COLORADO
Department of Education
School Finance and Operations Division

School Bus and Multifunction Bus Operator Guide

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Colorado Department of Education
SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION UNIT | 201 E COLFAX AVE., DENVER, CO 80203
WWW.ED.CDE.STATE.CO.US/TRANSPORTATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) School Transportation Unit issues these guidelines to assist public and charter school districts, service providers, and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) with developing policies and procedures for the transportation of students. These guidelines provide interpretations, suggestions, options, industry standards, best practices, and ideas that are consistent with 1 CCR 301-26, The Colorado Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection of School Transportation Vehicles; 1 CCR 301-25, Colorado Minimum Standards Governing School Transportation Vehicles, which promote transportation integrity in school transportation departments. We hope this publication will serve as a valuable resource for transportation providers in their efforts to comply with relevant legislation and regulations.

Acknowledgments

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Unit One – The Profession of Student Transportation: Standards, Culture, and Compliance

PART 1: PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL READINESS

Understanding the Role of a School Transportation Professional

Never permit yourself or others to say, “I’m just the bus driver.” Instead, speak with the absolute pride of your office: **“I am a Professional School Bus Driver.”**

When you drive a school bus or support vehicle, you are doing much more than just driving. It is common to hear people downplay the job, but the truth is that operating a school transportation vehicle requires a high level of skill, patience, and constant awareness.

Think about what goes into your daily routine:

- You are handling a large, heavy commercial vehicle through traffic, tight spaces, and unpredictable weather.
- You have to navigate changing road conditions, which can range from busy city streets to steep mountain roads, depending on your area.
- While doing all of this, you are managing up to 90 students sitting behind you, keeping them safe, and staying on schedule.

Because of these responsibilities, holding a standard Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) is only the baseline. Drivers must also stay compliant with ongoing federal drug and alcohol testing, pass regular Department of Transportation (DOT) medical exams, and master student management and communication techniques.

Life in a Fishbowl

As a school transportation operator, you operate inside a metaphorical fishbowl. Professionalism in pupil transportation is a 24-hour commitment that extends well beyond the boundaries of the standard shift. How an operator conducts themselves in public, both on duty and within the local community, directly and powerfully impacts the reputation of the school district, charter school, or service provider.

Because you are entrusted with the safety of children, parents and the general public hold your technical skills, personal integrity, and moral ethics to an exceptionally high

standard. The community demands that only high-quality, responsible, and emotionally disciplined individuals care for their children.

There is also a direct link between how you carry yourself and how your passengers behave. When students see that their driver is professional, calm, and fair, they are much more likely to follow the rules, which naturally reduces behavioral issues during the route.

The Professional's Daily Self-Audit

To help keep your safety and professional habits sharp, ask yourself these seven practical questions before you start your day:

- **Am I presenting a professional image?**
    - *Standard:* Wearing clean, appropriate clothes and sturdy, enclosed footwear that allows you to operate the pedals safely and evacuate quickly.
- **Is the vehicle placed in my care properly maintained?**
    - *Standard:* Keeping the aisle and seats free of trash, checking that the windows are clear, and ensuring the interior is clean for your riders.
- **Am I reliable and accountable?**
    - *Standard:* Arriving early enough to do a complete, unhurried pre-trip inspection so you can leave right on time.
- **Can families rely on my route timing?**
    - *Standard:* Running your route safely and at a predictable pace so families can rely on your stop times every day.
- **Am I treating passengers fairly?**
    - *Standard:* Enforcing bus safety rules consistently, calmly, and without playing favorites.
- **Am I setting a good example?**
    - *Standard:* Treating school staff, parents, and other drivers on the road with patience and respect.
- **Am I protecting my organization's reputation?**
    - *Standard:* Driving defensively and communicating professionally so that your actions reflect well on your team.

An operator who can confidently answer "yes" to each of these questions has successfully established the foundation for an excellent, impactful career in student transportation. Ultimately, the industry standard remains absolute: **“To be respected, you must first be respectable.”**

Your Personal Pre-Trip Assessment

A driver’s personal pre-trip assessment is every bit as critical to safety as the mechanical inspection of the vehicle itself. Your physical health, emotional stability, and mental attitude are the primary factors driving your performance behind the wheel. Chronic or acute stress in any of these areas directly degrades situational awareness, impairs cognitive processing, and significantly slows physical reaction times.

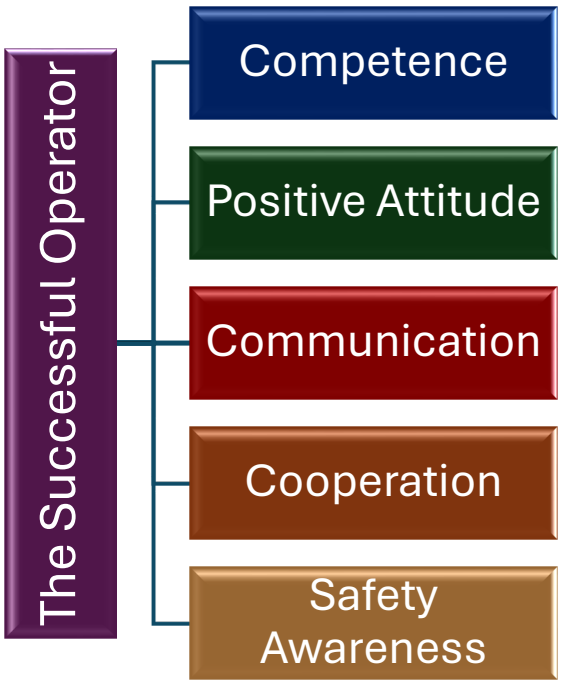
Before picking up your keys, take a moment to evaluate yourself against these key safety areas:

- **Fatigue and Rest:** Driving tired is incredibly dangerous. Being well-rested helps you spot hazards early, accurately judge stopping distances, and stay patient if students get loud or traffic gets heavy.
- **Illness and Medications:** Being sick or taking certain medications can slow your reaction time or cause drowsiness. Over-the-counter medications like cold syrups or allergy pills often carry warnings about operating heavy machinery. If you are too sick to focus or are taking medication that causes drowsiness, you cannot safely drive the vehicle. Behind the wheel of a school transportation vehicle is no place to combat the flu.
- **Clothing and Footwear:** Loose clothing, long unsecured hair, or dangling jewelry can catch on handrails, door levers, or switches. Your shoes must be stable and fit securely. Open-toed shoes, sandals, flip-flops, high heels, or slick-soled shoes should not be worn because they significantly increase your risk of slipping on bus steps or icy patches. Dress appropriately for the weather, and avoid clothing with graphics promoting alcohol, drugs, or inappropriate topics.
- **Substance Rules (Drugs and Alcohol):** State and federal laws strictly prohibit possessing, using, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or impairing substances while working. Violations result in immediate termination, loss of your license, and potential criminal charges.
- **Driving Confidence:** Safety requires a good balance. Drivers who are overconfident tend to take unnecessary risks, while drivers who are overly hesitant may fail to make decisive safety choices in heavy traffic.

- **Focus and Emotions:** The driver's seat is not a place to mentally rehearse interpersonal conflicts or relive personal arguments. When strong emotional events dominate an operator's thoughts, their field of vision narrows, and their ability to execute sound defensive driving maneuvers is severely compromised. It is important to leave personal worries aside when you step into the driver's seat.
- **Long-Term Well-Being:** Mental health conditions often develop gradually. While highly treatable, they require time and professional care to manage. Chronic stress, anxiety, or burnout can build up over time and affect your alertness. If you find yourself struggling to cope, take advantage of your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or talk to a medical professional.
- **Self-Esteem and Behavior:** How you feel about yourself and your job directly affects how you drive. Studies show that when a driver is feeling frustrated, disconnected, or down on themselves, they are statistically more likely to take unnecessary risks or get into accidents. On the flip side, taking real pride in your work as a professional driver naturally encourages you to make safer, more defensive choices on the road.

PART 2: THE FIVE FOUNDATIONS OF DRIVING EXCELLENCE

To succeed and stay compliant with Colorado regulations, every driver should focus on mastering five core areas. These are not separate rules, but habits that work together to keep your routes safe:



Technical Competence

This means going beyond basic steering. It involves understanding the federal and state rules that govern your job (like 1 CCR 301-26), knowing your vehicle inside and out, and committing to thorough daily inspections.

A Positive Professional Attitude

You set the mood for the vehicle. For many students, you are their first contact at school in the morning and their last in the afternoon. Staying calm and objective, even during bad weather or tough behavior situations, helps keep the environment at the lowest liability risk.

Clear Communication

Because you operate independently on the road, clear and simple communication prevents misunderstandings. This applies to giving clear safety directions to your passengers, talking with school staff, and using dispatch radios effectively.

Team Cooperation

No school transportation vehicle operator works in a vacuum. Drivers rely on a large support network. Being a team player means submitting detailed maintenance reports to mechanics, working with principals on student discipline, and sharing route notes with your fellow drivers.

Safety Awareness

Safety awareness is not a static set of rules; this is an active mindset. It means constantly checking your mirrors, increasing your following distance when the weather drops, and never cutting corners on safety routines at railroad crossings or student drop-offs.

PART 3: THE GOVERNANCE HIERARCHY AND TRANSPORTATION TEAM

Understanding the Rules Hierarchy

To maintain safety standards, you need to know the practical differences between laws, regulations, and local policies. Following these rules is a mandatory requirement of your employment.

Law

This is a requirement passed by a legislative body and signed by the Chief Executive. At the Federal level, the legislative body is Congress. At the State level, it is the state legislature. Laws/statutes are requirements that must be obeyed. The Colorado Revised Statutes are an example of a state statute, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is an example of a federal law.

Rules and Regulations

Synonymous terms for requirements adopted by an executive department with the authority to establish rules for carrying out the program. A definite procedure must be followed when adopting administrative rules. When adopted, the rules have the same effect as laws. They are requirements that must be obeyed. The Colorado Department of Education's Annual Inspection/Operation Rules for School Transportation and the Colorado Minimum Standards Governing School Transportation Vehicles are examples of Rules.

Policy

A course of action, guiding principle, or procedure adopted by any authoritative body that is expedient, prudent, or advantageous. Policies are principles or procedures that one is expected to follow, but they are not absolutely mandated as laws or rules.

School boards may have policies and procedures at the local school district, charter, or service provider level related to the pupil transportation program. Examples of school, charter, or service provider policies include student discipline and dress code policies.

Procedure

Refers to the official, standardized protocols and step-by-step instructions established by Educational Entities. These rules ensure the safe, efficient, and compliant movement of students to and from school, on field trips, or during extracurricular activities.

Recommendation

This is an officially proposed plan, advisory guideline, or requirement detailing how a student should be safely transported. It provides counsel or specific accommodations tailored to an individual student's needs, as well as to broader vehicular safety standards.

Best Practice

This is a standardized, proven method or strategy designed to maximize safety, efficiency, and legal compliance beyond baseline regulations. Because there is no

single instruction manual for pupil transportation, best practices serve as benchmarks for navigating its complexities.

Tier	Governing Body	Authority Level	Consequence of Breach
Law / Statute	Federal Congress / State Legislature	Absolute Mandate	Criminal/Civil Sanctions, Citation
Rule / Regulation	Federal Administrations (FMCSA) / State Agencies (CDE)	Full Force of Law	Loss of Certification, Fleet Grounding, Fines
Policy / Procedure	Local School Boards / Executive Directors	Employment Mandate	Disciplinary Action, Termination
Recommendation	Manufacturers / Safety Panels (NHTSA, NSC)	Advisory Standard	Voided Warranties, Increased Tort Liability

The Transportation Team Structure

Each team member involved in pupil transportation plays a critical role in keeping children safe. As a driver, understanding what everyone else does helps make daily routes and unexpected emergencies run smoothly.

Federal Oversight and Regulatory Bodies

- **United States Department of Transportation (USDOT):** This is the parent department for all federal transportation administrations. Created by Congress in 1966, its main job is to keep the country's transportation systems safe, efficient, and accessible.
- **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA):** An agency within the USDOT charged with writing, implementing, and enforcing the *Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS)*. It regulates vehicle safety features, mandates the universal Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) system, and oversees recalls.

- **Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA):** Directly regulates the commercial trucking and motorcoach industries in the United States. Its primary mission is to reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities involving large trucks and buses by setting federal standards for CDL qualifications, drug clearinghouse rules, and hours of service.

State and Regional Governance

- **State Board of Education and Colorado Department of Education (CDE):** Statutorily mandated under Section 42-4-1904, C.R.S., to adopt and enforce regulations governing the safe operation of all vehicles used for the transportation of school children.

- **CDE School Transportation Unit:** The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) School Transportation Unit is committed to ensuring that every student has access to a safe, reliable, and efficient journey to and from school. We recognize that a student's educational experience begins the moment they board a school bus, and we work to provide the safe and supportive foundation that makes learning possible.

  Our office is responsible for overseeing compliance with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations governing school transportation vehicles, operations, and driver qualifications. Through consistent oversight, clear guidance, and responsible stewardship of state resources, we support schools and transportation providers in meeting these expectations with confidence and integrity.

  We partner with school districts, charter schools, and transportation providers across Colorado to promote safe and effective operations. Our work is grounded in the standards established by Colorado's Minimum Standards Governing School Transportation Vehicles and the Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection of School Transportation Vehicles.

  Through training, inspections, technical assistance, and ongoing collaboration, we strive to ensure that every school transportation system operates at the highest level of safety, compliance, and professionalism – so that students can arrive ready to learn and return home safely each day.

- **Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES):** Regional educational service agencies organized under Article 5 of Title 22, C.R.S. They operate as an extension of local member school districts, providing

specialized educational services to two or more districts in a cooperative arrangement.

Local Education Agencies and Operators

- **Colorado Public School Districts, Charters, or Service Providers:** Organized pursuant to Article 30 of Title 22, C.R.S., to provide and administer the pupil transportation system for eligible students living within their boundaries. Includes *Public Charter Schools* and those authorized via the *Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI)*.

- **Board of Education (School Board):** The locally elected governing body responsible for creating, adopting, and administering school board policies, funding allocations, and student behavior standards.

- **Superintendent:** The chief executive administrator or manager in charge of the entire school district or charter school system.

Administrative and Operations Leadership

- **Transportation Director/Supervisor:** Provides direct administrative leadership, strategic management, purchasing, and operational supervision to all pupil transportation personnel and route networks.

- **Fleet Director/Supervisor:** Provides direct administrative management and professional supervision to all transportation mechanics, technicians, maintenance scheduling, and vehicle inspections.

- **Maintenance Mechanic/Technician:** Executes specialized, safety-critical maintenance and repairs on all machinery, powertrain components, and structural safety systems to ensure absolute fleet safety and compliance.

- **Dispatcher:** Serves as the central communication hub, managing two-way radio traffic, tracking logistics, and relaying time-sensitive information between active vehicles, school sites, and emergency services.

Educational, Family, and Trip Support Staff

- **Principals:** The leaders of individual school buildings. They have the final say on student discipline, handle parent meetings, and hand out consequences for misconduct on the bus.

- **Teachers:** Educators who work closely with students. They are great resources for open communication regarding a student's unique emotional, physical, or behavioral needs.
- **Pupils (Students):** The ultimate reason the transportation system exists. Students are responsible for following safety rules so the driver can focus entirely on the road.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Responsible for getting students to the bus stop on time, making sure they are dressed for the weather, and reinforcing safe bus habits at home.
- **Chaperones:** Adults appointed by the school to help maintain order and safety during activity or field trips.
- **Coaches:** Direct and train student athletes. In many districts, coaches undergo specialized training to operate school transportation vehicles, including multi-function buses, for activity trips.

PART 4: OPERATIONAL TOLERANCES AND ON-THE-ROAD MANDATES

Your Passengers and Public Image

A school bus is essentially a rolling billboard for your school district or company. If you drive aggressively or handle a situation poorly, community members will often call the transportation office before you even make it back to the yard. You provide an important service to a wide range of passengers—from preschool children to young adults up to age 26 in specialized regional programs—as well as staff, coaches, and parents.

Core Performance Qualifications

To do this job safely, an operator needs to maintain four core abilities:

- **Fleet Adaptability:** The skill to comfortably drive different sizes and types of vehicles, from small support vehicles to full-size school buses.
- **Geographical Knowledge:** A good working familiarity with your local area, route systems, busy intersections, and local mountain roads.
- **Regulatory Understanding:** A basic working knowledge of the local, state, and federal laws that govern commercial vehicles and school buses.

- **Mental Alertness:** The situational awareness and staying focused so you can make split-second safety decisions during traffic emergencies, breakdown situations, or sudden weather changes.

Daily Driving Responsibilities

On every shift, drivers must commit to these standard logistics and safety habits:

- **Route Fidelity:** Stick to your assigned schedule and stop locations exactly as written. Never change a route without clearing it with dispatch or your supervisor first.
- **Fuel Maintenance:** Keep an eye on your gauges and make sure your fuel tank never drops below your district's required minimum limit.
- **Cleanliness Standards:** Keep the inside of your vehicle clean. Make sure the center aisle, stepwells, and emergency exits are completely clear of trash or objects.
- **Inspection Rigor:** Carefully check your vehicle's mechanical condition by completing your pre-trip, en-route, and post-trip safety checks, and log any issues on your official paperwork.
- **Incident Reporting:** Always report any accident, minor scratch, or passenger injury to your supervisor immediately.
- **Record Keeping:** Keep accurate student behavior records and turn in formal conduct reports to department administrators in a timely, factual manner.

Cargo Management and Carry-On Item Rules

As the driver, you are legally responsible for making sure everything inside the bus is secured before you start moving. In a sudden stop or collision, any loose object can become a dangerous flying projectile. While students often carry a lot of gear, especially for sports trips, you must enforce these clear boundaries:

- **The Personal Items Standard:** As a general rule, personal items are allowed in the seating area only if the student can hold them securely on their lap or between their feet without taking up someone else's seat space.

- **Securing Heavy Objects:** If an object cannot be held securely by a student, it must be secured using approved tie-downs, cargo nets, or designated luggage compartments.
- **Seat Height Limits:** Items must never be stacked on passenger seats higher than the top of the seat back.
- **Emergency Exit Access:** Under no circumstances can equipment bags, instruments, or personal items block or narrow the center aisle, the entrance stepwell, or any emergency exit door, window, or roof hatch.

12.7.1 General Cargo and Medical Supplies

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall ensure that all carry-on items are properly handled to minimize the danger to all others.

(B) All baggage, articles, equipment, or medical supplies (except those held by individual passengers) shall be secured in a manner that assures unrestricted access to all exits by occupants, does not restrict the driver's ability to operate the bus, and/or protects all occupants against injury resulting from falling or displacement of any baggage, article, or equipment.

(1) Oxygen cylinders that are medically necessary meet this standard if they are securely attached to a wheelchair or otherwise secured in the vehicle and do not impede access to any exit. Educational Entities shall use reasonable care in determining the number of cylinders that may be safely transported at one time.

Chemical and Hazardous Materials Restrictions

Colorado enforces strict limits on which cleaning supplies and chemicals may be carried in a school vehicle. In an emergency, responding medical teams need to quickly determine whether students have been exposed to any hazardous liquids.

12.7.2 Chemicals and Cleaning Supplies

(A) All chemicals and cleaning supplies carried on a School Transportation Vehicle shall meet the following precautions:

(1) The container is non-breakable;

(2) The container is labeled with contents;

(3) The container is secured in a bracket, or in a closed compartment in the driver's area, or a compartment on the exterior of the bus; and

(4) The containers and/or quantities of products are no more than 32 ounces in size.

(B) Pressurized aerosols are prohibited.

Interior and Exterior Decoration Prohibitions

To maintain clear visibility and protect the vehicle's safety features, you cannot add personal decorations to the bus that block your line of sight, mirror paths, or emergency exit signs. Exterior changes are also illegal; state rules explicitly mandate the specific yellow paint formulas, reflective tape placement, and lettering sizes allowed on a school bus.

12.7.3 Interior and Exterior Decorations

(A) Interior decorations shall not be located within the driver's area (including the space in front of the front barriers, the step-well, dash, walls and ceiling, the windshield, the entry door, the driver's side window, and all windows in front of the front barrier), the first two passenger windows on both sides of the vehicle or all windows on the rear of the School Transportation Vehicle.

(B) Other decorations within the passenger compartment shall not:

(1) Cover any required lettering;

(2) Impede the aisle or any emergency exit;

(3) Hang from the walls and/or ceiling.

(C) Per the effective date of these rules, School Transportation Vehicles owned or leased by the Educational Entity that are used for student transportation shall not have the windows obstructed in any way by advertising, decorations, or vehicle wraps.

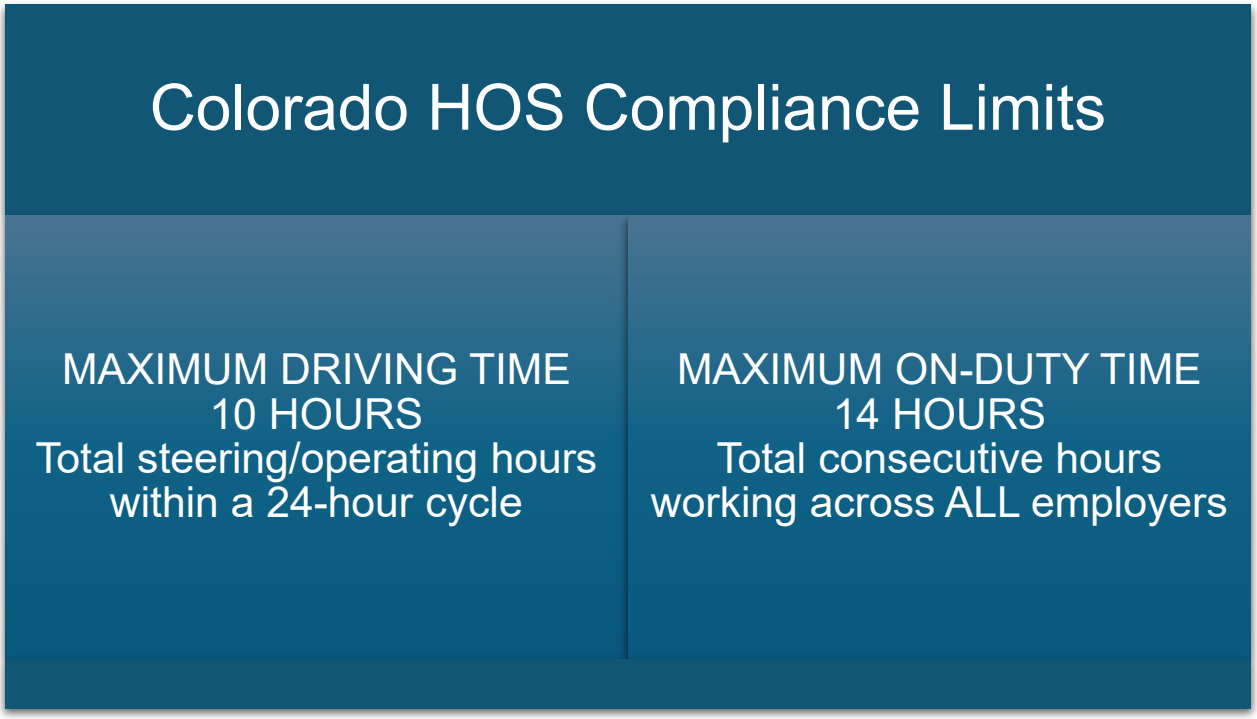
(1) Exception: Tint applied by the vehicle manufacturer to industry standards, as permitted in 1 CCR 301-25.

(2) Exception: Route identification is permitted per 1 CCR 301-25.

Maximum Driving Time and Hours of Service (HOS)

Managing driver fatigue is a critical federal and state safety compliance standard. When figuring out your daily driving limits, you must count **all hours worked across all employers**, including non-driving jobs, split-shifts, and secondary part-time work.

Per Colorado state rules, school transportation operators must operate strictly within the following 24-hour limits:



13.1 Maximum Driving and On-Duty Time

13.1.1 School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall not drive, and an Educational Entity shall not require or permit a School Transportation Vehicle Operator to drive, in violation of the hours-of-service limits established in this Section.

13.1.2 All School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall document that they are in compliance with this Section.

(A) A School Transportation Vehicle Operator's daily log, or equivalent, shall be completed for the trip in the School Transportation Vehicle Operator's own handwriting when the trip requires a scheduled or unscheduled overnight stay away from the work reporting location.

13.1.3 Definitions

(A) “Day” means any consecutive 24-hour period beginning at a time designated by the Educational Entity.

(B) “On-Duty Time” means all time worked for all employers, including all driving and non-driving duties.

(1) “On-Duty Not-Driving” means all time spent for pre-trip/post-trip inspections, loading and unloading students, cleaning the bus, administrative paperwork, or if the School Transportation Vehicle Operator is not free to leave the location of a School-Related Event.

(2) “On-Duty Driving” means the period during which the School Transportation Vehicle Operator is at the controls of a School Transportation Vehicle while it is in motion.

(C) “Off-Duty Time (Rest/Waiting)” means the time spent by School Transportation Vehicle Operators of School Transportation Vehicles during special events, meal stops, and School-Related Events—regardless of compensation—as off-duty, provided that the subsequent criteria are satisfied.

(1) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall be relieved of all duty and responsibility for the care and custody of the students, and

(2) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall be at liberty to pursue activities of their choice, including leaving the premises on which the School-Related Event is located.

13.1.4 Daily Limits

(A) A School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall not drive after accumulating 10 hours of driving time or after 14 consecutive hours of on-duty time until the required off-duty period is completed.

(1) The required 10 hours off-duty shall consist of:

(a) One period of at least six consecutive hours; and

(b) The remaining off-duty time accumulated in no more than two additional periods.

(2) This would include on-duty time for all employers.

13.1.5 Weekly Limits

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators are prohibited from driving after being on duty for more than 70 hours in any seven consecutive days.

13.1.6 Emergency Exception

(A) In case of an emergency, an operator may complete the trip without being in violation if such a trip reasonably could have been completed absent the emergency.

13.1.7 Federal Compliance Option

(A) In lieu of section 13.0 of these rules, an Educational Entity may comply with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, 49 C.F.R. § 395.

Emergency Evacuations and Activity Trip Documentation

In an en-route emergency, vehicle breakdown, or accident, you may be the only adult on the scene. Passengers will depend entirely on you for calm leadership and clear evacuation commands. To ensure everyone is prepared, state rules require drivers to maintain accurate training logs and to complete regular drills.

For all school-sanctioned events and activity trips, the operator is legally required to provide Emergency Evacuation Instructions to all passengers prior to the initial departure. The acknowledgment of this instruction must be documented.

16.0 Emergency Evacuation Drills

16.1 Mandatory Route Operator Evacuation Drills

16.1.1 Small-Capacity Vehicle Operators, as defined in these rules, are exempt from this requirement.

16.1.2 All School Transportation Vehicle Route Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants shall conduct emergency evacuation drills with students at least twice during each school year.

(A) One drill shall be conducted in the fall, and the second drill shall be conducted in the spring.

(B) Substitute and Multifunction bus operators shall be trained on how to conduct emergency evacuation drills.

16.1.3 Special Needs Provisions

(A) Physical evacuation drills are not required to be conducted for students with functional or special needs.

(1) For these students, at a minimum, a detailed written emergency evacuation plan shall be maintained on file by the transportation department. This plan shall be reviewed by Transportation Personnel at least twice per school year to ensure accuracy and safety.

16.2 School-Related Event Instructions

16.2.1 For all School-Related Events (field trips, athletics, etc.), passengers must receive a verbal emergency evacuation briefing prior to the initial departure of every trip. This briefing must include the location and operation of emergency exits.

16.2.2 Educational Entities shall maintain records documenting that the required evacuation drills were conducted and/or evacuation instruction was given.

See Unit 7 for more details.

Distracted Driving

Distracted driving represents an ongoing crisis on modern roadways. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) data show that thousands of motorists are killed and hundreds of thousands are injured annually in collisions directly caused by distracted driving.

The physiological and mechanical effects of distracted driving on a school bus operator are catastrophic, resulting in:

- **Slowed Perception:** Delaying or completely failing to identify critical traffic hazards, changing signals, pedestrian movements, or mechanical warnings.
- **Impaired Decision-Making:** Causing delayed physical reactions or improper, erratic control inputs to the steering system, accelerator, or service brakes.

The Critical Risks of Text Messaging and Mobile Devices

Research confirms that texting while driving is incredibly dangerous because it takes your hands, eyes, and mind off the road all at once. Under Colorado law (C.R.S. 42-4-239), manual texting or data entry while driving is a criminal offense. The law states that anyone 18 or older may not use a wireless telephone to text or perform manual data entry while operating a motor vehicle.

“A person eighteen years of age or older shall not use a wireless telephone for the purpose of engaging in text messaging or other similar forms of manual data entry or transmission while operating a motor vehicle.”

