

# School Bus Safety Orientation for Parents/Guardians and Students

On January 31, 2024, Governor Mike DeWine announced the release of the [Ohio School Bus Safety Working Group Report](#). This report, a comprehensive examination of all aspects related to school bus safety in Ohio, contains 17 recommendations intended to improve the safety of children being transported by school buses.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ([NHTSA](#)) reports that school buses are one of the safest vehicles on the road. NHSTA also acknowledges, though, that children are at the greatest risk when approaching or leaving school buses. The Ohio School Bus Safety Working Group was made aware of this risk and focused one of their recommendations around this concern by advising districts to:

*offer opportunities for students, along with their parents or guardians, to meet their bus drivers, tour a bus, and learn about school bus safety at the start of each school year. When possible, school bus safety orientations should be incorporated into existing mandatory orientations, meetings, or assemblies. School districts should provide families with take-home materials that parents can use to encourage positive school bus behaviors.*

This recommendation *is in addition* to existing law ( [ORC 3327.16](#) and [OAC 3301-83-09](#) ) that requires school districts to provide school bus safety instruction, within the first two weeks of school, for all students in kindergarten through third grade who are offered school bus transportation and have not previously attended such a program. This instruction is to include:

- (1) Safe walking practices to and from the bus stop.
- (2) Wearing light-colored or reflective clothing when going to and from the bus stop in darkness.
- (3) How and where to wait safely for the bus, including how to avoid personal risks involving strangers.
- (4) What to do if the bus is late or does not arrive.
- (5) How to enter and leave the bus safely. This instruction shall include the potential hazards regarding the snagging of clothing, backpacks, or other items, as well as items which may be dropped around or under the bus.
- (6) Safe riding practices (including instruction on OAC [3301-83-08](#), pupil transportation management policies).
- (7) Safely crossing the highway before boarding and after leaving the bus.

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- (8) Respect for the rights and privileges of others.
  - (9) The dangers of trespassing in a railroad right-of-way and other dangerous areas.

A district may choose to combine the parent/student safety orientation with the K-3 pupil instruction.

The Sample School Bus Safety Orientation Program Content is intended as a starting point to assist districts with back-to-school School Bus Safety Orientation programs. *As this document is only a starting point, districts are encouraged to determine which items are relevant for their local needs, as well as to consider what additional items need to be added to ensure a comprehensive review tailored to the individual district.* Reviewing and modifying the School Bus Safety Orientation program to fit each school and district's concerns will help ensure Ohio's students are safe when transported by school buses. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's Pupil Transportation team with questions and concerns. We all have a role to play in helping ensure the safe transportation of Ohio's students.

## **Sample School Bus Safety Orientation Program Content**

### **Components**

- ✓ Offer opportunities for students, along with their parents or guardians, to meet their bus drivers, tour a bus, and learn about school safety;
- ✓ Provide families with take-home materials that parents and guardians can use to encourage positive school bus behaviors;
- ✓ When possible, school bus safety orientations should be incorporated into existing school-required orientations, meetings, or assemblies.



## **Meet the Driver and Tour A Bus**

School bus drivers who know, understand, and teach students the rules for safe transportation on the bus will be respected and have control of their bus each day. Students who know and understand the rules will be much safer on the ride to and from their school. Those students will arrive to school in a frame of mind to learn and achieve their goals.

School transportation professionals are not just drivers; they are mentors, mediators, and role models who contribute to the development of positive behaviors and attitudes in students. Their responsibilities involve enforcing discipline and safety protocols, which help foster an environment conducive to learning and personal growth.

Introducing students to bus drivers at the beginning of the year orientation helps to personalize the driver and encourages positive student behavior.

Providing a school bus tour may help lessen first day-of school fears for young riders; helps students visualize, understand and prepare for social situations on a school bus such as sitting next to classmates and responding to driver directions; and makes school bus safety instruction more effective.

## **Learn About School Bus Safety**

### **Walking to the Bus Stop**

- Teach your student to always walk on the sidewalk if possible and stay off lawns
- If there is no sidewalk, stay close to the curb on the right side of the street
- Do not talk to strangers
- Don't stop on the way
- If it's dark (early morning or late afternoon), wear bright or reflective clothing so drivers can see them clearly

## About Bus Stop Locations

- Bus stops may be up to one half a mile from the student's home
- Students should be at their bus stop **before** the bus is scheduled to arrive
- Bus stops are chosen for safety, considering things like traffic, visibility, and weather.
- Bus stop locations are away from busy or dangerous spots (like the top of a hill).
- Each student is assigned a specific stop, and it's important they wait at their assigned location.
- Students should only cross in front of the bus, never behind it.

## Safe Bus Stop Procedures

### Getting on the bus:

- Students should wait at their designated spot until the bus comes to a **full stop and the driver signals them to board**.
- Use the handrail when getting on and off the bus to avoid accidents.
- Once inside, students should head directly to their seat and stay seated during the ride.

### Getting off the bus:

- After being dropped off, students should walk to their place of safety away from the bus (about ten giant steps).
- They should wait there until the bus leaves.
- If the driver honks the horn, this signals danger, and they should be extra careful.

