evaluate and provide any care of students, including reassurance, secure the scene, and call for help. A professional driver knows exactly what procedures to follow in case an emergency situation arises. The following steps will help the driver maintain control of the students and the collision/breakdown scene as well as collect information for the collision investigation. Make sure you follow your school district policies and procedures in any emergency situation.

Collision Scene Procedures

Stop the school bus.
Set the parking or emergency brake.
Turn off non-essential electrical systems.

- Evaluate the situation quickly.
- If the bus is in danger of being struck again, mark the tires on the ground and move the vehicle to a safe spot.
- If the bus cannot be moved, you may have to evacuate the students to a safe spot.

Secure the scene.

- Put out reflectors.
- Check passengers for injuries and give first aid.

- Call or send for help:
  - Typical district procedures would have you call the transportation office and request that the office staff send any additional assistance you need.
  - Send students for help only if allowed by district procedures and only if no other option is available. If you decide you must send a student, never send just one. Make sure you instruct the students not to go inside a private home and to return to the school bus as soon as possible. Provide them with a “go for help” card that includes:
    - The bus location and route information.
    - The situation and what assistance you are requesting.
    - The transportation office phone number.

Post-collision procedures

- Fill out the appropriate district and/or state forms.
- Get the phone numbers and names of any witnesses.
- Obtain the student names, seat locations, and phone numbers.
- Do not leave students unattended.

After securing the scene

- Do not admit fault and talk only to police officers or district administrators.
- Give accurate, unemotional statements.
- Do not speak to anyone from the media. If they continue to ask questions, refer them to your supervisor.
- Remain calm and professional.
- Remember that you may be required to take drug and alcohol tests right away.

If the students must leave the bus for safety, you must tell them which exit(s) to use (side, rear, service door, or roof exits). After the students are off the bus, you should get them to a safe location and treat any injuries until help arrives. As the students leave the school bus, gather or distribute:

- Reflectors.
- Fire extinguisher.
- First aid kit.
- Body fluid kit.

If the bus is equipped with a two-way radio, consider placing the microphone out driver’s window. This will allow you to use the radio without entering the bus. Only do this if standing alongside the bus at the driver window would be safe.

Emergency Situations

The CDL Guide provides an extensive section on dealing with emergency situations. Every commercial driver should regularly review these sections to refresh their memory of the actions to take in these common emergency events.

This section presents a few emergency situations that have additional complications when they involve a school bus. The thought process used to respond to these examples could be used when responding to any situation that may occur. The first concern is always with the safety of everyone on the bus; the students and yourself.

Hitting an Animal

A driver of a school bus should never swerve or make an emergency stop to avoid hitting an animal. Grip the steering wheel firmly. The safety and wellbeing of passengers and fellow motorists must come first. Should an emergency stop or swerve be made and an on-bus injury or collision results, the driver may be held responsible.

- If there are no students on board and time permits, stop in a safe place and locate the owner of the animal by asking around the neighborhood, or leave your name, address, and transportation office phone number.
- If the school bus has students on board, it is recommended you continue on your route and notify the proper authorities as soon as possible.
- If the bus has two way communications, notify dispatch. If students on other buses can monitor your transmission, the use of a predetermined code will avoid distress.
- Be familiar with your school district policy and be sure to follow it.

Submerged Bus

A submerged school bus is a frightening thought for most people. Make sure you never drive your bus through moving water during flood conditions. If the worst happens and your bus is in water, it will be important to act as quickly as possible. Depending on the depth of the water:

- Open the side windows or use the roof hatches. Water pressure may make opening the emergency doors very difficult.
- Escape through an open window before the water reaches the window level, if possible.
- If the bus sinks rapidly, move to the area within the passenger compartment opposite the engine location to breathe trapped air while planning how to escape (the engine end of the bus will tend to sink first).

Bees in the Bus

In warm weather, the windows on the bus may sometimes be lowered for temperature control. The bright yellow color of a school bus seems to attract various insects. Any large insect flying around inside the bus can create a lot of student commotion that escalates dramatically if the insect is a bee or wasp. Some tips in handling this type of situation are:

- If you are afraid of bees, it is important to manage your own fear and try to reassure your passengers to ease any fears they may have.
- Stop the bus at a safe location.
- Open windows, doors, etc., and allow the insect to leave the bus. Opening the service door while the bus is moving is specifically prohibited.