Defensive Driver Habits to Stay Focused

To protect your passengers and maintain complete focus, practice these professional habits:

- **Put Devices Away:** Turn off or silence personal phones before starting your route. If a device must stay on for emergency district contact, it must be placed within easy reach while you are buckled in and use an approved, hands-free voice feature.
- **The No-Reach Rule:** You are violating safety standards if you slide, lean, or reach for a mobile device while the bus is moving, even if you are trying to use a hands-free option. Scrolling or reading while driving is completely prohibited.
- **Set Up Your Area First:** Familiarize yourself completely with the unique layout, switches, climate controls, and dashboard of your vehicle prior to moving. Adjust all seat positions, steering columns, and mirrors before turning the key.
- **Pre-Program Navigation:** Program any emergency radio frequencies or GPS addresses while completely stopped in the bus yard. Never adjust routing programs or read maps while in motion.
- **Keep the Driver’s Area Clear:** Keep the driver's area free of loose clipboards, water bottles, or trash that could slide under your brake pedal. Secure all tools safely.
- **No Eating While Driving:** Never eat while the vehicle is in motion. Plan your schedule to allow for quick breaks while safely parked.
- **Keep Conversations Simple:** Avoid getting drawn into complex or emotionally intense conversations with students or staff while driving. Keep your eyes on the road and your mind on the drive.

Note: Always check the Educational Entity’s policy. Many school districts enforce an absolute ban on mobile device use while on duty, overriding any hands-free allowances.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-239 Use of a Mobile Electronic Device

(4)

(a) Except as provided in subsection (4)(b) of this section, an individual who violates this section commits a class A traffic infraction, and the court shall assess a penalty as follows:

(I) A fine of $75.00 and a surcharge of $10.00 for the first offense within the immediately preceding 24 months;

(II) A fine of $150.00 and a surcharge of $10.00 dollars for the second offense within the immediately preceding 24 months; or

(III) A fine of $250.00 and a surcharge of $10.00 for the third or subsequent offense within the immediately preceding 24 months.

(5) This section does not apply to an individual with a commercial driver's license who is operating a commercial vehicle.

12.1.4 Headphone Usage

(A) Pursuant to C.R.S. 42-4-1411, and to ensure auditory awareness for safe operation and student supervision, a School Transportation Vehicle Operator and/or School Transportation Bus Attendant shall not use headphones, earphones, bone conduction headphones, or similar audio devices that covers, partially covers, or rests upon both ears while performing safety-sensitive functions, including loading or unloading students and any time the vehicle is in motion.

(1) This provision does not include medically prescribed hearing aids or other assistive hearing devices.

(B) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall not utilize or engage any smart feature on wearable technology (e.g., notifications, calls, messaging, apps, etc.) beyond the device's primary function while loading or unloading students and any time the vehicle is in motion.

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Unit Two – Educational Entity Requirements

PART 1: ORGANIZATIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND OPERATIONS

Operating a student transportation system within the State of Colorado requires strict adherence to federal and state standards. These rules ensure that every Educational Entity maintains absolute regulatory compliance and administrative accountability.

Service Provider Registration Requirements

All third-party Service Providers contracted by a school district or charter school to transport students from home to school, school to school, or for school-related events must formally register with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) School Transportation Unit.

- **The Self-Certification Requirement:** Registration is executed by submitting an official Service Provider Registration Form. This submission serves as a legally binding self-certification that all School Transportation Vehicles owned, leased, or rented by the provider for contracted student transport meet or exceed the *Colorado Minimum Standards Governing School Transportation Vehicles*, and that the provider complies with all *Colorado Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection of School Transportation Vehicles*.
- **Fee Structure and Renewal Cadence:** There is no administrative fee required to register. Service Providers must renew their registration every 3 years. School districts and charter schools are expected to exclusively utilize Service Providers that maintain a current CDE STAR review and are actively listed on the Registered Service Provider list.
- **Statutory Exception:** Service Providers that hold a current Public Utilities Commission (PUC) Registration in good standing are completely exempt from these specific registration requirements.

5.1 Responsibilities and Governance

5.1.1 All Service Providers shall register with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) School Transportation Unit by submitting the Service Provider Registration Form. Submission of this registration form constitutes self-certification by the Service Provider that all School Transportation Vehicles used for contracted service – whether leased, rented, or owned – meet or exceed the Colorado Minimum Standards. Furthermore, this form submission by the Service Provider self-certifies compliance with the Colorado Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and

Inspection of School Transportation Vehicles. There shall be no fee to register.

(A) Service Providers shall renew their registration every three years.

(B) School Districts and Charter Schools should only utilize Service Providers that have a current CDE STAR review and are listed on the Registered Service Provider list.

(C) Exception: Service Providers with a current PUC Registration in good standing are exempt from the requirements of this Rule.

Route Planning and Optimization

Planning school bus routes involves more than finding the shortest path between two points. Transportation departments must design routes with safety as the top priority. When setting up paths and stops, each transportation department must carefully evaluate and avoid hidden risks, such as:

- High-speed intersections and blind curves.
- Roads with narrow shoulders or steep drops.
- Multi-lane street crossings where students would have to cross traffic unassisted.
- Active construction zones or areas with limited space for a large vehicle to turn around.

Drivers must stick exactly to these approved route paths. If an unexpected road closure or hazard requires an adjustment, you must report it to dispatch immediately to get an authorized detour.

2.0 Definitions

2.9 “Route” means a documented and authorized itinerary approved by an Educational Entity for the transportation of students. A Route consists of travel between identified locations—including student stops, school campuses, or other approved facilities—operated by a vehicle and driver meeting all applicable state and federal safety standards. This definition includes regular daily schedules, shuttle services, and specialized transport, regardless of whether the itinerary follows a fixed timetable.

14.2.2 Route Design

(A) Student stops shall not be located on the side of any major thoroughfare whenever access to the destination of the passenger is possible by a road or street which is adjacent to the major thoroughfare.

(B) Routes shall be designed as to:

(1) Eliminate railroad crossings where practicable; and

(2) Educational Entities shall design Routes to minimize student ride times while considering student educational needs, geographic boundaries, terrain, traffic congestion, and financial resources within the district.

(a) A local board of education, or the governing body of a charter school, may establish a maximum student ride time.

(3) Student stops shall be located no less than 200 feet apart, consistent with the requirement that alternating flashing amber warning signal lamps be activated not less than 200 feet in advance of the stop on the roadway where the stop is to be performed.

(a) Exception: In areas where wildlife may pose a high risk of threat to students' safety while they are waiting and/or walking to a student stop, designated stops may be less than 200 feet apart upon detailed written approval by the school district board of education or governing body of a charter school (or the board's designee).

(i) A copy of the written approval shall be kept in the school transportation office, and School Transportation Vehicle Route Operators shall be given written notice of the exception and have it indicated on Route sheets.

14.3 Route Prohibitions and Constraints

14.3.1 Crossing Prohibitions

(A) Educational Entities shall ensure that if students are required to cross a roadway, highway, or private road to access the student stop, the student(s) are prohibited from the following:

(1) Crossing any roadway constructed or designed to permit three or more separate lanes of vehicular traffic in either direction, including turn lanes;

(2) Crossing any roadway constructed with a median (raised, depressed, or painted) separating multiple lanes of traffic.

(3) Crossing any railroad crossings not designated for pedestrian crossings.

14.3.2 Operational Constraints and Exceptions

(A) Alternating flashing red warning signal lamps shall not be activated within 200 feet of an intersection if the intersection is controlled by a traffic control device, as defined in these rules.

(B) Four-way hazard lamps shall be used on private property, such as parking lots.

(C) Pursuant to C.R.S. 42-4-1903(2), School Transportation Vehicle Operators are not required to actuate the alternating flashing red warning signal lamps on a school bus when:

(1) The student stop is at a location where the local traffic regulatory authority has, by prior written designation, declared such actuation unnecessary, and no passenger is required to cross the roadway; or

(2) Discharging or loading passengers who require the assistance of a lift device, and no passenger is required to cross the roadway.

(3) When using a Type A-1 Multifunction School Activity Bus or Small-Capacity Vehicle for Route purposes.

(D) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall not relocate a student stop without the approval of the Educational Entity.

Passenger Control and Authorized Riders

Only authorized passengers are allowed on a school transportation vehicle.

- **The Driver's Authority:** As the operator, you have the authority to verify the identity of anyone boarding your vehicle. No individual may board or be transported within a School Transportation Vehicle unless they fall into one of the following approved categories:

    1. *Educational Entity Personnel* acting within the scope of their official duties.
    2. *Students* currently enrolled in a school district or charter school.
    3. *Law Enforcement Officials* engaging in official public safety actions.

4. *Authorized Individuals* who have received explicit, documented prior authorization directly from the transportation department of the Educational Entity.

12.5.1 Authorized Occupants

(A) Only Educational Entity personnel, students enrolled in a school district or charter school, law enforcement officials, or individuals who have received prior authorization from the Educational Entity may be passengers on any School Transportation Vehicle.

Emergency Procedures and Contingency Planning

Every transportation department must maintain a written emergency plan. This document provides step-by-step instructions for handling the following emergencies:

1. **Traffic Accidents:** Step-by-step scene management and safety protocols.
2. **Vehicle Breakdowns:** Mechanical isolation protocols and passenger containment measures.
3. **Unexpected School Closings:** Weather-induced or facility-related emergency dismissals.
4. **Unforeseen Route Changes:** Immediate adjustments to transit maps due to gridlock or road hazards.
5. **Emergency Relocation of Student Stops:** Dynamic stop changes are enforced when a primary stop becomes unsafe or structurally compromised due to localized threats.

You must know who to call first (usually dispatch or your immediate supervisor).

5.1 Responsibilities and Governance

5.1.2 Educational Entities shall have written emergency procedures and/or contingency plans to be followed in the event of a traffic accident, vehicle breakdown, unexpected school closing, unforeseen Route change, or relocation of a student stop in an emergency.

Cameras and Digital Media Policies

Many modern school buses are equipped with interior and exterior surveillance cameras to monitor student behavior and track traffic incidents.

- **Privacy Rules:** Video and audio recordings collected on the bus are considered protected educational records.

- **Handling Media:** Drivers are strictly prohibited from downloading, sharing, copying, or posting any bus camera footage to social media. All media requests, including those from parents to view footage, must go through your transportation director or school administration.

5.1 Responsibilities and Governance

5.1.3 Educational Entities utilizing camera or surveillance systems on School Transportation Vehicles shall establish, implement, and maintain written policies and procedures governing the management of recorded media.

Human Drivers and Automation Limits

Even as driver-assist technologies (such as automatic braking and lane-keep assist) become more common in newer fleets, they do not replace the driver. Colorado rules require a qualified human operator to be fully in control of the steering wheel and pedals at all times while the vehicle is in motion. You cannot rely on automated systems to monitor traffic or control the bus.

5.1 Responsibilities and Governance

5.1.4 Every School Transportation Vehicle in service shall be operated by a Natural Person, as defined in these rules.

(A) Any automated driving technology used on a School Transportation Vehicle shall not exceed Level 2 automation as defined in SAE J3016.

PART 2: PERSONNEL STANDARDS AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

Because school transportation staff work directly with students, all operations must maintain standard background checks, accurate records, and up-to-date driver qualification files.

Job Description Acknowledgment

Before you ever transport students, you must sign a written job description provided by your employer. This document clearly outlines your physical expectations, driving duties, student management tasks, and legal requirements. Your signature proves you understand what is expected of you on every shift. This is required for all:

- School Transportation Vehicle Operators
- School Transportation Bus Attendants
- CDE Annual Inspectors

- Entry-Level Driver Instructors

5.2 Personnel Standards

5.2.1 Educational Entities shall, at the time of hire, provide each member of Transportation Personnel with a copy of the applicable transportation job description. The job description shall be signed and acknowledged by the employee and shall apply to School Transportation Vehicle Operators, School Transportation Bus Attendants, CDE Annual Inspectors, and Entry-Level Driver Instructors.

Mandatory Background Checks

To protect student safety, all transportation employees must pass a strict background check before being hired or placed into a safety-sensitive function. This includes:

- **Fingerprinting:** Submitting prints to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the FBI to check for criminal records.
- **Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) Review:** A thorough check of your personal and commercial driving history to ensure you do not have severe traffic violations, recent DUIs, or a pattern of reckless driving.

5.2 Personnel Standards

5.2.2 Educational Entities shall conduct background checks pursuant to Section 22-32-122(4) C.R.S. or Section 22-32-109.8, whichever is applicable, on all supervisors, trainers, School Transportation Vehicle Operators, School Transportation Bus Attendants, technicians, and dispatchers

The Driver Qualification File

Your employer must maintain a physical or digital "Qualification File" for you. This folder proves to state auditors that you are legally allowed to drive a school vehicle. It must contain up-to-date copies of the items found in Rule 6.0.

5.2 Personnel Standards

5.2.3 Educational Entities shall maintain individual compliance files for all Transportation Personnel.

(A) Files shall include written substantiation of all requirements applicable under Section 6.0.

(B) Documentation for each training event shall include, at a minimum:

(1) Trainer name and signature of all attendees;

(2) Date and total duration of instruction;

(3) Itemized description of the topics covered, and the time allotted to each.

6.0 Qualification File Requirements

6.0.1 General Requirement:

(A) Each Educational Entity shall maintain qualification files for all Transportation Personnel subject to this Section.

(B) Unless otherwise specified, required Annual documentation shall be completed and retained within the Annual timeframe established by these Rules.

6.1 School Transportation Vehicle Operators

6.1.1 Core Permanent Qualification File Requirements (All School Transportation Vehicle Operators)

(A) Educational Entities shall maintain a permanent qualification file for each School Transportation Vehicle Operator that contains the following documentation:

(1) Documentation of the job description, signed by the employee to acknowledge receipt and understanding, as required by Rule 5.2.1.

(2) A copy of the driver's preliminary Motor Vehicle Record (MVR), authenticated by the reviewer's initials or an electronic equivalent.

(3) Documentation demonstrating completion of mountain and adverse weather training pursuant to C.R.S. 42-4-1902.

(4) Documentation demonstrating completion of mandatory reporter training pursuant to sections C.R.S. 22-32-109.1(z), 19-3-304, and 19-3-307.

(5) Documentation demonstrating completion of confidentiality training pursuant to sections C.R.S. 22-1-123, 22-16-104, and 22-32-109.3.

(6) Documentation demonstrating completion of review and

acknowledgment of the Educational Entity's policies (JKA and JKA-R) regarding the Use of Physical Intervention and Restraint on students.

(7) Documentation of an initial driver performance evaluation, including a pre-trip inspection conducted in a vehicle that is similar in type and size to the vehicle the applicant is assigned to operate.

(8) Documentation demonstrating completion of the training for the proper use and care of Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) and proper wheelchair securement when the operator is engaged in transportation involving these systems and devices, prior to transporting students.

(9) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall have access to and thoroughly review the applicable operator guide (either the School Bus/Multifunction Bus/Motor Coach Operator Guide or the Type A Multifunction Bus/Small-Capacity Vehicle Operator Guide) and sign the Certificate of Receipt and Understanding.

6.1.2 CDL Operator Qualification File Requirements (Vehicles 16+ Capacity)

(A) Annual File Requirements:

(1) A copy of a current, valid commercial driver's license (CDL) with the proper class and endorsement for the size and type of vehicle(s) to be driven.

(2) The Medical Examination Certification documentation required pursuant to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, 49 C.F.R. § 383.71.

(3) A Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) review shall be conducted annually. The MVR shall verify that the operator possesses a current, valid Class B Commercial Driver's License (CDL) or higher with the required endorsements and a valid medical certificate. The evaluator shall initial or digitally sign the MVR to document completion of the review.

(4) Documentation pursuant to Rule 5.2.3(B) of a minimum of six hours of in-service (continuing education) training annually. A portion of this Annual in-service requirement may occur during the school year.

(5) Successful completion of the Annual CDE School Bus/Multifunction Bus/Motor Coach Operator written examination with a minimum passing score of eighty (80) percent.

(6) A driver performance evaluation, including a pre-trip inspection.

(a) This evaluation shall be conducted in a vehicle that is similar in type and size to the vehicle the applicant is assigned to operate. Educational Entities have the option to re-evaluate at their discretion.

(7) Documentation verifying successful completion of first aid training, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and universal precautions, within 90 calendar days of initial employment.

(a) If the School Transportation Vehicle Operator holds a current first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation certificate, it will meet the requirements of this section.

(b) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall receive first aid training and/or recertification training every two years thereafter.

(B) Additional Permanent File Requirements:

(1) Pre-service (new driver) training documentation. The driver qualification file shall contain a preliminary motor vehicle record and one of the following:

(a) Entry-Level commercial operators shall have a copy of the following training certificate(s) and training syllabus placed in their qualification file, indicating that they have passed all required FMCSA pre-service training.

(i) Class B Theory Certificate and Syllabus;

(ii) Passenger Theory Certificate and Syllabus;

(iii) School Bus Theory Certificate and Syllabus;

(iv) Class B Behind-the-wheel Certificate and Evaluation;

(v) Passenger Behind-the-wheel Certificate and Evaluation;

(vi) School Bus Behind-the-wheel Certificate and Evaluation.

(b) Documentation verifying that the School Transportation Vehicle Operator completed pre-service training prior to February 7, 2022, that included training on the types of duties they may be required to perform.

The Multi-Employer Rule

If a School Transportation Vehicle Operator, School Transportation Bus Attendant, or CDE Annual Inspector works concurrently for more than one Educational Entity, or operates an outside vehicle inspection site, each individual employer must maintain a separate compliance file with full documentation in accordance with this rule.

5.2 Personnel Standards

5.2.3 Educational Entities shall maintain individual compliance files for all Transportation Personnel.

(C) If a School Transportation Vehicle Operator, School Transportation Bus Attendant, or CDE Annual Inspector works for more than one Educational Entity, or is the operator of an outside inspection site, each employer shall maintain a file with documentation in accordance with this rule.

Supervisor Training Rules

All transportation directors, managers, or individuals in supervisory positions who hold direct oversight over any aspects of transportation personnel, safety training, record keeping, fleet operations, maintenance, general operations, or policies must successfully complete the CDE New to Transportation Class. This professional certification must be completed within the first 12 months of their employment in that supervisory role.

5.2 Personnel Standards

5.2.4 Educational Entities shall require all transportation directors or other supervisory positions responsible for direct oversight of any aspects of Transportation Personnel, training, record keeping, fleet operations and

maintenance, general operations, and policies to complete the CDE New to Transportation Class within the first 12 months of employment.

PART 3: TRAINING AND SPECIAL NEEDS FRAMEWORKS

Before a key is turned or a route is dispatched, School Transportation Vehicle Operators and bus attendants must receive specific training tailored to their vehicle and passengers.

Your school district or service provider must give you a copy of the official CDE School Transportation Vehicle Operator Guide before you drive students. You must read it, understand your responsibilities, and sign an acknowledgment form to be placed in your qualification file.

5.3.1 Transportation Documentation and Personnel Training

(A) Educational Entities shall present all School Transportation Vehicle Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants with the applicable CDE School Transportation Vehicle Operator or School Transportation Bus Attendant Guide prior to transporting students.

Trailer Towing Restrictions

A School Transportation Vehicle Operator is strictly prohibited from driving a school transportation vehicle with a trailer attached unless their qualification file contains written documentation of training or experience. This documentation must be included in the driver's qualification file before operating a vehicle with a trailer attached.

5.3.1 Transportation Documentation and Personnel Training

(B) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall have documentation demonstrating completion of trailer towing training or verifiable experience prior to driving a School Transportation Vehicle with a trailer attached.

Special Needs Transport and IDEA Compliance

Transporting students with special needs requires exceptional care and legal compliance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- **Pre-Service Information:** Educational Entities must provide operators and attendants with all documentation necessary to safely transport assigned students. This includes explicit Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) criteria and relevant medical or behavioral background information, all of which are provided **prior to the initiation of transportation services**.

- **The IEP Onboarding Timeline:** When an Educational Entity enrolls, transfers, or assumes responsibility for a student whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes transportation services, the entity must ensure that all applicable documentation is provided to the appropriate transportation personnel or provider **prior to the initiation of services**. This transition data must be delivered as soon as practicable following any determination or revision of the student's needs to guarantee uncompromised roadside safety.
- **IEP Alignment:** Any operator or bus attendant assigned to students eligible under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* must receive documented training regarding those students' IEPs. Pursuant to federal regulations under 34 C.F.R. § 300.156, this training must explicitly include, but is not limited to:
    1. *Behavioral Intervention Strategies:* Positive behavioral supports and de-escalation tactics.
    2. *Personalized Learning Systems (PLS) Protocols:* Adjusting communication and instructional structures for cognitive alignment during transit.
    3. *Individualized Health Care Plan Implementation:* Emergency medical responses for specialized conditions and medical device monitoring.

5.3.2 Transporting Students with Special Needs

(A) Educational Entities shall provide School Transportation Vehicle Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants with all documentation necessary to safely transport assigned students, including Child Safety Restraint System requirements and other relevant medical or behavioral information, prior to the initiation of transportation services.

(1) When an Educational Entity enrolls, transfers, or assumes responsibility for a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that includes transportation services, the Educational Entity shall ensure that all documentation applicable to transportation is provided to the appropriate transportation personnel or provider prior to the initiation of services, and as soon as practicable following any determination or revision of the student's transportation needs, to support safe and appropriate transportation.

(B) Any School Transportation Vehicle Operator and School Transportation Bus Attendant assigned to students eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shall receive documented training on the

student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Per 34 C.F.R. § 300.156, this training shall include, but is not limited to:

(1) Behavioral intervention strategies;

(2) Personalized Learning Systems (PLS) protocols;

(3) Individualized health care plan implementation.

Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) and Wheelchair Securement Training

- **Mandatory Pre-Service Training:** Documented completion of specialized training for the proper use, care, maintenance, and storage of Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) and proper wheelchair securement is strictly required prior to transporting students
- **Scope of Training:** Qualification files must contain written documentation of training on selecting correct securement points on wheelchairs, the proper use of crash-rated Wheelchair Tie-down and Occupant Restraint Systems (WTORS) utilizing approved 7-point structures, and the age, weight, and height-appropriate positioning of preschool passenger safety restraints.

6.1.1 Core Permanent Qualification File Requirements (All School Transportation Vehicle Operators)

(8) Documentation demonstrating completion of the training for the proper use and care of Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) and proper wheelchair securement when the operator is engaged in transportation involving these systems and devices, prior to transporting students.

12.6.1 Seat Belts

(C) Preschool Passengers:

(1) Shall use an age, weight, and height-appropriate child safety restraint system when riding in any School Transportation Vehicle.

(2) Pursuant to sections C.R.S. 42-4-236 and 42-4-237, all preschool-aged children riding in small-capacity vehicles shall use an appropriate child safety restraint system as required by the Colorado Child-Passenger Safety Law.

12.6.2 Wheelchair Securement

(A) Pursuant to FMVSS 222 - School Bus Passenger Seating and Crash Protection, each wheelchair securement space shall use a 7-point system

that consists of four securements to the floor of the bus and a 3-point wheelchair tiedown occupant restraint system (WTORS).

(1) An ANSI/RESNA WC18-compliant WTORS may be specified when transporting a wheelchair that is fully compliant with WC19, which includes a crash-tested wheelchair-anchored pelvic belt.

(B) All systems shall be crash-rated. Each 7-point system must consist of components from a single manufacturer.

(C) Wheelchair securement and WTORS components use shall be detached daily and stored in a clean, secure onboard compartment that is accessible to the operator but resistant to displacement or vandalism.

Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) Verification

For drivers earning a CDL or adding a passenger/school bus endorsement for the first time, you must complete the federally mandated Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT). This program combines structured classroom learning with behind-the-wheel practice, and your completion must be logged in the federal training provider registry before you take your final skills exam. This is in absolute alignment with federal standard 49 C.F.R. § 380.601, which requires Educational Entities to verify that entry-level operators have successfully completed mandatory pre-service training.

- **The Dual-Component Curriculum:** The pre-service training must encompass both a comprehensive Theory curriculum and a hands-on Behind-the-Wheel (BTW) instructional block, both strictly mapped to Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) standards.
- **Registry Verification:** Training is legally invalid unless it is conducted by an approved training provider that is actively registered and listed on the federal FMCSA Training Provider Registry (TPR).

5.3.3 Entry-Level Driver Training Requirements (49 C.F.R. § 380.601)

(A) In accordance with 49 C.F.R. § 380.601, effective February 7, 2022, all Educational Entities shall verify that entry-level School Transportation Vehicle Operators requiring a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) complete mandatory pre-service training. This training shall adhere to the following standards:

(1) Curriculum: Shall include both Theory and Behind-the-Wheel (BTW) components as defined by Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) standards.

(2) Provider: Training shall be conducted exclusively by an entity registered and listed on the FMCSA Training Provider Registry (TPR).

PART 4: MEDICAL FITNESS, ALERTNESS, AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

Physical Ability Standards

Driving a school bus is a physically demanding job. You must be able to pass a standard DOT medical physical every 1 to 2 years, demonstrating that you have the sight, hearing, and physical mobility to control the vehicle. Additionally, Educational Entities must design and implement job qualification standards to guarantee that operators, attendants, annual inspectors, and instructors can successfully execute all essential duties mandated by state and federal laws, including but not limited to:

- Operating heavy emergency doors and exit roof hatches.
- Moving quickly down the center aisle to assist passengers.
- Lifting or assisting a child during an emergency evacuation.

5.4 Medical Fitness and Safety

5.4.1 Educational Entities shall develop job qualification standards to ensure that each School Transportation Vehicle Operator, School Transportation Bus Attendant, CDE Annual Inspector, and School Transportation Entry-Level Driver Instructor can perform all essential functions consistent with federal and state regulations.

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants shall demonstrate the ability to execute all core duties, specifically including emergency evacuations, in accordance with the standards defined by the employing Educational Entity.

Vehicle Post-Trip Inspection Protocols (Students Left Unattended)

Leaving a student unattended on a school bus constitutes a serious safety violation that can result in immediate termination and criminal charges.

- **Mandatory Physical Search:** Every single time you finish a route, run, or activity trip, you must walk completely to the back row of the bus.

- **What to Check:** Look under every seat, check the cracks between seat cushions, and look for sleeping children, dropped backpacks, or forgotten items. Many fleets use an electronic "child check" button at the back of the bus that requires you to walk the aisle to deactivate it before turning off the engine.

11.1.4 Post-Trip Student Verification

(A) Educational Entities shall have a procedure in place to verify that students are not left on an unattended School Transportation Vehicle.

System Safety and Emergency Evacuation Drills

- **Route Emergency Evacuation Drills:** You must conduct emergency evacuation drills with your route students at least **twice per school year** (once in the fall and once in the spring).
- **Special Needs Considerations:** For routes transporting students with physical disabilities, medical vulnerabilities, or assistive devices, a detailed written emergency evacuation plan must be designed and maintained on file by the transportation department. This specialized plan must be updated and reviewed by applicable transportation personnel (operator, bus attendant, transportation director) at least twice per school year to maintain compliance with CDE regulations.
- **Activity & School-Related Event Evacuation Instructions:** For all school-related events, field trips, or athletic trips, passengers must receive emergency evacuation instructions prior to the initial departure of every single trip. This must explicitly identify the evacuation meeting point, the location and operation of all emergency exits, and there must be documentation that the instruction was given.
- **STAR Review Requirements:** Educational Entities must maintain precise records documenting the execution of all route drills, special education plans, and activity trip evacuation instructions.

See Unit 7 for more details.

Annual Vehicle Inspections

To ensure that all components of the fleet maintain continuous alignment on safety, strict annual review timelines must be enforced.

2.0 Definitions

2.2 “Annual” means a recurring date-to-date compliance period that expires at

the end of the day exactly one calendar year after the date listed on the document.

2.2.1 Exception: “Annual,” when used in reference to Annual inspections, means valid through the last calendar day of the month that is twelve months from the date of the previous inspection.

All school transportation vehicles and school-program trailers must have a valid annual inspection Affidavit of Inspection completed by a certified CDE Annual Inspector in the vehicle to operate legally.

6.1.2 CDL Operator Qualification File Requirements (Vehicles 16+ Capacity)

(5) Successful completion of the Annual CDE School Bus/Multifunction Bus/Motor Coach Operator written examination with a minimum passing score of eighty (80) percent.

11.2.1 Inspection Requirements and Frequency

(A) Educational Entities shall ensure all School Transportation Vehicles and trailers, pursuant to 1 CCR 301-26, pass a CDE Annual inspection prior to transporting students and annually thereafter.

Reasonable Cause and General Prohibitions

You are strictly forbidden from operating a vehicle if you are under the influence of any substance that clouds your judgment or slows your reactions, including prescription drugs, alcohol, cannabis, or over-the-counter cold medicines. **No operator shall transport students while their ability or alertness is so impaired through fatigue, acute illness, or any other cause as to make it unsafe to operate the vehicle**.

If you have been away from work due to a major medical illness or a severe injury, you cannot drive students again until you receive a formal clinical release from a licensed medical professional.

5.4 Medical Fitness and Safety

5.4.2 The employing Educational Entity may require, at any time, a medical evaluation or physician’s release when the Entity has reasonable cause to believe that a medical condition may impair safe performance of duties.

(A) Educational Entities shall not permit a School Transportation Vehicle Operator to transport students while the operator’s ability or alertness is so impaired, through fatigue, illness, or any other cause, as to make it unsafe for the operator to transport students.

Clinical Return-to-Work Clearances

Transportation operators or bus attendants experiencing acute medical conditions, sudden serious illness, or physical injuries that impact safety, vision, or physical capability must submit a formal, clinical return-to-work release. This documentation, along with any additional local policy requirements, must be verified by the Educational Entity before the employee resumes assigned safety-sensitive duties.