### Crossing in front of the bus:

When crossing the street, students should always wait for the driver's signal, look both ways for traffic, and **cross at least ten feet in front** of the bus.



**Demonstrate**  
**Right-hand signals**

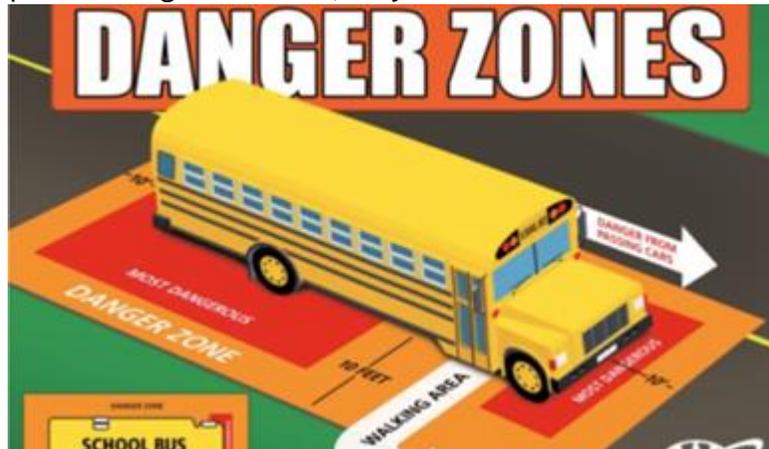


**Left-hand signals**

## The Danger Zone

The “danger zone” is a **10-foot area around the bus, especially in front and near the rear tires.**

- Encourage your student to **stay out of this area** to avoid accidents
- If they drop something in this zone, they should tell the driver before trying to pick it up





## Positive Behaviors on the Bus

To keep everyone safe, students are expected to:

- Be respectful and follow the bus driver's instructions right away
- Be kind to other students – no bullying, no profane language
- Stay seated with feet flat on the floor
- Keep clear aisles
- Personal items stay on laps
- No eating or drinking unless required for medical reasons
- No using nicotine (vapes, etc.) or drugs on the bus
- Do not throw things
- Do not stick heads or arms out the window

## Safety at Railroad Crossings

Before crossing railroad tracks:

- Students should be quiet and listen to the bus driver's instructions
- Remain seated
- Remain quiet until the bus has safely cleared the tracks

# Emergency Procedures

## Evacuation Drills

Every year, students will practice how to evacuate the bus in case of an emergency. This includes using both the front and rear exits. Students must listen to the driver's instructions during these drills and exit the bus quickly and quietly.



### Demonstrate

#### Emergency exit operation



## What to do in an emergency

Drivers are trained for emergencies like a school bus accident, breakdowns, or even a hostile intruder. The district has plans in place to ensure your child's safety in these situations. By reinforcing these simple safety tips and rules, you can help ensure your child stays safe while riding the bus. If you ever have questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact your school district's transportation office. Your child's safety is the top priority!

- Students should listen to their driver for further instructions in these cases
- Bus drivers will cover some procedures in training the students on their school bus

## Take Home Materials for Parents/Guardians

- **School Bus Safety Activity Books** that cover basic safety rules: 1. Be on time. 2. Never run to or from the bus. 3. Stand back from the curb. 4. Don't push or shove. 5. Stay in your seat. 6. Don't yell or shout. 7. Always obey the driver. 8. If you must cross the street, always do so at least 10 feet in front of the bus. 9. Never crawl under a school bus and never try to pick up a dropped article near the bus.
- **School Bus Safety Handouts for Parents/Guardians** that encourage discussions with their students. Sample talking points may be accessed at [NHTSA School Bus Safety](#). Sample [Bus Safety Discussions](#):

Parents, it's important to talk to your child, or children, about bus stop safety. Here are some tips.

### **Before the Bus Arrives**

Your child should arrive at the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus arrives. Ahead of the new school year, visit the bus stop and show your child where to wait for the bus, at least ten feet — five giant steps — away from the curb. Remind your child that the bus stop is not a place to run or play.

### **Getting On and Off Safely**

When the school bus arrives, your child should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop, the door opens, and the driver says it's okay to get on or off. Your child should use the handrails to avoid falling.

### **Always Use Caution Around the Bus**

Your child should never walk behind a school bus. If your child must cross the street in front of the bus, tell them to walk on a sidewalk or along the side of the street to a place at least ten feet — five giant steps — in front of the bus before crossing. Your child should also make eye contact with the bus driver before crossing to make sure the driver can see that they're crossing to avoid the danger zone. If your child drops something near the school bus, like a phone or book, the safest thing is for



your child to tell the bus driver right away. Your child should not try to pick up the item, because the driver might not be able to see them.

- **Bus Safety Quick Reminders:** these may be laminated cards for students to keep or refrigerator magnets. Consider making these available in languages that district riders who are not native English speakers can understand.
- **Image Library:** tailored materials may be accessed at [NHSTA School Bus Safety](#)

**Additional Resources:**

[School Zone Traffic Safety Tip Sheet \(evogov.s3.amazonaws.com\)](https://evogov.s3.amazonaws.com)

[School Zone Safety: 10 Essential Driving Tips to Keep Kids Safe - Elovate](#)

[School Zone Safety Tips \(asdk12.org\)](https://asdk12.org)