Bus Stalled on Railroad Tracks

If a train is coming:

- **Do not attempt to restart the bus**.
- **Immediately evacuate** the students from the vehicle and walk in the direction the train is approaching from and at a 45 degree angle away from the tracks.

If a train is not coming:

- Depending on the interlock devices on the ignition, try shifting or resetting the transmission and brake and re-try starting the bus.
- If these attempts do not solve the problem—evacuate the bus!

Bus Fires

In the case of your school bus catching on fire, your first concern should be your safety and that of your passengers. It is important for you to act quickly and not panic. School bus fires are relatively rare, but once started, school buses can burn quickly.

- Pull off the roadway, turn off the engine and evacuate the bus.
- If possible to do safely, take these additional actions:
  - Cut off the electrical power.
  - Take the fire extinguisher with you, but only attempt to use it if you can do so safely.

Down Power Lines

If down power wires or electrical wires are touching the bus:

- Stop the bus and remain inside.
- Do not move the bus. Wait for linemen to notify you that they have turned off the power to the wire(s) and it is safe to continue.
- Remember that if someone from outside touches the bus, that body becomes a path to ground resulting in possible electrocution.
- If there is a danger of fire, you should evacuate the bus. Everyone must jump out of the bus. You should warn students to not touch the bus and the ground at the same time. You should fold your arms across your body as you jump to reduce the chance of reaching out or touching the bus. Try to land simultaneously on both feet. Keeping your feet as close together as possible, shuffle out of the immediate vicinity of the bus and wire(s). This will minimize the risk of electricity moving between parts of your body.

Driver Emergencies

- If you get something in your eye or experience a violent coughing or sneezing attack, slow down and stop at a safe location until you have fully recovered.
- Do not try to retrieve anything from the floor of the vehicle while the vehicle is moving. Pull off to the side of the road and stop the bus. Then recover or dispose of the dropped item.

STUDENT MANAGEMENT

A school bus driver is not alone when it comes to solving discipline problems, but he or she may be alone when a disturbance occurs. This section covers three areas that will help the driver to maintain and restore order on a school bus.

- What can the school bus driver expect “out there on the road”?
- How should a professional driver behave?
- What can the school bus driver say or do to manage passenger behavior?

Rules for Passengers

All school district are required to adopt written policies and rules for passengers riding school buses. A copy of these policies or rules is required to be provided to each student who is scheduled to ride the school bus.

Reference: WAC 392-145-011 School District Requirements and WAC 392-145-016 Rules for Students Riding School Buses

Student Management Skills

Getting students to behave on the school bus is a teaching process. The word discipline is derived from a Latin word meaning “to teach”. The school bus driver is responsible for maintaining order and discipline on the bus; the school bus driver is the teacher.

There is no one magic key for dealing with students who do not behave. Modifying student behavior is a problem-solving process, because each student may respond differently. The school bus driver is the problem solver.

Common Inappropriate Student Behaviors

- Excessive noise.
- Changing seats while the bus is moving.
- Putting hands or arms out the window.
- Throwing items about the bus.
- Inappropriate language.
- Bullying, including name calling, taking another student’s property and fighting.
- Refusing to share a seat.
- Crowding and shoving while getting on or off the bus.

Successful Bus Driver Characteristics

- Effectively demonstrating confidence.
- Creating and maintaining a positive environment for students.
- Providing good customer service: knowing and following the route, using good driving skills, keeping a clean bus and taking pride in personal appearance.
- Knowing yourself: what your “hot buttons” are and being able to remain calm when students push them.
- Not taking student comments personally.

Set the Tone for Respect

- The most important tool in student management is to learn the student’s names. You should try to greet students by name each time they enter the bus.
- Always be polite and work to give positive feedback for good behavior.
- You should use different voice levels. Give mature commands and eliminate “I” and “me.” Instead of “I want you to sit down” use “You must remain seated.”
- You should be conscious of body language, both yours and the students. Be aware of ‘eye language’, while appreciating cultural differences.

Communicate Clearly and Effectively

- Give positive feedback in response to good behavior.
- Use a “my job / your job” explanation.
- Make sure to always explain the consequences of misbehaving.
- Give warnings and keep documentation.
- Match the consequences of misbehavior to the action.
- Be consistent in both discipline and following through.

