

**ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**SCHOOL BUS
SAFETY GUIDELINES
AND PROCEDURES**

TRANSPORTATION DIVISION
UPDATED AUGUST 2018

The Transportation Division reports to the Chief Operating Officer for Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Alex L. Szachnowicz, P.E. The Transportation Division staff consists of Les Douglas, Supervisor of Transportation; Sharon Whitcher, Administrative Specialist; Tina Acker, Ryan Chaney, Sandy Jordan, Wanda McIntire, Melissa Gray, Don Swift, Dick Wandres and Janelle Martin, Specialists in Transportation; and Stella Kenny, Support Specialist.

Our office is open from 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on school days. We can be reached at 410-222-2910 (local and Baltimore) or 301-970-8644, Ext. 2910 (from Washington).

BUS ROUTE SCHEDULES

The school bus route descriptions published on the AACPS website, www.aacps.org, have been planned to provide safe and efficient transportation for approximately 60,000 students. Route planning for the 2018-2019 school year began in the spring of 2018. The school bus fleet consists of nearly 800 vehicles owned by contractors and Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

The school system contracts more than 730 school buses through private contractors. Approximately 70 system-owned vehicles primarily serve exceptional children attending special school locations.

Our school buses will travel nearly 10 million miles this school year.

TRANSPORT SERVICE ELIGIBILITY

Student transportation eligibility is chiefly determined by distance guidelines established by the Board of Education of Anne Arundel County. The Board of Education provides the following transportation eligibility distance policy:

- Kindergarten students living in excess of one-half mile of their assigned school.
- Elementary school students living in excess of one mile of their assigned school.
- Secondary school students living in excess of one and one-half miles of their assigned school.

School bus transportation is limited to providing students transport services to and from assigned schools. Students are not permitted to switch buses to attend meetings, go to music lessons, go to the doctor or dentist, or to visit the home of a friend.

Because our service is limited by specific policy guidelines, exceptions of this nature are not made. Students shall use one bus stop nearest their homes unless otherwise directed by a public school administrator. In addition, the policy limits described above prohibit transport services to areas outside the local school attendance area, and to locations within the walking area of the school. It is the ultimate destination of the child that is used to determine whether services will be provided. This means that services will not be provided to areas within the transported area, if the ultimate destination for the child is beyond the school's attendance area, or within the school's walk area.

DRAWSTRINGS AND HANDRAILS

Drawstrings on children's clothing have become snagged in school bus handrails located at the entrance to the school bus. Since 1991, six youngsters have been killed nationwide and more have sustained serious injury when drawstrings become entangled in the school bus handrail. The problem occurs when the drawstring length permits the child to step to the ground and to an area away from the view of the school bus driver. The bus thereafter departs the stopping area while the locked drawstring causes the youngster to be dragged along the side of or under the school bus. There are several remedies:

1. Inspect and Modify Handrail Joint Fixtures

Handrails on school buses have been inspected at all regular inspections held since the summer of 1995. Periodic future school bus inspections will include review of this issue.

Handrails that may cause a problem have been modified, replaced, and where permissible, removed. In most cases, the remedy increases the space at the bottom of the joint where the handrail attaches to the school bus entrance way.

2. School Bus Driver Instruction

All school bus drivers have been advised of this concern and have received appropriate instruction. Drivers have been instructed to confirm that recently discharged passengers have cleared the "danger zone" of the school bus before leaving a bus stop or school unloading zone.

3. The Parental Role

Parents are encouraged to examine drawstrings on student-owned clothing. All drawstrings, whether at the neck, wrist, waist or thigh levels, have risks. Drawstrings having buttons at the end of the drawstring are particularly dangerous. Consider this issue when purchasing new clothing. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) suggests that drawstrings be cut and removed from student clothing.

Be mindful that drawstring problems are not limited to school bus handrails. Additional problems may be experienced on playground equipment, bicycles, escalators, automobiles, equipment, carnival rides, and just about anything that moves people.

PARENTS, STUDENTS AND TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

- **The danger zone**

The most dangerous part of the trip to and from school involves the area immediately around the school bus. In fact, the most common student transportation-oriented fatality occurs as a result of injuries sustained outside of the bus, in an area called "the danger zone." Across the country in a typical year, more students are lost to accidents occurring outside of the bus in the danger zone than those resulting from injuries occurring within the bus. About half of the fatalities are the result of another motorist's failure to stop for school bus warning lights.

In the remaining cases, the youngster is run over by the school bus. More often than not, the child was not seen by the bus operator because of a distraction, the child retrieved a dropped paper from under the bus, a parent lost track of a sibling at the bus stop, or a tardy child attempted to chase down a departing school bus.

