

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) – Transportation

Dear Friends of Grass Lake Community Schools:

*The following **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** has been developed to assist parents/guardians in finding common answers to important questions regarding pupil transportation. This FAQ document is organized into three unique sections:*

▪ **Section 1 – BUS STOP RELATED QUESTIONS**

▪ **Section 2 – SCHOOL BUS RELATED QUESTIONS**

▪ **Section 3 – GENERAL TRANSPORTATION RELATED QUESTIONS**

We hope that you find this FAQ document helpful in addressing your bus stop, school bus or transportation related questions.

Section 1 – BUS STOP RELATED QUESTIONS

Q. Why are there fewer individual stops and more “group stops” on the bus route?

A. In order to be efficient with limited public resources, school districts all across the state have had to scale back on the number of individual, curb-to-curb, bus stops largely because of economic reasons. Our school district faces annual cuts from the Michigan legislature and governor in excess of \$3.5 million so efficiencies have to be maintained. The “platinum” service that was provided in better times is no longer feasible.

Q. Is there a specified distance that must exist between school bus stops?

A. The “overhead yellow” lights on a school bus which are used to notify other traffic of an upcoming stop must, by law, be activated at least 200 feet from the designated bus stop. Bus stops must be at least 200 feet apart. There is no state law which specifies a maximum distance between stops.

Q. Is there a law on the maximum distance a student has to walk to get to their assigned bus stop?

A. There is no law that specifies how far a child can walk to the bus stop.

Q. The bus goes right by my house – why can’t it stop and pick-up my child?

A. There are many factors which are taken into consideration when school administrators establish the placement of school bus stops. The basic legal factors are spelled out in MCL 257.1855, but the **primary concern** is visibility of the school bus to other traffic and the consideration of stopping distances necessary for other motor vehicles in order to accomplish safe loading and unloading of the children. In general, on a highway or roadway, state law requires 400 feet of clear and continuous visibility where the speed limit is more than 35 miles per hour, and 200 feet of clear and continuous visibility where the speed limit is less than 35 miles per hour.

Q. I live in a mobile home community or an apartment complex, where will the bus pick-up and drop-off my child?

A. For safety, buses generally pick-up and drop-off at “group stops” on private roads and driveways, just off from major roads and highways. For efficiency, buses generally do not weave in and around mobile home communities and apartment complexes. Most often, bus stops are centrally located to all students within a specified area. Whenever possible, bus stops are created to encourage students to approach and depart the bus to the front of the bus in the bus driver’s line of vision.

Q. What about the safety of my child getting to and from the bus stop? There are no sidewalks where we live and the bus stop is out of the “sightline” from our home.

A. It is the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian to see that a child gets safely to and from the bus stop. The school district provides transportation as a non-mandated service and establishes placement of the bus stop in accordance with the requirements of the law.

Q. My child is starting kindergarten. Will the bus pick my child up in front of my house?

A. Not necessarily. There are no special laws or regulations for transporting regular education students enrolled in kindergarten. Transportation is provided in accordance with the requirements of the Pupil Transportation Act with regard to the placement of the bus stop.

Q. When should my child be at the bus stop in the AM?

A. Bus riders should be at their assigned bus stop at least five (5) minutes prior to the scheduled pick-up time. This allows for some variation in the bus route due to unanticipated events.

Q. Why do bus pick-up/drop-off times vary, especially at the beginning of the school year?

A. At the beginning of the school year, bus routes are developed for all eligible riders, not knowing who is and who is not going to ride. Routes are constructed with the best of intentions based on known information at the time when routes are developed. However, it is only after bus routes get underway that the District learns where added efficiencies can be found.

From the time bus information is made available to parents, about two (2) weeks prior to the start of school, until about mid-to-late September, bus pick-up and drop-off times may vary. Parents/guardians are asked to be patient as bus drivers learn their new routes and become familiar with their new students.

Once the school year gets underway, buses generally run on time with exception to weather conditions, road construction, no adult present at the bus stop, students who become ill, mechanical problems, etc.

