

Loading and Unloading the School Bus Safely

Reference Guide and Test

Produced by
Video Communications

Introduction

Bus drivers have the responsibility to inspect the bus and make sure it is safe for ALL passengers. They have the responsibility to manage student behavior on the bus. They also have to operate the bus in a safe and defensive manner; report mechanical issues and even deal with parents. Loading and unloading the school bus is something that drivers have to do SEVERAL times each school day. The most dangerous part of a school bus ride for students is getting on and off the bus. Remember, parents of the students who ride your bus trust you with the lives of their children. It is YOUR JOB to maintain your undivided attention and focus in ALL aspects of operating the school bus.

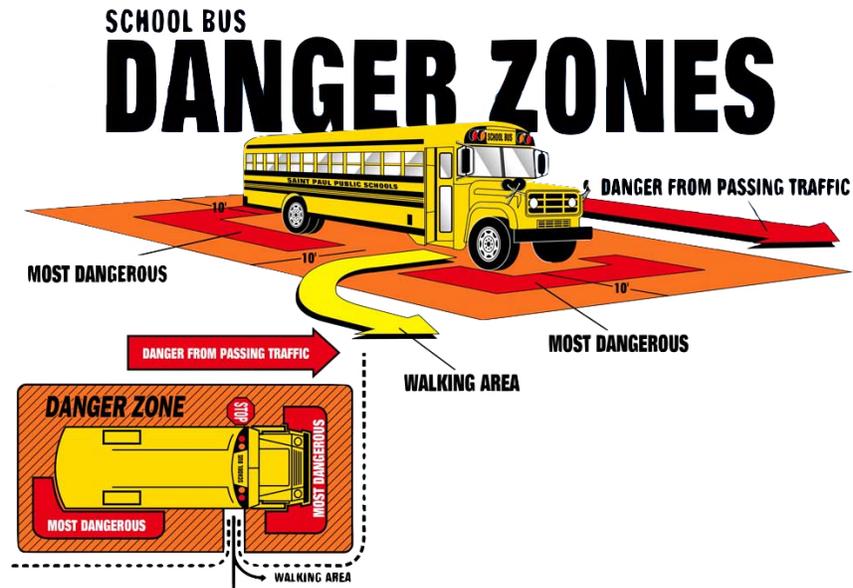
Introduction and Overview

1) The job of a school bus driver requires multiple demands. One of the biggest demands for school bus drivers is getting students on and off of the bus safely. Loading and unloading the school bus is the single most dangerous procedure for students and drivers. Here are alarming statistics to consider.

Every year, 33 school age children die in school bus related accidents. Nearly two thirds of students killed in school bus crashes are killed outside of the bus. Two thirds of THAT total are killed by the school bus itself and half of all school age pedestrians killed by school bus related crashes, are 5 to 7 years old.

2) Most fatal school bus related crashes occur during the day and in clear weather. **In most cases, students are killed or injured by their own bus.** As a school bus driver, you are legally responsible. As a human being, you will have to live with that experience for a LIFETIME.

3) The danger zone is the area that represents the greatest risk for serious injury to students. Whenever students are loading and unloading, they will be in the danger zone. It extends at a MINIMUM of 10 feet all around the bus. Extreme caution must be exercised when students are inside the danger zone. **See below:**



NOTE: Make sure to follow district policies. Some districts say a minimum of 10 feet around the bus, others say 12 or even 15 feet!

4) It is also important to know that younger students, ages 5 to 7, are the most at risk and are most vulnerable when entering and exiting the danger zone. The reason being, is that they are smaller and harder to see. Younger age students are also inexperienced and many are impulsive. It's important that drivers understand the dimensions of the danger zone, as well as which areas of the danger zone present the highest risk.

5) Here is an important reminder....the afternoon school route is more dangerous than the morning route. This is due to students having to sit quietly all day. In the afternoon route, students are eager to move and are less likely to pay attention.