Younger children are the most common “danger zone” victims. Children who must cross the street to board or depart the school bus at the bus stop are to wait until the bus has stopped with warning lights flashing, and all traffic in both directions comes to a complete stop. They should then cross the street in front of the bus.

Teach your children that dropped papers must be left behind, and that if papers are to be safely retrieved, they should ask the bus driver to supervise the retrieval of the items.

If parents cannot accompany children arrangements should be made, if possible, for a brother, sister, relative or neighbor to escort younger children to and from school bus stops. While there is no substitute for appropriate parental supervision for all students, parental supervision is most critical for younger students.

- **The Maryland School Bus Stop Law**

Maryland law requires motorists to bring vehicles to a full stop 20 feet from a school bus when the bus’ red alternating flashing warning lights are in operation. This law applies to vehicles meeting or overtaking a school bus from either direction when the bus is stopping or has stopped to receive or discharge passengers.

The driver of the vehicle shall not allow the vehicle to move until the school bus resumes motion or the red alternating warning lights are no longer flashing. Also, the driver of a vehicle upon a highway with separate roadways (dual lanes) need not stop upon meeting a school bus that is on the opposing roadway. Roads with common left turn lanes are not divided highways and, thus vehicles must stop from both directions.

- **Walking routes and pedestrian practices**

Parents, together with the child, should develop a walking route to and from the school bus stop or school which minimizes the exposure of the child to vehicular traffic. Shortcuts through isolated paths, fields, and woods, or across streams or railroad tracks, can often be dangerous.

Entering abandoned houses or deserted buildings on the way to or from school bus stops should not be condoned. The route to and from school should be direct and uninterrupted.

- **Conduct on school buses**

Appropriate student behavior on school buses is essential to the safe operation of the school bus. The slightest distraction to the driver may have significant student safety consequences. Riding the school bus is a privilege. This privilege may be temporarily denied or permanently revoked if misconduct jeopardizes the safe operation of the school bus or the safety of students riding the bus. School suspension is a possible sanction for bus misconduct.

- **Student supervision**

Parents are responsible for the supervision and safety of students receiving bus transportation from the time that children leave home in the morning until the time of boarding the school bus. The same rule applies at the time of discharge from the bus on the way home from school. The school administrator and bus driver acquire supervisory responsibility while children are on the school bus.

- **Meeting the bus and supervision**

There is no general provision to keep children on the school bus when parents fail, or choose not, to meet the school bus at the bus stop at the time of the afternoon discharge. This provision for discharge includes kindergarten students.

If for some reason you are not able to be at the bus stop to greet your child, and you do not wish for your child to be discharged without adult supervision, contact a responsible adult and arrange for this alternative person to be at the bus stop, or call the local school and ask that your youngster not be placed on the bus. If you request that your child stay at the school, you must immediately provide for your child's pickup at the school.

- **Be on time**

Children should leave home early enough to arrive at the designated school bus stop 10 minutes before the scheduled arrival time of the school bus. This requirement is not just to ensure that there is enough time; there are important safety considerations involved. Being late causes panic, and catastrophic consequences can result.

Further, remember that the school bus operator activates the alternately flashing lights at bus stops. Motorists must stop for these lights. Tardy passengers cause motorists to become impatient, and some will ignore the lights. For this reason, bus operators are instructed, generally, not to wait for persistently late passengers.

- **Property damage**

Parents are responsible for their child's behavior while on the school bus, and retain full responsibility for damage caused by their children to the property of others, including the school bus.

When students walk to and from the bus stop or school, while students wait at the school bus stop, and while students walk home from the school bus stop at the end of the day, they must show consideration and respect for the property of those citizens whose homes and places of business are located along the route.

- **Unauthorized entry into a school bus**

The Maryland Education Article, Section 26-102, prohibits unauthorized entry into a school bus. Parents are advised not to enter a school bus without the consent of Anne Arundel County Public Schools, or its authorized agent or employee. Persons violating this rule are subject to a misdemeanor offense. Conviction may result in fines or imprisonment, or both. Fines may not exceed \$1,000. Imprisonment may not exceed six months.

- **Detaining a school bus**

Please avoid confrontations with school bus operators at bus stops. Doing so is dangerous and constitutes an act that may be misinterpreted by other persons and other parents. Issues concerning bus operations should be discussed in a school setting, and resolution should be sought through contacts with school personnel.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

- **Proper attire**

Weather determines how a child is to be dressed. Encourage your children to wear appropriate clothing that will minimize exposure to the elements and enable them to be seen by other people. If children cannot be seen by operators of vehicles, they are exposed to unnecessary danger. For example, white clothing is difficult to see in snow but makes one clearly visible at night.

If the weather is inclement, the child should be dressed for the occasion and leave a few minutes earlier than normal in order to reach the school bus stop or school safely and on time.

