

# SCHOOL BUS SAFETY



**WHAT  
PARENTS  
SHOULD KNOW**



**ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
Making Illinois Schools *Second to None*

Funded by  
**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**  
and  
**Illinois Department of Transportation - Division of Traffic Safety**

## **SCHOOL BUS SAFETY INFORMATION FOR PARENTS**

With the beginning of each school year, it is important to be reminded about the safety of students being transported to and from school and school-related activities. Federal law requires that manufacturers meet stringent safety standards for vehicles used by or for a district. These standards require school buses to be more conspicuous (amber and red flashing warning lights, stop arms and crossing arms), and have enhanced seating systems, crashworthiness protection, mirrors and emergency exits. What does this mean for the children that ride the "Big Yellow Bus"? It means they are virtually riding in a steel cage.

What are the safety features of the school bus that make it so special? Consider the following safety features of school buses that are not found in any other passenger vehicle:

- School bus seats are above the crash line so that the impact of a vehicle colliding with a school bus impacts beneath the seated passengers;
- Rollover protection which specifies the minimum structural strength of buses in rollover-type accidents;
- Body joint strength which specifies the minimum strength of the joints between panels that comprise the bus body and the body structure;
- Passenger seating and crash protection which establishes requirements for school bus seating systems for all sizes of school buses;
- Pedestrian safety devices with an automatic stop signal arm on the left side the bus to alert motorists that they should stop their vehicles to allow students to board or leave the stopped school bus, and school bus safety crossing arms which require students to walk at least eight to ten feet in front of the school bus to cross a roadway;
- Amber and red flashing warning lights to alert other motorists that the school bus is stopping to load or discharge students;
- Mirror systems which provide school bus drivers with a full view of the front and sides of the school bus danger zones;
- Bus emergency exits (doors, windows and roof hatches);
- Bus fuel system integrity (a steel cage around the fuel tank); and
- Fingerprinting, physical examinations (including drug and alcohol testing), training, licensing and permitting of school bus drivers.

## **PUPIL TRANSPORTATION ELIGIBILITY**

### **1. What districts are required to provide free transportation?**

- Community unit districts
- Community consolidated districts
- Consolidated elementary and high school districts
- Combined districts if they include any district that was previously required to provide free transportation

### **2. What are the distance requirements for transportation?**

Free transportation shall be provided by school districts listed above if the pupils live at least one and one-half miles from the school to which they are assigned, except where adequate transportation for the public exists.

### **3. How does the district determine the distance of one and one-half miles?**

Article 29 of the Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/29-3), states that the distance **shall be** measured from the exit of the residence property to the point where pupils are normally unloaded at the school attended by determining the shortest distance on normally traveled roads or streets. Pupils can also be required to walk up to one and one-half miles from their residence to a pick-up point regardless of the distance traveled by bus.

### **4. Does the district have to provide door-to-door transportation?**

No. Door-to-door transportation is provided only for special needs students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires a child to be picked up at the door. Children under the age of five can be considered special needs by age alone; however, parents are expected to get the child to the curb for transportation purposes. All students in grades K through 12 can be expected to walk to a pick-up point up to one and one-half miles from their home, regardless of the distance they travel by the school bus.

### **5. What is meant by “adequate transportation for the public”?**

“Adequate transportation for the public” is defined as a pupil’s ability to get to school by walking, one way, along normally traveled roads or streets less than one and one-half miles from home to school; bicycling; or riding available mass transit routes.

**6. Does the district have to provide transportation for my child if it is too dangerous to walk?**

Article 29-3 states that school districts **may provide free transportation** for any pupil living less than one and one-half miles from the school attended where conditions are such that walking, either to or from the assigned school or to or from a school bus pick-up point, constitutes a serious hazard to the safety of the pupil that is **due to vehicular traffic or rail crossings**. The district must have a Department of Transportation approved safety hazard application on file. Such transportation **shall not be provided** if adequate transportation for the public is available.

**7. Who determines whether a safety hazard exists?**

The school district will conduct a study of the walking routes of pupils and submit an application to the Illinois Department of Transportation who will then determine whether the application and findings meet the DOT requirements.

