

## **SAU 70 - Hanover, Norwich & Dresden School Districts**

To: Students and Families

From: Jamie Teague, Business Administrator

Subject: School Bus Transportation

Date: August 2024

### **Welcome to our Transportation Family!**

We are sharing this document that outlines the responsibilities for all parties involved in the safe operation of all school buses operating in SAU 70. It also states procedures for handling discipline issues on school buses. The Dresden, Hanover, and Norwich School Boards have endorsed these responsibilities and procedures.

While these rules and procedures have been in existence and a part of the contracts with our bus contractors for some time, we update them annually and make them available to all families. We believe it is important for parents/guardians and the school district to work together in promoting a safe pupil transportation system in which high standards of safety and decorum are maintained. Please give us your support by taking the time to read and understand the outlined responsibilities with your student(s).

In regards to discipline, the respective school principal may make a judgment, in accordance with the seriousness of the offense, as to the consequences, which might include, but are not limited to temporary suspension from the bus or permanent suspension from the bus.

School bus transportation is a privilege that can be taken away any time a student's conduct is considered to jeopardize the safety of the other passengers or the driver. The right to safe transportation will not be taken from an entire busload of students because a few disobey the rules. If necessary, a bus will return to the school or the transportation office and parents/guardians will be called to pick up their unruly student.

The information to follow is also the section included in your PowerSchool online registration where parents confirm they have read the General Information for Student Transportation including the Guidelines for School Bus Rider Responsibilities and the School Bus Discipline Procedures, and agree to abide by them.

### **General Information - Student Transportation:**

Many parents will have questions about the use of school buses. You should find the answers to many of your questions in this section of the website or in your school handbook.

Day-to-day issues concerning discipline, behavior, etc. should be referred to the appropriate school administrator:

Bernice A. Ray School

Lauren Amrhein, Principal

(603) 643-6655 or [lauren.amrhein@sau70.org](mailto:lauren.amrhein@sau70.org)

Marion Cross School  
Shawn Gonyaw, Principal  
(802) 649-1703 or [shawngonyaw@sau70.org](mailto:shawngonyaw@sau70.org)

Frances C. Richmond School  
Tim Boyle, Principal  
(603) 643-6040 or [timboyle@sau70.org](mailto:timboyle@sau70.org)

Hanover High School  
Julie Stevenson, Principal  
(603) 643-3434 or [julie.stevenson@sau70.org](mailto:julie.stevenson@sau70.org)

If a question deals with the bus contractor - equipment, driver qualifications or behavior, ongoing issues related to routes, schedules, or stops - it should be referred to:

Mike Gaudette, Manager  
Student Transportation of Vermont, located at 1796 Route 14, White River Jct., VT  
(802) 698-8528 or [mgaudette@ridesta.com](mailto:mgaudette@ridesta.com)

Jamie Teague  
Business Administrator  
(603) 643-6050 or [jamieteague@sau70.org](mailto:jamieteague@sau70.org)

### **Bus Route Change**

**Please don't assume you know the routes.** We review routes often and make appropriate changes to accommodate actual rider needs. Bus routes and stops are accurate as of the date of publication, but are subject to change during the course of the year depending on actual ridership patterns. All times are estimated as times can change depending on how many stops are actually made during the route. Students are advised to be at their stop five minutes before the scheduled stop time. Please check the Transportation section of our website - under the Bus Routes Tabs for the most up to date information. If changes to routes affect timing, we will make every attempt to notify riders via email.

### **Kindergarten Transportation**

Kindergarten students ride the regular route buses to the Marion Cross and the Bernice Ray School in the morning and home at the end of the school day. It is essential that an adult receive kindergarten and first grade students at their stop. Drivers are instructed to NOT drop Kindergartners or First Graders (or Pre-K from MCS) at stops without an adult to receive them, unless other arrangements have been requested in writing by using the Transportation Request Form found on our website.