Keep Your Cool

- Never be confrontational.
- Never be sarcastic.
- Never argue.
- Never yell.
- Never use the brakes as a student management tool.

Acknowledge Good Behavior – Address Inappropriate Behavior

Make initial contact by “noticing”

“I noticed you stayed in your seat today.”

"I noticed you were pushing Jennifer."

Ask open-ended questions

"What's the problem?" (Use the student's name and expect an explanation.)

"What's the consequence for spitting on other people?" (Use the student's name and expect the student to give an example of the consequence.)

Use quick, unthreatening interventions to handle a problem

"What is the rule? What are you supposed to do?"

"It looks like you have a problem, how can I help you solve it?"

"If you could make this situation better, what would you do?"

Ask questions after intervening

"What are you going to do to make this work?"

"Have you thought about how to solve it?"

"Are your actions helping to solve this situation?"

"If you continue to do what you're doing, what will happen?"

"What could you do to get to a successful solution?"

Four steps to follow when giving directions

1. Make a polite statement: "Jerry, please remain seated."
2. State your expectations if the student refuses to comply: "Jerry, you're expected to remain seated."
3. State the consequences if the student still refuses to comply: "Jerry, if you don't remain seated, you will have to ride up here in the front seat."
4. If there is no compliance at this point, ask the student to give an example of the consequence and the positive alternative and let the student make the decision. Break eye contact and allow them to make a choice. "Your choice is to remain seated or ride in the front seat. Which would you like to do?"

Interrupt behavior that is just beginning

- Use student names and ask questions regarding their behavior: "Are you supposed to be throwing paper on the bus?"

- Get students to consider the consequences of their behavior by asking questions such as: “What happens when you throw paper on the bus?”
- Get students to focus on a change in their behavior by asking questions such as: “So, what’s your plan?”
- Get students to verbalize their plan for correct behavior: “I guess I’ll just ride to school and keep my papers in my backpack.”

Interrupt suspicious behavior that just happened or happened recently

You may not be sure if this person is guilty, but you may be reasonably certain.

- **“What’s your plan?”**
- “What do you mean, what’s my plan?”
- **“What’s your plan to stop writing on the seats on the bus?”**
- “I don’t need a plan.”
- **“You’re right. But if you continue to write on the seats, you’ll have to follow <u>my</u> plan and ride up here or take time after school to clean the seats.”** (Make sure you don’t threaten a punishment that school district policy won’t allow you to follow through on.)

Control group behavior

- When you deal with groups, talk to the person who gives you verbal resistance.
- Remain focused on the behavior and the person who gives you verbal resistance.
- Make a general polite directive.
- Explain the consequence of the behavior to that verbally resistive person.
- Give that person the negative and positive choice, and let him or her make the choice.

Use confident statements to respond to a verbal attack

- “This is not how you get what you want from me.”
- “This conversation is not helping. How can we solve the problem?”
- “I’ll talk to you after you’ve calmed down. We can work this out later.”
- “When you complain, I only hear how you feel. What do you want?”
- “Everyone’s doing it is an opinion. What do you really want?”

Methods for stopping arguments

- The Broken Record Method: repeat calmly over and over the command or the behavior that you want.

- The Echoing Statements Method. Repeat the statements of arguing students.
  - "John took my books."
  - **"Mary says you took her books."**
  - "I didn't take her books."
  - **"John says he didn't take your books."**
  - "Yes, he did. He took my books."
  - **"She says you took her books."**
  - Continue this until the book is returned to its owner.

Student Cell Phone Use

Students are used to using their cell phones on a nearly continuous basis. Many districts have rules regarding student cell phone use to limit their distraction during the school day. Some districts may limit the use of cell phones on the bus ride. In most cases, students may be trying to get caught up on the latest social news while they ride the bus to and from school. The use of cell phones can provide a distraction and this can be good for behavior patterns or it can make a driver's job more difficult. Even humorous, appropriate video clips can create a lot of extra noise. While most school bus drivers find laughter to be a noise that is a lot easier to tolerate than "angry noise", noise still must be controlled enough for the driver to be able to hear emergency vehicles or questions from passengers.

