



School Bus Driver Safety

According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), school buses are one of the safest road vehicles on the road today. However, even the safest vehicle can be involved in fatal or life-changing events. Between 2006 and 2015, there were an average of 1,172 school-related transportation crashes annually, resulting in an average of 131 fatalities per year (NHTSA, 2017).

Having sound systems and processes in place can ensure that drivers and young passengers are as safe as possible.

Some elements for review:

- Ensure that you have the following on file for all drivers including, full-time, part-time, backup, and coach drivers:
 - Motor Vehicle Record checks at least annually.
 - Driving records receive evaluation against set criteria for acceptability.
 - Conduct driver training at least annually, ideally defensive driver training.
 - The NHTSA offers no-cost online curriculums for school districts at [nhtsa.gov/school-bus-safety/school-bus-driver-service-curriculum](https://www.nhtsa.gov/school-bus-safety/school-bus-driver-service-curriculum).
 - At least annually, confirm the presence of appropriate licensure and medical certificate (where and when applicable).
 - Documented findings from an annual ride-along observation or road test.
- Establish routes that minimize the need for left turns that take the vehicle across the path of potentially oncoming traffic.
- Establish routes that eliminates or minimizes the amount of backing.
 - When backing is necessary, ensure there is appropriate room to complete the turn and minimizing the risk of striking other vehicles, pedestrians or other hazards in or near the roadway.
- Maintain buses according to manufacturer specifications. Be aware that more than one set of specifications may need to be reviewed, as the manufacturer of the chassis, may be different from the body.
- Inspect buses daily or pre-use as well as annually / semi-annually depending upon state requirements.
 - The inspection should include the condition of reflective material, flashing lights, swing arms, and other safety devices.



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- Winter Weather can affect the vehicle's ability to operate safely. Ensure that:
 - Tires are at recommended pressures
 - Tread depth is within specification
 - Traction methods are used as needed, i.e. tire chains
 - Buses equipped with block heaters are correctly grounded and plugged into an appropriate weatherproof receptacle
 - Windows are free of snow/ice/fog before beginning routes
 - Drivers may require long extension type scrapers and the use of step-stools/ladders
 - All fluids filled to recommended capacity
 - Communication devices are in good working order
- Ensure a solid winter weather plan is in place that includes addressing cancellation and delays to make driving safer.
- Establish cell phone and texting procedures prohibiting the use by any driver of a bus, regardless if it currently has any students, staff, or others on board.
- Ensure that onboard GPS and camera systems are in working order and have not been tampered with or obscured.
- One of the biggest distractions can be the students themselves. Tips Include:
 - Use of an assistant, monitor or other staff to communicate with students and control behavior.
 - Assign zones if carrying different levels of students (e.g., grades K – 4 in front, 5 – 8 middle, 9 – 12 in rear).
 - Assigned seats for those who cause distraction can also help "break up" students who feed off each other's poor behavior.
- Create wellness programs for drivers to ensure that they are getting the appropriate amount of rest, avoid relying on stimulant drinks for alertness, and performing the job at the highest level possible for their and the student's safety.
- Be aware of hazards associated with rural driving:
 - Wildlife; including uncontrolled domestic animals
 - Curvy roads / blind corners
 - Transitions in driving surface (pavement to gravel)
 - Road disrepair
 - Unmarked drives, roads, entrances
 - Farm traffic
 - Fallen trees, rock falls, or other road hazards



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- Ensure drivers walk the passenger space from end to end after the last student is dropped off, but before they return to the bus garage / storage lot, to ensure no students have fallen asleep and missed their drop off spot.

Ultimately pre-planning on the part of the school system, driver, and the organization as a whole can ensure that drivers and students alike make it to school and sporting events safely. Your Eastern Alliance Risk Management Consultant can help ensure that all applicable policies, procedures, and controls are in place for the highest level of success for your organization.



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