### **School Bus Rider Responsibilities**

- Students will sit in suggested locations/sections by their grade levels.
- Riders and drivers will treat others with courtesy and respect at all times.

- The use of profanity, vulgar, obscene, or abusive language will not be tolerated. This includes communicating with others outside the bus in any way (signs, gestures, faces, etc.) and behavior of this nature may result in expulsion from the bus.
- Fighting, shoving, or bullying others on the bus, or while waiting for the bus, will not be tolerated and may result in expulsion from the bus.
- Throwing anything on the bus or out of the windows is prohibited and will result in expulsion.
- Talking should be carried on in conversational tones so the bus driver can be heard at all times.
- Students are prohibited from using tobacco or vaping products, alcohol, drugs or any controlled substance on the bus.
- Students shall refrain from eating, drinking and gum chewing on the bus as it is a choking hazard.
- Students shall not carry hazardous materials, nuisance items or animals onto the bus.
- Students shall not have possession under/or use of weapons or articles used as weapons (including rubber bands, pea shooters, sharp pencils, etc.) while on the bus.
- Students must comply immediately with any request or suggestion from the driver pertaining to safe pupil transportation.
- Defacement of or destruction to the bus will not be tolerated. Any vandalism of the bus or bus seats will be billed to the parent/guardian of the student responsible for the damage.
- Aisles are to be left free of books, lunch boxes, coats, and other objects at all times. Students should sit totally in their seats, and not put their arms, legs, etc., into the aisles, except when inadequate space makes this impossible.
- Students must remain seated at all times when the bus is moving; arms and heads must be inside the bus at all times. All of the contracted buses are equipped with seat belts for use by students. Although seat belt use on buses is not presently required by NH, VT, or federal mandate, many agree the best practice is to fasten the seat belts while the bus is in motion.
- Students may be required to walk up to one-and one-half miles to a bus stop, or two miles to school.
- Students must be ready to board the bus at least five minutes prior to its scheduled stop. In order to keep all of the students on time, drivers are not to wait for pupils who are not present at the designated stop times. Pupils should not crowd onto the street or road waiting for the bus; instead, they should line up and enter the bus in an orderly fashion when it arrives. Middle and high school students boarding buses in front of the Richmond School in the afternoon should stand behind the white line until the buses have come to a complete stop at the curb.
- Students must board the bus in an orderly and courteous manner, go immediately to their suggested seating area, sit down, and secure their personal belongings.
- Students loading and departing from the bus will do so from the front door of the bus. If the road must be crossed, students will wait for the driver's signal and then (using caution) will cross at least 10 feet in FRONT of the bus.
- All school rules are in effect on the school bus for transportation to and from school or any school event including co-curricular and/or athletics.

## **School Bus Discipline Procedures**

### **Discipline will be handled according to the following procedures:**

- For unacceptable behavior in the judgment of the driver, the driver will complete a Bus Conduct Report form, which notifies the principal of the problem.
- The principal will speak to the student(s) and, if appropriate, speak to or send a letter home to the parents/guardians. The principal will advise the bus contractor of action taken on each conduct report submitted by drivers.
- A serious offense, or behavior which creates a safety hazard, may result in a suspension of up to two weeks, at the discretion of the principal. The driver may insist on a suspension for a student whose behavior creates a safety hazard.
- Unusually serious offenses may result in permanent suspension from the bus. If this action becomes necessary, the principal will notify the parents and the Superintendent in writing. The actual suspension will be made by the Superintendent, with the right of appeal to the School Board.
- If a student is suspended from the bus as a consequence of a bus conduct report, or of a reported poor behavior on the bus, the punishment will take effect the following morning. However, if at the discretion of the school administration the safety of other children is in question, the student may be suspended from the bus immediately. In that case, an attempt will be made to contact the parent/guardian to make other transportation arrangements for the suspended student. If the parent/guardian cannot be contacted, the school will arrange for the student to be transported home only on the day suspension occurs. Thereafter, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to arrange for their students' transportation to and from school. If a suspension occurs on one bus, it includes ridership on all route buses.