Q. Do I have to stop when I see a school bus with its overhead “yellow” lights on?

A. The National Transportation Safety Administration says that upon activation of the overhead yellow lights, “...motorists should **slow down and prepare to stop.**”

Q. Do I have to stop when I see a school bus with its overhead “red” lights on?

A. **Yes... you MUST stop.** There is no provision in law to permit a motorist to pass a school bus with its overhead red lights on and stop arm(s) extended. The penalties for “running the overhead reds” in a “school bus zone” (20’ in any direction around the bus) are double, similar to traffic violations in a construction zone. Fines are expensive.

Who gets the ticket? Under current law, the registered owner of the vehicle is the presumed driver. You do not need to be identified to receive a ticket from the police – only the vehicle’s license plate number is needed to issue a traffic citation. Loss of life due to an accident while running the reds is a Class C felony offense. Don’t do it!

Q. I saw a school bus performing a bus stop, picking up and dropping off students with just the emergency flashers on (the overhead yellow and red lights were never flashing at the bus stop). Is that legal? What should I do as a motorist?

A. Yes, it is both legal and safe... under certain circumstances when students are not crossing the road (right-hand drop only). Public Act 187 of 1990 allows what is called a “*hazard light stop*” to allow all traffic to continue, unimpeded, while the bus stop is being performed. This practice has reduced the potential of an accident by

reducing the likelihood of an accident created by the mix of some motorists who stop for the bus and others who violate the overhead red light/stop arm law.

Motorists approaching a school bus that is performing a hazard light stop may proceed with passing the bus while it is picking up or discharging students. Motorists should always use care when doing so. In this type of stop, children are not allowed to cross the roadway. However, motorists should always be prepared for the unexpected and drive accordingly.

Section 2 – SCHOOL BUS RELATED QUESTIONS

Q. What is the safety record of school buses in Michigan?

A. Approximately 850,000 students are transported daily on about 17,000 buses within Michigan with no student fatality inside the bus as a result of a mechanical malfunction or multi-vehicle accident in over 20 years. That is like evacuating the City of Detroit, safely every day for over 20 years with no loss of life – an amazing safety record. Buses travel over 180 million miles annually in Michigan. This equates to traveling around the earth 7,228 times each year.

Q. My child's bus seems crowded. Can some students be placed on another bus?

A. For efficiency, buses are loaded with the attempt of utilizing all of the seating space provided on a bus. Buses have a maximum seat capacity as designed by the manufacturer. As long as student numbers do not exceed the rated capacity, the bus is not considered to be overloaded. *(At the beginning of the school year, school buses may seem more crowded as the "legal limit" of eligible riders does not take effect until after the fourth Friday following Labor Day to allow schools to find efficiencies and to determine who is and who is not riding.)*

Q. As an adult, can I board and ride on the bus to monitor student behavior and help make the bus safer?

A. State law (Section 257.1859 of the Pupil Transportation Act) specifically prohibits school bus drivers from allowing any unauthorized person from riding on a school bus while transporting pupils to and or from school. For the protection of all students, a parent/guardian should NEVER BOARD a bus with students on board – it can be very frightening to bus riders and can startle the bus driver.

In most cases when authorized adults are assigned to monitor students that are being transported on a bus, they are fingerprinted and approved employees of the District who are assigned near the student or students who possess the greatest amount of supervisory need.

Q. Why aren't seat belts for passengers required to be used on school buses?

A. The United States Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is responsible for establishing motor vehicle safety manufacturing standards and requirements for vehicles, including school buses. The standards developed for the manufacture of school buses incorporate an occupant protection design referred to as "*compartmentalization*" which is unique to the school bus. This standard provides a protective envelope consisting of strong, closely spaced seats that have energy-absorbing seat backs. The effectiveness of compartmentalization has been confirmed and consistently reconfirmed in National Transportation Safety Board and National Academy of Sciences studies. School safety standards have been adopted into the Michigan Vehicle Code which exempts large buses, over 10,000 pounds, from seat belt requirements for passengers. Drivers of all sizes of buses are required to wear seat belts because the driver is located in the front of the bus with no energy-absorbing seat back in front of them, and as such, are not protected within a compartmentalized space like the passengers on the school bus.

Section 3 – GENERAL TRANSPORTATION RELATED QUESTIONS

Q. What should I teach my child in order to be a safe bus rider?

A. The school bus is an extension of the classroom. The **Behavior Expectations** on the school bus are similar to the behavior expectations in the school classroom: *Be Safe; Be Responsible; Be Respectful*.