The CDL Physical Recertification Trigger: Pursuant to federal motor carrier law 49 C.F.R. § 391.45(g), commercial drivers (CDL operators) who return from a medical condition (physical or mental injury or disease) that has impaired their ability to perform normal safety-sensitive duties must undergo a new examination and obtain a brand-new DOT Medical Examiner's Certificate prior to resuming vehicle operation.

- *Statutory Exception:* Individuals who are actively navigating approved, documented medical programs under the *Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)* or Colorado's *Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI)* program with established, intermittent medical leave are excluded from this mandatory re-examination trigger, provided their immediate alertness is uncompromised.

5.4 Medical Fitness and Safety

5.4.3 School Transportation Vehicle Operators and/or School Transportation Bus Attendants experiencing acute medical conditions, sudden illness, or injuries impacting safety, vision, or physical capability shall submit a clinical return-to-work release. Such documentation, along with any additional requirements under local policy, shall be verified by the Educational Entity before the school transportation employee resumes assigned duties.

(A) Pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 391.45(g), CDL operators shall obtain a new DOT Physical after returning from a medical condition (physical or mental injury or disease) that has impaired the driver's ability to perform his or her normal duties.

(B) Exception: Individuals who are currently under programs such as FMLA or FAMLI with approved intermittent leave are excluded from Rule 5.4.3.

PART 5: FEDERAL DRUG AND ALCOHOL COMPLIANCE (49 C.F.R. § 382)

To guarantee a drug-free environment, every district must run a standard drug and alcohol testing program that complies with 49 C.F.R. § 382.

FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse

The federal government maintains a secure online database called the Commercial Driver's License Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse.

1. **Pre-Employment Full Queries:** Prior to finalizing the hire of any prospective CDL operator, the Educational Entity must execute a *Full Query* of the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse to verify that the applicant is not legally restricted from safety-sensitive functions due to unresolved substance violations.
2. **Annual Compliance Queries:** The Educational Entity must conduct a *Limited Query* through the Clearinghouse at least once every 12 months for all currently employed CDL operators to ensure no violations have been logged by secondary or off-duty employers.
3. **Query Consent Releases:** Before completing the initial database check, the Educational Entity must secure a signed Query Consent Release Form from the CDL operator. This consent form must be kept securely on file and remain valid for the entire duration of the driver's employment.

5.5 Drug and Alcohol Compliance (49 C.F.R. § 382)

5.5.1 Pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 382, Educational Entities shall comply with the following requirements:

(A) Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse:

(1) Conduct a pre-employment full query of the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse for all prospective CDL operators to verify they are not prohibited from performing safety-sensitive functions.

(2) Conduct and maintain the Annual Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse query for all CDL operators.

(3) Obtain a signed Limited Query Consent Release Form from each CDL operator prior to the initial query of the Clearinghouse Database, and shall maintain a valid consent on file for the duration of the driver's employment.

Mandatory Drug and Alcohol Testing

As a CDL holder, you are subject to several types of drug and alcohol screens. The Educational Entity must ensure that:

- **Pre-Employment Testing:** All CDL operators complete a formal pre-employment drug test, with a verified negative result on file, prior to ever transporting students.
- **Random Testing:** All active CDL operators are continuously enrolled and participating in a USDOT-approved random drug and alcohol testing program.
- **Post-Accident:** If you are involved in an accident that results in a human fatality, if you receive a traffic ticket for a crash where a vehicle has to be towed, or if medical care is given on scene, you must undergo mandatory testing.
- **Reasonable Suspicion:** If a supervisor observes physical signs that suggest you might be under the influence, you will be pulled from duty and sent for immediate testing.

5.5 Drug and Alcohol Compliance (49 C.F.R. § 382)

5.5.1 Pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 382, Educational Entities shall comply with the following requirements:

(B) Drug and Alcohol Testing:

(1) Ensure all CDL operators have completed a pre-employment drug test prior to transporting students.

(2) Ensure all CDL operators are enrolled in a USDOT-approved drug and alcohol testing program.

Supervisor Reasonable Suspicion Certification

Transportation supervisors of CDL operators must complete a mandatory 60-minute training course on alcohol misuse and an additional 60-minute course on controlled substance abuse. This training teaches them how to recognize the physical, behavioral, speech, and performance signs of drug or alcohol use, giving them the legal grounding to order a "reasonable suspicion" test.

5.5 Drug and Alcohol Compliance (49 C.F.R. § 382)

5.5.1 Pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 382, Educational Entities shall comply with the following requirements:

(C) Supervisory Training:

(1) Have documentation of completing “Reasonable Suspicion” training for all supervisors of CDL operators.

PART 6: RECORD RETENTION AND COMPLIANCE

Educational Entities, charter schools, and service providers must establish a systematic, audited record retention workflow to maintain compliance with state and federal regulations. Records are divided into distinct maintenance categories, each carrying precise retention timelines and legal access thresholds.

1. Driver and Personnel Qualification Files

Individual qualification files must be maintained separately for each school transportation operator, paraprofessional, annual inspector, and ELDT instructor.

- **Permanent File Retention:** All items required in the Core Permanent Qualification File requirements of 1 CCR 301-26, Rule 6.0 must be maintained continuously for the duration of the individual's employment.
- **Annual File Retention:** All items required in the Annual Qualification File requirements of 1 CCR 301-26, Rule 6.0 must be maintained for the **current year, plus 5 years** of historical data.
- **Separation Retention (The 1-Year Standard):** Upon an employee's separation from the Educational Entity, the completed qualification file must be securely stored and retained for a **minimum of 1 year** from the date of separation before being eligible for authorized disposal.
    - **Educational Entity Policy:** The Educational Entity policy may indicate or require that the separation retention period be longer than the 1-year timeline designated by the Colorado Department of Education.
- **Multi-Employer Files:** If an operator provides services for more than one district or service provider, a complete, standalone qualification file must be actively maintained by *each* individual employer.

5.2 Personnel Standards

5.2.3 Educational Entities shall maintain individual compliance files for all Transportation Personnel.

(C) If a School Transportation Vehicle Operator, School Transportation Bus Attendant, or CDE Annual Inspector works for more than one Educational Entity, or is the operator of an outside inspection site, each employer shall maintain a file with documentation in accordance with this rule.

2. Operational Safety and Evacuation Logs

Critical daily operational and safety documentation must be retained to verify ongoing institutional safety protocols.

- **Emergency Evacuation Drills:** Written logs proving completion of twice-yearly system drills (fall and spring), as well as pre-departure instructions given to students prior to any activity or field trip, must be permanently cataloged and retained for **3 years**.
- **Driver Vehicle Inspection Reports (DVIR):** Daily written or digital pre-trip and post-trip inspection reports must be stored chronologically for a minimum of **1 year** following the date of the inspection, or as required by local board policy.
- **Vehicle Defect Reports, Annual Inspections, and Preventative Maintenance Reports:** This documentation is required to be maintained for the life of the vehicle or until the vehicle is removed from the possession of the Educational Entity.

3. Surveillance and Digital Media Management

When onboard vehicle cameras are utilized by the district or service provider to monitor student behavior or transit incidents, clear localized data policies must be observed:

- **Standard Retention Buffer:** Routine, non-incident footage should be held on an automated, rolling overwrite loop according to local Educational Entity capability (recommended minimum of **14 to 30 calendar days**).
- **Incident Exception Hold:** Any footage capturing a vehicular crash, traffic violation, documented safety hazard, or student disciplinary incident resulting in disciplinary action must be isolated, archived, and securely retained for a minimum of **3 years** or until any associated legal liability or administrative proceedings are completely resolved.

4. Federal Controlled Substance and Alcohol Records (49 C.F.R. § 382.401)

To maintain compliance with the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse infrastructure, substance testing records must be maintained under strict privacy controls and separate from standard personnel folders:

- **5-Year Retention Mandate:** The following items are to be retained for a minimum of **5 years.**
    - Verified positive drug test results.
    - Alcohol test results indicating a concentration of 0.02 or greater.
    - Documentation of a driver’s refusal to take a required test.

    - Driver evaluation and Substance Abuse Professional (SAP) referrals.
    - The copy of each calendar year summary (Management Information System/MIS reports).
- **1-Year Retention Mandate:** The items that must be maintained for a **minimum of 1 year** are as follows:
    - Negative and canceled controlled substance test results.
    - Alcohol tests with a concentration of less than 0.02.
- **The 3-Year Query Mandate:** Records of queries conducted through the FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse (along with the driver's signed consent logs for limited queries) must be retained for **3 years** from the date of the query.
- **The 2-Year Collection Process Mandate:** Pursuant to § 382.401(b)(2), records relating to the *collection process* itself (such as random selection process documentation, collection logbooks, or documents generated for reasonable suspicion or post-accident test decisions) must be kept for **2 years**.
- **The "Indefinite" Training Mandate:** Pursuant to § 382.401(b)(4), records regarding employee education and supervisor training (specifically, the 60-minute reasonable suspicion training logs) must be kept **indefinitely while the individual performs those functions, plus an additional 2 years** after they stop performing those duties.

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Unit Three – Vehicle Familiarization and Spatial Maneuvering

PART 1: TYPES OF VEHICLES AND LEGAL DEFINITIONS

Knowing Your Fleet

Operating a student transportation system in Colorado means understanding the exact types of vehicles you are allowed to drive. Under Colorado Department of Education (CDE) rules, everything related to student transportation falls under the master category of **School Transportation Vehicle**. Depending on your assignment, you might drive:

- **School Bus:** A traditional yellow bus built to strict federal safety standards specifically for student travel.
- **Multifunction School Activity Bus (MFSAB):** A vehicle that looks and protects like a school bus but lacks the flashing eight-way warning lights and stop arms. These are used for field trips and sports, never for standard neighborhood routes with roadside stops.
- **Small-Capacity Vehicle:** A support vehicle (like a district van or large SUV) designed to carry 15 or fewer passengers.

2.0 Definitions

2.13 “School Transportation Vehicle” means every motor vehicle that is owned, leased, or authorized by an Educational Entity, and is operated for the transportation of students for Route or School-Related Event purposes within the State of Colorado. This definition excludes vehicles operated as common carriers or informal carpooling.

School Transportation Vehicle

No matter where the engine is or what fuel it burns, the law groups these vehicles into specific types:

School Bus

This vehicle, built to carry more than 10 passengers, meets strict federal and state safety rules for transporting students. It is easy to spot because it has a specific set of traffic-control features: alternating flashing lights (amber and red), a pull-out stop sign arm on the driver’s side, national school bus yellow paint, and a reinforced steel frame to protect passengers in a crash. There are four types of school buses:

- **Type A:** A conversion bus constructed utilizing a cutaway front-section chassis with a left-side driver's door, designed to transport smaller passenger loads.
    - There are two classes of Type A vehicles. These classes are based on vehicle capacity.
        - Type A-1 is 14 passengers or fewer (not including the driver). Does not require a CDL to drive.
        - Type A-2 is 15 passengers or more (not including the driver). The driver of a Type A-2 bus is required to carry a Class C CDL or higher.

- **Type B:** Constructed utilizing a stripped chassis where the body is installed over the engine compartment, with a portion of the engine extending into the driver's cabin.

- **Type C (Conventional):** The traditional industry standard constructed utilizing a bared chassis with the entire engine compartment mounted completely forward of the windshield and passenger firewall.

- **Type D (Transit Style):** Constructed utilizing a stripped chassis with the engine mounted either completely forward of the front axle (Front Engine/FE), or completely behind the rear axle (Rear Engine/RE), maximizing internal forward visibility and cabin space.

Multifunction School Activity Bus (Multifunction Bus)

This vehicle is built just as strong and safe as a school bus, with one major difference: it cannot be painted national school-bus yellow, and it does not have flashing student-loading lights or a pull-out stop-sign arm. Because it lacks these traffic-warning tools, you cannot use a multifunction bus to pick up or drop off students on a public roadside where traffic must stop. It is strictly used to transport students from one building or event directly to another.

Small-Capacity Vehicle

A motor vehicle designed and passenger-rated by the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) to transport 10 or fewer occupants, including the driver. This classification typically includes standard consumer sport-utility vehicles (SUVs), multi-passenger minivans, and cars. Educational Entities use these to transport small groups of students, students with special needs, or to navigate tight rural routes where a big bus cannot fit.

PART 2: COMPARING CONVENTIONAL AND TRANSIT-STYLE BUSES

The physical differences between Conventional (Type C) and Transit-Style (Type D, flat-front) school buses significantly affect how each vehicle maneuvers, how weight is transferred to the axles, and how much clearance is required on public roadways. It is important to look at the physical size differences between a Conventional (Type C, with the hood out front) and a Transit-Style (Type D, flat-front) bus. These numbers show just how massive these vehicles are compared to a normal car:

Physical Metric	Conventional (Type C) Specifications	Transit-Style (Type D) Specifications
Total Structural Length	30 to 40 Feet	35 to 45 Feet
Total Roof Height	9 to 11 Feet	9 to 11 Feet
Base Body Width	8 ½ Feet (102 Inches)	8 ½ Feet (102 Inches)
Total Operational Width *(With Mirrors)*	10 to 12 ½ Feet	10 to 12 ½ Feet
Unloaded Curb Weight	6 Tons (12,000 Lbs.)	7 Tons (14,000 Lbs.)
Loaded Gross Weight	10 Tons (20,000 Lbs.)	12 Tons (24,000 Lbs.)
Unloaded Axle Distribution	3.5 Tons (7,000 Lbs.)	5 Tons (10,000 Lbs.)
Loaded Gross Axle Distribution	5 Tons (10,000 Lbs.)	7 Tons (14,000 Lbs.)
Passenger Rated Capacity	11 to 78 Pupils	48 to 90 Pupils
Wheelbase Length	20 to 22 Feet	22 to 24 Feet

Length and Tire Distance (Wheelbase)

Conventional buses are slightly shorter, maxing out around 40 feet. Transit-style buses can be up to 45 feet long and have a longer wheelbase (the distance between the front and rear tires). A longer wheelbase means the bus needs a much larger, wider path to make a turn without hitting obstacles.

Real Width vs. Lane Space

A standard school bus is significantly wider and longer than a normal car. The metal body of a bus is 8 ½ feet wide; the large mirrors protruding from the sides expand the actual operating width to as much as 12 ½ feet. **You must remember that your mirrors stick out even further than the body of the bus!!** When driving down narrow city lanes or through construction zones, you have very little room for error on either side. Keep the bus centered in your lane and scan ahead constantly to spot narrow spaces early.

Weight Limits on Bridges

School buses are heavy, and that weight increases dramatically when the bus is full of students. You must keep an eye out for weight limit signs posted before bridges or overpasses. Driving a vehicle that exceeds a bridge's posted weight capacity is illegal and extremely dangerous. Always know the gross weight of your specific vehicle before heading out.

The federal bridge formula is:

$$W = 500\left(\frac{LN}{N-1} + 12N + 36\right)$$

Where:

- **(W)**: The maximum allowed gross weight in pounds on any group of two or more consecutive axles.
- **(L)**: The distance in feet between the outer axles of any group of two or more consecutive axles.
- **(N)**: The number of axles being considered in the group.

PART 2: TURNING AND REVERSING A LONG VEHICLE

Driving a vehicle this long requires a basic understanding of how a bus moves around corners and in reverse. You cannot drive it like a standard car.

How the Back Wheels Turn (Off-Tracking)

When you turn a corner, the back wheels of a long vehicle do not follow the exact path of the front wheels. Instead, they cut inside the turn. This is called **off-tracking**. To prevent your rear tires from hitting curbs, clipping signs, or sliding off the pavement during a right turn, you must drive deep into the intersection before starting your turn.

The rear wheels act as a pivot point for the whole bus. If you turn the steering wheel too early when making a right turn, the rear tires will jump over the sidewalk curb, risking pedestrians' safety and damaging the tires. If you turn too late, the bus's nose will swing too far out, crossing into oncoming traffic.

Watching the “Tail-Swing”

Because school buses have a long body extending approximately 10 feet past the rear axle, the back end of the bus moves in the opposite direction of your turn. This is your **tail-swing**. If you make a sharp right turn, the back-left bumper of your bus will swing out into the adjacent lane. Always check your side mirrors before and during a turn to ensure your tail-swing doesn’t clip a vehicle or pedestrian next to you.

Reversing and the Rear Overhang

The 10-foot rear overhang (the section of the bus behind the back wheels) also creates a hazard when you back up. Backing up a school bus should always be a last resort. The area directly behind the bus is your largest blind spot. Furthermore, the rear overhang swings out dramatically when backing around a curve.

Any obstacle near the edge of the sidewalk, like a signpost, fence, tree branch, or light pole, can easily be smashed by the back of your bus before you realize you have gone too far. Because of this, backing up must be done at a slow walking pace, using your mirrors or using a guide (spotter) outside the bus whenever possible.

PART 3: BALANCE, WEIGHT, AND PASSENGER SAFETY

A bus’s massive weight and high center of gravity create unique handling challenges. You must adjust your driving habits to keep the vehicle balanced.

High Center of Gravity (Top-Heavy Balance)

A school bus is naturally top-heavy because the internal floor sits 3 feet or more off the ground. This high center of gravity means they are more prone to rolling over than passenger cars if handled roughly. You must slow down significantly *before* entering a curve or highway off-ramp. Taking a curve too fast forces the bus to fight physics, which can cause the tires to lose traction or cause the vehicle to flip.

- **The Full-Load Risk:** This tipping hazard increases when the bus is full. The seats are raised another 1½ feet off the floor, meaning the weight of all the students is suspended high inside the bus.

- **Aisle Standees:** Allowing students to stand in the aisle raises the center of gravity even further, making the bus much harder to control during sudden stops or turns.

Low Undercarriage Obstructions

Even though the internal floor is high, the lower metal frames, bumpers, and side skirts beneath the bus sit close to the ground (with only 18 to 26 inches of clearance). Because the bus is so long, this low clearance means the bottom or rear of the bus can scrape the pavement when you drive up or down steep driveways, dips, or railroad crossings, especially when the bus is loaded down with students. Also, when backing up, the low rear bumper can strike objects like hidden rocks, utility boxes/posts, or tree stumps.

The Big Step Hazard

The entry door step sits about 14 inches off the ground. This creates a tripping hazard for small children or passengers with mobility issues. There is a constant danger that a child trying to climb up might lose their grip on the handrail, slip, and fall backward underneath the side of the bus right next to the heavy front tire. Always monitor students closely as they board and exit, ensuring they use the handrails provided.

Slow Acceleration and Long Stopping Distances

Because a bus is so heavy, its speed and braking are governed by momentum:

- **Slow to Get Moving:** A bus takes significantly longer to get up to speed than a regular car. You must remember this delay when pulling out from a stop sign, merging onto a highway, or changing lanes.
- **Longer to Stop:** Momentum is the product of mass and velocity. A heavy bus carries tremendous momentum and cannot stop on a dime. It takes much more distance to stop a bus than a car. To stay safe, maintain a wide cushion of space ahead of you, lift your foot off the gas early when approaching red lights, and start braking much sooner than you would in a personal vehicle.

When Students Rock the Bus

The students can cause dangerous movement inside the bus. You must address this behavior immediately to keep control of the vehicle:

- **Front-to-Back Bouncing:** If a group of students in the back row starts bouncing up and down together, they can create a see-saw motion. This heavy bouncing lifts the weight off the front steering tires, making the steering wheel jerk and causing you to lose steering control.

- **Side-to-Side Swaying:** If students on both sides of the bus rock side-to-side at the same time, they can make the whole bus sway wildly. This reduces your already tight lane clearance and can cause your side mirrors or other parts of the bus body to swing into oncoming traffic.

PART 4: THE DANGER ZONES (BLIND SPOTS)

A school bus has four massive blind spots where students, pedestrians, or small cars are completely hidden from the driver's view. These areas are called the Danger Zones, and they are the most hazardous spots around the vehicle. The danger zones may extend as much as 30 feet from the front bumper, **with the first 10 feet being the most dangerous**, 10 feet from the left and right sides of the bus, and 10 feet behind the rear bumper of the school bus. In addition, the entire area to the left of the bus is always considered dangerous because of passing cars.

1. The Front Danger Zone

The area directly in front of the front bumper is a major blind spot. This blind spot is much larger on a Conventional bus (with the hood) because the high engine hood blocks your view of the ground for several feet.

- **The Eye-Level Variable:** In all buses, the size of this blind spot depends on how high you sit in the driver's seat. A shorter driver with a lower eye level will have a longer blind spot, making it impossible to see a small child standing close to the front bumper.

2. The Rear Danger Zone

A major blind spot extends directly behind the vehicle. It cannot be monitored using standard exterior mirrors, and the interior rearview mirror is designed and aligned exclusively to monitor passenger behavior, not the roadway behind the bus. This rear blind spot can completely hide trailing cars, pedestrians, or structures, requiring extreme caution during backing maneuvers.

3. The Driver-Side Danger Zone

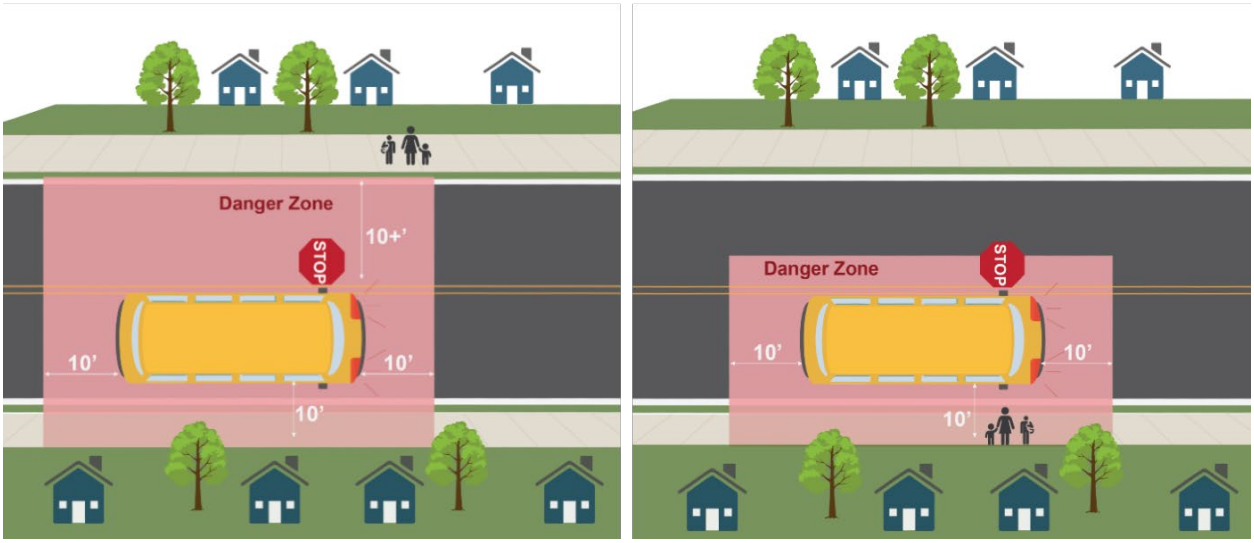
This blind spot runs along the left side of the bus body, directly below the window level. How far the blind spot extends will also vary with the driver's eye level when seated in the driver's seat. Any object below this angle cannot be seen directly by the driver.

4. The Passenger-Side Danger Zone

This is the single most dangerous area around the bus. Because you sit on the far left side of the vehicle, you are far away from the right-side windows. This distance creates a massive blind spot on the bus's right side. How far this blind spot extends will also

vary with the driver's eye level when seated in the driver's seat. Any object below this angle cannot be seen directly by the driver.

- **The High-Risk Areas:** The highest risk zones are directly in front of the front right tire and right around the rear dual tires. Students walking near these tires are completely invisible to the driver.



PART 5: HOW TO ADJUST YOUR MIRRORS

To address the blind spots, you must check and carefully adjust your mirrors before every trip. The view in your mirrors must connect perfectly with what you can see out your windows.

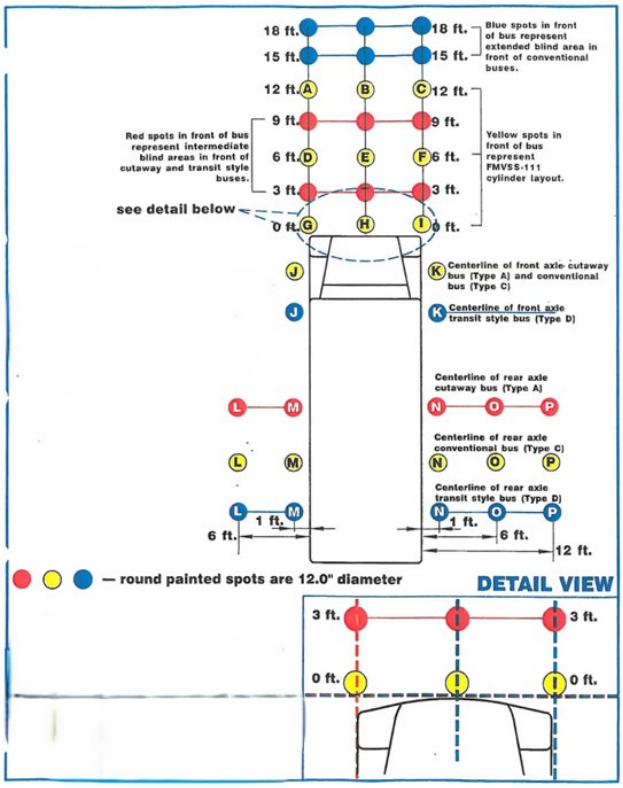
FMVSS 111 (Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 111, Rear Visibility)

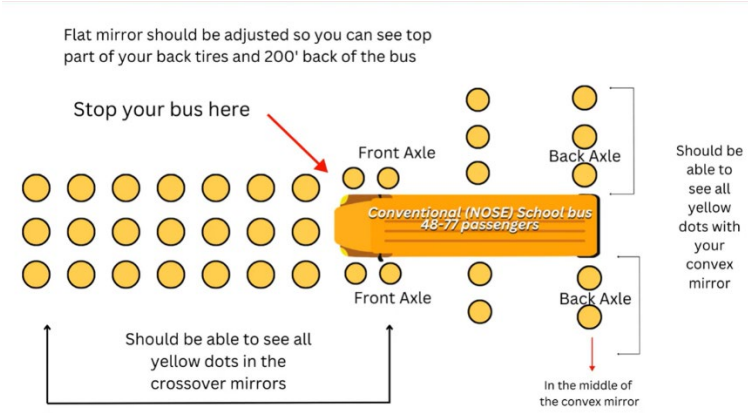
This is a federal safety rule managed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Its main goal is to protect people by reducing blind spots behind and beside a vehicle. The rule sets strict standards for the mirrors and visibility systems required on all cars, trucks, and school buses so drivers can see exactly what is around them before they move.

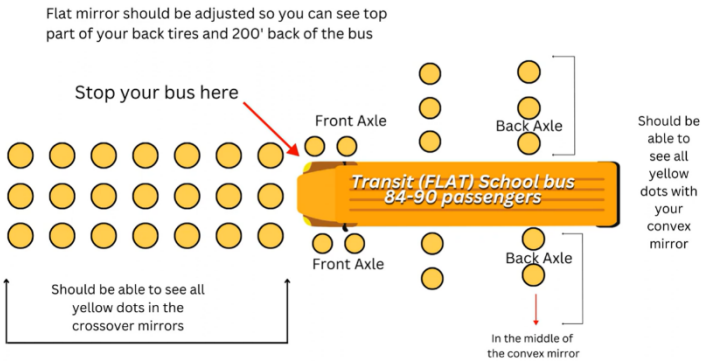
The Mirror Grid (Field of View Requirements)

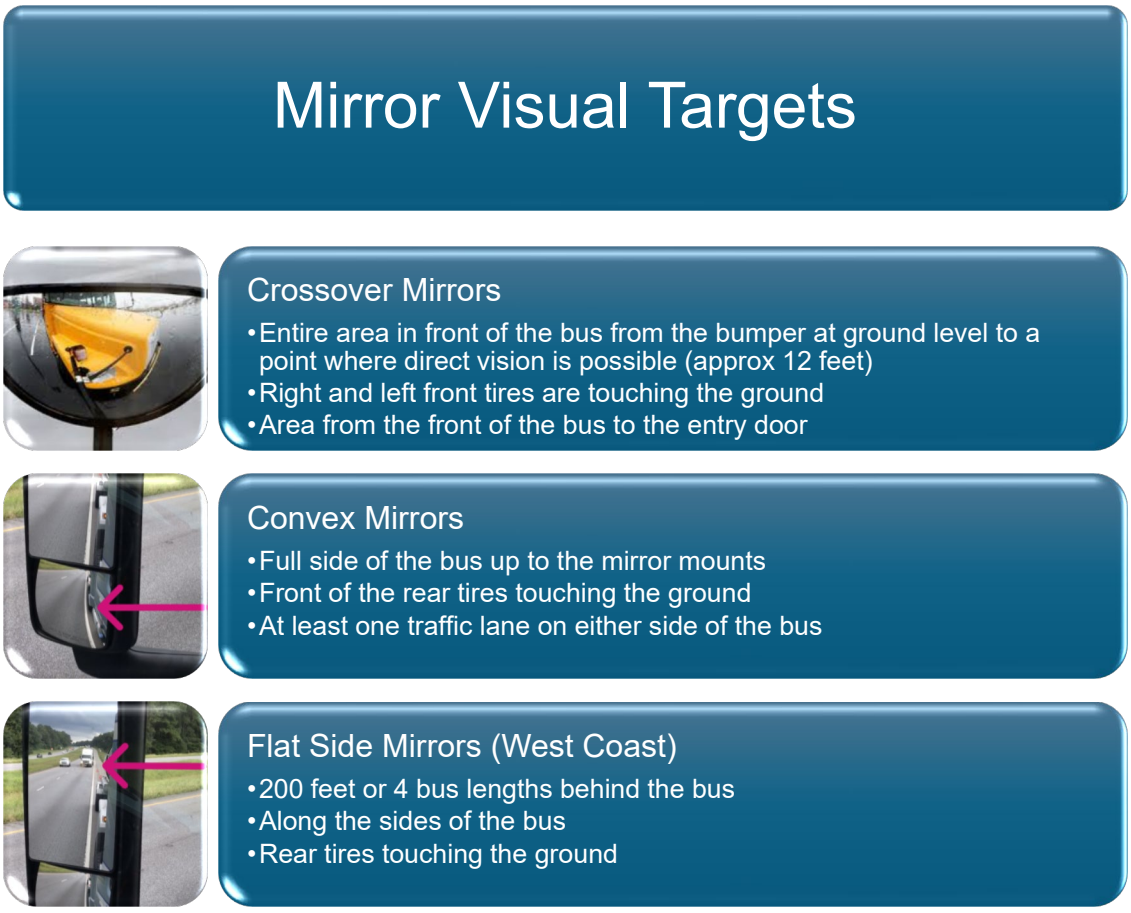
The "mirror grid" is a test layout used to demonstrate that a bus has the legally required field of view. To pass this safety test, the vehicle is parked inside a grid painted on the ground with specific targets. From the driver's seat, the operator must be able to clearly see every target through the mirrors or backup camera system before the vehicle's mirrors are correctly adjusted and the vehicle is moved.