- **School hour adjustments**

Adjustments to school schedules caused by overnight inclement weather are generally announced by 5:30 a.m. Information concerning the transportation program will be announced on major radio stations in the Baltimore, Washington and Annapolis metropolitan area. Please do not contact radio stations for this information.

After 5:30 a.m., you may call 410-222-5000. A recorded message will inform you of the status of school hour adjustments for that particular day. School operating hour adjustments are also posted on our web site at www.aacps.org, on the school system's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/aacps, on the school system's Twitter page, www.twitter.com/aacountyschools, and the school system's Instagram page (aacountyschools). An automated phone message containing delay or closing information is also sent to parents. There will be no announcement if school hours are not being adjusted.

- **Special note about school hour adjustments**

Parents of morning session pre-kindergarten, and Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) students' should note the following special rule. Whenever there is a scheduled, or unscheduled two-hour early closing, the morning session will close at the regular time, or 11:15 a.m., whichever is earliest.

SCHOOL BUS INSPECTIONS

The annual summer inspection of all school buses has just been completed. Prior to this inspection, each school bus contractor completed a preventative maintenance inspection of each bus. This inspection included the pulling of all wheels for a close-up check of the entire braking system of the school bus. During the school year, buses are inspected by the inspection team in November and again in March. Spot inspections are conducted by the Transportation Division and the Motor Vehicle Administration between formal inspections.

DRIVER TRAINING

The Transportation Division and local school bus contractors sponsor a variety of training opportunities for our school bus operators and attendants. Margaret Porter is our training manager and she is assisted by Carol Gaug-Bouchal and Vicky Clark. All school bus drivers recently attended a four-hour summer in-service program sponsored by the Transportation Division.

All students also attended a specially designed training program. The bus driver program topics included accident prevention, student management, a review of accident statistics, daily operational inspection requirements and an update on the requirements of the special license required for school bus drivers. Additional safety meetings will be held with our school bus operators and attendants throughout the school year.

Prospective school bus drivers are trained and approved for service by our driver training staff. Instruction includes both classroom and behind the wheel training. Behind-the-wheel training takes place in a standard school bus. For those driver trainees lacking the required Commercial Driver's License, the training session is complete upon acquisition of the license from the Motor Vehicle Administration.

Each new driver receives a minimum of 25 hours of training. However, training time may often exceed 30 hours as 12 hours alone are devoted to classroom instruction. All approved and certified school bus drivers possess a Commercial Driver's License, and are subject to United States Department of Transportation physical condition rules and substance abuse regulations.

REQUESTS FOR SERVICE AND SERVICE CONCERNS

- **Schedules and services**

The Transportation Division is responsible for any concern involving the school bus, be it the schedule, the driver, the bus stop, or the bus itself. Concerns should be forwarded by telephone to the Transportation Division. We will make every effort to resolve concerns as quickly as possible. Please avoid confrontations with school bus operators at bus stops. Doing so is dangerous and constitutes an act that may be misinterpreted by other persons and other parents.

- **Crossing Guards**

Local police departments are responsible for the training, placement, and supervision of school crossing guards. All requests for school crossing guards are to be made in writing through a school's PTA or Citizen Advisory Committee and forwarded to the Transportation Division for processing and evaluation with the appropriate police and traffic agencies.

- **Traffic signs, crosswalks and traffic conditions**

Local traffic agencies are responsible for school zone signs, pedestrian cross-walks and traffic control signs. Requests for any of these items may be directed to the local agency, or to the Transportation Division.

8-LIGHT WARNING SYSTEM FOR BUSES

Maryland mandates the 8-light warning system on all school buses. The 8-light warning system is composed of two red and two amber lights on the upper front of the bus and two red and two amber lights on the rear of the bus. The amber lights will be flashing about 100 feet before the school bus stops. When the bus comes to a stop, the amber lights will go off and the red lights will alternately flash. Whenever the red or amber lights are flashing, motorists must stop no less than 20 feet from the bus.

AUDIO/VIDEO/ DIGITAL CAMERAS

A program designed to equip school buses with video/digital cameras and audio recording devices commenced several years ago. These tools provide both visual and audio recordings of the passenger area of the bus. The objective of the camera initiative is to provide an important additional tool to assist the driver in managing student conduct on school buses. Equipment installation continues.

MEALS ON WHEELS SUMMER OF 2017

The Transportation Division and Food Services Division partnered together six years ago to provide the first school summer meals on wheels program in the state of Maryland. This program filled a gap for students in need of a lunch during the summer months.

This year we had two buses serving Anne Arundel County students, one in the Meade area and one in the Annapolis area. Each bus was equipped with coolers to handle the food that was distributed to a number of locations within the county. The program ran from June 12, 2017 through August 24, 2017.