In general, students need to observe the following three primary **Bus Rules**:

- 1.) *Stay in your seat, facing forward.*
- 2.) *Keep all hands, body parts and personal belongings to yourself.*
- 3.) *Obey the bus driver at all times.*
- 4.) **“BOTTOM TO THE BOTTOM, BACK TO THE BACK, FEET ON THE FLOOR, BACKPACK IN YOUR LAP”**

Each school bus in the Grass Lake fleet has **Bus Rules** posted at the front of the bus for all riders to observe and to follow.

Q. What is the maximum “walk distance” to a school building?

A. State law defines that if a school district chooses to provide transportation, the district should be ready to provide transportation if that child lives greater than 1.5 miles from the school building.

Q. If I think the weather is too questionable, I may not want my child attending school. Do I have the right to not send my child on the bus?

A. Absolutely. School administrators take considerable effort to assess weather conditions very early in the morning (before 5:30 a.m.) and throughout the school day. As a parent/guardian, you can make the choice to keep your child home if you feel weather conditions warrant it.

Across the nation, school buses are respected as the safest form of transportation, year-after-year. School buses are uniquely designed to offer unparalleled protection to your child while inside the school bus. Bus drivers are professional in transporting students to and from school and school-related events. Great effort is taken to provide a safe environment for your child while in the custodial care of the school bus driver.

Q. Should I call if my student will not be riding the bus?

A. Generally this is not necessary. If the bus has to go significantly out of its way to reach your assigned bus stop, a call to the Transportation office well in advance of the bus stop time may be helpful.

Q. Why can't the bus wait at the bus stop for a small amount of time if my child is late to the bus?

A. It is critical that each passenger be at the bus stop in advance of the bus arriving. When it becomes dark in the winter it is virtually impossible for drivers to monitor children who are not at the bus stop in advance of the bus stopping. A dangerous situation can be set up if the driver does not see the child and closes the door to continue with their run. **If the child is not directly at the stop when the bus arrives, do not send them to try to catch the bus.**

Q. Why can't my child ride another bus to a friend's house?

A. Grass Lake school buses transport approx. 850 students during each of their morning and afternoon runs. Many buses are filled to capacity and “extra seats” may not be available. Permission to ride a bus other than their own may be issued only in “emergency” situations by the Transportation Office.

Q. I pay taxes. Isn't the school district “required” to transport my child?

A. School districts are NOT required by law to transport regular education students. For most students, riding a school bus is a privilege provided by your local school board and is not a service that is mandated or paid for by the State. Schools receive no added funding from state tax dollars for choosing to provide – or not provide – pupil transportation. By law, it is the parent/guardian’s responsibility to see that your child is in school.

Michigan Compiled Law (MCL) 380.1321 outlines the obligations of the school district IF its board of education elects to provide transportation. Under Article 3 of the Revised School Code, the school district is obligated to provide for the transportation of a special education student if the Individualized Educational Planning Committee (IEPC) has determined that the transportation is a specialized service which is included within and necessary to carry out the student's IEP.

Q. I would like to talk to the bus driver. Where and when is the best time to visit?

A. Generally speaking, the bus stop is not the best time to visit with the bus driver. Buses run a tight schedule. At the bus stop, bus drivers need to remain focused on the safety of all students on and off the bus.

If you must visit with the bus driver at the bus stop, approach the driver from the bus driver’s window (left side of the bus). NEVER BOARD A SCHOOL BUS to visit with the bus driver – it can be very frightening to bus riders and can startle the bus driver.

The **best time to visit** with the bus driver **is after the driver has finished the bus run and has parked and secured the bus**. You can request to speak with the bus driver’s supervisor or you can request a meeting with your bus driver and the Director of Transportation, by contacting the Transportation office.

Q. What are the office hours of the Transportation Department?

A. The Transportation office is open from 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday thru Friday (except holidays).

Q. How can I contact the Transportation Department?

A. The Grass Lake Community Schools Transportation Department is located at 899 S. Union Street, Grass Lake, Michigan 49240. (In the Superintendent’s Office

You can contact the Transportation office:

- By email at doug.moeckel@grasslakeschools.com
- By website at www.grasslakeschools.com (Then go to “Departments”, then “Transportation”)
- By telephone at (517) 522-5544.
- By fax at (517) 522-8195