A New Year Reminder: School Bus Safety Is a Shared Responsibility

Tom Gray, RSU5 Superintendent

As we begin a new year, I want to take a moment to talk about something that touches nearly every person in our school community: school bus safety.

Recently, our state has experienced heartbreaking school transportation tragedies in Rockland and Standish that resulted in the loss of young lives. These events have weighed heavily on all of us. Even when something happens elsewhere, it brings the reality home. Every morning and every afternoon, children across RSU 5 climb onto buses trusting that the adults around them—drivers, families, and community members—will do everything possible to keep them safe.

That responsibility belongs to all of us.

School bus drivers have one of the most demanding jobs in public education. They are responsible not only for operating large vehicles on busy roads, but for keeping dozens of children safe at the same time. That work becomes even more challenging in winter, when roads are icy, visibility is limited, and conditions can change quickly. We have been very clear with our drivers that safety comes first, always. If a route takes longer because a driver needs to slow down, stop, or double-check a situation, we fully support that decision and ask for the community's patience and understanding.

Like many school districts, RSU 5 is also experiencing a shortage of bus drivers. In fact, several of our current drivers have come out of retirement to help us meet the need. We are deeply grateful to them, and to all of our transportation staff, for their dedication and professionalism. The reality is simple: if we cannot safely get students to school, we cannot educate them. Supporting our drivers means supporting our schools.

I also want to speak directly to those who share the road with school buses. When you see a bus stopped with its lights flashing, please slow down, stop, and give it your full attention. Those few seconds may feel inconvenient, but they can be lifesaving. Although we are all grateful that, at last, we have slightly more daylight each day, at this time of year our kids are often getting on and off buses in the dark of winter's early mornings and late afternoons. Children are small, unpredictable, and often hard to see, especially in winter clothing and low light. A moment of patience can prevent a lifetime of regret.

Families play an important role as well. Talking with children about bus safety, reminding them to stay alert, and being present at bus stops when possible—especially for younger students—makes a real difference. Those extra eyes and that extra reassurance matter.

As a community, we take pride in looking out for one another. School bus safety is one of the clearest examples of how interconnected we are. Drivers, students, parents, neighbors, and

passersby all have a role to play. None of us can do it alone, but together we can make a meaningful difference.

As we turn the page to a new year, my hope is that we do so with renewed care for one another, especially for the children who rely on us to make good choices on their behalf. Thank you to our bus drivers for the essential work you do every day, often without recognition. Thank you to families for partnering with us. And thank you to the broader community for slowing down, paying attention, and helping us keep our students safe.

Wishing you a safe, healthy, and hopeful New Year.