## **School Bus Administrative Guidelines**

- Transportation will be provided to eligible students from a designated stop near their home to school, and from school to that stop. Tuition students will be allowed to ride only if the student is pre-registered and if there is room on the bus. Students will only be picked up and/or dropped off at their designated stop.
- Bus stops in rural areas may be at least 500 feet apart.
- Inspected school vehicles driven by certified school bus drivers will be used for all regular pupil transportation routes. Where possible, inspected vehicles and certified drivers will also be used on field and athletic trips, and for special education requirements. In some cases, however, it may be necessary or prudent to use personal or rented vehicles on such trips; in such cases, the drivers of private or rented vehicles must present evidence of insurance.
- All students will only be discharged at school or their designated stop, unless other arrangements have been made and approved through the school principal's office.
- Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade students will not be discharged from buses unless the student's parent, guardian, or other adult designated by the parent or guardian, is present to take charge of the student. Exceptions to this policy will be made only upon the written authorization of the parent or guardian. Depending upon locations, conditions or other extenuating circumstances, parents/guardians may be asked to meet 2nd graders as well.

- The majority of students should be on the bus as little as possible; routes should be designed so that the bulk of the students are picked up last in the morning, and discharged first in the afternoon.
- Only authorized students are to be transported on school buses. Parents, friends, teachers, etc., are not to ride the bus on regular routes. However, teachers, coaches, or other authorized chaperones may accompany field and athletic trips.
- In determining the location of bus stops, primary consideration will be given to safety including the age of the riders and proximity to nearest pickup. Secondary considerations will include fairness, convenience, and availability of budgeted funds. No stop will be established which, in the opinion of the school administration, will unreasonably compromise the safety of students who are expected to use that stop. In cases where the safety of a stop is questioned, the NH Department of Education and NH Department of Safety's School Bus Stop Evaluation Criteria will be used and/or the local police chief may be consulted.
- Small musical instruments which students can hold in their laps, or can put under their seats on the bus, will be allowed. Larger musical instruments, or other large items which require the use of another seat on the bus, may not be allowed, depending on how crowded the bus is. Items requiring the use of the center aisle will not be allowed. As of April 2017, we have allowed smaller athletic equipment such as hockey and lacrosse sticks, tennis rackets, and baseball/softball bats to be carried on the buses. The ability to bring these items is a privilege not a right and must be accompanied by strict behavior. The equipment must be secured in an upright position, beside or between the rider's legs. The equipment should not be flailing about, poking the roof or bounding up and down off the floor, lying on the floor, impeding the aisle way, or infringing on another rider's space. Any behavior of this type will be reported by the drivers to the Administration and will result in the privilege being revoked. At this time, skis, poles, and equipment bags such as hockey and golf are too large to accommodate.
- Questions from parents/guardians about school bus matters should normally be directed to the appropriate school principal. If the question deals with day-to-day issues concerning discipline, behavior, and unusual daily circumstances (late or early bus, missed stop, etc.), it should be referred to the appropriate school principal. If the questions deal with the bus contractor (equipment, driver qualifications and behavior, etc.), or ongoing issues relate to routes, schedules, stops, etc., it should be referred to the Business Administrator. In all cases, the Superintendent, and then the School Board, can be involved if the questions are not resolved.

### **School Bus Driver Responsibilities**

- Drivers are expected to exhibit the same levels of respect and decorum, which are expected of the riders.
- Buses will not be backed up while students are still outside the bus.
- Where possible, students will be picked up and discharged on the proper side of the road, so they are not required to cross a road.
- If a student is on the wrong bus, he or she will be returned to the school at the end of the route; unless other arrangements can be made. If, for any reason at any time, there is no one at the school who is able to assume temporary responsibility for that student, the driver should contact the SAU office and must make sure that the student is assigned to someone who can assume that responsibility. If parents, guardians, or other previously agreed-upon caretakers are

not available and the SAU office is closed, all efforts will be made to contact the relevant District Administrator for guidance. As a last resort the driver should leave the student with the local police.

