

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Office of Student Transportation

DATE: September 29, 2025

RE: High Winds and School Buses

Vehicle size, wind speed, wind direction, road conditions, and visibility must all be taken into account when making operational decisions during periods of inclement weather. It is important to emphasize that all operational decisions are the responsibility of the local school district. What is occurring in one area may differ significantly from conditions just a few miles away, making local discretion essential.

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) recognizes the importance of clarity in this matter and is providing the following non-binding factors that districts may consider when evaluating bus operations during high wind and severe weather conditions. These considerations are intended only as informational support, not as regulatory requirements or mandates.

Wind-Related Operational Factors

- Wind speeds of 30 MPH or greater can affect vehicle steering and control, especially in high-profile vehicles such as school buses. Sustained winds above 30 MPH and gusts over 45 MPH may present additional safety challenges.
- High winds can obscure visibility due to blowing dust or debris, and increase the likelihood of fallen trees or roadway obstructions.
- High winds may negatively impact braking and stopping distance.
- Buses traveling over elevated surfaces such as bridges, overpasses, and causeways—or through mountainous areas—are more susceptible to wind-related effects due to reduced surrounding protection.

Additional Factors for Local Consideration

- Remind drivers of the potential hazards of operating school buses during periods of high winds or wind gusts.

- When feasible, limit operations to times when sustained winds are below 30 MPH and gusts are below 45 MPH. Final decisions should be based on current local conditions and trusted forecast data.
- If the National Weather Service (NWS) issues a Wind Advisory or High Wind Warning, local leaders should assess whether these conditions may impact the safe operation of school buses and consider delaying or suspending services as appropriate.
- If a Severe Thunderstorm Warning or Tornado Warning is in effect, conditions are generally not safe for bus operation. Drivers and transportation staff should follow district emergency protocols immediately.
- When parking buses during severe weather, do so in open areas and on level ground. Ensure that all windows, doors, and roof hatches are closed and secured.

Definitions from the National Weather Service (NWS)

For clarity, the following definitions are provided by the **NOAA National Weather Service** (<http://w1.weather.gov/glossary>):

- **High Wind Warning:** Sustained winds of 40 MPH or greater, or gusts of 58 MPH or greater, are expected. These conditions may pose hazards, particularly for high-profile vehicles.
- **Wind Advisory:** Winds of 31–39 MPH with higher gusts are expected. These may make driving difficult, especially for buses and other large vehicles.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** Issued when radar or spotters identify hail 1 inch or larger in diameter and/or winds of 58 MPH or more. These conditions can rapidly evolve and may lead to tornadoes with limited notice.
- **Tornado Warning:** Issued when a tornado is either sighted or indicated by radar. Immediate action should be taken to seek safe shelter.

Final Notes

This memo is intended solely as non-binding guidance. The SCDE fully supports the authority and discretion of each local school district to determine whether and how to operate school buses during adverse weather conditions. The intent of this communication is not to mandate action, but to provide information that may assist in local decision-making.

For additional questions or discussion, please contact the Office of Student Transportation at 803-734-8244.