Students may call their parents from the bus at the scene of an accident or videotape an incident on the bus. School bus drivers should expect their actions to be videotaped at any time. This is another good reason to maintain a positive attitude and a professional approach to any incident on the bus!

Harassment

The bus driver is the first school person the student meets in the school day. As the students are getting on the bus in the morning, you should greet each student and accept the responsibility that they will be in a **safe environment.** If you see or hear of harassment on your bus, taking no action is **not acceptable.** You should expect all students to travel with dignity and respect and to arrive at school safely and ready to learn.

Harassment includes unfair and disrespectful remarks, written words, or pictures that are unpleasant and offensive. In the transportation arena, we have an opportunity and obligation to be role models. We should consistently demonstrate that respect for individuals is the expected and only acceptable behavior, each and every day. If a student confides in you about being harassed, listen and show understanding and

support. When you hear unkind, humiliating remarks, respond immediately. Remember, doing nothing is not an option.

Documentation is critical. All allegations must be reported and documented. Take all your concerns to your supervisor, principal, or other designated school personnel. Policies and procedures are designed to protect all members of the educational community in the exercise of their rights and responsibilities.

Sexual Harassment and Peer-to-Peer (Student-to-Student) Harassment

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is illegal according to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects an adolescent at work, and Title IX of 1972, which protects students from sex discrimination at school.

- Sexual harassment is a deliberate or repeated behavior that is unwelcome, not asked for, and not returned. The word “unwelcome” places responsibility on the receiver to tell the sender the behavior is unwanted.
- The behavior can be verbal, nonverbal, visual, and/or physical.
- Examples of **verbal sexual harassment** include teasing someone about their body development or body parts, telling dirty sexist jokes, calling others names that have a negative sexual meaning, or saying something to someone about sexual acts.
- Examples of **nonverbal sexual harassment** may include obscene gestures, “wolf whistles”, or looking at another person in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable (suggestive looks, leering, staring).
- Examples of **visual sexual harassment** include glaring or staring; obscene/ suggestive letters, notes, or graffiti; obscene/suggestive pictures taped inside locker or on notebooks; or posters of nude or nearly nude people.
- Examples of **physical sexual harassment** include purposely brushing against someone’s body; “friendly” pats, pinches, grabs and holds; pulling down someone’s gym shorts; or physically cornering a person in one place.

Harassment includes remarks or behavior that shows disrespect for its victims and is unwelcome. It hurts and harms the student victim in long-lasting ways**. It is not the way a student should be treated.** The student may suffer from a loss of confidence or self-esteem, find it hard to study and pay attention, and dread or even avoid going to school if they anticipate harassment.

School bus drivers have a legal responsibility to protect students from known or reasonably foreseeable harm occurring during, or in connection with, school activities.

Reference: WAC 392-145-011(4) School District Requirements

Your Duty to Notify

Each school district is required to develop a policy requiring all school employees to report harassment. Please refer to your district policy and report accordingly.
Remember: doing nothing is not acceptable.

Reference: RCW 26.44.030 Reports — Duty and authority to make — Duty of receiving agency — Duty to notify — Case planning and consultation — Penalty for unauthorized exchange of information — Filing dependency petitions — Investigations — Interviews of children — Records — Risk assessment process.

Special Education Requirements

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Federal laws prohibit school districts from discriminating against students with disabilities (such as denying them appropriate transportation) “solely by reason” of their disability.

The objective of Section 504 is to remove barriers—physical, definitional, administrative, psychological, or otherwise—to participation by or service to students with disabilities. Moreover, a school district must make “reasonable accommodation” to transport the student if that is necessary. As an example, a school district cannot avoid charges of discrimination under Section 504 by offering a student with disabilities exactly the same services available to a student without special needs, when it is apparent that the student with special needs will be unable to use the service.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – IDEA

The objective of IDEA is broader and more specific than Section 504. First, congress wanted to ensure that schools are, in fact, providing all students with the same access to public education, in much the same educational setting, regardless of any disability. The second congressional objective was to be sure that the educational services being provided are ones targeted to the student’s individual needs.