**8. I can't get my district to cooperate. What can I do?**

If parents believe that a vehicular safety hazard exists for their child walking up to one and one-half miles to school, they may send a written petition to the local school board and request that a safety hazard study be done and the findings be submitted to the Department of Transportation.

**9. How long does this process take?**

The Department of Transportation **shall review and approve or disapprove** the school board's findings within **30 days** after receipt of the school board's application.

**10. What can I do if the district refuses to transport my child and there is a safety hazard approval from the Department of Transportation?**

The language of Article 29-3 is "permissive" in that districts may provide free transportation and receive reimbursement for the cost of transporting the pupils. However, district liability is greater if a fatal accident occurs and the district has a serious safety hazard approval on file indicating that the conditions were a walking hazard due to vehicular traffic.

### **11. Whom should I contact if I have questions regarding pupil transportation?**

You should always start with the superintendent for the district in which your child resides. If you need further assistance, you should contact the Regional Superintendent of Schools in the county in which you reside and your child's school is located. If additional assistance is needed beyond that, you may contact the Division of Funding and Disbursement Services of the Illinois State Board of Education at 217/782- 5256.

## **SCHOOL BUS SAFETY TRAINING**

**105 ILCS 5/27-26 of the Illinois School Code** requires that the curriculum in all public schools and in all other education institutions in Illinois which provide instruction in any grades from kindergarten through 12, **shall** include instruction in safe bus-riding practices and emergency evacuation drills twice annually.

The following safety tips from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) are provided to help parents teach their children how to act around school buses.

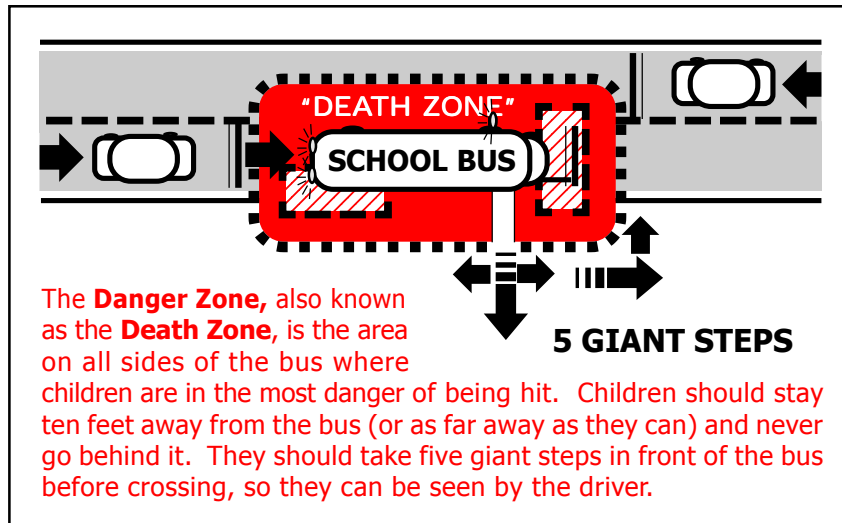
### **SCHOOL BUS STOPS: A RISKY PART OF THE RIDE**

#### **Why students are in danger**

Twenty-five million children in the United States ride safely to and from school on 440,000 school buses over 4.3 billion miles each year. Although school buses are the safest way for students to get to and from school, an average of 33 school-age children die in school-bus-related traffic crashes each year.

Most of the children killed are pedestrians, five to seven years old. They are hit within the school bus danger zone and are struck by their own school bus or by a passing vehicle in violation of the school bus warning systems. Young children are most likely to be hit because they

- hurry to get on or off the bus,
- act before they think and have little experience with traffic,
- assume motorists will see them and will wait for them to cross,
- don't always stay within the bus driver's sight.



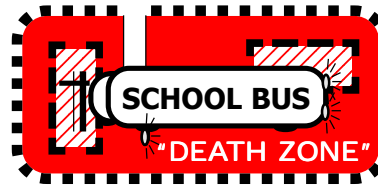
### SAFETY STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- Supervise children to make sure they get to the stop on time, wait far away from the road and avoid rough play.
- Teach your child to ask the driver for help if he/she drops something near the bus. If a child stoops to pick something up, the driver cannot see him/her, and the child could be struck by the bus. A book bag or backpack helps keep loose items together.
- Make sure clothing has no loose drawstrings and backpack straps are short so that they don't get caught in the handrail or school bus door.
- Encourage safe school bus loading and unloading (see next page).
- If you think a bus stop is in a dangerous place, talk with your school office or transportation director about changing the location.



