Transportation Safety

General

Operating a fleet of school buses represents the single greatest exposure to loss a school district can have.

- There are an estimated 23 million children transported to and from school daily in approximately 425,000 buses.
- Although school buses are considered a safe form of ground transportation, there are still significant opportunities for accidents to occur.
- The information presented here can be used to support the district’s fleet safety program, and is not intended to be a comprehensive document.
- Driver training, defensive driving, weather conditions, discipline and other topics should be considered.

The Driver

Quality school bus drivers are vital to the success of any fleet safety program. More than any other factor, drivers will have the most profound impact on your overall fleet safety record.

- The largest majority of school bus-related accidents are due to driver error.
- The abilities necessary for safe and efficient driver performance include knowledge, skills, values and personality/attitude.
- Of these, only knowledge and skills can be learned. Therefore, your driver selection process and minimum hiring criteria must be designed to identify candidates who can and will safely perform the task of driving.

The driver is defined as a person who is in actual physical control of a vehicle. Driving a school bus safely is a significant responsibility and the driver has many roles to play. The primary role is to provide safe transportation to and from school. However, the driver must also maintain control inside the bus so the actions of any one student will not lead to an accident, injury or other loss.
Employment
The quality of your drivers begins with your minimum hiring criteria and selection process.

- An applicant must meet all state and federal laws. Meeting those laws, however, does not necessarily mean the candidate will make a good bus driver.
- Each district should develop a list of minimum hiring criteria and use it when assessing every candidate.
- Driver selection criteria may include: a structured personal interview; reliable references; physical exam; drug and alcohol screening; exams on school bus operations, safety, local regulations and special traffic laws; the ability to pass state and federal criminal checks and fingerprinting; motor vehicle records check based on the district’s minimum hiring criteria — MVR check and CDL verification is recommended.

Safety Training
Once selected, drivers should undergo a new employee orientation and education program. Thereafter, they should be provided with continuous driver training.

- Drivers need to have a clear understanding of the rules and procedures for safely driving a school bus.
- They need to have sufficient mastery over their vehicle in all types of conditions and they must be skillful in dealing with all types of students.
- Finally, the driver should have a solid understanding of their school bus and its limitations.

Some of these subjects are best suited to classroom or self-directed learning. However, much of the required learning is related to skill. Skills can only be learned through experience and practice — an effective driver development program must include comprehensive hands-on training.

Safety Meetings
Safety meetings are an opportunity to present safety and risk management principles and to discuss specific behaviors, activities, conditions, processes and situations which are directly linked to accidents and injuries.

- Although the format and presentation may change depending upon the purpose of the meeting, there should always be an opportunity for dialogue, discussion and questions.
- Tap into your experienced drivers — they have a lot of wisdom and can make major contributions to the meeting.

Driver Awards
Most comprehensive fleet safety programs include some type of recognition for safe driving performance.

- Programs range from simple recognition dinners to annual certificates or other awards.
- In some award programs, the fleet manager may include monetary incentives.
- For the most part, these rewards have little effect on the drivers’ day-to-day behaviors. Therefore, you shouldn’t rely on an awards program to correct accident-related behaviors.
Pre-Trip Inspections
Before a school bus can be operated, the driver should conduct a pre-trip inspection of the mechanical and safety equipment on the bus.

- The purpose is to ensure the school bus is road worthy before starting a route or trip. The pre-trip inspection must be recorded.

Mirrors
Mirrors, and their proper adjustment and use, play a significant role in accident and injury prevention. Drivers should know what they are supposed to see in each mirror, and they should be checked and adjusted each day during the pre-trip inspection. In addition, regular preventive maintenance should be implemented.

- The right convex/crossover mirror should be adjusted in such a way that the front of the bus, including the grill and bumper, can be seen.
- The right convex mirror should be tilted down to clearly show the right front tire, the area around the tire and the ground in front of the service door.
- The right flat mirror should be adjusted so the driver can see from the service door to the outside edge of the rear bumper, as well as the right rear wheel well.
- The left convex/crossover mirror should be adjusted so the front of the bus, including the grill and bumper, can be seen.
- The left convex mirror should be tilted down to clearly show the left front tire, the area around the tire and the area between the tire and the side-mounted stop sign.
- The left flat mirror should be adjusted so that the driver can see from the side-mounted stop sign to the outside edge of the rear bumper, as well as the left rear wheel well.

Bus Routes
Local school districts should review their school bus routes every year to ensure they are safely planned.

- Both regular and substitute drivers should be completely familiar with the routes they will be driving and should not deviate from them.
- If any driver believes a route is dangerous, he or she should notify the proper officials.
- School districts should develop and implement a program for identifying every hazard along a route.

Bus Security
- Maintaining control of keys is an important part of bus security. They should be out of the bus and stored in a secure location whenever they aren’t in service.
- At the end of each run, drivers should remember to physically check every aisle of the bus to ensure that there are no remaining students on board. This can be accomplished by placing a reminder card on the inside of the back door at the beginning of the run and then retrieving it at the end of the run.
- Buses should be parked inside whenever possible. If they are stored outside, they should be in a fenced area with a locked gate and adequate lighting to discourage vandalism and provide for greater employee safety.