Getting Students On and Off the Bus

6) School bus drivers are trained on multiple aspects of operating the bus. Needless to say, students need consistent reminders about safe riding procedures. They have to be told how to get on and off the bus safely, because they often forget. Here are some general rules that ALL students should be trained to follow:

- a) Always have students walk a MINIMUM of 10 feet in front of the bus and NEVER behind it.
- b) Students should be taught to wait at least 10 feet away from the front side of the school buses on its arrival.
- c) Students should walk a minimum of 10 feet away after disembarking the school bus (teach students that 10 feet equals 5 GIANT STEPS.)
- d) If a student drops an item in the danger zone, they should tell the driver and not attempt to retrieve it themselves.
- e) Students should NEVER run to try and catch the bus.

7) When students prepare to load the bus, there are key issues to be mindful of. One of these, is when students have to cross the road to get to the school bus. **If students do have to cross the road**, they should stay on the side of the road, as far away from traffic as they can get. They should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop and then they must wait until the bus driver signals them to cross.

8) When the driver signals that it is safe to cross, **students should first check for traffic themselves**. As students cross in front of the bus, they should watch and make eye contact with the bus driver. It is important to note that many students are killed or injured by motorists illegally passing a stopped school bus, so both students and the driver need to check for traffic in both directions.

9) When **boarding the bus**, the driver should ask the students to use the handrail for additional support. Get students into the habit of using the handrail on the way into and out of the bus.

10) Once on the bus, students should move towards the rear quickly without crowding or pushing. If the bus is not filled to capacity, have students sit in the middle of the bus. Remind them to get to their seats and sit down quickly before putting the bus in motion.

11) **When students are getting dropped off at the end of the school day**, they should stay seated until the bus comes to a complete stop. Remind students

to be patient and not to push or play around on their way off the bus. When students exit the bus, they should use the handrail to avoid falls and they must watch out for hanging straps, drawstrings or clothing that may get caught on the handrail or door.

12) After exiting the bus, be sure that **students walk a minimum of 10 feet away from the bus**. If students have to cross the road to go home, they should stay on the side of the road that they exited the bus on and completely away from traffic. **They should be AT LEAST 10 feet ahead of the bus where the driver can see their faces.**

12a) When it is safe to do so:

- a) Signal that it is safe for the students to cross
- b) Students should cross to the outside edge of the bus and they should check both ways for traffic.
- c) If it is clear, they can cross on the bus driver's direction. If it is not clear, they should return to the curb immediately and await further instruction.
- d) Once ALL students have safely disembarked the school bus and crossed, they should go directly home.
- e) Watch the door of the bus close and make sure that no student is caught in the bus door.

13) There are several issues to be mindful of when students are entering and exiting the bus. Whether students are crossing or not, it requires your full attention.

Loading and Unloading Procedures

14) **NEVER RUSH** when loading and unloading students. Concentrate on what you are doing and don't get lazy or complacent by deciding to skip over part of the loading and unloading process. Proper loading and unloading can be the difference between life and death. Even if your route is running late, don't hurry.

And, remember the saying: “Safety First, Schedule Second.

15) It’s important to **give plenty of warning to motorists by activating your amber warning lights**. They should be activated approximately **150-250 feet from where you will be stopping the bus**.

- a) When stopping, be sure to stay to the right side of the roadway.
- b) Keep the bus in the traffic lane and not the shoulder.

16) When approaching a stop or loading zone, where students are present, be sure to stop the bus before reaching the point where students are waiting for the bus. You should make the students walk to the bus, so you can see all of the students.

17) Secure the bus whenever you load and unload students. Also, make sure to set the parking brake and place the gear selector in neutral. **NEVER** move the bus if students are within 10 feet of any side of the bus.