## TEACH YOUR CHILD TO GET ON AND OFF THE SCHOOL BUS SAFELY

- When loading, stay away from the danger zone and wait for the driver's signal. Board the bus in single file.
- When unloading, look before stepping off the bus to be sure no cars are passing on the shoulder (side of the road). Move away from the bus.



Supervise children at the school bus stop. Make sure they move away from the bus, out of the **Danger Zone**.

- Before crossing the street, take five "giant steps" out from the front of the bus (Illinois has the school bus crossing arm) until you see the driver's face. The driver will signal you when it is safe to cross the roadway.
- Look left-right-left when coming to the edge of the bus to make sure traffic is stopped. Continue to watch for traffic when crossing.

## INSTRUCTIONS TO SCHOOL BUS RIDERS

School bus riders, while in transit, are under the jurisdiction of the school bus driver unless the local board of education designates another adult to supervise the riders.

It is strongly recommended that all riders, parents of riders, and teachers become thoroughly familiar with the following regulations governing school bus riders. This may be accomplished by giving each student a mimeographed copy of Instructions to School Bus Riders.

It is also recommended that administrators and parent-teacher organizations hold school bus transportation meetings throughout the school year. The Illinois State Board of Education will be happy to assist in meetings of this type whenever possible.

## INSTRUCTIONS

(REMEMBER: These instructions should be followed to ensure the safety and well being of all students on the bus and to assist the driver in the safe operation of the school bus vehicle.)

1. Be on time at the designated school bus stop; help keep the bus on schedule.
2. **Stay off the road at all times while waiting for the bus.**
3. **Be careful in approaching the place where the bus stops. Do not move** toward the bus until the bus has been brought to a complete stop.
4. Do not leave your seat while the bus is in motion.
5. **Be alert to a danger signal from the driver.**
6. Remain in the bus in the event of a road emergency until instructions are given by the driver.
7. **Keep hands and head inside the bus at all times after entering and until leaving the bus.** Do not throw anything out the bus windows.
8. Remember that loud talking and laughing or unnecessary confusion divert the driver's attention and could result in a serious accident.
9. **Be absolutely quiet when approaching and crossing rail road crossings.**
10. Treat bus equipment as you would valuable furniture in your own home. **Never** tamper with the bus or any of its equipment.
11. Assist in keeping the bus safe and sanitary at all times. **No eating is allowed on the bus.**
12. Do not bring animals on the bus (except with special permission of the district).
13. **Keep books, packages, coats, and all other objects out of the aisles and away from emergency exits.** These items should be placed under the school bus seat while in transit.



14. Do not leave books, lunches or other articles on the bus.
15. **Be courteous to fellow pupils and the bus driver. To earn respect, you must first show respect.**
16. Help look after the safety and comfort of smaller children. Keeping distractions to a minimum will help the bus driver ensure your safety.
17. **Do not ask the driver to stop at places other than the regular bus stop.** He or she is not permitted to do this except by proper authorization from a school official.
18. Observe safety precautions at exit points. **Know and observe the rules.** When it is necessary to cross the highway, proceed to a point at least **10 feet in front of the bus** on the right shoulder of the highway where traffic maybe observed in both directions. **Wait for the signal from the school bus driver permitting you to cross.**
19. Observe the same rules and regulations on other trips under school sponsorship as you observe between home and school. Respect the wishes of the chaperone appointed by the school.

**REMEMBER:** *Your safety on the school bus depends on how well you conduct yourself as well as how the driver performs his or her responsibilities. There are consequences for breaking bus-riding rules, and you can lose your bus-riding privileges as a result of breaking the rules. The driver also has rules that must be followed and unsafe driving practices or inappropriate conduct should be reported to the school superintendent or principal.*

## **PLAY IT SAFE: WALKING SAFELY (Toddlers and Preschoolers)**

### **Dangers for young children on the move:**

- Darting out into traffic from the middle of the block.
- Playing in or near the street.
- Riding a tricycle or bike in a parking lot, driveway, or street.