- In case of a breakdown, the driver will notify the bus contractor, who will dispatch a substitute bus as soon as possible. Before the substitute bus arrives, the driver will not release any children to anyone other than a parent, guardian, or school official, or to someone authorized by the parent/guardian to make decisions on behalf of the student.
- In case a bus cannot complete its afternoon route (because of road conditions, disruptive behavior, etc.) students will be taken back to the school. They will not be discharged at another place, unless prior arrangements have been made with parents/guardians.
- Unusually bulky objects may not be allowed on a bus during its regular route. The bus driver will determine whether or not there is room to safely transport "extra" items.
- Drivers should keep to their approved time schedule as closely as possible, and should never be more than five minutes early. If a driver discovers that the bus is approaching that five-minute limit, the driver will wait at appropriate predetermined places on the route until the bus is back on schedule.
- Drivers will maintain a log, or diary, on their bus, which will contain documentation of verbal warnings issued to students for disciplinary purposes. The log will also be used to record other noteworthy items, such as the license plate numbers of motorists passing the bus illegally. While drivers are expected to note any significant events, this log is not to be considered an all-inclusive record of bus incidents.
- Drivers who witness or are made aware of threatening, harassing or bullying type student behavior will **immediately** and **formally** report the information to the student's Principal on the Bus Conduct Report Form.

**Inclement or threatening weather: How does the SAU make the decision to cancel school or issue a delayed start due to weather?**

Determining school cancellations and late starts is taken very seriously by the administration of SAU 70 and the Dresden, Hanover and Norwich School Districts. Our students, employees, and bus driver's safety is of utmost concern. Because we are a collaboration of integrated school districts, we must be consistent in cancellations and late starts across all three. We currently contract with Student Transportation of Vermont to provide transportation services to our districts. They employ the drivers and own the buses, which carry our District's names on them. We currently run 13 regular town wide routes in Hanover and Norwich combined, as well as many additional special routes across different types of terrain and elevations. Many of our 450 District employees travel from towns near and far via highways and secondary roads.

In order to account for the different weather conditions depending upon location and keep everyone safe, we follow many steps before a decision is made to close school or start school late. Close attention is paid to the weather every evening during the winter months. As soon as the National Weather Service issues a storm advisory, we begin watching the national and local weather channels as well as Doppler radar via the Internet. Tracking active storms is done all night long in preparation for possible school closings.

We also base our decision on the following extremely important factors:

- Temperature, including wind chill factor
- Number of inches and timing of projected snowfall
- Freezing rain and/or icy conditions
- Wind velocity impacting the blowing and drifting of snow, along with visibility issues
- Buses running routes at a slower pace having an impact on the length of time students may be waiting at bus stops
- Parents/guardians driving their students in poor driving conditions and high school age students with little experience driving

A decision to close schools or start late must be made by 5:45 am, as buses begin picking up students at 6:45 am. At about 5:15 am the Business Administrator contacts the district's police and highway departments as well as the transportation company to determine road conditions. Drivers who live in various district locations are polled about conditions of their roads as well. The Business Administrator, Transportation Manager of STV/A and Superintendent then consider all the information that has been gathered to decide.

Late starts are used when we are seeing the end of a storm and highway departments have advised that the extra time can aid in the clean-up. It also provides better visibility for drivers during daylight. Late starts will normally be a two-hour delay from your normal school start. For example, if your student's school normally starts at 8:00 am, a late start causes the school day to begin at 10:00 am. When school is canceled or evening activities are canceled, it is important to contact your student's after-school program providers to see if they too are closing early or canceling their programs. Our decisions do not necessarily affect programs run by the individual towns. Once a decision is made to close school or start late, a District "phone-tree" goes into effect, which notifies District parents, employees, radio and television stations.

