



AMERICAN SCHOOL BUS COUNCIL™

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www.AmericanSchoolBusCouncil.org

Guidelines on Pupil Transportation

Endorsed by the American School Bus Council

Updated Feb. 14, 2007

The following guidelines on pupil transportation safety are endorsed by the American School Bus Council — an organization representing public and private transportation providers, school bus manufacturers and state policy leaders for pupil transportation, all of whom have come together in this Council because of their commitment to providing safe, effective, efficient and healthy transportation for our nation's schoolchildren. The Council's members include NAPT (National Association for Pupil Transportation), NASDPTS (National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services), NSTA (National School Transportation Association), Blue Bird Corp., IC Corporation and Thomas Built Buses.

These guidelines come from a number of sources, including the 14th National Congress on School Transportation's "2005 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures, Revised Edition." Established in 1939, the Congress is composed of state officials, representatives and advisers from the education, school bus, public safety and transportation industries. The Congress convenes every five years to review and adopt best practices for school bus procedures and operations.

The Guidelines on Pupil Transportation are for use by those responsible for the safe transport of more than 25 million children to and from school each day — including school districts, bus companies and pupil transportation officials. The guidelines address transportation safety; emergency preparedness; bus driver qualifications, hiring and training; and health and environmental safety. They meet, and in some cases exceed, federal and state laws, and ensure that school buses are the safest mode of transportation for our nation's schoolchildren.

For more information:

Visit the American School Bus Council online at www.AmericanSchoolBusCouncil.org.

A copy of the 14th National Congress on School Transportation's "2005 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures, Revised Edition," the report from the most recent Congress, can be found at www.ncstonline.org.

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Health and Environmental Safety in School Bus Design and Construction

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I. Air Quality

- All operational school buses must comply with pollution emission requirements issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the date of manufacture.
- Federal law mandates that pollution controls be installed on all school bus diesel engines built in 2004 and later.
- Based on a new U.S. EPA requirement and related industry practice, school buses use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel or an alternative clean fuel as approved under the Clean Air Act.
- All newly constructed school buses must meet new smog restriction regulations by reducing soot and smog-causing emissions by 90 and 95 percent, respectively.
- The American School Bus Council endorses the Clean School Bus USA initiative, the goal of which is to upgrade the nation's entire school bus fleet by 2010 to reduce emissions by retrofitting older buses with new emission control technologies, incorporating the use of cleaner fuels, and purchasing new reduced-emissions school buses where funding is available and would not result in reducing the number of students riding the school bus.
- Because newer school buses generally produce fewer emissions than older buses, school districts should use newer school buses on the most appropriate school bus routes and on school activity trips.
- School districts should ensure that school bus inspection and maintenance programs monitor school bus exhaust emissions and maximize pollution control performance.
- States and school districts should develop and implement school bus engine idling reduction policies that limit the amount of time school buses are allowed to idle, particularly in school loading zones, parking lots and elsewhere on school grounds, to reduce emissions.

II. Noise

- All school buses must meet noise level requirements that prevent passenger compartment noise levels from exceeding 85 decibels, consistent with the advice of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to prevent hearing loss.

III. Fuel

- School districts should use clean fuels whenever possible to reduce pollution emissions. Clean fuels include clean diesel, bio-diesel, compressed natural gas, propane and hybrid technologies.



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Pupil Transportation Safety: Vehicles and Procedures

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Pupil Transportation Safety Program Administration and Operations

Each state, in cooperation with school district administrators and school transportation officials, should develop, document and implement a comprehensive pupil transportation safety program, evaluated annually, to ensure that all school buses are operated and maintained for maximum safety and efficiency.

I. Identification and Equipment of School Buses

All school buses must be readily identifiable to the public and students, and incorporate the standard markings and color that have become synonymous with school buses. School buses should be:

- Painted National School Bus Yellow in accordance with the National Institute of Standards and Technology.
- Identified by the words "School Bus" in large letters on the front and back of the bus, located between the warning signal lamps.
- Equipped with a stop signal arm that operates in conjunction with flashing red lights.
- Equipped with a system of amber and red signal lamps to warn motorists that the bus is stopping or has stopped to pick up or drop off passengers.
- Equipped with mirrors that allow the driver to see to the rear on both sides of the bus and along the front of the bus.
- Equipped with multiple emergency exits.
- Equipped with a fire extinguisher and other safety equipment for use in an emergency.