18) It is also important to understand that backing up is discouraged. **If you miss a stop, you should go around the block instead of backing up.**

19) It is your job as a bus driver to address behavioral issues on the school bus. However you should not deal with on-bus problems when loading and unloading students. Loading and unloading will require your **FULL** attention. You should never take your eyes off of what is happening outside of the bus. If there is a behavioral problem on the bus, wait until the students are safely unloaded and have moved away from the bus before addressing the behavioral problem taking place. And if necessary, pull the bus over to address the situation.

20) **Use consistent hand signals when crossing students**. Hand signals vary from state to state, and district to district. Make sure you follow your districts policies on this matter. However, keep in mind that consistency is the key for students. It is equally important to understand that confusion can lead to an accident. Your hand signal should not be confused with a wave to motorists who

might think you are waving for them to pass.

21) Anytime students load and unload, **the driver should know how many students are getting on and off of the bus.** When students are loading at a bus stop, you should count them before they load. If any students are missing the driver can ask where they are or if necessary, secure the bus and personally check the outside of the bus.

22) When students are unloading at a bus stop, count them as they pass you. Then, count them again as they move away from the bus. Remember this, do not move the bus until you are absolutely sure that all students are away from the bus. You should **count students at every bus stop**, every day. Make it a habit and do not become complacent.

23) Make sure to **constantly check your mirrors during the loading and unloading process.** Continue to check all mirrors before you move the bus, and as you move away from the bus stop.

24) Although it's against the law for motorists to pass a school bus with its red stop lights out, it does happen more often than it should. Don't let students off the bus until you are sure it is safe. **If a motorist does run your red lights You should make a record of anyone who passes illegally.** Try to get:

- a) the license plate number
- b) color and make of the vehicle
- c) location and time that the incident took place.

25) It is important to understand that emergency vehicles have the right of way, **EVEN** when the buses red flashing lights are engaged. Pay close attention to this matter and ask your district about the appropriate actions to take if emergency vehicles are approaching the bus during loading and unloading procedures.

26) **Weather such as fog and rain can reduce your visibility.** Many times it is difficult to see students and other vehicles can't see you. If weather, such as

fog is a problem in your area, plan with students to have them wait as far from the road as possible.

27) be on the look out for hazards at bus stops. This can be: construction crews, snow banks, and even cars backing out of driveways. Focus at all parts of the loading and unloading process at all times.

CLOSING

Throughout the video, we covered several issues concerning loading and unloading students. Remember, kids are impulsive and it is up to you to train, remind, and protect them. It is also up to you to remain focused and cautious at every part of the loading and unloading process. We applaud your hard work and attention to detail. Thanks for watching and remember, stay safe.

TEST QUESTIONS

- 1) The most dangerous part of a school bus ride for students is getting on and off of the bus. **TRUE or FALSE**

- 2) Most fatal school bus related crashes occur in stormy weather.
TRUE or FALSE

- 3) If you miss a stop, you should back up the school bus. **TRUE or FALSE**

- 4) You should engage your ambers at:
 - a) **50-150 feet before reaching stop**
 - b) **150-250 feet before reaching stop**
 - c) **250-350 feet before reaching stop**

- 5) Students only use the handrails if backpacks are too heavy. **TRUE or FALSE**

- 6) If a motorist runs your red lights, you should make sure to get:
 - a) **license plate number**
 - b) **color and make of the vehicle.**
 - c) **location and time that the incident took place**
 - d) **all of the above**

- 7) If students are acting out on the bus, deal with it no matter what is going on outside of the bus. **TRUE or FALSE**

- 8) Even if the buses red lights are out, emergency vehicles have the right of way.
TRUE or FALSE

- 9) Hand signals for crossing students are the same across the nation.
TRUE or FALSE

- 10) You do not have to secure the bus if students are not crossing the roadway.
TRUE or FALSE

ANSWER KEY

1) TRUE

2) FALSE

3) FALSE

4) b

5) FALSE

6) d

7) FALSE

8) TRUE

9) FALSE

10) FALSE