The image below shows the distances for each target to be placed around the school bus to ensure the mirrors are set correctly.









1. Front Crossover Mirror (Mirrors on the front corners)

- **What you should see:** These must be set so you can see the ground directly in front of the bumper, stretching out until you can see the road clearly through the windshield. Your direct view and your mirror view must overlap.
- **Tire view:** You must be able to see where both front tires touch the ground, and the entire walking path from the front bumper to the passenger entry door.

2. Convex Mirror (Wide-angle, curved mirrors on the sides)

- **What you should see:** These must show the entire side wall of the bus, all the way up to where the mirrors are mounted.
- **Ground view:** You must see the front edge of the rear tires touching the pavement, plus at least one full driving lane next to the bus.

3. Side Flat Mirror (Tall, flat "West Coast" mirrors)

- **What you should see:** These should be adjusted so you see just a tiny sliver of the bus body in the inside edge of the glass (not enough to count the passenger windows).

- **Road view:** The view must run straight back parallel to the bus, showing at least one full traffic lane next to you, the ground within 6 inches of your rear tires, and the road for at least four full bus lengths behind the rear bumper.

4. The Mirror-Intersection Blind Spot Warning

While the flat side mirrors are essential for seeing behind you, their large frames create a new blind spot in front of you. The mirror housings are large enough to completely block your view of a cross street, hiding an oncoming vehicle as large as a semi-truck.

To stay safe, you must use the Leaning Rule: whenever you approach an intersection, a railroad crossing, or a crosswalk, you must lean forward over the steering wheel and peer around the side mirror frames to make sure no cross traffic or pedestrians are hidden behind them. Never assume a lane is empty just because your initial glance looks clear.

5. Interior Rearview Mirror

- **What you should see:** Position this mirror so the top edge of the back emergency window aligns with the top of the mirror glass.
- **Student view:** The mirror must display all passenger seating rows, including the heads of students seated in the center rows directly behind the driver's station, allowing you to continuously monitor passenger behavior.

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Unit Four – Vehicle Inspections

PART 1: THE PURPOSE AND LEGAL BASIS OF INSPECTIONS

Why We Inspect

A vehicle inspection is a highly organized, step-by-step check of a vehicle's mechanical and electrical systems before, during, and after a run. As an operator, your primary task during an inspection is to look, listen, feel, touch, and even smell the vehicle to catch small issues (e.g., fluid leaks, loose parts, or strange odors) before they lead to a major breakdown or a roadside emergency.

Never operate a vehicle that has a mechanical defect. Under Colorado law, performing these checks is a mandatory duty for every student transportation operator.

Legal Foundations and Penalties

The Colorado Model Traffic Code states clearly that it is unlawful for any person to drive, or for any school entity to knowingly permit someone to drive, an unsafe vehicle on a public highway. A vehicle is legally considered unsafe if it lacks required parts or if its safety equipment (such as brakes, tires, or steering) is not properly adjusted and in good working order.

- **Police Spot Inspections:** Uniformed police officers have the legal authority to stop a school transportation vehicle at any time if they have a reasonable cause to believe it is unsafe. They can conduct a spot test of the vehicle's equipment.
- **Out-of-Service Orders:** If an officer finds a dangerous problem, they will give you a ticket. If they think the bus is too hazardous to keep driving, they can order the vehicle to be instantly grounded ("Out of Service"). The bus will have to be towed away at your Educational Entity’s expense.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-202 Unsafe vehicles – penalty – identification plates

(1) It is unlawful for any person to drive or move or for the owner to cause or knowingly permit to be driven or moved on any highway any vehicle or combination of vehicles which is in such unsafe condition as to endanger any person, or which does not contain those parts or is not at all times equipped with such lamps and other equipment in proper condition and adjustment as required in this section and sections 204 to 231 and part 3 of this Code, or which is equipped in any manner in violation of said sections and part 3 or for any person

to do any act forbidden or fail to perform any act required under said sections and part 3.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-203 Unsafe vehicles – spot inspections

(1) Uniformed police officers, at any time upon reasonable cause, may require the driver of a vehicle to stop and submit such vehicle and its equipment to an inspection and such test with reference thereto as may be appropriate. The fact that a vehicle is an older model vehicle shall not alone constitute reasonable cause. In the event such vehicle is found to be in an unsafe condition or the required equipment is not present or is not in proper repair and adjustment, the officer may give a written notice and issue a summons to the driver. Said notice shall require that such vehicle be placed in safe condition and properly equipped or that its equipment be placed in proper repair and adjustment, the particulars of which shall be specified on said notice.

(2) In the event any such vehicle is, in the reasonable judgment of such police officer, in such condition that further operation would be hazardous, the officer may require, in addition to the instructions set forth in subsection (1) of this section, that the vehicle be moved at the operator's expense and not operated under its own power or that it be driven to the nearest garage or other place of safety.

Protecting Passengers and Avoiding Liability

Safety is the single most important reason to inspect your bus. A thorough check protects you, your passengers, and everyone else sharing the road. Discovering a broken part at the bus lot allows a mechanic to fix it safely, preventing a breakdown or an accident on the highway. Parents and school bosses put an incredible amount of trust in you. Skipping your inspection or pencil-whipping the paperwork creates massive legal liability. If something breaks on the road and a student gets hurt, a driver who skipped their inspection sheet could face severe professional and legal trouble.

Preventing Roadside Breakdown Risks

A broken-down bus sitting on a busy shoulder is an immediate hazard. Passing motorists often slow down or stop to look, which dramatically increases the risk of a secondary traffic accident.

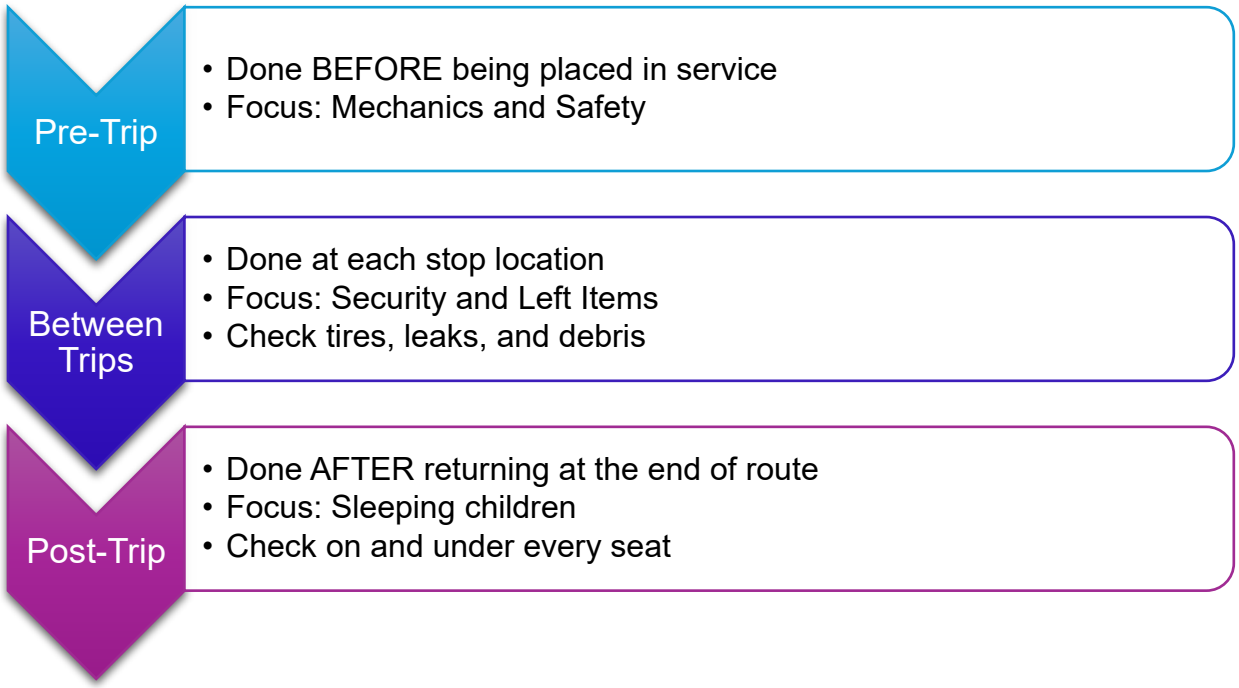
Furthermore, unexpected breakdowns cause severe anxiety for young students and may pose a life-threatening crisis if your passengers include medically fragile children, such as a student with severe diabetes who requires a timed insulin dose or snack. When students do not arrive on time, the phones in the transportation department start

to ring “off the walls”! Many families depend on their students to arrive within a specific period due to work schedules and after-school events.

Proactively checking items like your engine fan belts, fluid levels, and tire pressures helps keep your vehicle reliable and in good working order and helps avoid these high-stress situations.

PART 2: THE THREE ESSENTIAL TYPES OF INSPECTIONS

Colorado rules require multiple layers of vehicle verification throughout the operating day. Every pre-trip, between-trip, or post-trip inspection must be carefully documented and maintained at the Educational Entity for a year.



The Pre-Trip Inspection

This check must be completed before a vehicle is placed into service for the day. You must follow a systematic checklist to verify that your bus is structurally sound and safe to carry students. You must also report defects as soon as you become aware of them. You have a responsibility to drive a safe bus. Mechanics cannot make necessary repairs, nor do they know something needs repair unless they receive timely and accurate defect reports from you.

The reports must be filled out completely and carefully, and each form should have a full driver’s signature.

- **Large Vehicles:** For standard school buses, multifunction activity buses, and motor coaches, you are required by law to check, at a minimum, every item listed on the CDE Form School Bus/Multifunction Pre- and Post-Trip Requirements.
- **Small Capacity Vehicles:** For smaller production passenger vehicles (like SUVs and minivans holding 10 or fewer occupants), you must check and document every item on the CDE Form Small Vehicle Pre- and Post-Trip Requirements.

The Between-Trip Inspection

Whenever you park the bus at a mid-day destination, a school building, or a field trip site, you must perform a brief walk-around check before starting your next leg. Walk around the exterior to check for debris between your tires, look under the engine compartment for new fluid leaks, check the vehicle for vandalism, and glance down the passenger aisle to remove any trash or safety hazards left behind.

The Post-Trip Inspection

A complete post-trip inspection must be performed at the end of each vehicle's daily operations. The heaviest amounts of dirt are brought to your vehicle in the morning when students have been waiting outside to board. If you sweep your vehicle after your morning run, in the afternoon, all you have to do is pick up any trash and do a quick sweep, and your vehicle will look neat and clean all day long. Studies show that school buses kept clean demonstrate to students that the driver takes pride in caring for the vehicle, and, in return, students will take better care of it. It also shows that drivers in well-kept buses have fewer discipline issues.

While you will check the vehicle's overall condition, the primary focus of the post-trip inspection is to ensure that no students are left behind in an unattended vehicle.

You must physically walk all the way to the back row of the bus, looking completely over, under, and between every single passenger seat cushion to scan for sleeping, injured, or hidden children.

11.1 Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Inspection Requirements

11.1.1 Inspection Requirements and Frequency

(A) A daily pre-trip inspection shall be completed prior to a vehicle being placed in service.

(B) A daily post-trip inspection shall be completed at the end of each vehicle's daily operation.

11.1.2 Documentation

(A) Documentation of completion shall be maintained for each inspection performed.

(1) Pre-trips shall be documented prior to the vehicle being placed in service.

(2) Post-trips shall be documented at the end of the vehicle's daily operation.

(B) Documentation shall be completed by the School Transportation Vehicle Operator or other Transportation Personnel authorized by the Educational Entity.

PART 3: PRE-TRIP CHECKS

When performing your mandatory pre-trip check, you must examine several zones as described on the CDE School Bus/Multifunction School Activity Bus Pre-Trip Form. You are checking to ensure every component is safely mounted, not cracked or broken, and working perfectly. The items below are only some of the areas that you will be checking. **Your trainer will provide more details and further describe your pre-trip requirements**.

Inside the Engine Compartment (Fluid Levels & Belts)

Before starting the engine, open the hood or access door to inspect the core mechanical systems:

- **Fluid Level Verification:** Check the engine oil, power steering fluid, windshield washer fluid, and engine coolant levels. Fluids must remain within safe operating limits. Look for any active drips or wet puddles beneath the engine block.
- **Belts and Hoses:** Inspect all engine drive belts for cracks, fraying, or excessive slack. Check rubber hoses for leaks, bulging, or brittle spots.

Exterior Walk-Around (Tires, Wheels, & Suspension)

Walk the perimeter of the vehicle to verify its structural integrity:

- **Tires:** Tires must have adequate tread depth and correct air pressure. Check that the rubber has no sidewall cuts, bulges, or exposed steel belts.
- **Wheels & Lug Nuts:** Look for cracked rims and rust trails around lug nuts, which indicate a nut is loose and slipping.

- **Suspension & Brakes:** Look behind the wheels to verify that your leaf springs are intact and not shifted. Check that shock absorbers are securely bolted and not leaking oil. Ensure that brake lines and air chambers are undamaged.

Safety Equipment and First Aid Modules

Every vehicle must carry a fully stocked, securely mounted safety kit that is easily accessible to the driver. These items are often overlooked and checked as non-compliant during your district or charter school's STAR review. You must verify that these items are on board or in working order every morning:

- **Fire Extinguisher:** Must be secure, fully charged, with its pressure gauge needle resting in the green zone, and its safety pin securely locked in place.
- **Reflective Triangles:** A protective plastic case containing three bidirectional emergency warning triangles must be secured to the vehicle.
- **Body Fluid Clean-Up Kit:** A sealed, dustproof container used to safely manage biohazards. Because the sanitizing materials inside can degrade over time, school entities should replace the entire kit every 36 months.
- **Webbing/Seatbelt Cutter:** The bus must carry at least one durable webbing cutter featuring a full-width handgrip and a protected blade. It must be securely mounted within easy reach of the driver while the driver is buckled into their seat. If the cutter ever shows signs of rust or corrosion on the blade, it must be replaced immediately.
- **Emergency Exits:** Checking emergency exits during a daily pre-trip inspection is one of the most critical safety duties a professional operator performs. According to the CDE safety and inspection standards, a thorough pre-trip check of emergency exits is vital for several life-saving, legal, and operational reasons:

    1. **Safety and Rapid Evacuation (The Window of Survival)**
        - **Preventing Entrapment:** In an absolute crisis, such as a vehicle fire, rolling over into water, or a severe collision, the primary exit (the front service door) may be crushed, jammed, or engulfed in flames. The passenger cabin can fill with toxic smoke or water in a matter of seconds. Pre-tripping ensures that alternative escape routes (rear doors, side doors, emergency windows, and roof hatches) are mechanically functional and will not stick, jam, or lock when child or adult passengers desperately try to open them.

- **Every Second Matters:** If a mechanism is corroded, broken, or frozen stiff from cold weather, a driver or student cannot afford to waste critical seconds fighting a stuck latch during a real emergency.

2. **Ensuring Strict Clearance Paths (No Blockages)**
   - **Aisle and Exit Integrity:** Part of the inspection ensures that emergency exits are completely accessible. Under strict operational rules, under no circumstances may any carry-on items, equipment bags, or luggage block, narrow, or obstruct the center aisle or the clear path leading to any emergency door, window, or roof hatch. Checking this during the pre-trip prevents the hazardous practice of piling activity trip gear in front of vital exit routes.
3. **Verification of Warning Systems (Electronic Interlocks)**
   - **The Interlock/Buzzer Check:** School buses are legally equipped with an electronic warning buzzer system connected to the emergency exits. During the pre-trip, opening an exit must trigger the audible alarm in the driver’s cockpit.
   - **Preventing Intentional or Unintentional Opening:** This buzzer alerts the operator if an exit has accidentally unlatched while in motion or if a student is tampering with a handle in the back of the bus. If the buzzer or warning system is defective, a door could fly open on a high-speed highway without the driver's immediate knowledge, creating an extreme risk of a passenger falling out of the vehicle.
4. **Mitigating Roadside Breakdown and Secondary Accident Risks**
   - **High-Risk Secondary Environments:** Every vehicle failure or unexpected roadside stop puts passengers in a potentially volatile environment along high-speed shoulders. If an immediate evacuation is deemed necessary because it is unsafe to keep passengers inside the vehicle, the driver must be 100% certain that the emergency doors will open smoothly to execute a rapid, controlled exit toward a safe zone away from traffic.
5. **Compliance, Civil Liability, and Legal Protection**
   - **Regulatory Duty:** Performing a documented pre-trip inspection is a mandated legal requirement under Colorado Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection (1 CCR 301-26).

- **The Ultimate Accountability:** Operating a vehicle with defective emergency gear exposes both the driver and the Educational Entity to severe civil liabilities and criminal penalties for careless operation or negligence. If a child is trapped or injured during a crisis due to a faulty door latch or blocked exit that *should* have been caught during a pre-trip, the operator faces severe legal scrutiny regarding why they failed to execute their professional safety duties.

11.0 Vehicle Requirements

11.1 Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Inspection Requirements

11.1.1 Inspection Requirements and Frequency

(A) A daily pre-trip inspection shall be completed prior to a vehicle being placed in service.

(B) A daily post-trip inspection shall be completed at the end of each vehicle's daily operation.

11.3 Maintenance and Repair

11.3.1 General Maintenance Requirements

(A) Educational Entities shall ensure all School Transportation Vehicles are systematically inspected, maintained, and repaired by a qualified mechanic.

(1) Safe Condition:

(a) An Educational Entity shall not permit student transportation in any vehicle that is not in a safe and proper operating condition.

(2) Documentation:

(a) Separate files shall be maintained for each School Transportation Vehicle containing records of Annual inspections, preventative maintenance (PM), reported defects, and all corresponding repairs.

11.3.2 Defect Reporting and Resolution

(A) Any damage, defect, or deficiency affecting safety or regulatory compliance shall be reported immediately to the Educational Entity upon discovery.

(B) Educational Entities shall have a system to document preventative maintenance, reported defects, and repairs made to School Transportation Vehicles.

(1) Report Content shall include:

(a) Educational Entity's name,

(b) Date and time of the submission of the report,

(c) Detailed description of the defect,

(d) Name of the preparer.

(2) Resolution:

(a) Educational Entities, or a representative agent, shall repair the reported defect/deficiency or document why no repair is necessary. The vehicle shall be confirmed safe prior to transporting students.

11.3.3 Out-of-Service Criteria

(A) A School Transportation Vehicle may be designated "out-of-service" by the Educational Entity, a CDE Annual Inspector, or the CDE School Transportation Unit.

(1) Educational Entities shall not transport students in a School Transportation Vehicle that is not in a safe and proper operating condition.

(2) Emergency Operation:

(a) Any School Transportation Vehicle discovered to be in an unsafe condition while being operated on the highway, roadway, or private road may be continued in operation only to the nearest place where repairs can safely be effected.

(b) Such operation shall be conducted only if it is less hazardous to the public than to permit the vehicle to remain on the highway, roadway, or private road.

(B) Reinstatement:

(1) Required repairs shall be completed before student transport. If the School Transportation Vehicle was placed out of service during an Annual inspection, it

shall pass a new CDE Annual Inspection before returning to service.

PART 4: THE HYDRAULIC, AIR BRAKE, AND EV BRAKE SAFETY TESTS

Brakes are the most critical safety system on a heavy transportation vehicle. You must test their operation daily before leaving the terminal or yard.

The Hydraulic Brake Test (For Fluid-Based Systems)

If your vehicle uses standard hydraulic fluid brakes, you must verify that the master cylinder can hold constant pressure:

- **The Pump and Hold Method:** With the engine turned off, pump the brake pedal three times, then press down firmly on the pedal and hold it for five (5) seconds.
- **The Evaluation:** The pedal must remain completely firm and stable. If the pedal sinks down toward the floorboard during those five seconds, there is a fluid leak or a mechanical failure in the system. The vehicle must be placed out of service immediately.

The 3-Step Air Brake Test (For Heavy Air Systems)

If you are driving a larger vehicle equipped with commercial air brakes, you must perform a mandatory three-step check to test the air chambers, low-pressure warnings, and emergency spring brakes. This test must be performed perfectly every day**.**

Step 1: The Applied Pressure Leakage Test

Bring your air tanks up to full pressure (around 120–125 PSI), turn the engine off, then turn the key back to the "On" position to power the dashboard gauges. Release (push in) your parking brake valve. Press down firmly on the service brake pedal and hold it for one full minute. Watch your air pressure gauge. After the initial drop, the air pressure must not drop by more than 3 PSI in 1 minute for a single bus.

Step 2: The Low Air Warning Signal Test

With the engine still off and the key in the "On" position, begin pumping (fanning) the brake pedal up and down to bleed air out of the tanks. Watch your dashboard gauges and listen closely. Before the air pressure drops below 60 PSI, a mandatory warning light and a buzzing alarm must turn on to alert you that your air supply is dangerously low.

Step 3: The Emergency Spring Brake Pop-Out Test

Continue pumping the brake pedal firmly up and down to push the remaining air out of the system. As the pressure falls lower, the heavy emergency spring brakes inside the wheels will no longer have enough air pressure to keep them held open. Between 20-45 PSI, the red/yellow parking brake knob on your dashboard must automatically pop out, locking the wheels completely to safely stop the vehicle in an emergency.

Electric Vehicle Braking Systems and Regenerative Power

Regenerative Braking Systems: On electric school buses, the braking system may generate power during deceleration to recharge the vehicle's high-voltage battery system. Operators must be familiar with the unique slowing characteristics of regenerative systems.

Parking Brake Operational Testing Procedure

Brakes are the most critical safety system on a heavy transportation vehicle. The parking brake must be mechanically tested daily using this precise sequence before leaving the terminal yard to verify it holds the vehicle securely against drivetrain torque:

- **Air Pressure Stabilization:** Start the engine and allow the brake system air pressure to build to its normal operating range, ensuring it reaches at least 100 psi before beginning the simulation.
- **Vehicle Kinetic Transition:** Place the vehicle's drive selector into low gear, completely release the parking brake, and accelerate the vehicle forward smoothly on a flat, level surface until reaching a tracking speed of 3 to 5 mph.
- **Neutral Isolation and Brake Engagement:** While the vehicle is in motion, shift the drive selector/transmission into neutral, then immediately engage the parking brake valve control. The vehicle must come to a prompt, complete stop without sliding, shuddering, or delayed friction bite.

PART 5: THE STATE-LEVEL ANNUAL INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

While drivers perform daily checks, every vehicle in the fleet must undergo a comprehensive structural inspection once a year to ensure compliance with Colorado State standards.

Certified Annual Inspections

Every school transportation vehicle and student-transit trailer must successfully pass a comprehensive CDE Annual Inspection before it is ever allowed to carry students. This inspection must be repeated at least once every 12 months.

- **New Fleet Additions:** Any newly purchased, used, leased, or rented vehicle added to your fleet must successfully clear this annual state inspection *prior* to transporting its first passenger.
- **The STU-25 Affidavit:** The results of this rigorous mechanical check must be officially documented on the CDE Form STU-25 (Affidavit of Annual Inspection). By law, a current copy of this signed affidavit must be carried inside the vehicle at all times, and the original copy must be filed in the transportation department's vehicle maintenance folder.

Certified Inspection Sites

Annual inspections cannot be performed in a standard driveway or an unapproved shop. They can only be conducted at a facility that holds a valid CDE Inspection Site Certificate. To earn and maintain this state certification, the shop facility must meet strict criteria:

- **Physical Space and Flooring:** The shop bay must be large enough to completely hold the vehicle and all required diagnostic tools. The floor surface or concrete pad must be engineered to safely support the maximum loaded weight of the largest vehicle in the fleet.
- **Environment and Tools:** The shop must feature adequate lighting and proper ventilation systems. Most importantly, the site must contain professional tools that are specifically designed and precisely calibrated to take accurate readings of critical safety items, such as tire tread depths and brake lining thicknesses.
- **Site Applications:** The shop operator must submit a formal request to CDE to prove their facility meets these requirements, and the official state certificate must be clearly posted on the shop wall.

PART 6: THE CDE "STAR" PERFORMANCE REVIEW

To ensure that local districts, charter schools, and contract service providers fully comply with all state safety rules, the Colorado Department of Education conducts regular field audits. This official oversight process is known as the CDE School Transportation Assistance Review (STAR).

During a STAR audit, state transportation analysts visit your local facility to perform a thorough review of your entire operation. They will review:

- **Driver Qualification Files:** Checking to ensure every operator has a valid commercial license (CDL), a current DOT medical card, up-to-date background checks, and documented hours of annual safety training.

- **Maintenance and Inspection Records:** Verifying that daily pre-trip and post-trip sheets are filled out properly and that annual STU-25 affidavits are current for every active vehicle.
- **Operational Rules Compliance:** Reviewing route sheets, local emergency plans, student loading zones, and evidence that required student evacuation drills were completed.

Passing the STAR review demonstrates that your transportation department is running a compliant, safe program that minimizes risks for Colorado students.

Most Common Items Found During a STAR Review

- First Aid Kit and Bodily Fluid Clean-up Kit – Missing and/or missing items.
- Seats – Padding broken down; seat bottoms not secured
- Emergency Exits – Identification or instructional stickers peeling or missing
- Emergency Exits – Hard to open due to lack of inspection, buzzers not working
- Lack of documentation
- Unsecured items in the passenger area
- Electrical Systems – Inoperative or with broken lenses
- Cleaning Supplies – Unmarked and/or unsecured

The school transportation vehicle operator should discover all of the items listed above by performing a thorough pre-trip, between-trip, and/or post-trip inspection.

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Unit Five – Vehicle Operations

PART 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF DEFENSIVE DRIVING

Driving a large school transportation vehicle requires a much higher level of skill and attention than driving a normal car. You must practice defensive driving, which means you are always looking out for potential hazards and managing your vehicle to prevent accidents.

The Five Qualities of a Defensive Driver

1. **Knowledge:** You must know the traffic laws, your vehicle's physical limits, and school district safety policies inside and out.
2. **Alertness:** You must stay fully awake and focused on the road, constantly scanning your surroundings for changing conditions.
3. **Foresight:** You must look far ahead to predict what other drivers might do, or how a sharp curve or a hill up ahead will change your driving.
4. **Judgment:** You must make smart, calm decisions about speed, spacing, and lane positioning.
5. **Skill:** You must know how to physically operate the steering, gears, and brakes smoothly under any circumstances.

The Five Keys to Driving Safely

1. **Aim High in Steering:** Look at least 12 to 15 seconds down the road ahead of you (about a quarter-mile on the highway) so you can spot problems early.
2. **Get the Big Picture:** Don't just stare at the car directly in front of you. Watch the sidewalks, intersections, and all lanes of traffic.
3. **Keep Your Eyes Moving:** Shift your gaze back and forth between the road ahead, the sides of the street, and your mirrors every few seconds.
4. **Leave Yourself an Out:** Maintain a cushion of open space all around your bus so you have room to move if someone cuts you off.
5. **Make Sure They See You:** Use your signals, headlights, hazard lights, or horn to communicate your presence clearly to other drivers.

The Strategic "Three A's" of Defensive Driving

To protect your bus and keep your passengers safe, a professional school transportation operator must master the Three A's of Defensive Driving. This framework shifts defensive driving from a passive theory to a continuous, active process of cognitive threat assessment and mechanical prevention.