Vehicle enhancements should be considered when appropriate. Some of the currently available options are:

- Flashing strobe lights to increase bus visibility in poor visibility conditions.
- A crossing control arm to ensure that children cross a safe distance in front of the bus.
- Roof-top identification by numbers or letters.
- An outside public address system to alert children to dangerous situations.
- Climate control (air conditioning).
- Onboard passenger video recording equipment.

As new technologies become available and affordable, they should be considered where appropriate. Some examples of recent developments are:

- Global Positioning System (GPS) vehicle tracking and locating devices.
- Electronic vehicle recorders for tracking bus movements.
- Student identification equipment.
- Hazard awareness or alerting equipment.



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II. School Bus Operation Policies

Each state and/or school district should establish and document school bus operating procedures consistent with the following:

- School districts should develop policies and guidelines concerning emergency procedures and contingency plans in the event of a crash, unexpected school closing or route change.
- Each state should enact legislation that provides for uniform procedures regarding school buses stopping on public highways for loading and discharging children, and conduct a public education campaign to inform the driving public of such procedures and guidelines.
- Each state and school bus operator should have policies in place that implement controls on the number of hours per day that a bus driver can operate a school bus.
- All school bus passengers should be properly seated while the school bus is in motion.
- Passengers in school buses with seat restraints should wear those restraints whenever the school bus is in motion.
- Passenger capacity should be managed so that each passenger is seated in a position that will provide maximum protection by the seating compartment. This seating compartment is the key to maximizing passenger safety through the proven strategy of compartmentalization.
- The number of passengers in a school bus should not exceed the bus manufacturer's rated capacity. Seating should be adjusted according to the size of the passengers being transported.
- Access to emergency exits should be available at all times. Baggage and other items transported in the passenger compartment should be stored and secured so that the aisles are kept clear and the doors and emergency exits remain unobstructed at all times.
- Districts should have documented policies in place that clarify what baggage and other items will be allowed on school buses being used to transport children.
- School districts should adopt procedures to inform the public about the skills, training and qualifications of their drivers and other school transportation personnel.

III. Vehicle Maintenance

Each state should establish maintenance procedures that meet the following criteria:

- School buses should be maintained in safe operating condition through a systematic preventive maintenance program.
- Drivers should conduct daily pre-trip and post-trip safety inspections, and should record all mechanical issues and promptly report them to maintenance personnel.
- All school buses should be inspected in accordance with a state-approved inspection program at least annually.
- All school buses should meet or exceed federal and state school bus construction standards.



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- School bus maintenance personnel should be familiar with manufacturer's recommendations for vehicle maintenance and have procedures in place that comply with those recommendations.

IV. Additional Pupil Transportation Recommendations

- All students should receive regular instruction in safe school bus riding procedures, including proper loading and unloading techniques, proper street crossing to and from school bus stops, and emergency evacuation drills.
- Local school administrators and law enforcement should work together to establish crossing guard programs.
- Local school administrators should establish passenger vehicle loading and unloading points at schools that are separate from the school bus loading zones.

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School Bus Driver Qualifications, Hiring and Training

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The school bus driver is one of the greatest assets of the school bus industry. As such, all drivers deserve and require training, supervision and procedures that prepare and support them for the extensive responsibilities that they face. While each employer and school district has location-specific procedures, certain elements should be standard in addition to the commercial driver's license that all school bus drivers must have.

I. Driver Hiring Practices and Criteria

Requirements for screening, hiring and ongoing employment of school bus drivers should include:

- Development of specific written criteria for hiring and rejecting potential applicants.
- Development and use of a written application document.
- A personal interview with each applicant.
- Pre-employment and ongoing driving record checks.
- Pre-employment and ongoing drug and alcohol screening.
- Pre-employment and ongoing physical exams.
- Pre-employment and periodic criminal background checks.
- Pre-employment road performance testing and annual employee evaluations.
- Annual state-approved training and testing programs.
- Periodic evaluation to ensure that drivers' skills meet standards.
- Ongoing in-service training and testing to ensure appropriate driver knowledge.
- Demonstrated ability to follow written instructions and record data accurately.