Unless there are unusual circumstances, SAU 70 and its Districts will not implement early dismissals for bad weather situations. An early dismissal introduces the risk of sending a young student home to an empty house. We believe that knowing students are inside, safe, warm and learning is far better than sending them home to an empty house. However, it is important to remember that you are the parent/guardian and know what is best for your student. If you believe your student would be safer at home in poor weather conditions, your young learner's absence will be marked as excused. Likewise, if uncomfortable with the weather conditions throughout a poor-weather day as you access the weather conditions, we would encourage you to act upon that belief, communicate with your school's principal, and make the necessary arrangements to pick up your student.

Overall, buses are very safe modes of transportation. Drivers can and do pull over to call for on the spot sand deliveries should conditions warrant. Please encourage your teenager to ride the bus during inclement weather rather than drive. They are safer having an experienced driver take them to school.

What may appear to be a simple decision, as you can tell, includes many components: transportation, communications, before/after school student care programs within and outside of our elementary schools, the timing of the decision, road crews, the transportation company and the bus drivers. The decisions to close school are based on the ability of the buses to safely and efficiently transport students and the ability

of our employees and student drivers to arrive safely at school and home again. Ultimately, the decision lies with the superintendent and it is, indeed, a difficult one, but like you, our first priority is to ensure the safety of our students. Although some may choose to disagree, we will never compromise that basic principle when making the decision, and we support your decision in keeping children home if and when you find it necessary. It is often a judgment call and we strive to do the best we can for everyone involved.

In an effort to cut down on cancellations, we have reviewed all of our bus routes to determine which have proven especially difficult to navigate on poor-weather days. Approximately 20% of the terrain falls into this category. After speaking with our School Boards, we have been working with our transportation provider to make temporary suspension of certain route stops and use “weather-advisory stops” during days of severe weather conditions. If bad weather presents this type of situation and you live on one of these route sections, we will notify you via email of the alternative pick up or drop off locations in advance of the buses running, unless it’s an emergency situation that arises during the course of a route, then notification will occur as soon as it’s possible.

The winter weather advisory procedure will work as follows:

If you live in a section of town or on a road that has historically proven difficult passage on weather-advisory days, we would notify you by 6:00 am that we cannot make it to your regular stop, but will pick your student(s) up at an alternative listed location. Or you may choose to bring the student to school with your own vehicle, or choose to keep the student home.

How does the SAU communicate changes in school openings?

If school is to be closed due to inclement weather conditions, we notify [WMUR](#), [WCAX](#) and New England Cable News ([NECN](#)), as well as posting updates on the [SAU70](#) website.

These announcements will normally be made by 6:00 A.M., or shortly thereafter.

The District also operates an automatic call and email system that will notify parents/guardians on days when there are school cancellations and delays. If you are not receiving these calls (emails), or if you would like to receive them at a different phone number (email address), or you would like NOT to receive those phone calls (emails), please contact your school’s secretary. If a two-hour delay is called for weather or other reasons, all school related schedules will be moved two hours later. Therefore, if your student customarily waits for a bus at 7:20 a.m., he or she should wait for the bus at 9:20 a.m. If your child’s school’s start time is 8:00 a.m., the starting time will change to 10:00 a.m. If a two-hour delay has been announced as described above, and it is later determined that conditions have NOT improved and schools will be closed, an announcement to that effect will be made following the notification streams listed above before 8:00 a.m. Continue to monitor notification streams and the web in case school is subsequently canceled.

It is important to note SAU 70’s practice regarding weather related early dismissals. We very rarely will send students home early due to the concern about unsupervised households, unplowed access routes to homes, etc. If there is any concern about end of day routes, we will most likely err on the side of caution and cancel the school day.