1. AWARENESS: Continuous Environment Evaluation

Awareness is the absolute foundation of defensive driving. Simply put, you cannot avoid a hazard if you don't see it coming. Staying aware behind the wheel requires you to keep your eyes moving constantly, scan the road ahead, and actively manage the space all around your bus.

- **Active Visual Scanning (The 15-Second Horizon):** Operators must maintain a high visual lead time, scanning at least 15 seconds ahead in urban environments and up to a quarter-mile on open highways. This visual field must be continuously penetrated to identify decelerating vehicles, changing traffic control devices, and erratic motorist patterns.
- **Systematic Mirror Checks:** Operators must execute a complete mirror check every 4-5 seconds to maintain 360-degree situational awareness, monitoring the vehicle's blind spots, lane positioning, and the tracking paths of the rear tires.
- **Watching Your Sides (Peripheral Vision):** Awareness demands constant tracking of high-risk roadside hazards, including distracted pedestrians, bicyclists, active school crossing zones, merging delivery vehicles, and changing surface conditions.

Awareness reminds you that children are apt to do the craziest things at the worst possible times.

2. ANTICIPATION: Scanning Ahead

Anticipation is the process of critically examining perceived road dynamics and predicting the worst-case scenario. Professional operators do not wait for a hazard to materialize; they anticipate it and pre-plan a strategic escape route.

- **Predicting Motorist Hazards:** Operators must approach every intersection, roundabout, and merge point assuming that other motorists will fail to yield the right-of-way, violate traffic signals, or cut abruptly in front of the long wheelbase of the bus.
- **Targeting Distracted and High-Risk Drivers:** Operators must scan for visual indicators of impairment or cognitive diversion in surrounding traffic, such as lane

drifting, erratic speed changes, or mobile phone usage, categorizing these vehicles as immediate operational threats.

- **Changing with the Conditions:** Anticipation requires the driver to adjust driving metrics *before* entering a challenging space. This includes proactively dropping speed when approaching blind crests, entering sharp curves, encountering steep mountain grades, or operating in deteriorating visibility.

3. ACTION: Taking Decisive Action

Action is where your awareness and planning pay off. Once you spot a hazard and predict what could go wrong, you have to act. This means performing quick, smooth, and safe driving maneuvers to avoid a crash.

- **Managing Your Speed:** Action dictates that an operator immediately lift off the accelerator or safely apply the service brakes to create a larger safety cushion the moment a potential conflict is anticipated, adhering strictly to safe stopping distance physics.
- **Creating Space:** This means safely moving your bus within your lane to get as far away as possible from hazards on the side of the road. While always staying inside your legal lane boundaries, you should lean toward the opposite side of your lane when passing tight spots like roadside construction zones, broken-down vehicles parked on the shoulder, or pedestrians walking near the curb.
- **Communicating with Others:** This means letting other drivers know exactly what you plan to do long before you do it. To protect your bus and get the attention of distracted drivers, you need to use all of your vehicle's tools early and clearly. This includes using your turn signals well before a corner, tapping your brakes to flash your brake lights, turning on your hazard lights when slowing down or stopping in traffic, and using your horn to warn someone who isn't paying attention.

PART 2: COMFORT, CONTROLS, AND COOPERATION

Before you even turn the key, you need to adjust your driver's seat, mirrors, and seatbelt so you are comfortable, in total control, and have the best possible view around your bus.

Setting Up Your Driver's Seat

When driving long distances, poor posture can cause fatigue or minor aches. Set up your seat using these targets:

- Sit with your lower back completely flat against the seat back.

- Adjust the seat up or down so your hips are slightly higher than your knees.
- Move the seat forward or backward so your knees still have a slight bend when you push the pedals all the way to the floor.
- Ensure your arms reach the steering wheel comfortably without forcing you to lean forward or twist your back.

Shifting an Automatic Transmission

Modern commercial automatic transmissions manage gear ranges independently, but operators must exercise explicit safety steps:

- **The “Safe Start”:**
    - Check that the parking brake is set.
    - The service brake pedal must be firmly depressed before starting the vehicle, and the vehicle must be in Neutral (N).
    - Turn the key to the “on” or “accessory” position and allow the vehicle to cycle through the computer setup and wait for the gauges in the dashboard to return to the normal operating position. This is vehicle-dependent.
    - If the vehicle has a diesel engine, wait until the indicator light has shut off before engaging the starter.
    - Once the vehicle has completed the start-up process, turn the key to engage the starter.
- **Incline Management:** When climbing or descending steep grades, manually shift the selector into a lower range (such as "2" or "3") to lock the torque converter. This provides stable engine braking and keeps the transmission from shifting gears too often, preventing overheating.

Shifting a Manual Transmission

You must learn the correct speed range (or tachometer range) for upshifting or downshifting. You must also shift gears without losing sight of the road. Many school buses have synchromesh standard transmissions. Generally, vehicles are equipped with either a 4- or 5-speed standard transmission. Operating a traditional manual gearbox requires precise coordination to prevent power loss mid-maneuver:

- **The “Safe Start”:**

    - The service brake pedal must be firmly depressed before starting the vehicle, and the vehicle must be in Neutral (N).
    - Turn the key to the “on” or “accessory” position and allow the vehicle to cycle through the computer setup and wait for the gauges in the dashboard to return to the normal operating position. This is vehicle-dependent.
    - If the vehicle has a diesel engine, wait until the indicator light has shut off before engaging the starter.
    - Once the vehicle has completed the start-up process, turn the key to engage the starter.
- **Starting to Move:**
    - Check the chart on the shift lever or on the dash.
    - Depress the clutch pedal.
    - Depress the foot brake (service brake)
    - Shift the gear lever into 1st or 2nd gear
    - Release the foot brake
    - Hold the friction point and slightly depress the accelerator, increasing power to prevent stalling.
    - Once the vehicle begins to move forward, slowly release the clutch pedal, allowing the transmission to take control.
- **Shifting Gears Up:**
    - Check the rpms on the tachometer.
    - Release the accelerator, push in the clutch, and shift to neutral at the same time.
    - Release the clutch.
    - Let the engine and gears slow down to the RPM required for the next gear (this takes practice).
    - Push in the clutch and shift to the higher gear at the same time.
    - Release the clutch and press the accelerator at the same time.
- **Shifting Gears Down:**

- Release the accelerator, push in the clutch, and shift to neutral at the same time.
- Release clutch.
- Press the accelerator, increase the engine and gear speed to the RPM required in the lower gear.
- Push in the clutch and shift to a lower gear at the same time.
- Release the clutch and press the accelerator at the same time.

- **Double-Clutching:**
  - Depress the clutch pedal and shift to Neutral.
  - Release the clutch and let the engine RPM adjust to match the target gear speed.
  - Depress the clutch a second time and slide the selector into the desired gear.
- **No Shift Zones:** Drivers are strictly prohibited from shifting gears while actively executing a turn or traversing railroad or light rail tracks. Select the correct target gear *before* commencing the maneuver to prevent stalling. Coasting in neutral is strictly against Colorado law (Section 42-4-1009, C.R.S.) as it removes engine control and can damage the transmission.

Safety Restraints

- **Driver Requirements:** Under CDE rules, you must wear your safety belt properly at all times while operating the vehicle. Your safety belt is your primary lifesaver.
- **Passenger Constraints:** You are legally responsible for making sure every passenger wears their seat belt if the vehicle is equipped with seat belts. If the vehicle uses specialized Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS), they must be properly adjusted and secured according to manufacturer guidelines.

12.6.1 Seat Belts

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators:

(1) Shall have the safety belt fastened, worn correctly, and properly adjusted prior to the School Transportation Vehicle being placed in motion.

(B) School-Aged and Adult Passengers:

(1) All passengers in a School Transportation Vehicle under 10,000 lbs. GVWR shall have their safety belts fastened, worn correctly, and properly adjusted prior to the School Transportation Vehicle being placed in motion.

(2) If a Type A-1 school bus or multifunction school activity bus is fully equipped with safety belts, all passengers shall have their safety belts fastened, worn correctly, and properly adjusted prior to the School Transportation Vehicle being placed in motion.

(C) Preschool Passengers:

(1) Shall use an age-, weight-, and height-appropriate child safety restraint system when riding in any School Transportation Vehicle.

(2) Pursuant to sections C.R.S. 42-4-236 and 42-4-237, all preschool-aged children riding in small-capacity vehicles shall use an appropriate child safety restraint system as required by the Colorado Child-Passenger Safety Law.

Stopping and Parking the Vehicle

When bringing the vehicle to its final stop at a terminal, school, or layover spot, you must secure it safely:

- Apply the parking brake firmly.
- Shift the transmission into Neutral or Park.
- Turn off all electrical accessories (wipers, radios, fans) to prevent draining the battery.
- Turn off the engine, remove the ignition key, and lock the service door to prevent unauthorized entry.

PART 3: SPACE MANAGEMENT, SPEEDS, AND LANE POSITIONING

A large vehicle takes significantly longer to speed up and stop than a car. You must actively manage the space around your bus.

Following Distance Rules

- **The 4-5 Second Rule:** Under ideal weather conditions on a dry road, you must maintain a minimum following distance of one second for every 10 feet of vehicle length. For a standard 40-foot bus, this means you must stay at least 4 seconds

behind the car ahead of you. If you are traveling above 40 mph, add an extra second for a total of 5 seconds of safety cushion.

- **When Stopped in Traffic:** Always stop far enough behind the car in front of you so that you can see its rear tires touching the pavement. This leaves a safety gap of about 15 feet, giving you room to steer around them if they break down or roll backward.

Managing Your Space and Roadway Position

Because a commercial bus spans up to 8½ feet wide (expanding to 12½ feet when accounting for extended mirrors), lateral space is critical:

- **Lane Centering:** Keep the vehicle perfectly centered within your travel lane. Avoid hugging the right shoulder line (which invites tire damage from road debris) or the left centerline (which increases the risk of mirror-to-mirror strikes with passing vehicles).
- **Roadway Position – Staying to the Right:** Because a school bus is a large, heavy vehicle that takes longer to speed up than a regular car, you must follow strict lane rules:
    - **The Slower Traffic Law (C.R.S. § 42-4-1001):** Colorado law states that any vehicle proceeding at *less than the normal speed of traffic* under existing conditions must be driven in the right-hand lane. Because school buses are large, heavy vehicles that accelerate slowly, especially when fully loaded or climbing steep mountain grades, they naturally fall under this requirement. To avoid blocking the flow of traffic, school bus operators must maintain lane discipline by staying in the outermost (far-right) lane.
    - **When you can leave the right lane:** You should only move out of the far-right lane for a few specific reasons:
        - To prepare for an upcoming left turn.
        - To safely pass a slower vehicle.
        - To avoid a hazard in the road.
        - To comply with the Colorado Move-Over Law.
- **Overhead Clearance Buffers:** Drivers must maintain continuous awareness of low bridges, overpasses, canopy roofs, and low-hanging tree branches. Always maintain a 12-inch safety buffer between the roof of your vehicle and any overhead structure.

Managing Tailgaters

You cannot stop people from driving too close behind you, but you can reduce the danger:

- **Slow Down Gradually:** Drop your speed slightly. Traveling at a slower speed reduces the impact force if they hit you and encourages them to pass you safely.
- **Increase Your Front Gap:** When someone tailgates you, increase your own following distance from the car *ahead* of you. This gives you a massive cushion so you will never have to brake suddenly, preventing the tailgater from slamming into your rear bumper.

The Basic Speed Law

The Colorado Basic Speed Law dictates that you must never drive faster than what is reasonable and prudent under the conditions then existing, regardless of the posted speed limit.

The "Reasonable and Prudent" Mandate:

"No person shall drive a vehicle on a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions then existing." – C.R.S. § 42-4-1101(1)

The term "reasonable" refers to a person who possesses sound judgment and acts in a fair and sensible manner. It is often used to describe a situation where no one with a sensible mind would object. Other synonyms include rational, logical, fair, fair-minded, just, and equitable.

"Prudent" refers to acting with care and thought for the future. For instance, no wise or well-judged money manager would authorize a loan without first knowing its purpose. Synonyms for "prudent" include "sensible" and "well-advised." It's important to keep in mind that the person determining whether your speed was reasonable and prudent is the one to pay attention to!

Even if you are driving *under* the posted speed limit, you can still be cited for a traffic violation if your speed is unsafe for current conditions. Factors that legally require you to reduce your speed include:

- Weather Hazards: Snow, ice, slush, heavy rain, or standing water.
- Visibility Restrictions: Dense fog, blowing dust, smoke, blinding sunlight, or driving at night in areas with poor lighting.
- Traffic Conditions: Heavy bumper-to-bumper congestion or construction zones.

- Roadway Topography: Steep mountain descents, narrow lanes, blind curves, or gravel surfaces.

The Duty to Decrease Speed for "Special Hazards"

The law explicitly states that a driver *must* proactively slow down from an otherwise lawful speed when a "special hazard" arises. The state defines special hazards as:

- Approaching or crossing an intersection or railroad crossing.
- Approaching and going around a sharp curve or cresting a hill.
- Traveling on a narrow or winding roadway.
- The presence of pedestrians, cyclists, highway maintenance workers, or emergency vehicles on the shoulder.

"Prima Facie" vs. Absolute Speed Limits

Colorado uses a prima facie speed limit system for its default limits. *Prima facie* means "at first glance" or "presumed." If you exceed a default limit, it is legally presumed that you were driving at an unreasonable and imprudent speed.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-1101. Speed Limits

(1) No person shall drive a vehicle on a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions then existing.

(2) Except when a special hazard exists that requires a lower speed, the following speeds shall be lawful:

- 20 mph: Narrow, winding mountain highways or blind curves.
- 25 mph: Any designated business district.
- 30 mph: Any designated residential district.
- 40 mph: Open mountain highways.
- 55 mph: Open, unsurfaced, or two-lane highways, not on the interstate system.
- 65 mph: Four-lane surfaced freeways, expressways, and interstates.
- Any speed not in excess of a speed limit designated by an official traffic control device.

- (3) No driver of a vehicle shall fail to decrease the speed of such vehicle from an otherwise lawful speed to a reasonable and prudent speed when a special hazard exists with respect to pedestrians or other traffic or by reason of weather or highway conditions.

⚠️ **The Absolute Maximum:** No matter how perfect the conditions are, 75 mph is the absolute maximum legal speed limit anywhere in the State of Colorado. Neither CDOT nor local municipalities has the legal authority to authorize a speed zone higher than 75 mph.

Penalties for Violating the Basic Speed Law

If a law enforcement officer determines you were driving too fast for conditions (even if you were traveling below the posted limit), you can be cited for a Class A traffic infraction. This carries a base fine of $100, statutory court surcharges, and a mandatory assessment of three points against your driver's license.

Speed Control and Total Stopping Distance

Driving at speeds incompatible with vehicle control is a leading cause of fatal crashes. Drivers must actively adjust their speed to match current driving conditions, including traction, curves, visibility, traffic density, and hills.

Understanding Total Stopping Distance

Total stopping distance is the cumulative distance a vehicle travels across multiple phases of driver and mechanical reaction.

For standard vehicles, the formula is:

Perception Distance + Reaction Distance + Braking Distance = Total Stopping Distance

- **Perception Distance:** The distance a vehicle travels from the moment a hazard comes into view until the driver's brain recognizes it. For an alert driver, average perception time is ¾ second. At 55 mph, this accounts for 60 feet of travel.
- **Reaction Distance:** The distance traveled from the moment the brain signals the foot to transition from the accelerator to the brake pedal. The average driver's reaction time is ¾ second, adding another 60 feet of travel at 55 mph.
- **Braking Distance:** The physical distance required for the vehicle to come to a complete stop once the brakes are applied. At 55 mph on dry pavement with properly functioning brakes, a heavy vehicle takes approximately 4.5 seconds and 170 feet to stop.

- **Air Brake Lag Distance (Air Brake Vehicles Only):** Vehicles equipped with air brakes require an additional ½ second for air to travel through the lines and mechanical components to engage the brakes. At 55 mph, this adds 32 feet to the stopping distance.

Total Stopping Distance Calculations (At 55 mph)

At 55 mph under ideal conditions, a heavy vehicle requires approximately **5 seconds** to stop, traversing a distance roughly equivalent to the length of a football field.

Hydraulic Brake Systems

Perception Distance (PD) + Reaction Distance (RD) + Braking Distance (BD) = Total Stopping Distance

60 ft + 60 ft + 170 ft = 290 feet

Air Brake Systems

Perception Distance (PD) + Reaction Distance (RD) + Braking Distance (BD) + Lag Distance (LD) = Total Stopping Distance

60 ft + 60 ft + 170 ft + 32 ft = 322 feet

The Exponential Effect of Speed

High speeds drastically compound stopping distances due to the laws of physics. Whenever a vehicle's speed doubles, its required stopping distance and its destructive impact force increase fourfold.

Speed Management and Vehicle Control

Speed and Curves

Drivers must proactively adjust their speed before entering curves. Taking a curve too fast forces the vehicle to combat physics, resulting in one of two catastrophic outcomes:

- **Loss of Traction:** The tires slip, causing the vehicle to skid straight off the road.
- **Vehicle Rollover:** The tires maintain traction, but the centrifugal force flips the vehicle.

⚠️ **Important:** Tests prove that vehicles with a high center of gravity (such as buses and commercial trucks) can roll over **at or below** the posted advisory speed limit for a curve. Posted advisory speeds are calculated for passenger cars, not large vehicles.

Safe Cornering Guidelines:

- **Slow Down Early:** Reduce your vehicle to a safe speed *before* entering the curve. Braking while already inside a curve disrupts vehicle stabilization and can trigger a jackknife or skid.
- **Never Exceed the Advisory Speed:** Treat the posted curve speed as a maximum threshold for ideal conditions.
- **Maintain Power:** Select a gear that allows for slight acceleration through the apex of the curve. This stabilizes the chassis and maintains tire traction.

Speed and Distance Ahead

A fundamental safety rule of commercial driving is the ability to stop within the distance you can clearly see ahead.

Adverse Weather: Fog, heavy rain, blinding snow, and dust require immediate speed reductions to ensure your stopping sight distance matches your total stopping distance.

- **Night Driving:** Your field of vision is significantly shorter when using low beams compared to high beams.
- **The Headlight Rule:** Never "outdrive" your headlights. If your total stopping distance at your current speed exceeds the reach of your headlight beams, you are driving blindly into potential hazards.

Speed and Traffic Flow

Drivers should strive to match the safe, legal flow of surrounding traffic. Maintaining a consistent speed and a safe following distance reduces conflict points with other motorists.

Attempting to drive faster than the flow of traffic to "save time" is statistically ineffective and highly dangerous. Operating above the ambient traffic speed results in:

- **Frequent Lane Changes:** Constantly passing other vehicles exponentially increases your risk of a collision.
- **Accelerated Driver Fatigue:** The intense mental focus required to weave through traffic causes rapid exhaustion, increasing the probability of a crash.

🚌 **Highway Speed Protocol:** When operating a bus on a highway with a posted speed limit of 75 mph, standard safety protocol dictates driving **5-10 mph below** the maximum limit to account for vehicle mass and passenger safety.

Speed on Downgrades

Selecting an appropriate speed is the single most critical factor when descending long, steep grades safely.

If a heavy vehicle descends a hill too quickly, the driver is forced to overuse the service brakes. This causes extreme heat buildup, leading to **brake fade**. This is a mechanical failure in which the brakes gradually lose their stopping power until they are entirely ineffective.

Mountain Descent Protocol:

1. **Plan Ahead:** Pay close attention to advanced warning signs indicating upcoming downhill grades and runaway truck ramps.
2. **Pre-Inspect:** Perform a quick brake check and monitor your air pressure gauges before starting down the hill.
3. **Downshift Early:** Shift the transmission into a lower gear *before* the descent begins. Utilize the engine's compression (or auxiliary retarders, if road conditions are dry) to control your speed, reserving the service brakes only for periodic, targeted slowing.

See Unit 6 for more information.

PART 4: ROAD MANEUVERS (TURNING & INTERSECTIONS)

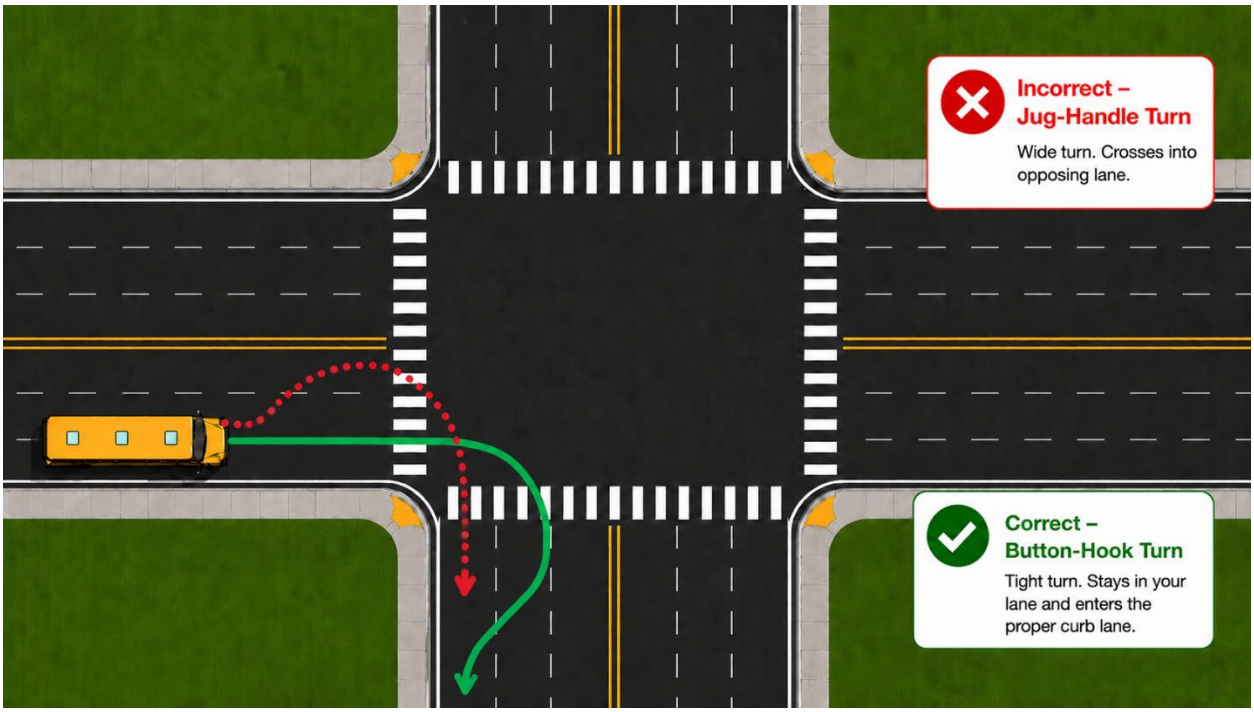
Because the bus is long and has a wide wheelbase, making turns requires unique lane positioning. Position the vehicle in the proper lane. Use the outermost right lane for double/triple turns.

Executing a Right Turn

The rear wheels of the bus will cut the corner (off-track). To prevent your rear tires from jumping onto the sidewalk curb or hitting a light pole, use these steps:

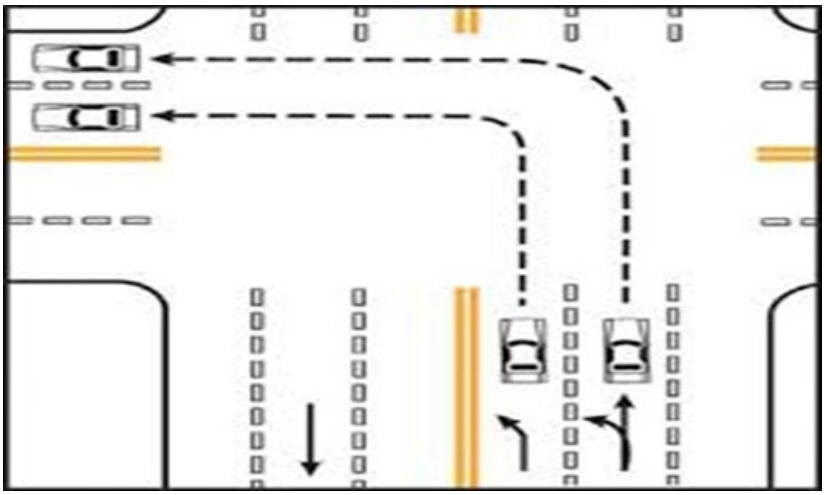
- Turn on your right turn signal 100 to 300 feet (or 3-5 seconds) before the turn.
- Keep the rear of the bus close to the right-hand curb line as you approach the intersection to prevent small cars from trying to pass you on the right side.
- Drive straight into the intersection before starting your turn. Do not swing left into the adjacent lane before turning, as cars may try to squeeze under your right side.

- Let the front nose of the bus swing wide into the intersection so that your rear wheels clear the curb completely.

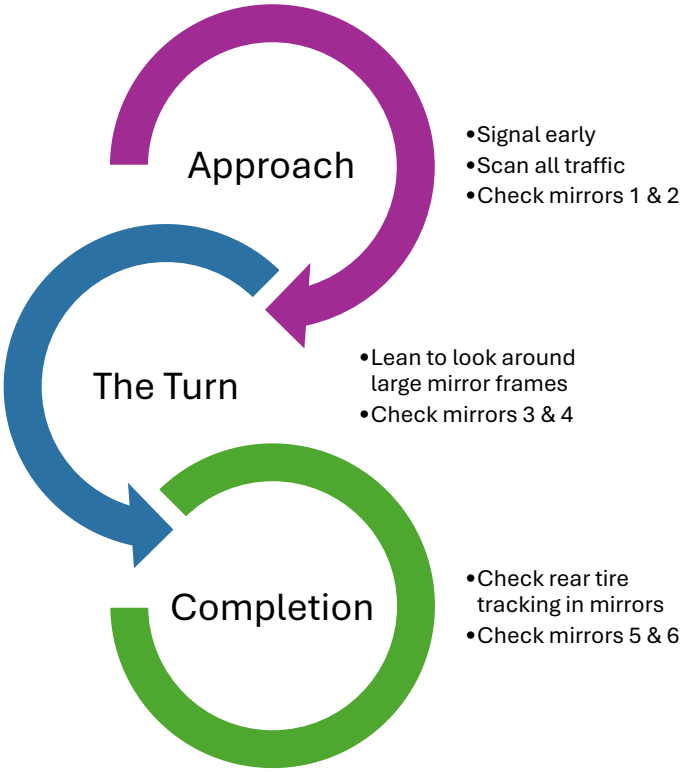


Executing a Left Turn

- Ensure your left turn signal is active at least 100 feet before the turn (or 200 feet if you are traveling faster than 40 mph).
- Reach the center point of the intersection before turning the steering wheel. If you turn too early, the left side of your bus will cut across the oncoming traffic lanes.
- Check your left side mirror continuously during the turn to ensure your rear tires do not slide over the center line or clip cars waiting in the left-turn lane.
- Maintain your lane of travel when conducting left-hand turns.



Executing a Turn



Crossing Intersections Safely

Never assume you have the right-of-way. If a traffic light has been green for a long time, treat it as a "stale green light," take your foot off the gas pedal early, and prepare to stop, because it will likely turn red before you get there.

The 6-Mirror Scan: Check each of the six exterior mirrors on the vehicle to confirm you can cross the intersection safely. Then, lean forward to look around the large mirror frames so cross-traffic is visible.

Uncontrolled Intersections: At a four-way stop or an uncontrolled crossing, yield to the vehicle that arrived first. If two vehicles arrive at the same time, yield to the driver on your right. Before entering any intersection, perform a Left-Right-Left visual sweep.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-802 Pedestrians' Right of Way in Crosswalks

(1) When traffic control signals are not in place or not in operation, the driver of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way, slowing down or stopping if need be to so yield, to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within a crosswalk when the pedestrian is upon the half of the roadway upon which the vehicle is traveling or when the pedestrian is approaching so closely from the opposite half of the roadway as to be in danger.

Changing Lanes Safely

Never execute a lane change abruptly. Always perform the **M.S.M. Sequence**:

1. **M - Mirror Scan:** Check your flat and convex side mirrors to verify the target lane is completely clear.
2. **S - Signal Intent:** Actuate your turn signal at least 4 to 5 seconds before moving to give other drivers time to react.
3. **M - Maneuver:** Slide the vehicle smoothly into the target lane. Avoid jerky steering movements, and cancel the signal immediately upon clearing the lane line

Passing and Overtaking

Passing another vehicle in a school bus requires an immense amount of clear highway space due to slow acceleration rates:

- **The Scanning Buffer:** Only pass another vehicle if it is completely legal and necessary. Ensure you have a completely clear visual horizon ahead. Do not pass on two-lane roads near intersections, curves, hilltops, or railroad tracks.
- **The Clearing Margin:** Signal your lane changes at least 100 feet in advance (200 feet if traveling over 40 mph). When passing a slower vehicle, do not slide back into the right lane until you can clearly see the entire front bumper of the passed vehicle in your right-side flat mirror. You should be at least **1½ bus lengths ahead** of them before returning to your lane.