II. Driver Training

- Before transporting students, all school bus drivers should complete a pre-service training and testing program that includes classroom and on-the-road training, and successfully pass both written and driving performance tests that demonstrate adequate knowledge of policies and traffic laws as well as driving skills.
- Driver training and instruction and procedures should include:
 - Rules and policies for conducting safe and efficient student transportation.
 - Instruction in operating school bus equipment.
 - Proper adjustment and use of the school bus mirror system.
 - Daily pre-trip and post-trip vehicle safety inspections.
 - Safe driving techniques, including defensive driving skills.
 - Procedures for loading and unloading passengers.
 - Procedures for entering and exiting school zones.
 - Student management.
 - Accident and emergency procedures, including evacuation and use of emergency equipment.
 - Basic first-aid procedures.
 - Safety procedures for railroad crossings.



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- Guidance in following route instructions and map diagrams.
- Appropriate use of electronic communications, if available. These may include wireless communication and GPS.
- Proper refueling procedures.
- Laws and rules associated with school activity trips.
- Engine idling policies.
- Effective communications with staff, students and parents.
- Cultural diversity, including effective communication techniques when language barriers exist.
- Proper professional attitude and behavior.
- Customer service skills.
- Post-trip inspections of the school bus interior to verify that all children have left the bus.
- Training on use and securement of passenger safety devices, including safety seats and other equipment.

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School Transportation Security and Emergency Preparedness

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Growing Vulnerability

Events in recent years have increased awareness of the vulnerability of schools and school transportation to crime and other security risks. Consequently, school transportation officials and others should continuously evaluate school transportation procedures to ensure that school districts give security and emergency preparedness adequate attention and planning.

I. Risk Analysis

School officials should evaluate all aspects of their transportation operation, as well as their environment, to determine what risks are probable. These risks should not only be identified but also prioritized. Potential risks should include crime, accidents, student behavior issues, road hazards, weather emergencies, terrorist activities and any other potential disruptions to continuance of normal transportation operations.

After risks are identified, districts should develop and document plans to manage them. Planning should include all related resources, including police, fire, 911 centers, and local community personnel and all school personnel that could be involved.

Following planning, a regular training cycle should be initiated that helps all personnel to become familiar with the plans developed.

II. Security Readiness

- Systemwide security audits should be conducted with school administrators, law enforcement, and fire and emergency officials to identify weaknesses and strengths in the operation. Security audits should:
 - Review current security plans, policies and procedures.
 - Review current communication plans to ensure coordination with local law enforcement, fire and emergency services, school administrators and parents.
 - Review current security procedures regarding personnel to establish proper chains of command.

III. Security Plans and Procedures

- Security plans and procedures should include current guidelines adopted by the state and federal departments of homeland security, and should have the security of students as a top priority.
- Communication guidelines for contact with parents and guardians should be developed and approved by the state and/or school board officials.
- Plans should identify key decision makers, including school administrators and transportation officials, and establish proper chains of command for communication.



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- Each school bus should have appropriate technology installed that allows for communication with the driver.
- As GPS and tracking technology develops, school bus operators should incorporate these assets into bus fleets.
- State transportation officials and representatives of the transportation industry should work with the Transportation Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to distribute school bus security training materials and establish a systemwide tracking program to monitor security-related school bus incidents.
- School districts and bus companies should provide programs such as School Bus Watch, School Transportation Security Awareness and others that train drivers and other personnel to increase awareness of security vulnerability in school transportation. Drivers should be encouraged to participate in training to help recognize and report suspicious activity.

IV. School Transportation Personnel Screening and Training

- All school bus drivers and attendants should receive a criminal background check prior to hiring.
- School bus drivers and attendants should be trained and tested on evacuation procedures.
- School districts should instruct students on emergency school bus evacuation procedures and periodically conduct school bus evacuation drills.

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