To realize these objectives, IDEA requires that:

- Each qualified student with disabilities is provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE).
- FAPE consists of any special education programming and related services the student requires. Transportation is a related service.
- Each student’s needs are to be determined individually by qualified personnel using methods appropriate for that student’s disability.
- The student’s present capabilities, anticipated needs and goals, and a method for measuring them should be stated and revised at least annually in an individualized education program (IEP).
- Based on the IEP, the student must receive those services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). An LRE is a setting as close to the one in which the student would be placed if he or she did not have special needs, differing only to the extent necessary to provide required service. LRE applies to related services as well.
- Parents are consulted about and consent to their child’s education program and placement. In the event they disagree with school district proposals,

parents have the right to challenge any aspect of the program by invoking procedural safeguards, which include the right to go to hearing.

Under federal law, a school district will generally be required to provide transportation for students with disabilities to special education programs even if it does not provide similar transportation to the general student population. When the student is being provided educational services under Section 504, special transportation may not be required. Many Section 504 students will be provided transportation on basic education routes. Generally, administrative staff will make the initial decisions.

Transporting Special Education Students

It is always necessary to maintain strict confidentiality with any information regarding a student's medical conditions. State and federal law require confidentiality of medical information. Take particular care when discussing your day with other drivers, such as while on breaks between routes. Maintaining confidence helps ensure that when there is sensitive medical information that you should know as a driver, school district staff and parents feel comfortable that you won't inappropriately share the information.

Drivers of students with disabilities have to be understanding, compassionate, dedicated, and have positive attitudes toward students and parents, as well as school staff and fellow drivers. They should expect and adapt to continuously changing routes.

Special needs drivers must be ready to adapt to changing behavior patterns of the students they transport. Student discipline for special needs routes can be difficult, especially when the student's behavior is directly related to the student's condition. Always follow district procedures for developing a seating chart. Many students will find having a specific assigned seat to be reassuring. When students have a specialized securement system for their needs, it will be especially important to have complete, detailed instructions for a substitute driver.

The school bus driver should inform dispatch about the types of changes that can affect special education routing. Examples of this could be the following:

- Road construction and traffic revisions that may impact arrival time.
- Changes in the environment at the residence or driveway that impacts the loading/unloading location.
- Any changes in a student's equipment, such as wheelchairs that need repair.
- Any additional life support apparatus or other new equipment.
- A change in the ability to safely store life support equipment or additional articles on the bus.
- Missing seatbelts or safety vests that might have been taken or left at home.

- Last minute daycare information given to the driver by the parent/guardian.

Following your school district's procedures, report any serious personality conflicts between students that may require separation. Work with other school district staff to identify how to safely transport all students.

Special Ed Route Emergency Procedures

Drivers should be aware of and understand the abilities and limitations of their special education student passengers and should consider, in an emergency situation, the following:

- Which students are likely to injure themselves or others or may be severely uncooperative during emergency evacuations.
- Which students are able to follow directions and proceed on their own to a safe location outside the bus without risk to themselves? Be aware of any students whose condition may include a tendency to walk or run away.

Drivers should carefully consider their student's needs and abilities and develop a specific plan for an emergency evacuation of the bus. It is recommended that this plan be written and provided with the route material available to any substitute driver. Remember to review and revise the plan any time there is a change in student assignment.

Wheelchairs – Mobility Devices

There are a large number of types of manual and electric wheelchairs available on the market today, well beyond the ability of this handbook to provide specific details on securement. Whenever possible, wheelchairs should be evaluated before transporting. Each design has its own requirements for securement. While the bus is in motion, any brakes on the wheelchair must be locked. Unless specifically required by the IEP, wheelchairs should be secured with the student facing forward. It is important that you familiarize yourself with the chairs you are transporting to provide optimum safety for the student. If you are unsure of the securement process, make sure to let your supervisor or school bus driver instructor assist you.

While on the bus, electric chairs should be shifted into the neutral or off position, so that the student does not accidentally drive the chair. When loading, be sure that all wheels are on the platform of the lift. Set any brakes to prevent the chair from moving while on the lift. Make sure that the lift is even with the ground or the bus floor before attempting to move the chair, and remember to store any lift control out of the reach of students.

Child Safety Restraint Systems

The use of Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) in passenger cars is widespread and reduces potential injuries to young children. There are many situations where small or very young children are transported on a school bus. School buses are exempt in the state law requiring the installation and use of CSRS, but their use is in line with best practice in the industry and in the best interest of the child's safety.