Navigating Roundabouts

Large commercial vehicles require specialized positioning strategies when navigating circular intersections:

- **Speed Reduction:** Slow the vehicle to the posted advisory speed (typically 15 mph or slower) before entry.
- **Off-Tracking Management:** Due to the vehicle's long wheelbase, the rear tires will cut inward. Keep the front steering wheels close to the outer lane line upon entry, allowing the rear dual tires to safely track along the inner mountable concrete truck apron without striking structural curbs.
- **Yield Priority:** Yield the right-of-way to any traffic already established inside the circulating loop before launching the vehicle into the roundabout.

Starting and Stopping on a Hill

- **Stopping on an Incline:** Bring the vehicle to a full stop. Keep your right foot firmly pressing the service brake pedal. If stopped for an extended period, pull the parking brake valve to prevent any rollback.
- **Launching Up-Grade:** For manual transmissions, coordinate the parking brake release with the smooth engagement of the clutch and throttle. For automatic transmissions, maintain light throttle pressure to overcome gravity before completely releasing the service brake, ensuring the vehicle does not roll backward even one inch.

PART 5: REVERSE MANEUVERS (BACKING UP)

Backing up a school transportation vehicle is incredibly dangerous because the area behind the bus is a massive blind spot. CDE rules strictly prohibit backing up a school transportation vehicle when students are standing outside at a student loading stop.

Backing in a Straight Line

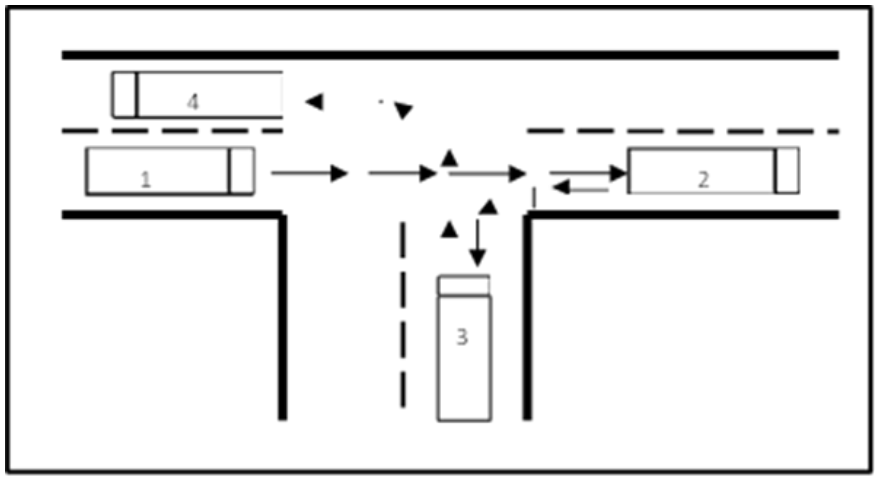
If straight-line backing is unavoidable, execute these safeguards:

- **The Physical Check:** Before stepping into the driver's seat, walk entirely around the rear bumper to confirm the path is clear.
- **Speed Controls:** Keep backing speeds down to a slow crawl (under 2 mph). Keep your foot hovering over the service brake pedal ("creeping"), and use your left and right flat mirrors to make small steering corrections.

- **Actuate Safeguards:** Turn on your four-way amber hazard flashers, tap your horn or ensure your backup alarm is sounding, and use an outside guide (spotter) whenever available.

Executing a Back-Up Turnaround (Y-Turn)

When a route requires a physical turnaround on a narrow roadway, perform the maneuver by backing into an intersection or side road, rather than backing out into main highway traffic:

- **Drive Past the Target Spot:** Signal your intent, drive past the side road entrance, and stop the bus along the right shoulder of the main highway.
- **Secure and Clear:** Activate your 4-way hazard lights and sound your horn. Check all mirrors thoroughly to confirm traffic has stopped.
- **Back into the Side Road:** Slowly reverse the vehicle, turning into the side road until the front bumper completely clears the main highway lane. Move at a slow, careful walking pace.
- **Re-Enter Traffic:** Deactivate your hazard lights, select first gear or Drive, activate your turn signal, and pull forward back onto the main roadway when clear.
- 

PART 6: RAILROAD AND LIGHT RAIL TRACK CROSSINGS

Crossing railroad or light rail tracks is one of the most critical safety routines a school bus operator performs. A mistake here can be catastrophic.

Railroad Crossings

Colorado Revised Statute 42-4-707

(1)

(a) Except as otherwise provided in this section, the driver of a school bus, as defined in subsection (5)(b) of this section, or the driver of a multifunction school activity bus, as defined in subsection (5)(a.5) of this section; the driver of a vehicle carrying hazardous materials that is required to be placarded in accordance with rules issued under section 42-20-108; or the driver of a commercial vehicle, as defined in section 42-4-235, that is transporting passengers, before crossing at grade any tracks of a railroad:

(I) Shall stop the vehicle within fifty feet but not less than fifteen feet from the nearest rail of the railroad;

(II) While stopped, shall listen and look in both directions along the track for any approaching train or on-track equipment or for signals indicating the approach of a train or on-track equipment; and

(III) Shall not proceed until the driver can do so safely.

(b) After stopping as required in this section and upon proceeding when it is safe to do so, the driver of a vehicle described in subsection (1)(a) of this section:

(I) Shall cross only if there is no necessity for changing gears while traversing the crossing; and

(II) Shall not manually shift gears while crossing the tracks.

A full mandatory stop is required at all passive and active commercial railroad crossings **UNLESS** one of the following conditions is legally met:

- The crossing is marked with an official "EXEMPT" sign.
- The crossing is actively regulated by a red/yellow/green traffic control signal (and the light is in the green position).
- Traffic is being manually directed by a police officer or a human flag person.

⚠️ **Important:** If none of these exemptions are present, a full stop is mandatory by law. If you are crossing an exempt or green-signal crossing, you must still reduce your speed, scan carefully in both directions, and be prepared to stop if conditions shift.

The Approach (Approx. 200 Feet Out)

As the bus approaches a commercial railroad crossing that requires a stop:

- **Signal Intentions:** Turn on your 4-way hazard lights at least **200 feet** prior to the nearest rail to give ample warning to motorists behind you.
- **Positioning:** Keep the bus as far to the right of the roadway as possible. Do not form two lanes of traffic unless the highway is specifically marked for four or more lanes of travel.
- **Do Not Coast:** Keep the vehicle firmly in gear; coasting in neutral or with the clutch disengaged during the approach is strictly prohibited.
- **Quiet the Bus:** Use a prearranged signal to alert all students to remain completely quiet. Turn off all noise-making equipment inside the cab, including the AM/FM radio, climate control fans, and heaters.

The Stop

- **Distance Requirements:** Bring the school bus to a full and complete stop. The front bumper must be positioned **no closer than 15 feet and no further than 50 feet** from the nearest rail.
- **Open and Observe:** Once a complete stop is made and student silence is achieved, fully open the driver’s side window and the front passenger service door.
- **Look and Listen:** Physically look and listen in both directions along the track(s) for any approaching trains, on-track maintenance equipment, or warning signals. Use the "Rock and Roll" method (moving your torso forward and back) to clear your view around the bus mirrors and structural blind spots.
- **At Night:** Turn off interior dome lights prior to making your observation to completely eliminate windshield reflection and glare.

The Containment Check ("If it won't fit, don't commit!")

Before deciding to cross, you must visually inspect the space on the other side of the tracks:

- Ensure there is adequate clearance and storage area on the opposite side of the train's right-of-way to hold the entire length of your bus, plus an additional 15 feet of safety buffer.

- If a traffic backup prevents you from clearing this threshold, do not proceed across the tracks, even if the signals or gates indicate it is clear.

- **Multi-Track Rule:** When crossing multiple sets of tracks, do not stop a second time unless the bus is completely clear of the first crossing and has at least 15 feet of clearance in both the front and the rear.

Crossing the Tracks

Once you have fully verified that the tracks are clear and the containment area is safe:

- **Close the Door:** The passenger service door **m**ust be completely closed before placing the bus in motion.

- **Select the Right Gear:** Shift the bus into a gear low enough to permit traversing the entirety of the tracks without needing to change gears mid-crossing.

- **Cross Without Shifting:** Proceed smoothly across the tracks. Manually shifting gears while crossing railroad tracks is strictly illegal under Colorado law to eliminate the risk of a stall.

- **Do Not Stop or Back Up:** Once you commit, never stop or attempt to back up the bus on a railroad crossing for any reason.

- **Deactivate Hazards:** Turn off your 4-way hazard lights only after the entire bus has completely cleared the final track.

15.0 Railroad Crossing Procedures

15.1 Mandatory Railroad Crossing Protocol for School Buses, Multifunction Buses, and Motor Coaches

15.1.1 Pursuant to C.R.S. 42-4-707, School Transportation Vehicle Operators of School Buses, Multifunction Buses, and Motor Coaches, whether transporting students or not, shall apply the following procedures during the process of approaching, stopping, and crossing railroad tracks.

(A) Activate the four-way hazard lamps not less than 200 feet from the railroad crossing to alert other motorists of the pending stop for the crossing;

(B) Stop the bus within 50 feet but not less than 15 feet from the nearest rail of the railway;

(C) When stopped, the bus shall be as far to the right of the roadway as possible and shall not form two lanes of traffic unless the highway is marked for four or more lanes of traffic; and

(D) Use a prearranged signal to alert students to the need for quiet aboard the bus when approaching railroad tracks. Turn off all noise-making equipment (fans, heater, radio, etc.).

(E) After quietness aboard the stopped bus has been achieved, School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall open the service door and operator window. The School Transportation Vehicle operator shall listen and look in both directions along the track(s) for any approaching train(s) and for signals indicating the approach of a train or on-track equipment.

(F) If the tracks are clear, the School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall close the service door and may then proceed in a gear low enough to permit crossing the tracks without having to manually shift gears. The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall cancel the four-way hazard lamps after the bus has cleared the tracks.

15.2 Clearance Requirements

15.2.1 Multi-track Crossings

(A) When two or more tracks are to be crossed, the School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall not stop a second time unless the bus is completely clear of the first crossing, with at least 15 feet clearance in the front and at least 15 feet clearance to the rear.

15.2.2 Storage Space

(A) Before crossing the tracks, the bus operator shall verify that there is enough space after the tracks for the bus plus 15 feet if it is necessary to stop after crossing the tracks.

15.3 Exceptions to Stop Requirements

15.3.1 School Transportation Vehicle Operators of Small-Capacity Vehicles are excepted from all requirements regarding railroad tracks.

15.3.2 School Transportation Vehicle Operators of School Buses, Multifunction Buses, and Motor Coaches are not required to stop at crossings controlled

(A) Only by a red, amber, or green traffic control signal when it is in the green position;

(B) Or when the crossing is controlled by a police officer or human flag person;

(C) Or when the crossing is marked with an official "exempt" sign placed on the railroad crossing light post or crossbucks post.

Light Rails

Light Rail Vehicles are six-axle, articulated, bi-directional rail vehicles powered by overhead electrical wires. Light rail tracks in and around downtown Denver pose extreme danger, and school transportation vehicle operators must exercise the utmost caution when approaching, traveling alongside, or crossing them.

Unlike traditional railroad tracks, RTD light rail tracks are often located within the same roadway used by motorists. In many areas, the tracks run parallel to traffic and may operate with or against the normal flow of traffic. RTD light rail tracks also cross several major streets throughout the Denver area. Because Light Rail Vehicles can travel in either direction, operators must carefully observe all sets of tracks before proceeding. Even after one train has cleared a crossing, another train may be approaching on a different track.

Light Rail Vehicles are very quiet and may appear to be moving more slowly than they actually are. Each car weighs approximately 40 tons and is equipped with a bell, an emergency siren, and three bright lights visible from two to three blocks away. Two lights are located in the normal headlight positions, and the third is centered near the top of the vehicle. Light Rail Vehicles are also equipped with turn signals to indicate their direction of travel.

In most locations, there are no physical barriers, such as curbs or medians, separating vehicle traffic from the light rail tracks. The rails are set in concrete and are lighter in

color than the surrounding asphalt; however, certain weather and lighting conditions can make this difference difficult to see. In some areas, tracks are located near parking areas, which may cause confusion for motorists regarding where vehicles may safely and legally park.

A yellow, diamond-shaped warning sign with a black symbol of a streetcar indicates the location of the LRV tracks. At intersections, or by the tracks, these signs have a black bi-directional arrow below the streetcar symbol. Before intersections, these signs have the term "AHEAD" below the streetcar symbol.

Before initiating a standard stop procedure, a driver must identify the layout of the light rail crossing. Per Colorado law, a full mandatory stop is **not** required if:

- The track is a "street railway" within a designated business district.
- Traffic at the crossing is actively regulated by a standard red/yellow/green traffic control signal (and the light is green).

⚠️ **Important:** Even if a stop is not legally mandated at a green-light traffic signal, the driver must still reduce speed, scan both directions, and be prepared to stop if the signal changes or an emergency arises. At all other light rail crossings (such as passive crossings or those with standard crossbucks/gates), the full stopping procedure below must be executed.

The Approach (Approx. 150–200 Feet Out)

Treat light rail crossings as a railroad crossing, except for the use of the hazard lights only when necessary, as they are not recommended or required. As the bus approaches a light rail crossing that requires a stop:

- **Decelerate:** Reduce the bus speed smoothly.
- **Signal Intentions:** Merge to the far-right lane as possible.

- **Do Not Coast:** Keep the vehicle in gear; coasting in neutral or with the clutch disengaged during an approach is strictly prohibited.
- **Quiet the Bus:** Turn off the AM/FM radio, climate control fans, and any other noisy equipment. Explicitly ask passengers to be silent so you can hear oncoming trains.

The Stop

- **If Required to Stop:** Flash the brake lights. Stopping on the tracks is unsafe and unlawful.
- **Positioning:** If required to stop, the front bumper must be no closer than 15 feet and no further than 50 feet from the nearest rail. Always observe the "Stop Here on Red" sign and the location of the white safety stripe (stop line) on the road surface.
- **Secure the Vehicle:** Keep your foot firmly pressed on the service brake to prevent rolling.
- **Look and Listen Light Controlled:** Traffic light-controlled intersections govern both the motorist and the LRV. Treat these intersections like any other traffic-controlled intersection. Look and listen in the appropriate directions for LRVs, motorists, and pedestrians before crossing the tracks.
- **Look and Listen Sign Controlled:** At stop sign-controlled intersections, the Colorado Department of Education recommends that a school bus operator, when stopped, open the driver's side window and service door. Look and listen in both directions for LRVs, motorists, and pedestrians. Close the service door before crossing the tracks.

The Containment Check ("If it won't fit, don't commit!")

Before deciding to cross, look across the tracks at the traffic flow ahead.

- You must ensure there is enough containment or storage area on the other side of the tracks to hold the entire length of your bus, plus an additional 15 feet of safety buffer.
- If traffic is backed up and you cannot fully clear the tracks into a safe zone on the other side, do not begin to cross, even if you have a green light or the gates are up.

PART 7: SYSTEM COMMUNICATIONS AND NIGHT OPERATIONS

Communicating clearly ensures your large vehicle is visible and your intentions are understood in all driving environments.

Standard Headlights

You should operate your low-beam headlights at all times while driving the vehicle, even during bright daylight hours. This increases your visibility to other motorists and helps pedestrians spot your vehicle from a distance. Clean your headlights during your pre-trip check to ensure maximum visibility.

Roof-Mounted White Strobe Lights

Under Colorado rules, this light is not meant for regular, clear-weather driving. You are permitted to use the roof strobe light only when:

- Your vehicle creates an unusual hazard for other motorists.
- You are loading or unloading students during severe, inclement weather (such as heavy fog, blinding snow, or dense rain).
- Structural barriers (like a sharp mountain ridge or a blind curve) block the view of oncoming traffic, and the strobe is needed to help other drivers see the bus.
- Your vehicle has broken down or is moving at a speed of 25 miles per hour or slower, in which case the strobe can be paired with your four-way hazard flashers to warn traffic.

12.2.3 Strobe Lamp Usage

(A) Roof-mounted strobe lamps are permitted only to:

(1) Enhance visibility of the School Transportation Vehicle when visibility is reduced to 1000 feet or less due to lighting or unfavorable atmospheric conditions.

(2) Warn other motorists in conjunction with four-way hazard lamps when the School Transportation Vehicle is traveling at 25 mph or less or is stationary and presents a hazard to traffic.

(3) Enhance visibility while the School Transportation Vehicle is performing safety-sensitive functions.

Required Use of Hazard Warning Lights

Colorado Model Traffic Code rules dictate specific conditions when an operator must activate their four-way amber hazard flashers:

- Whenever the vehicle is traveling at a speed of 25 mph or slower on a public highway.
- When the vehicle is stopped or disabled on the roadway due to a mechanical breakdown, medical emergency, or severe weather conditions.

Colorado Model Traffic Code 215 – Signal Lamps and Devices

(7) Any vehicle may be equipped with lamps which may be used for the purpose of warning the operators of other vehicles of the presence of a vehicular traffic hazard requiring the exercise of unusual care in approaching, overtaking, or passing and, when so equipped and when the said vehicle is not in motion or is being operated at a speed of twenty-five miles per hour or less and at no other time, may display such warning in addition to any other warning signals required by this Code. The lamps used to display such warning to the front shall be mounted at the same level and as widely spaced laterally as practicable and shall display simultaneously flashing white or amber lights, or any shade of color between white and amber. The lamps used to display such warning to the rear shall be mounted at the same level and as widely spaced laterally as practicable and, except as provided in section 204, shall show simultaneously flashing amber or red lights, or any shade of color between amber and red. These warning lights shall be visible from a distance of not less than five hundred feet under normal atmospheric conditions at night.

Colorado Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection of School Transportation Vehicles (1 CCR 301-26) additional conditions when an operator must activate their four-way amber hazard flashers:

- As a warning when approaching any railroad track crossing or preparing to execute a back-up turnaround maneuver.

12.3.2 Safe Backing Procedures

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall exercise extreme caution when backing. Before reversing on a roadway, highway, or private property:

(1) Four-way hazard lamps shall be actuated; and

(2) The horn or audible warning device shall be sounded, or a spotter must be positioned outside the vehicle to give direction.

14.3.2 Operational Constraints and Exceptions

(B) Four-way hazard lamps shall be used on private property, such as parking lots.

15.1 Mandatory Railroad Crossing Protocol for School Buses, Multifunction Buses, and Motorcoaches

15.1.1 Pursuant to C.R.S. 42-4-707, School Transportation Vehicle Operators of School Buses, Multifunction Buses, and Motor Coaches, whether transporting students or not, shall apply the following procedures during the process of approaching, stopping, and crossing railroad tracks.

(A) Activate the four-way hazard lamps not less than 200 feet from the railroad crossing to alert other motorists of the pending stop for the crossing;

Horns, Warning Devices, and Communicating

- **The Horn Rule:** The horn is a safety tool, not an instrument for venting anger. Use a quick, gentle tap ("city blow") to alert pedestrians or drivers who aren't paying attention at intersections or backing lanes. Avoid holding down the horn, as other drivers can tune it out.
- **Non-Verbal Safety Communication:** Use your brake lights early to warn drivers behind you that you are slowing down. Never use hand gestures to wave another driver across an intersection, as this can make you legally liable if they pull out into an unseen collision.

Advanced Driving at Night

Night driving brings unique safety challenges because visibility drops significantly:

- **The Low-Beam Target:** Switch your high beams to low beams within 500 feet of an oncoming vehicle or within 300 feet of a vehicle you are trailing.
- **Glare Mitigation:** To keep from being blinded by oncoming high beams, look down toward the right fog line (or white shoulder line) of your lane rather than staring directly into the glare.

Part 8: TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICES AND SIGNAGE

As a professional driver, you must follow every traffic sign, signal, and line painted on the road. These markings aren't just suggestions; they tell you who has the right-of-way, set the speed limit, and warn you about what's coming up ahead, like a sharp curve or a hidden intersection. To stay safe and legal, you need to understand the main types of road signs and know exactly how to adjust your driving for each one.

Driving Through Road Warnings

Warning signs give you time to prepare for what's coming. Because a school bus is tall, heavy, and long, you need to adjust your driving early:

- **Curves and Turns:** When you see a curve sign, slow down *before* you enter the turn. Buses are top-heavy, and going into a curve too fast can cause the bus to lean dangerously or slide.
- **Roads Getting Narrower:** If lanes merge or a bridge is narrow, check your mirrors immediately to make sure you have enough space around your bus.
- **Roundabouts:** Watch the signs early to choose the correct lane before you enter. Once your bus is inside a roundabout, never stop. Keep moving smoothly until you reach your exit.

Sign Shapes and Colors: What They Mean at a Glance

Traffic signs are color-coded and shaped differently so you can recognize them instantly, even from far away or in bad weather.

SHAPE	COLOR	WHAT IT MEANS
Octagon (8-sided)	Red	You must bring the vehicle to a complete stop behind the white line.
Triangle (Pointing Down)	Red and White	Yield. Slow down and watch for other traffic or hazards.
Diamond	Yellow and Black	Warning. This warns you of a hazard or a change in the road ahead.
Pentagon (5-sided)	Bright Yellow-Green	School zone or school crossing. Watch closely for children
Pennant (Flag-shaped)	Yellow and Black	No Passing Zone. This is placed on the left side of the road to indicate that passing is unsafe.
Vertical Rectangle	White	Laws and Rules. These tell you the speed limit or which lane you must turn from.
Horizontal Rectangle	Green or Blue	Directions and Information. Green tells you where the exits and towns are. Blue tells you where services like hospitals are.
Round	Yellow and Black	Railroad crossing ahead
Standardized shapes	Orange and Black	Construction, utility, and maintenance zones signify a highly volatile roadway environment.

Types of Signs

Regulatory

Regulatory signs inform highway users of traffic laws or regulations. Regulatory signs are used to control speeds, such as maximum and minimum speed limits, and turning movements. For example, you may recognize these signs with a red circle and a slash mark, which means “no” or “do not.” Regulatory signs control parking. When parking is prohibited, the parking signs have red lettering, such as “No Parking at Any Time,” “No Stopping, Standing, or Parking,” or “No Parking, Bus Stop.” When parking is permitted, the lettering is green, such as “One Hour Parking.”

Regulatory signs can also supplement information given by traffic signals, such as “Stop Here on Red” or “Crosswalk.” Finally, regulatory signs are used for a variety of other controls, such as providing the axle weight limit (GVWR) or “Road Closed to Through Traffic.”

Warning Signs

Warning signs inform the driver of situations ahead that may require extra care. Warning signs can show changes in horizontal alignments, such as turns, curves, and winding roads. Distinct types of intersections ahead are indicated symbolically. These signs can indicate a crossroads or a “T” or “Y” intersection. Advance warnings for traffic control devices can be provided. Warning signs can also indicate highway grades, advance warning of railroad crossings, and roadway surface conditions, such as bumps, soft shoulders, and slippery conditions. They also show various kinds of entrances and crossings, such as truck entrances, deer crossings, and bicycle crossings.

Guide Signs

Guide signs are the third major classification of traffic signs. They guide drivers along streets and highways, inform them of intersecting routes, or direct them to their destination, be it a city, river, park, or similar type of destination. On conventional roads and streets, black messages on white backgrounds are frequently used as an alternative. Two of the most typical guide signs are the familiar destination and mileage signs. On some interchanges, symbolic destination signs are used.

Mileposts are another form of guide sign. Mileage always runs from south to north or west to east and begins at the state line or at a junction where the route begins. Guide signs are also used to show the locations of airports, bus stations, and train stations.

Electronic Traffic Signals: Lights and Arrows

Traffic lights change colors to safely separate the flow at intersections. Because a bus takes longer to accelerate and stop, you must always look ahead to see what the light is doing.

- **Steady Red Light:** Stop completely behind the painted stop line or crosswalk. Remain stopped until the light changes to green.
- **Steady Yellow Light (The "Stale" Light):** The light is about to turn red. If you have not reached the intersection yet, you must slow down and stop safely. Never speed up a heavy bus to try and "beat" a yellow light. If you are already *inside* the intersection when the light turns yellow, continue through smoothly.

- **Steady Green Light:** Go, but proceed with caution. Always look left, right, and ahead before entering the intersection to make sure a cross-traffic car isn't running its red light.
- **Flashing Red Light:** Treat this exactly like a stop sign. Come to a complete stop, look all ways, yield to traffic already there, and proceed when it is safe.
- **Flashing Yellow Light:** Proceed with caution. You do not need to stop, but you must slow down, scan for hazards, and be ready to brake if someone pulls out in front of you.
- **Red Arrow:** You are strictly prohibited from turning or moving in the direction of the arrow.
- **Green Arrow:** You have a "protected" turn. This means oncoming traffic has a red light, and you can safely make your turn. However, you must still watch for pedestrians in the crosswalk.
- **Flashing Yellow Arrow:** You may turn in the direction of the arrow, but you *do not* have the right-of-way. You must yield to all oncoming traffic and pedestrians first, then turn when there is a safe gap.

Painted Road Markings: Lines and Stripes

The painted lines on the asphalt tell you where you are allowed to position your bus and when it is legal to change lanes.

Yellow Lines (Separate traffic moving in opposite directions)

- **Broken (Dotted) Yellow Line:** You may cross this line to pass a slower vehicle if it is safe to do so.
- **Double Solid Yellow Lines:** Passing is strictly prohibited for vehicles traveling in both directions. You must stay in your lane.
- **Solid Yellow Line Next to a Broken Yellow Line:** Look at the line closest to your bus. If the line closest to you is broken, you may pass if it's safe. If the line closest to you is solid, you are in a **No Passing Zone** and must stay in your lane.

White Lines (Separate traffic moving in the same direction, or mark the road edge)

- **Broken (Dotted) White Line:** This separates lanes of traffic moving the same way. You may safely cross this line to change lanes after checking your mirrors and turning on your signal.

- **Solid White Line:** This is a lane boundary where lane changes are discouraged because it is a higher-risk area (like right before an intersection or inside a tunnel). You should stay in your lane unless it is an emergency.
- **Double Solid White Lines:** Changing lanes is completely illegal. You must remain in your lane.
- **Solid White Edge Line (Fog Line):** This marks the outer right edge of the drivable road surface. It helps you see where the shoulder begins during heavy rain or at night.

Special Intersection Markings

- **Stop Lines (Solid White Bars):** These are wide white lines painted across your lane at intersections and stop signs. You must stop *behind* this line so that the front bumper of your bus does not protrude into cross traffic or block walking paths.
- **Crosswalks (White Parallel Lines or Zebra Stripes):** These are dedicated zones for pedestrians. You must never stop the bus on top of a crosswalk, forcing walkers into traffic. Always yield to pedestrians inside these lines.
- **White Lane Arrows:** Some lanes have white arrows painted directly on the pavement (such as a straight arrow combined with a left-turn arrow). You must follow the direction of the arrow painted in your lane.

Delineators

A “Delineator” is a retro-reflective device mounted above the roadway surface and along the side of the roadway in a series to indicate the alignment of the roadway, especially at night or in adverse weather. Below are some specifics on delineators.

- **Delineator Posts:** Posts that are interstate green with colored reflectors. They are in elevated-risk and informational areas of roadways to convey a variety of messages to motorists.
- **Delineator Panels**: Retro-reflective panels that are striped markers consisting of a vertical rectangle with alternating black and yellow stripes sloping downward at an angle of 45 degrees toward the side of the obstruction on which traffic is to pass. These types of delineators can be seen at the end of guardrails, on bridges, etc.

Delineator Color Combinations

- **White Delineators:** These mark the right side of the road.

- **Amber or Yellow Delineators:** These mark the left edge of a divided highway or median.

- **Three Vertically Stacked Amber (Yellow) Front Delineators:** These are called "Object Markers." They tell you there is a solid physical hazard (i.e., a concrete bridge wall or a large drainage pipe) right next to the road. The post is placed exactly where the object starts, letting you know just how close your bus can safely get.

- **Two White Front and One Red Rear Delineators:** These are designed to warn motorists of acceleration and deceleration lanes ahead. The red reflector warns motorists that they are going the wrong way.

- **Two Amber (Yellow) Front and One Red Rear Delineators:** These are normally installed in medians for left-turn deceleration lanes.

- **Blue Front Delineators or Blue Reflective Panels On Interstates:** These mean two things. First, a double blue reflector warns emergency vehicles that a median crossover (a gap where police and snowplows can turn around) is 500 feet ahead. Second, they mark the joints on a bridge so that snowplow drivers know where to raise their blades to avoid damaging it. Bus drivers are legally prohibited from using these median turnarounds.

- **Blue Front Delineators or Blue Reflective Panels on Local Roads:** These show the exact location of a fire hydrant or water main. Never park or idle the bus in front of a blue marker, as emergency crews must have clear access to the water.

- **Three Green Front Delineators:** These are for Department of Transportation maintenance workers. These are installed in front of approaching guardrails with flare ends, not on bridges. They can be found in front of curb heads.

- **Red Delineators:** When a red delineator or red reflective panel is used on a roadway, it serves an immediate, critical warning function: it indicates danger, a strict prohibition, or a wrong-way condition.

    - If you see red reflectors on the pavement or on the side posts, you have accidentally entered an exit ramp or are driving against oncoming traffic. The immediate professional action required is to safely pull over, stop, and turn the vehicle around.