### **Young children are NOT small adults!**

- They move quickly and can run into the street without warning.
- They don't know safety rules and expect adults to watch out for them.
- They are small and hard for drivers to see.
- They cannot judge speed or distance of vehicles moving toward them.
- Children hit by cars can be hurt or killed, even when cars are moving slowly.
- Toddlers (one and two) are most often hurt by a backing vehicle.
- Preschoolers (three and four) are most often hit when dashing across a street near home.

### **Take steps to safety: Supervise, Supervise, Supervise!**

- Parents and caregivers must watch toddlers and preschoolers closely when they are near parked or moving vehicles.
- To supervise properly, you must be near your child, not watching from a distance.
- Hold your child's hand when you walk together along the street.
- Keep children away from traffic.
- Fenced yards, parks, or playgrounds are good places for your child to play.
- Young children learn by watching adults.
- Show them ways to cross streets. When walking, talk to your child about street safety.
- Show him/her how to stop at the edge of the street and look for cars.
- Don't expect your young child to do this by himself/herself.

## **KIDS ON THE MOVE: WALKING AND BIKING SAFELY (Kindergarten to Grade Three)**

### **Learning to be traffic smart**

Children in kindergarten through third grade are learning to become independent. They enjoy walking, riding bikes, and playing outside. They

don't have the judgement to cope with traffic by themselves yet, but they can begin to understand safety rules.

### **What parents need to know—the bottom line**

- Parents often think their children are able to handle traffic safely by themselves before they actually are ready.
- Children don't have the skills to handle these risky situations until at least age ten.
- Boys are much more likely than girls to be injured or killed in traffic.
- Bicycles are vehicles. Children should not ride bikes in the road until they fully understand traffic rules and show they can follow them.

### **Young children are NOT small adults!**

- They often act before thinking and may not do what parents or drivers expect.
- They assume that if they see the driver, the driver sees them.
- They can't judge speed and they think cars stop instantly.
- They are shorter than adults and can't see over cars, bushes, and other objects.

### **Walking risks**

Nearly one-third of five- to nine-year-old children killed by motor vehicles are on foot. They are hit by cars most often when playing near home. They tend to run into the street in the middle of the block, where drivers don't expect them.

### **Bicycling risks**

Children can be hurt riding on or off the road. Many children who are killed in bike crashes are 7 to 12 years old. The most serious injuries children get while biking are head and brain injuries. Head injuries can cause death or lifelong disability.

## TAKE STEPS TO SAFETY

### Set limits for your child.

As your children grow, set appropriate limits on where they can walk or bike safely. Don't expect them to be responsible or to start to behave safely until age ten.

### Find safe places for riding and walking.

Find places away from streets, driveways, and parking lots. Good choices are fenced yards, parks, or playgrounds.

### Teach safe walking habits.

Begin to teach your child about how to cross streets safely. Give them plenty of chances to practice when you are with them.

### Be an example.

Young children learn by watching their parents and other adults. Cross streets properly and always wear a helmet when you ride a bike. When you are driving, obey speed limits and watch for children.

## REVIEW THE FOLLOWING SAFETY TIPS WITH YOUR CHILD



Toddlers are often hurt by backing vehicles.



Parks and playgrounds are safe places to play away from traffic.



Start helmet use early - even when riding a tricycle or play vehicle.



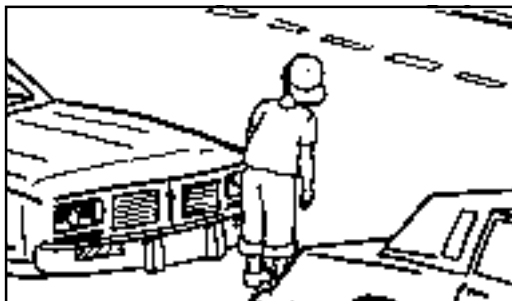
Hold your child's hand so she/he doesn't dash into the street.



Many children are hit by cars when running into the street.



Set a good example. Ride with your child and wear your helmet.



Show your older child how to look around parked cars or objects blocking her/his view of traffic.



# **Illinois State Board of Education**

## **Making Illinois Schools Second to None**

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