There are many situations that could require the use of one or more safety restraint systems. The systems could be comprised of lap-shoulder belt systems used in conjunction with child safety seats or safety vests. These situations should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and discussed between a driver and the driver instructor or supervisor to determine the most appropriate system to use in each situation.

Parental Involvement in Transportation Requirements

It is essential for the parent or caregiver to take part in the discussion of the child's transportation needs as well as educational needs. This discussion often takes place during the IEP process and the IEP may identify specific transportation requirements. School transportation staff are entitled any information necessary for the safety of the student while being transported, including any medical or behavioral condition of the child and any special care requirements. It is important for parents to provide updates on their child's condition as necessary. The school bus driver must keep all such medical information strictly confidential.

RESOURCES

Training Programs

Pupil Transportation Management Training Program (PTMTP)

This program is offered at the Central Washington University campus in Ellensburg. This program is recommended if you want to become a manager, improve your skills in your present position, or simply gain a better understanding of how to work more effectively with management. The program takes three years with one week in July and the presentation of a project on a Saturday in October each year. Additional college level credits are required for the course completion certificate.

Driver Instructor Training Course (DITC)

This is a two-week course that occurs in mid to late July. Upon successful completion of the course, you are authorized by OSPI as a school bus driver instructor. A school bus driver instructor is allowed to conduct the initial training and annual in-service training of public school bus drivers. Some school districts use non-authorized school bus drivers as behind the wheel trainers. DITC involves behind the wheel and classroom training. While the training authorizes you to train school bus drivers, it is up to each school district to decide which driver instructors to employ.

State Organizations – Conferences – Competitions

Washington Association for Pupil Transportation (WAPT)

WAPT is the statewide pupil transportation organization for all school transportation professionals: office staff, driver instructors, technicians and school bus drivers.

WAPT holds an annual state conference in late June, and offers workshops and classes. There is also a vendor show that highlights current developments in the industry. The location for the state conference is determined annually by the association.

Information on the conference as well as local, industry related events is found at www.wapt4u.org

Local WAPT Chapters and Associations

Various industry groups including WAPT Chapters, supervisor, driver trainer and mechanic/technician groups hold monthly meetings across the state. Your supervisor or the state's regional transportation coordinators are an excellent source for information about these meetings. Contact information for the regional transportation coordinators is available on OSPI's website at: http://www.k12.wa.us/Transportation/coordinators.aspx.

School Bus Roadeos

Regional school bus roadeo competitions are held in the spring in each of the nine WAPT regions. The top three drivers in each regional roadeo move on to the state competition. Most regional competitions include both competitions for basic and special needs buses. Special needs roadeo competition consists of a driver and bus aide team. The state roadeo competition is held annually at the WAPT conference. The association pays the way for the top winners to compete in the national competition.

Technician's Conference and Competition

Held in early August, this event includes the newest information on school buses. Mechanic/technicians have an opportunity to network and share valuable information. Regional technician competitions occur in spring at an eastside and westside location. The top three technicians from each region move on to the state competition in June. The winning technician has their way paid to the national completion.

National Organizations – Conferences - Competitions

- National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) www.naptonline.org
- STN (Student Transportation News) Expo www.stnexpo.com
- Transporting Students with Disability Conference www.tsdconference.com
- National School Bus Roadeo (school bus driver competition) www.yellowbuses.org
- America's Best (technicians competition) www.americasbesttech.org

OSPI Publications

OSPI's Student Transportation website has a lot of resources for anyone interested in student transportation. The homepage is: http://www.k12.wa.us/transportation.aspx

Included is a publications page: http://www.k12.wa.us/Transportation/publications.aspx

The publications page includes:

- Washington State School Bus Driver Handbook (as a PDF document)
- Washington School Bus Specifications Manual
- OSPI/WSP Inspection Manual and Inspection Interpretations
- The current Washington State Student Transportation Directory

Rules and Regulations

RCW 46.61 Rules of the Road

The majority of the traffic laws of Washington State are found in RCW 46.61, Rules of the Road. The text of the RCW can be found at this website:

http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=46.61

WAC 392-144 School Bus Driver Qualifications

The WAC for school bus driver qualifications can be found at this website:

http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=392-144

WAC 392-145 Transportation - Operation Rules

The WAC for school transportation operational rules can be found at this website:

http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=392-145