- On steep mountain passes, red delineators or red reflective panels are used at the very back or upper limits of a runaway truck ramp to mark the final boundary of the safety gravel bed and warn drivers of the impending end of the escape lane.
- Red delineators are often placed on barricades or posts at the physical end of a street to warn drivers at night that the road does not continue.
- When configured as a group of reflectors on a post immediately adjacent to a bridge or guardrail approach, a red or red-and-white striped panel (known as an object marker) warns drivers of a fixed structural hazard. It outlines the exact lateral clearance limit of an obstruction on the right shoulder, telling a long-wheelbase vehicle precisely how far it can maneuver before striking a physical barrier.

PART 9: TRAVEL HAZARDS, ROAD RAGE, AND FEDERAL LAWS

Hazards on the Road

Professional drivers must actively spot and handle three main types of en route hazards:

- **Work Zones:** Slow down immediately when entering road construction zones. Watch for lane shifts, uneven pavement, and flaggers holding stop paddles.
- **Pedestrian/Bicycle Incursions:** Give bicyclists at least a **3-foot safety buffer** when passing them on the shoulder. Watch closely for children running into the street near parks, schools, and apartment complexes.
- **Roadway Debris:** If you spot debris like blown truck tires or boxes in your lane, check your mirrors before braking hard or swerving. If you cannot change lanes safely, slow down as much as possible to glide over the debris without damaging your air lines or steering systems.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-802 Pedestrians' Right-of-Way

(1) When traffic control signals are not in place or not in operation, the driver of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way, slowing down or stopping if need be to so yield, to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within a crosswalk when the pedestrian is upon the half of the roadway upon which the vehicle is traveling or when the pedestrian is approaching so closely from the opposite half of the roadway as to be in danger.

Road Rage

Road rage and aggressive driving are some of the most dangerous challenges you'll face on the road. When you are behind the wheel of a massive vehicle filled with students, handling these situations professionally isn't just about customer service; it's about protecting your passengers.

It helps to know the difference between a driver who is just rushing and one who has completely lost control.

- **Aggressive Driving (A Traffic Offense):** This is selfish, impatient driving. It looks like tailgating your bus, speeding past you to cut you off, weaving through traffic, or honking at your bus because it stops at railroad crossings.
- **Road Rage (A Criminal Offense):** This happens when a driver's anger escalates into an active attempt to harm you, your bus, or your students. This includes forcing your bus off the road, stopping in front of you to block your path, yelling threats, throwing objects, or brandishing a weapon.

If another driver is targeting your bus or driving erratically around you, follow these rules immediately:

- **Avoid Escalation:** If a motorist cuts you off, tailgates your bumper, or honks aggressively, do not make eye contact or gesture back. Breathe deeply, maintain your speed, and look for a safe place to pull over so they can pass.
- **Get Out of Their Way:** Do not try to block them, "teach them a lesson," or match their speed. If someone is tailgating the bus, safely pull over or change lanes
- **Do Not Use Your Horn Aggressively:** Only use your horn if it is absolutely necessary to avoid a crash. A loud, angry honk can trigger an aggressive driver into a full-blown road rage episode.
- **Protect Your Bus:** Keep your doors locked and windows rolled up. If an angry driver gets out of their car and approaches your bus, **do not open the door.**
- **Reporting:** If an aggressive driver threatens your bus or follows you down your route, call dispatch immediately on your fleet radio, give your location, and request law enforcement assistance.

FMCSA Mobile Phone Restriction Rules

Under strict Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) safety rules, commercial drivers face heavy penalties for using mobile phones:

- **The Hand-Held Prohibition:** Commercial operators are strictly prohibited from holding, dialing, or reading text messages on a mobile phone while driving. This includes when stopped at red lights or in traffic delays.
- **The Fines:** Violating these rules can result in heavy personal fines (up to $2,750), driver disqualification, and severe civil penalties for your school district or service provider. All mobile devices must be turned off or set to a hands-free configuration that can be operated with a single button press from the driver's seat.

Colorado Hands-Free Law

In a move to enhance road safety and reduce distracted-driving crashes, a new Colorado law that took effect in 2025 prohibits drivers from using a mobile electronic device while driving, though hands-free accessories are permitted. The law expands the ban on using cellphones beyond just texting. It now includes holding or manually using a phone or other mobile device for voice calls or any other reason, requiring all drivers to use a hands-free device.

The law includes exemptions for individuals reporting emergencies, utility workers, code enforcement officers, animal protection officers, first responders, and individuals in parked vehicles. The law also does not apply to an individual with a commercial driver's license operating a commercial vehicle. These exceptions ensure that critical communications are not hindered in emergency or essential service situations.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-239 Use of a Mobile Electronic Device

(4)

(a) Except as provided in subsection (4)(b) of this section, an individual who violates this section commits a class A traffic infraction, and the court shall assess a penalty as follows:

(I) A fine of $75.00 and a surcharge of $10.00 for the first offense within the immediately preceding 24 months;

(II) A fine of $150.00 and a surcharge of $10.00 dollars for the second offense within the immediately preceding 24 months; or

(III) A fine of $250.00 and a surcharge of $10.00 for the third or subsequent offense within the immediately preceding 24 months.

(5) This section does not apply to an individual with a commercial driver’s license who is operating a commercial vehicle.

Colorado Move Over Law

Roadside spaces are incredibly dangerous environments. Colorado State Patrol and CDOT records demonstrate that roadside crashes are among the most preventable secondary collisions on public highways. As a school transportation operator, you must strictly comply with Colorado's "Slow Down, Move Over" statutes to protect emergency personnel, maintenance crews, and disabled motorists.

The Full-Coverage Mandate (HB 23-1123 Expansion)

Historically, Move Over laws applied exclusively to police cars, fire engines, ambulances, and tow trucks. Under current Colorado law, the Move Over law applies to ALL stationary vehicles parked on the side of the road with their hazard lights flashing**.** You must afford the exact same defensive space cushion and speed reductions to a disabled private passenger car or a stranded box truck that you would provide to a marked state patrol cruiser.

Step-by-Step Compliance

When you spot any vehicle stopped on the shoulder or roadside ahead with emergency lights, flashing strobes, or 4-way amber hazard lights activated, you must execute the following sequence:

- **Step 1: Move Over Safely (The Primary Goal):** If you are traveling on a highway with at least two lanes moving in your direction (such as an interstate or divided highway), you must perform a safe lane change to vacate the lane immediately next to the stopped vehicle. This leaves a full empty buffer lane between your bus and the workers or motorists.
- **Step 2: The Mandatory Speed Drop (If You Cannot Clear the Lane):** If heavy traffic gridlock makes it unsafe to switch lanes, or if you are operating on a narrow, two-lane road with only one lane in each direction, you are legally required to significantly lower your speed as you pass:
    - On roads with a posted speed limit under 45 mph, you must slow down to a maximum of 25 mph.
    - On roads with a posted speed limit of 45 mph or higher, you must drop your speed by at least 20 mph below the posted limit. *(For example, in a 65 mph zone, you must pass the scene at 45 mph or slower).*

Statutory Penalties and Driver Accountability

Failing to slow down or move over is a serious traffic offense in Colorado. Because you are operating a large student transportation vehicle, you are held to the highest standard of accountability:

- **Standard Non-Compliance:** A standard ticket for failing to move over or slow down is a Class 2 misdemeanor traffic infraction, carrying a minimum $150 fine and a 3-point deduction against your commercial or standard driver's license.
- **Bodily Injury Escalation:** If an operator fails to comply with the Move Over law and causes bodily injury to someone on the roadside, the charge upgrades to a Class 1 misdemeanor, punishable by fines up to $5,000 and 6 to 18 months in jail.
- **Fatal Escalation:** If non-compliance results in a roadside fatality, the operator faces a Class 6 Felony prosecution, bringing mandatory prison sentences and catastrophic personal liability.

Defensive Rule: Never panic or swerve blindly into an adjacent lane when seeing roadside hazard lights. Scan your mirrors early, activate your turn signal to warn trailing traffic of your intent to shift over, and begin reducing your speed smoothly ahead of time if the adjacent lane is blocked.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-705 Operation of a Vehicle Approached by an Emergency Vehicle or the Operation of a Vehicle Approaching a Stationary Vehicle

(1) Upon the immediate approach of an authorized emergency vehicle making use of audible or visual signals meeting the requirements of section 42-4-213 or 42-4-222, the driver of every other vehicle shall yield the right-of-way and where possible shall immediately clear the farthest left-hand lane lawfully available to through traffic and shall drive to a position parallel to, and as close as possible to, the right-hand edge or curb of a roadway clear of any intersection and shall stop and remain in that position until the authorized emergency vehicle has passed, except when otherwise directed by a police officer.

(2)

(a) A driver in a motor vehicle shall exhibit due care and caution and proceed as described in subsections (2)(b) and (2)(c) of this section when approaching or passing:

(I) A stationary authorized emergency vehicle, including a port of entry vehicle, that is giving a visual signal by means of flashing, rotating,

or oscillating red, blue, or white lights as permitted by section 42-4-213 or 42-4-222;

(II) A stationary towing carrier vehicle that is giving a visual signal by means of flashing, rotating, or oscillating yellow lights;

(III) A stationary public utility service vehicle that is operated by a public utility, as defined in section 39-4-101 or 40-1-103, or an authorized contractor of the public utility and that is giving a visual signal by means of flashing, rotating, or oscillating amber lights; or

(IV) A stationary motor vehicle giving a hazard signal by displaying alternately flashing lights or displaying warning lights.

(b) On a highway with at least two adjacent lanes proceeding in the same direction on the same side of the highway where a stationary vehicle described in subsection (2)(a) of this section is located, the driver of an approaching or passing vehicle shall proceed with due care and caution and yield the right-of-way by moving into a lane at least one moving lane apart from the stationary vehicle described in subsection (2)(a) of this section unless directed otherwise by a peace officer or other authorized emergency personnel. If movement to an adjacent moving lane is not possible due to weather, road conditions, or the immediate presence of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, the driver of the approaching motor vehicle shall proceed in the manner described in subsection (2)(c) of this section.

(c)

(I) On a highway that does not have at least two adjacent lanes proceeding in the same direction on the same side of the highway where a stationary vehicle described in subsection (2)(a) of this section is located, or if movement by the driver of the approaching motor vehicle into an adjacent moving lane, as described in subsection (2)(b) of this section, is not possible, the driver of an approaching motor vehicle shall reduce and maintain a safe speed with regard to the location of the stationary vehicle described in subsection (2)(a) of this section; weather conditions; road conditions; and vehicular or pedestrian traffic and proceed with due care and caution, or as directed by a peace officer or other authorized emergency personnel.

(II) For the purposes of this subsection (2)(c), the following speeds are presumed to be safe unless the speeds are unsafe for the conditions as provided in section 42-4-1101 (1) and (3):

(A) If the speed limit is less than forty-five miles per hour, twenty-five miles per hour or less; or

(B) If the speed limit is forty-five miles per hour or more, twenty miles per hour less than the speed limit.

(2.5)

(a) A driver in a vehicle that is approaching or passing a maintenance, repair, or construction vehicle that is moving at less than twenty miles per hour shall exhibit due care and caution and proceed as described in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this subsection (2.5).

(b) On a highway with at least two adjacent lanes proceeding in the same direction on the same side of the highway where a stationary or slow-moving maintenance, repair, or construction vehicle is located, the driver of an approaching or passing vehicle shall proceed with due care and caution and yield the right-of-way by moving into a lane at least one moving lane apart from the vehicle, unless directed otherwise by a peace officer or other authorized emergency personnel. If movement to an adjacent moving lane is not possible due to weather, road conditions, or the immediate presence of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, the driver of the approaching vehicle shall proceed in the manner described in paragraph (c) of this subsection (2.5).

(c) On a highway that does not have at least two adjacent lanes proceeding in the same direction on the same side of the highway where a stationary or slow-moving maintenance, repair, or construction vehicle is located, or if movement by the driver of the approaching vehicle into an adjacent moving lane, as described in paragraph (b) of this subsection (2.5), is not possible, the driver of an approaching vehicle shall reduce and maintain a safe speed with regard to the location of the stationary or slow-moving maintenance, repair, or construction vehicle, weather conditions, road conditions, and vehicular or pedestrian traffic, and shall proceed with due care and caution, or as directed by a peace officer or other authorized emergency personnel.

(2.6) A driver in a vehicle that is approaching or passing a motor vehicle where the tires are being equipped with chains on the side of the highway shall exhibit due care and caution and proceed as described in subsection (2) of this section. The driver of a motor vehicle that is being equipped with chains shall give a hazard signal by displaying alternately flashing lights or displaying warning lights.

(3)

(a) Any person who violates subsection (1) of this section commits a class A traffic infraction.

(b)

(I) Except as otherwise provided in subsections (3)(b)(II) and (3)(b)(III) of this section, any person who violates subsection (2), (2.5), or (2.6) of this section commits careless driving as described in section 42-4-1402.

(II) If the person violates subsection (2) of this section and the person's actions are the proximate cause of bodily injury to another person, the person commits a class 1 traffic misdemeanor.

(III) If the person violates subsection (2) of this section and the person's actions are the proximate cause of the death of another person, the person commits a class 6 felony and shall be punished as described in section 18-1.3-401.

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Unit Six – Adverse Weather and Mountain Driving

This unit includes information on adverse weather conditions and driving in the mountains, driving techniques, and driving school transportation vehicles in all weather conditions experienced in Colorado. Becoming aware of the effects of the conditions will provide the understanding required to respond correctly. Should you slow down, pull over, or decide to reschedule? Safety must be the driver's primary concern.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-1902 School vehicle drivers – special training required

On and after July 1, 1992, the driver of a school vehicle as defined in section 42-1-102 (88.5) owned or operated by or for a school district in this state shall have successfully completed training concerning driving on mountainous terrain, as defined in section 42-4-1901(3)(a), and driving in adverse weather conditions.

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING WEATHER WATCHES AND WARNINGS

Weather Watch: Be Prepared

A watch is issued when the risk of a hazardous weather or hydrologic event has increased significantly, but its occurrence, location, or timing remains uncertain. It is intended to provide sufficient lead time for those who need to set their plans in motion. A watch means that hazardous weather is possible.

- **When it's issued:** Usually 12 to 48 hours in advance to give you time to set plans in motion.
- **What you should do:** Have a safety plan ready. Monitor local forecasts, review emergency kits, and prepare to take action if the watch is upgraded.

Weather Advisory: Be Aware

An advisory is issued when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, imminent, or likely. Advisories are for less serious conditions than warnings.

- **When it's issued:** When conditions cause significant inconvenience, but are not immediately life-threatening.
- **What you should do:** Stay alert, use caution, and adjust your plans as necessary.

Weather Warning: Take Action

A warning is issued when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, imminent, or likely. A warning means weather conditions pose a threat to life or property.

- **When it's issued:** When there is an 80% or greater probability of severe weather. It requires immediate protective action.
- **What you should do:** Take shelter or implement your emergency plan right away.

PART 2: DRIVING IN HIGH WINDS AND TORNADOES

Wind

Intense winds pose significant challenges to operating a school bus. Steering becomes more difficult, and staying within the travel lane is a struggle during high winds. Wind gusts can exert pressure on the side of the bus, leading to sideways thrust. In extreme cases, roof hatches have been known to pop open and tear off, highlighting the severity of the situation.

Overcompensated steering can cause the bus to tip over or leave the travel lane. Wind may blow debris around that could hit the bus, causing damage or injuries.

High winds increase just before and at the beginning of a change in the weather. Visibility can be severely impaired during thunderstorms, dust storms, and blizzards. Operators should be cautious when crossing bridges and overpasses, driving between hills, exiting tunnels, on open straightaways, and passing high-profile vehicles.

Tips for Driving in Intense Winds

- Grip
- Keep a firm grip on the steering wheel.
- Anticipate the wind gusts.
- Speed reduction
- Reduce speed to lessen the effect of the wind
- Pull-over
- Pull off the road and wait it out

- Pull onto a solid shoulder, side road, or parking lot
- Call
- Contact your school district, charter school, or service provider to convey the situation and ask for further instructions.
- Observe your surroundings
- Watch for blowing debris, falling trees, or downed power lines.
- Reduced visibility may occur from blowing dust, sand, rain, or snow.
- Prepare
- Always be prepared for the unexpected.

Tornadoes

A tornado is a violently rotating column of air. In the northern hemisphere, tornadoes rotate counterclockwise. They develop in warm, moist air before an eastward-moving cold front. Most tornadoes move southwest to northeast. The average forward speed of a tornado is 30 mph, but it can be up to 70 mph.

When the temperature is between 65 and 84 degrees, and the dew point is above 50, the dangers of a tornado are at their highest. Tornadoes often accompany severe thunderstorms.

Tornadoes are common in eastern Colorado. Though rare, tornadoes are possible in the mountains, foothills, and western valleys.

Tornado Signs

- Green-colored sky
- Hail
- Wall cloud
- Funnel cloud

Many say a tornado sounds like a freight train approaching. If it does not appear to be moving, a tornado may be coming toward you. If you are on the bus and see a tornado, evacuate to a safe location, preferably a building.

When in a building, go to an interior room or basement, away from windows, and have all passengers sit and cover their heads with their hands.

When in the direct path of a sighted tornado and shelter in a building is unavailable and an evacuation is ordered, escort passengers to a nearby ditch, culvert, or depression. Direct all passengers to lie face down on the ground with their hands covering their heads. They should be far enough away so the bus cannot topple on them.

Avoid areas subject to flash floods. Never go under a bridge or overpass, which can become the equivalent of a wind tunnel.

Downbursts - Micro and Macro

Downbursts

These are also known as straight-line winds and are intense winds formed when air falls quickly to the ground and then disperses outward from the point of impact. The term downburst encompasses both macro and microbursts. The key distinction between microbursts and macrobursts is their size and duration. However, both types can unleash winds exceeding 100 mph, causing significant damage.

Microbursts

A microburst is a small, focused downburst that releases a sudden burst of intense winds at or near the ground. Microbursts are compact, measuring less than 2.5 miles across, and typically last only 5-10 minutes. There are two types of microbursts: wet and dry. A wet microburst occurs alongside heavy rainfall at the surface, whereas dry microbursts, often found in areas like the high plains and the intermountain west, happen with minimal to no precipitation reaching the ground.

Macrobursts

A macroburst is a sudden outflow of intense winds at or near the ground, spanning horizontal distances greater than 2.5 miles, which occurs when a powerful downdraft hits the surface. Initially, macroburst winds may start in a small region and then expand into a broader area, sometimes causing damage similar to that of a tornado. While they are typically linked to thunderstorms, macrobursts can also happen with light showers that lack sufficient strength to generate thunder.

They are hard to detect, so be careful when thunderstorms and high winds are in the area.

Other types of High Wind Weather

Gust Front

A gust front refers to the leading edge of cool air generated by rain, which collides with the inflowing warmer air of a thunderstorm. These gust fronts are distinguished by changes in wind direction, a drop in temperature, and gusty winds that precede a thunderstorm. Occasionally, these winds can elevate air above them, resulting in the formation of a shelf cloud or a detached roll cloud.

Derecho

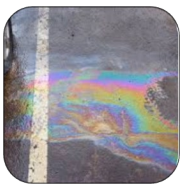
A derecho is a common, long-lasting windstorm linked to a swiftly advancing band of showers or thunderstorms. Typically, a derecho includes many microbursts, downbursts, and clusters of downbursts. According to the definition, an event can be categorized as a derecho if the damage path extends over 240 miles and features wind gusts of 58 mph or higher for most of its length.

PART 3: RAIN, WATER HAZARDS, AND HYDROPLANING

Rain

While drivers naturally respect snow and ice, federal highway data reveals that rain is actually the most dangerous weather threat on public roads, accounting for nearly 50% of all weather-related crashes and out-ranking snow and ice combined. Wet pavement drastically reduces your tires' ability to grip the road, which reduces overall roadway capacity and lowers traffic speeds by 10% to 25%. Professional drivers must master three primary threats during a rain event:

The Three Threats of Rain



Slick Film
- First 10 minutes are the most dangerous
- Oil mixes with light water
- Severe at intersections

Hydroplaning
- Tires float on a sheet of water
- Occurs most typically at speeds above 35 mph
- Steer straight; do not brake!

Refraction Glare
- Water scatters light beams
- Blurs road lines and signs
- Blind spots are magnified

Rain is a major driving adversity that reduces tire traction, limits visibility, and extends stopping distances. Standing water on the roadway may lead to additional challenges, such as hydroplaning or hiding obstacles such as potholes. Rain can interfere with vehicle safety features like Automatic Emergency Braking and Lane-Keeping Assist.

The First Rain (10-Minute Rule)

During dry weather, oil, grease, and rubber dust build up on the asphalt. When it first begins to rain, this light moisture mixes with the oils to create an incredibly slick, greasy film. The first 10 minutes of a rainfall are the most dangerous**.** Traction drops immediately, especially at high-traffic intersections where vehicles idle and drip fluids. Do not assume the road is safe just because the rain is light; wait until a heavy downpour has completely washed the oil residue off the pavement before trusting your tire grip.

Visual Distortions and Spray

Rain alters how light travels. Raindrops on your windows bend and scatter light beams (refraction), creating a grayish haze that blurs road signs and lane lines. At night, wet roads act like giant mirrors, reflecting oncoming headlights and streetlights into an intense glare that can temporarily blind you. Additionally, the massive tires of passing semi-trucks throw off a heavy, blinding spray of dirty water. This spray can instantly coat

your windshield and mirrors, completely blocking your view. You must keep your windshield wipers in perfect condition. Additionally, activate your low-beam headlights (never high beams, which reflect right back into your eyes), and use your window defroster to keep the glass from fogging up inside.

Thunderstorms

A thunderstorm is a rain event accompanied by thunder. As thunder results from lightning, every thunderstorm features lightning. A thunderstorm is deemed "severe" if it includes one or more of the following elements:

- Hail one inch or greater,
- Winds gusting in excess of 57.5 mph, or
- A tornado

Thunderstorms typically occur in spring and summer, primarily in the afternoon and evening, though they can happen at any time of year. They are often associated with hazardous weather events. When conditions are favorable, the rainfall from thunderstorms can lead to flash flooding.

Severe Thunderstorm Watch

The NOAA Storm Prediction Center meteorologists issue a severe thunderstorm WATCH when weather conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms. A watch can cover parts of a state or several states.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning

A Severe Thunderstorm WARNING is issued by the NOAA National Weather Service Forecast Office meteorologists when severe weather is reported by spotters or detected by radar. Warnings indicate a serious threat to life and property for those in the storm's path. A warning may encompass parts of one or more counties at risk.

Lightning

Sudden storms can produce lightning. If a severe storm produces lightning, the safest place is in the vehicle; roll the windows up, and avoid contact with any conductive paths leading to the outside of the vehicle (e.g., radios, CBs, ignition, etc.). Avoid touching metal objects or pulling over in high-risk areas (such as canyons, near power lines, or near tall trees).

If a vehicle is struck by lightning, the metal shell acts as a Faraday cage, protecting passengers inside and making the vehicle relatively safe during a lightning storm. The

electrical current from lightning mainly travels through the metal frame and tires, bypassing the passengers. Despite this protection, the vehicle may still sustain damage, particularly to the antenna, electrical system, rear windshield, and tires.

After a lightning strike, it's recommended to remain inside the car for at least 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder before exiting.

Water on Roadways

Driving through deep puddles, floods, or excessively wet conditions can introduce water into the brake drums, leading to a dangerous condition known as "water fade." Because drum brakes are enclosed, they easily trap moisture, resulting in a spongy pedal, severely delayed stopping times, and an immediate loss of braking efficiency.

Key Complications

- **Lost Friction & Delayed Bite:** Trapped water sits directly between the brake shoes and the inner drum wall. This moisture acts as a lubricant, preventing the brake pads from gripping the metal effectively.
- **Water Fade (Steam Barrier):** When the brake pedal is pressed, the resulting friction heats the trapped water, turning it into steam. This steam creates a physical cushion or barrier between the shoe and the drum, causing a temporary but severe drop in stopping power.
- **Corrosion and Rusting:** Enclosed moisture accelerates rust formation on cast-iron drums and internal metal hardware. Flaking rust can contaminate friction surfaces, while rust buildup on the wheel cylinder can lead to sticking or internal hydraulic leaks.
- **Mud and Debris Trapping:** Flooding often washes mud, dirt, and road grit directly into the drum housing. Once the water evaporates, this abrasive grit bakes onto the shoes, scoring the drum and accelerating mechanical wear.

How to Restore Braking Power

⚠️ **Safety Note:** Always check your surroundings and ensure it is safe to do so before riding or pumping your brakes.

To dry out the system and restore normal performance after passing through standing water:

- **Apply Light Pressure:** Gently drag or tap the brakes while maintaining a safe, slow driving speed.

- **Generate Controlled Heat:** This light friction creates just enough heat to evaporate the trapped moisture without overheating the system.
- **Confirm Responsiveness:** Continue applying light pressure for a short distance until the spongy pedal feeling disappears and normal braking bite returns.

Hydroplaning

Hydroplaning occurs when water on the road is deeper than your tire tread can push aside. Water pressure forces a thin sheet of liquid directly underneath the rubber tire, lifting the wheels completely off the pavement. Your bus is now literally floating on the water, resulting in a complete loss of steering and braking. The risk of hydroplaning increases significantly if you are traveling above 35 mph, if your tires are worn below legal tread depth, or if you drive through deep puddles. If you feel the steering wheel go "loose" or light, do not slam on the brakes or turn the wheel. Ease off the accelerator pedal and keep the tires pointed straight until the vehicle slows down and drops back onto the pavement.

How to Avoid Hydroplaning

- Slow down when roads are wet.
- The faster the speed, the more difficult it is for tires to scatter water properly.
- Stay away from standing water and puddles.
- Do not use cruise control – if equipped.
- Drive in a lower gear.
- Avoid hard braking
- Try to avoid making sharp or quick turns.

Never drive in flowing water, as the depth and force of the current are unknown. Hazards masked by water may not be detected until it is too late. There may be debris, downed power lines, or washed-out portions of the road.

PART 4: SLIPPERY SURFACES AND SKIDS

Vehicle braking or steering cannot occur without traction. Road conditions may reduce traction and require slower speeds. When road conditions are slick, it will take longer to stop and be harder to steer without skidding.

Slippery surfaces can more than double stopping distances.

Common Slippery Surfaces

- Shaded areas
    - Shaded parts of the road may remain icy and slippery long after open areas have melted and dried.
- Bridges
    - When the temperature drops, bridges freeze before the road surface.
    - Be especially careful when the temperature is at or near freezing (32°F).
- Snow
    - Various types of snow offer different levels of traction. The most traction can be obtained from dry, granular snow or very cold snow.
    - Occasionally, packed snow may give better traction than freshly fallen snow.
    - When temperatures fluctuate around freezing, the danger of driving increases because the road surface may be covered with snow, camouflaging ice, or the snow may be ice-covered, thus reducing traction.
    - The roads are most hazardous when the snow or ice begins to melt.
    - It is important to exercise extra caution when driving on packed snow or icy roads when the temperature outside is close to freezing (32°F).
- Black Ice
    - When the temperature drops below freezing but the road looks wet, it may be covered in black ice.
    - This thin, transparent layer of ice can occur anywhere but is more common in high-traffic intersections and areas exposed to wind.
    - It is most prevalent during the early morning hours, especially after snow melts on the roadways, and it can refreeze overnight when the temperature drops below freezing.
    - This can also form when roadways are slick from rain, and temperatures drop below freezing overnight.

- Hail
    - Like ice, hail provides a unique set of hazardous circumstances.
    - Hail on the roadways can produce an extraordinarily slippery and uneven road surface.
    - Hail can also break windshields and windows.
    - If you're facing hail, it's generally wise to look for a sheltered, low-risk parking spot if available. It’s better to wait it out than to risk damaging your windows.
- Mud and Mudslides
    - Roads covered in excessive mud can become slippery and nearly impossible to navigate.
- Heat
    - High temperatures can lead to the tar in road pavement surfacing, resulting in a soft or slippery area.
- Other
    - Materials applied to roadways for anti-icing and de-icing, such as gravel, magnesium chloride, and salt, can initially enhance traction by melting the upper layer of snow or ice during daylight. However, as temperatures fall below freezing at night, they may lead to the formation of new ice, ultimately reducing traction.

Skids

A skid happens when a vehicle’s tires lose traction on the road. Some common ways this can happen are:

- Over-braking
- Braking too hard and locking up the wheels
- Over-steering
- When the operator turns the wheels sharper than the vehicle can turn at a given moment.

- Over-acceleration
    - When the driver applies too much power, the tires can lose traction and spin, leading to a loss of control.
- Driving too fast
    - Driving at speeds exceeding what the road surface and tire grip can handle increases the likelihood of skids.

Operators who adjust their driving to the conditions do not over-accelerate and do not have to over-brake or over-steer to avoid gaining too much speed. Learning to stay off the brake and react quickly during a skid takes a lot of practice. Avoid sudden movements, such as abrupt changes in steering, acceleration, or braking, which could worsen the skid. Keep your eyes up and look where you want to go; focus on your desired path, not where the car is currently sliding.

The best place to practice this is on a large driving range or "skid pad."

Drive-wheel Skids

This is the most common skid and occurs when the rear wheels lose traction due to excessive braking or acceleration. Rear-wheel braking skids occur when the rear wheels (drive tires) lock up. This usually happens on slippery surfaces. Because locked wheels have less traction than rolling wheels, the rear wheels usually slide sideways in an attempt to “catch up” with the front wheels (steer tires). In a bus, the vehicle will slide sideways into a “spinout.”

To correct a drive-wheel skid:

- Stop accelerating
- Stop braking to allow the rear wheels to roll again
- Steer in the direction the vehicle is sliding. This helps to counteract the sliding motion and regain control.
- Once the vehicle regains traction, gently steer in the desired direction to continue moving forward.

Important Considerations:

- Front-wheel drive (FWD) and all-wheel drive (AWD) vehicles
    - Lifting off the accelerator and steering in the direction of the slide will best help to correct the skid.

- Rear-wheel drive (RWD) vehicles
    - Steering to the skid is particularly important in RWD vehicles, as the rear wheels are the ones losing traction.

Front-wheel Skids

Driving too fast and having inadequate tread depth on the front tires cause most front-wheel skids. In this type of skid, the front of the bus tends to go in a straight line regardless of how much the steering wheel is turned. This causes extreme difficulty (if not impossibility) when steering around a curve or turn.

To correct a front-wheel skid:

- Release the accelerator
- Do NOT brake. This will allow the front wheels to turn again and regain traction.
- In a front-wheel skid, it is generally better to keep the steering wheel in the position it was in before the skid happened.

PART 5: SNOW, AVALANCHES, COLD WEATHER, AND OTHER WINTER DRIVING

Winter roads in Colorado demand extreme caution. On slick surfaces, your stopping distance can easily double. Drive according to highway and weather conditions. Some bridges and overpasses in Colorado are heated or equipped with de-icing sprayers, which can create an abrupt change in road conditions. Scan ahead and remain aware of these locations.

Snow Driving

You must completely clear all snow, ice, and frost from every window, mirror, and exterior light lens. Driving with a "snow cap" on the roof of a bus or commercial truck is highly illegal in Colorado, as it can slide forward during braking or blow back onto other motorists. Verify that the windshield washer fluid reservoir is completely full with a winter-grade de-icing mix and that the air brake moisture ejectors are functioning properly to prevent frozen airlines.

Speed Management and Vehicle Control

The golden rule of winter driving is that posted speed limits are meant for ideal dry conditions, not snow**.**

- **Reduce Speed Significantly:** Cut your speed by at least one-third to one-half on snow-covered roads.
- **Increase Following Distance:** Expand your following distance from the standard 4 seconds to a minimum of 8-10 seconds. You need ample space to react without slamming on the brakes.
- **Smooth Inputs:** Avoid sudden, jerky movements. Accelerate gradually, steer smoothly, and brake gently. Abrupt inputs will break the delicate traction between your tires and the snow, inducing a skid.
- **Do Not Use Cruise Control or Retarders:** Turn off cruise control immediately. If your vehicle is equipped with an engine brake or retarder, turn it off on snow-covered or slick roads. If the retarder engages on a slippery surface, it can cause the drive wheels to lock up, sending the vehicle into an unrecoverable jackknife or spin.

Recognizing Variable Surface Hazards

Snow conditions in Colorado change rapidly based on altitude, sun exposure, and temperature.

- **Pack Snow vs. Slush:** Packed snow often provides more predictable traction than melting, rutted slush. Slush can grab the steering tires of a heavy vehicle, pulling it violently toward the shoulder or into oncoming traffic.
- **The Temperature Danger Zone:** Traction is actually *lowest* when the temperature is right around the freezing mark (30°F to 34°F). At this threshold, a thin, highly lubricated film of water forms on top of the snow and ice, creating the slickest possible driving surface.

Avalanche Hazard Management and Winter Survival

Before departing on any route through Colorado’s mountain corridors, drivers should consult specialized state tracking tools.

- **The CAIC Forecast:** Check the Colorado Avalanche Information Center's daily threat matrix. Do not rely solely on standard weather apps; look specifically for backcountry and highway slide warnings.
- **COtrip.org & 511:** Monitor real-time electronic road signs and updates for active Avalanche Control Road Closures. CDOT frequently closes passes to intentionally trigger slides using Gazex exploders, Howitzers, and helicopter charges.

- **Vehicle Preparedness:** Ensure compliance with the Colorado Traction Law (minimum 3/16-inch tread depth with mountain-snowflake or M+S rating, or active chains/AutoSocks).

Identifying Active Avalanche Conditions

Be highly alert for rapid changes in mountain topography and climate. Avalanche risk skyrockets during or immediately following:

- **Heavy, Wet Snowstorms:** Common in Colorado's late winter and spring seasons.
- **High-Wind Events:** Winds exceeding 30 mph rapidly transport snow across ridges, creating unstable, heavy overhanging drifts (cornices).
- **Rapid Thaws:** A sharp, sudden increase in temperature can cause the snowpack to lose structural integrity.
- **Visual Warning Signs:** If you observe natural "sluffing" (minor snow slides), shooting cracks in roadside snowbanks, or hear hollow "womphing" sounds, the surrounding slopes are highly unstable.

Immediate Action Plan: If Caught in an Avalanche

If a snow slide or powder cloud begins descending toward your vehicle, you have only seconds to react. Never attempt to outrun an avalanche in a large or heavy vehicle; the speed of the slide will easily overtake you.

Step 1: Secure the Vehicle

- Bring the vehicle to an immediate stop away from the direct center of the slide path if possible.
- **Stay inside the vehicle.** The structural steel frame of a commercial truck or bus provides your primary defense against heavy snow debris and flying rocks.

Step 2: Engine Shutdown & Air Containment

- **Turn off the engine immediately.** Once the vehicle is buried or surrounded by snow, running the engine will cause lethal carbon monoxide (CO) to seep directly into the passenger cabin.
- Ensure all windows, passenger doors, and roof vents are completely sealed to keep out suffocating snow dust.

Step 3: Passenger Safety & Positioning

- If operating a bus, instruct all passengers to clear out of the aisle, sit low in their seats with their backs away from the side windows, and cover their heads.
- If the snow begins pressing against the windows, brace yourself firmly in your seat.

Step 4: Communication & Survival

- Use your cell phone or fleet radio to notify emergency services or dispatch of your exact location (mile marker or nearby landmark).
- Do not leave the vehicle to dig yourself out unless the slide has completely stopped and you can safely verify that a secondary "echo" slide is not imminent.

Wait for CDOT emergency crews or search-and-rescue teams to clear the roadway centerline and locate your vehicle.

Identifying Invisible Road Hazards

- **Shaded Areas:** Stretches of road hidden by trees, mountains, or buildings can remain packed with ice long after open, sunny areas have melted and dried.
- **Bridges:** When temperatures drop, bridges and overpasses freeze before standard roadways because cold air flows beneath them as well as above them. Some Colorado bridges feature automatic de-icing chemical sprayers, which can cause an instant, unexpected change in traction.
- **Black Ice:** If the temperature is below freezing but the road looks wet, it is likely covered in black ice. This is a paper-thin, completely transparent layer of ice that blends in with the asphalt, usually forming in high-traffic intersections or wind-exposed zones in the early morning.
- **The Melting Hazard:** Ice and snow are actually at their most dangerous and slippery right when the temperature hits 32°F, and the surface begins to melt into water.

Adjusting Your Lane for Safety

As traffic travels over snow, cars compress it into narrow, icy ruts called "slick tracks". Because a school bus has a wider stance (track width) than standard cars, your tires will not fit inside these narrow car ruts. Trying to drive inside them will cause your bus to sway violently back and forth.

To stay in control, slightly shift your lane position so your tires run smoothly over the untracked, fresh snow in your lane. Untracked snow provides much better mechanical traction and steering control than compressed car tracks.

Safety Buffers and Spacing

Because stopping takes significantly longer in winter, you must take the standard 4-to-5-second following distance rule and double it. Maintain at least an 8-to-10-second safety gap between your bus and the vehicle ahead. Check road conditions online at www.cotrip.org before every departure.

Reduced Visibility

School transportation vehicle operators can expect to encounter the following driving hazards that may reduce visibility. The most important response is to slow down. Maintain a speed that allows safe continuation in these conditions:

- Fog
- Sun
- Dust
- Rain
- Snow
- Debris
- Smoke
- Terrain
- Hail or Graupel darkness
- Light variations
- Vegetation

Additional Hints and Reminders for Winter Driving

- Speed should be conservative when conditions are less than perfect.
- Maintain a speed that allows you to stop quickly in the event of the unexpected.
- Know your limits and the vehicle's limits.
    - If you are uncertain, pull off to a safe location rather than continuing in adverse or unsafe conditions.

- Test traction and braking ability in a safe location free from traffic or other hazards.
- False shoulders exist in all seasons (i.e., snow, tall grasses, and heavy rains). Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Increase the following distances.

Three Key Elements to Safe Winter Driving

- Stay alert
- Slow down
- Stay in control

PART 6: MOUNTAIN DRIVING

Mountain driving presents unique situations that require greater attention to the same driving skills and expertise expected of all school transportation vehicle operators. Driving a school vehicle on winding, narrow mountain passes leaves no room for error. Colorado law (C.R.S. 42-4-1902) strictly mandates that any school vehicle driver operating in mountainous terrain must successfully complete specialized mountain and adverse-weather training before they are allowed to carry students.

It demands a variety of driving skills to ensure safety in such environments. Given the steep or fluctuating grades, sharp or blind curves, potential rockfalls, traffic, wildlife, and unpredictable weather, it's clear that extensive practice and unwavering focus are vital during operation. Equally crucial is being PREPARED to drive in these regions. Because the margin for error is significantly reduced, even small mistakes can lead to serious issues. Mountain driving necessitates heightened concentration and a strong respect for the landscape. Additionally, these areas often lack a reliable cellular signal, and in some instances, there might not be a house for miles.

This section focuses on maintaining control, transmission and retarder use, braking, pitch and grade, chains, and other skills for safe operation of school transportation vehicles in the mountains. Here are some things to remember when preparing to drive in mountainous and/or hilly locations.

CDE advises regular skill refresher courses for mountain drivers.

Climbing the Pass

Chains

Chaining is crucial to mountain driving in adverse weather. The Department of Transportation requires chains on commercial motor vehicles on all mountain passes. The two most common types of chains are automatic and conventional. There are several installation methods. Below are some commonly used methods and tips for safely chaining a vehicle.

Automatic Chains

These chains are permanently fastened to the rear suspension of the school bus and can also be present on Type A minibuses or MFSAB. They activate from a dashboard switch that opens an electric over-air solenoid mounted on the frame rail. Air pressure from the buses' on-board air brake system or an auxiliary air source flows to two air cylinders that lower the two chain wheels until they contact the tire sidewall. The friction between the tire and the chain wheel causes the chain wheel to rotate. Each chain wheel has a length of chain attached to it. The centrifugal force causes the chains to flail out and pass between the tire and the road surface, enhancing traction in snow and ice. The additional traction also reduces stopping distance under the same slippery conditions. When in the “off” position, the solenoid exhausts the air in the cylinder, and the spring in the cylinder returns the chains to the retracted position.

Despite the many benefits of automatic tire chains, the system has limitations, and precautions must be taken to ensure proper operation.

Advantages of automatic chains:

- Automatic tire chains perform best on surfaces with up to 6 inches of snow and ice. Their effectiveness may diminish in deeper snow, depending on its consistency. Consequently, it is crucial to recognize the current conditions and understand that these chains are not designed for winter off-road driving.

- Automatic tire chains are pneumatic mechanical systems permanently installed beneath the vehicle. This position exposes them to tough conditions like water, gravel, and road salt, making regular maintenance crucial. Ideally, the chains should be engaged at least once a month, even in summer, to keep the bearings well-lubricated and ensure optimal function of the moving parts.

- This increases safety, as the bus is always equipped and has quick access on short notice. The typical engagement time is two seconds.

- Automatic chains dramatically reduce the time spent installing conventional chains, increasing the productivity of the operator. More importantly, routes can remain on schedule.

- Automatic chains can eliminate body damage caused by broken conventional chains, which, at times, can be a mission-disabling failure.

- Hauling force, acceleration, and stopping distance.

- The operator may lower or raise automatic chains at any time at speeds less than 30 mph.

Disadvantages:

- The operator must realize that this system is not a “fix-all” (avoid a false sense of security).

- Operator activation is required.

- The system, per design, is limited to ice and a maximum of up to four inches of snow.

- In deep snow conditions, the operator may still have to install conventional chains.

- To avoid damage, do not raise the chains if the bus is not in motion. If the chains are raised when not in motion, the chains, arm mechanism, and air system can be damaged.

Conventional Chains

The operator must install and remove conventional chains. Always plan ahead when chaining is a possibility. If there is any doubt about traction, it is best to chain up to avoid safety issues.

When determining where to install and remove conventional chains, always choose a safe location out of the way of traffic. If passengers are on board, they should remain inside the bus. Ensure the engine is off and the brake is set so the bus will not move.

Check your chains:

- When laying out the chains, make sure the hooks face up. This will ensure they face out when you place them on the tires. All the tensioners should be open.

- If you lay out your chains on a snow-covered surface, brush off the snow before putting them on your tires.

Choose the proper chaining method to use – In-place or Draping:

- In-place
- Drape the chains over the tire so that the cross-links at the bottom do not hinder fastening the inside hook to the chain link.
- Use a chain tightener or coat hanger to guide the link between the dual tires to fasten the chain link with the inside hook.
- Pull the chains as tight as possible. A good tip is to use your knee against the tire to spare using only your back. Fasten the chains with the outside clasp and attach the tighteners.
- When the vehicle has moved and is out of danger, remove the tighteners, readjust the chains, fasten both the inside hook and outside clasp, and reattach the tighteners.
- Never drive over 30 mph when chains are installed on the tires.
- Draping
- Drape the chains over the tire, with at least half of the chain falling to each side. Use your fingers to clean any remaining snow off the chains. Make sure the hooks face outward and the tensioners are open.
- Hooks on the inside, clasps on the outside, cross-links perpendicular to the tire, and all reinforcement bars on cross-links facing away from the tire.
- Roll the vehicle over the chains. Determine the optimal direction to roll (forward or backward) by assessing which direction has the most room.
- Avoid rolling over the hook and clasp the chain end, if possible. If on a slope, always ensure the operator is on the upward side of the tire when fastening chains.
- Place a mark on one side of the front passenger door, then drive the vehicle with the front wheels straight until the opposite side of the entry door lines up with the mark.

- Fasten the chains. The inside hooks should be fastened first. Do not hook on the end link. An identical number of links on the inner hook and outside clasp is ideal for fastening the chains.
- Attach the stretchers/tighteners on the outside of the tire.
- Drive forward 50-100 yards, remove the stretchers, tighten the chains, and reattach the tighteners.

Removal Steps:

- Remove conventional chains only when the road surface provides safe traction without the use of chains.
- Find a safe area away from traffic and keep the students in the vehicle.
- Remove the tightener.
- Loosen the outer clasp.
- Unhook the inner hook first to prevent the chains from dropping between freezing wheels.
- Drive over the chains in a manner that prevents the tires from running over clasps or hooks.
- Stretch the chains out to check for broken or badly worn links. Bundle chains for storage.
- Place the tightener perpendicular to the cross-links, and pull each link over the tightener while inspecting its condition.
- Fasten the tightener at the ends and place it in the desired storage area.

If you are unsure about the condition of any part of the chains, take them to a mechanic or other repair person for inspection and/or replacement.

Additional Tips:

- Carry additional tighteners in case of breakage.
- Inspect and install all chains in the fall to ensure the proper condition and fit.

- Every element of a chain is a moving part. Check for broken chain links and verify that the hooks and clasps are in good working order.
- Label all chains with paint to confirm they are the proper ones for that particular vehicle, and add this check to the daily pre-trip inspection.
- If new tires are installed on the vehicle, always check the chains for the proper size.

Colorado Passenger Traction and Chain Laws

https://www.codot.gov/travel/winter-driving/tractionlaw

During winter storms or when conditions require, CDOT will implement the Passenger Vehicle Traction Law (Code 15) or the Passenger Vehicle Chain Law (Code 16). CDOT can implement Passenger Vehicle Traction and Chain Laws on any state highway.

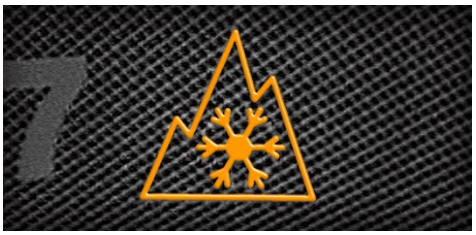
Passenger Vehicle Traction Law (Code 15)

Code 15 shall mean an implementation of the chain law that restricts all motor vehicles from traveling on the state highway unless the vehicle has snow tires or is equipped with tire chains or alternative traction devices (ATDs), or is a four-wheel-drive vehicle with adequate tires and all four wheels engaged.

During a Traction Law, all motorists are required to have EITHER:

- 4WD or AWD vehicle and 3/16” tread depth
- Tires with a mud and snow designation (M+S symbol) on the sidewall and 3/16” tread depth. Tires with tread designs that meet the definition may be branded with the letters "M" and "S" in several ways (e.g., M&S, M+S, M/S, MS, etc.) at the tire manufacturer's discretion.

- Winter tires or all-weather tires (Mountain + Snowflake symbol) on the sidewall and 3/16” tread depth



- Chains or an approved alternative traction device (ATD)

Passenger Vehicle Chain Law (Code 16) Chain Up or Stay Off

Code 16 shall mean an implementation of the chain law that requires all vehicles to use chains or ATDs. Under this code, auto transports shall be restricted from travel unless able to use chains or ATD's.

During severe winter storms, CDOT will implement the Passenger Vehicle Chain Law. All passenger vehicles must have chains or alternate traction devices (ATDs) on two or more drive tires. This rule applies to every two-, four-, or all-wheel-drive passenger vehicle in the affected area. This is the final safety measure before the highway is closed.

Motorists driving with inadequate equipment when a Traction Law or Chain Law is in effect could be fined more than $130. If a motorist blocks the roadway because they have inadequate equipment when a Traction Law or Chain Law is in effect, he/she could be fined more than $650.

Test Your Tread:

- Insert a penny upside-down into your tire tread, with Lincoln's head facing down and towards you.
- If the top of his head is covered by tread, you are good to go.
- If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, your tire tread is worn down to 2/32 of an inch or less.
- If the top of his head is visible at any point around the tire (check in multiple locations), you cannot drive when a Traction Law or Chain Law is called. You also likely need new tires.

Pull-Out Locations

Use pull-out locations to allow traffic backed up behind the vehicle to pass safely. If a pull-out is large enough, maneuver the front of the vehicle so that you can look over

your shoulder for oncoming traffic before reentering the roadway. Do not rely solely on the mirror if the opportunity to square off and look exists.

Lane Position

Observing lane position can prevent head-on collisions. Pay attention to tail swing on tight curves, especially switchbacks. Keep centered in your lane to maintain safe clearance around the vehicle. Riding too close to the outside of a curve increases the risk of a tire dropping off the road onto a soft shoulder. Conversely, staying too close to the inside can cause your mirrors to intrude into other motorists' space. When possible, adjust your speed and spacing to avoid driving next to other vehicles in a curve on a multilane highway. On right-hand curves, position yourself as far outside the lane as possible. It's crucial to monitor the relationship between your right rear tires and the pavement. Oncoming vehicles tend to take their half out of the middle while navigating a left-hand curve.

Be aware of rocks that overhang the road. Off-tracking brings the bus's center closer to these overhanging objects. When entering a tunnel, pay attention to the curve of the edges and the top. The vehicle height may fit through the middle, but not along the outer edges.

Speed

Slow to a safe speed before entering any curve. Braking in a curve is dangerous because it is easier to lock the wheels and cause a skid. Do not exceed the posted speed limit for the curve. Since the posted speed limit is for small vehicles, the bus speed should be 5-10 mph below the posted limit. To help maintain control, be in a gear that will allow slight acceleration through the curve. When entering a curve while going downhill, allow gravity to provide slight acceleration.

PART 7: DESCENDING THE PASS

Pass Checks

Pass checks are a frequent practice in mountainous states. Although not required by law, they are incredibly wise as a precautionary measure.

Generally, there are wider areas where you can chain up your vehicle as you climb the pass, and these areas are available for you to pull into to complete a “Pass Check.”

- As you enter the parking area, apply firm pressure on the brakes, checking for proper stopping and for whether the vehicle pulls to one side or the other.
- Secure your vehicle and walk around to ensure all the lights are working.

- Stop at each wheel and feel the hub for signs of heat.
- Look at all tires for damage and proper inflation.
- Return to the driver's seat and place the vehicle in the proper gear to descend the downgrade.

When approaching a downgrade where a full check of the vehicle is not possible, prior to reaching the apex of the hill, firmly apply the brakes to feel for proper brake response and no pulling in either direction. Shift down to the proper gear prior to the apex of the hill.

Pitch and Grade

Pitch and grade affect how mountain drivers maneuver through curves. Long, wide curves in the mountains may remain slippery for extended periods due to the road's pitch or the sun's position. During a downhill curve, the bus may accelerate on its own. Do not brake in a turn, especially during adverse conditions. Apply the retarder or service brake (depending on conditions) well in advance of the curve, and allow the bus's speed to decrease gradually. Once the bus has reached the apex of the turn, gradually accelerate. This helps the bus track correctly through the lane. Braking through a turn may cause the bus to skid, making control difficult.

When approaching curves, notice how the road pitches from side to side in relation to the curve and the grade. Often, the operator can drive at a higher speed if the curve maintains a pitch that follows the direction of the turn (on-camber) than if the curve is flat or off-camber. The amount of acceleration out of the curve will depend on the degree of pitch. A skid can occur by accelerating too early when negotiating curves with a relatively flat pitch.

Terrain

One of the hardest techniques to learn may be reading terrain. Maintain a safe scanning distance and scan the entire area for changes in grade, upcoming curves, wildlife, and traffic. When possible, look through the trees beyond the curve before entering.

Tips for Reading Terrain

- Whitewater – indicates a steep grade
- Objects that seem to change size rapidly – indicate a steep grade
- Canyon walls that appear to close in ahead of the bus – indicate a possible narrow road ahead

- Do not blindly follow the traffic ahead of you – other drivers may misinterpret the terrain.

One of the most complex techniques to learn may be reading terrain. Maintain a safe scanning distance and scan the entire area for changes in grade, upcoming curves, wildlife, and traffic. When possible, look through the trees beyond the curve before entering.

Maintaining Control

To stay in control on a steep downgrade, prioritize engine braking (engine compression) by shifting to a lower gear before beginning the descent, and refrain from excessive braking. Combine engine braking with light, intermittent braking to manage speed and prevent brake overheating. Additionally, be aware of both your and your vehicle's capabilities.

Never coast down a steep hill in neutral. This removes the engine's ability to help slow the vehicle and can lead to a loss of control.

Target Speed

Target speed is the speed a driver determines to be safe for a given driving condition. How to properly brake the vehicle using the Target Speed.

- Find a speed at which you are comfortable driving the vehicle in the conditions you are experiencing.
- When the vehicle speed increases to the target speed, the driver applies the service brake and slows down to 5 mph below the target speed.
- Once you have dropped your speed to 5 mph below your target speed, allow the vehicle speed to increase naturally back to the target speed.
- Repeat this process as needed.
- If this process happens often, the driver has not shifted down to a gear that will provide the engine compression to hold the vehicle at or below the target speed.

Engine Compression

Engine compression is the first source of braking power, even in vehicles fitted with a retarder. When navigating a long, steep descent, ensure you are in a gear low enough to ascend that same incline. For steeper grades or when carrying a heavy load, shift down at least one gear. Remember that if the engine reaches its maximum RPMs,

automatic transmissions may upshift, even if the transmission is manually locked in gear.

Select the appropriate gear for the grade before starting your descent, and keep the bus in that gear until reaching the bottom of the grade. This will prevent the risk of being unable to shift into the next lower gear if necessary. This is particularly important with a standard transmission. Maintain the manufacturer’s recommended RPM range for the selected gear to avoid over-revving or lugging, as these conditions may damage the engine.

Service Brake Use

When driving in mountainous areas, gravity significantly influences your vehicle's behavior. Gravity accelerates the vehicle as you descend steep slopes, and a heavier load increases speed. It's crucial to drive slowly enough to avoid relying on the service brakes, which helps maintain a safe speed. Continuous use of the service brakes can lead to brake fade, where the brake's stopping power is diminished. This phenomenon occurs due to heat buildup, which causes brake linings to glaze or break down at elevated temperatures, reducing their effectiveness and, in severe cases, potentially igniting a fire. Always keep your speed within safe limits. For extended downhill stretches, control your speed using engine compression and, if available, the retarder to minimize service brake use. Apply the service brakes sparingly, allowing sufficient time between applications to keep the linings, drums, and/or rotors cool.

A driver is in control when the school transportation vehicle is maintained at a safe road and engine speed. A safe school bus (Type A minibus or MFSAB) speed is either at or below the posted limit. The vehicle manufacturer determines the safe engine speed or revolutions per minute (rpms).

PART 8: EMERGENCIES

Emergency Stops

The school transportation vehicle’s braking systems are mechanical and can fail. The following emergency stopping procedures should be demonstrated and practiced during on-the-road (hands-on) training. These simulations will prepare the operator for situations in which any or all braking systems fail. Except where noted, use a road or highway with minimal traffic and good visibility for the simulations.

Every Which Way Simulation

This simulates a situation where there is a need to stop the vehicle when the service brakes fail to operate. The operator will use all available means to stop the vehicle. Shift

down to the first gear of the automatic transmission, and pull the parking brake. As the vehicle slows, the transmission will automatically downshift. As the engine speed slows, the operator will downshift through the sequence in a standard transmission.

Four-Wheel Lock Simulation

This simulates when the service brakes are functioning, and the engine is running. The operator will experience the forces associated with severe braking. The operator will get the feel of a vehicle skidding. At 25 mph, the driver will release their grip on the steering wheel (do not let go of the steering wheel) and press the brake pedal hard. Note any tendency of the vehicle to pull right or left. Make sure there is room on both sides of the lane for the vehicle to pull in either direction.

Park Brake Simulation

This simulation is to practice for when the service brakes are inoperable, and the speed is too high for downshifting to slow the vehicle. Depending on the service brake defect, the parking brake may be inoperable or already set due to a loss of air pressure. Select a flat, straight portion of the road with a full-width shoulder lane where the vehicle can pull completely out of the travel lane. At highway speed, turn on the hazard lamps, let up on the accelerator, pull the parking brake, and carefully pull the vehicle into the shoulder lane as it slows to a stop.

Ride-It-Out Simulation

This simulation is to practice when the parking brake is broken and hot, the brakes are fading, and the engine is running.

Simulate stopping a vehicle without using the brakes. Select a downgrade that will allow the vehicle transmission, when placed in the highest gear, to maintain the approximate posted speed limit. The downgrade should be reduced to safely simulate the procedure. Let up on the accelerator at the top of the descent, put the gear selector in first (if automatic), and ride out the descent. As the vehicle slows, the transmission will automatically downshift. The operator will downshift through the sequence in a standard transmission as the engine and road speed slow. Turn on the hazard lamps at 25 mph and pull into the shoulder lane. At an idle in first gear, pull the right-side wheels into the soft shoulder dirt, shift the transmission into neutral, and allow the vehicle to stop.

Escape Ramps

In steep mountain driving, a heavy vehicle’s braking system can overheat from constant use, leading to a dangerous mechanical failure known as brake fade. If your school transportation vehicle completely loses its brakes while descending a steep grade, your primary lifesaver is a runaway truck ramp (also known as an escape ramp).

Runaway truck ramps are specialized emergency lanes built along the sides of steep mountain passes, specifically engineered to safely stop heavy vehicles that have lost control.

How Runaway Ramps Work

Runaway truck ramps use physics and the mechanical properties of the ground surface to absorb a heavy vehicle's forward momentum without requiring the use of vehicle brakes. There are three common designs used on mountain highways:

- **Gravity Ramps:** These are built tracking up a steep, built-in hillside. The ramp forces the vehicle to travel upward against gravity, which naturally slows it to a complete stop. Once stopped, the vehicle will naturally want to roll backward, so these ramps often feature a layout that guides the rolling vehicle into a soft retaining zone.

- **Arrester Beds:** These are flat or slightly uphill lanes filled with a thick, loose layer of specialized pea gravel or sand (usually 12 to 36 inches deep). When a heavy vehicle enters the bed, the tires instantly sink into the loose gravel. The stones roll against each other and pile up in front of the tires, creating massive mechanical resistance that safely stops the vehicle in a short distance.

- **Combination Ramps:** These utilize both systems, a steep uphill climb combined with a deep bed of loose gravel, to provide the maximum possible stopping power for heavily loaded vehicles.

The Step-by-Step Emergency Decision Process

If your vehicle suffers a total brake failure while descending a mountain pass, you must act instantly and systematically:

- **Shift to a Lower Gear Immediately:** Do not push the clutch in or drop the transmission into Neutral. Attempt to downshift to the lowest possible gear to use the engine's internal friction (engine braking) to slow the vehicle.

- **Communicate the Crisis:** Turn on your four-way hazard flashers, tap your horn continuously, and use your two-way radio to notify your terminal base or emergency dispatchers of your location, speed, and status.

- **Scan for the Ramps:** Look far ahead for CDOT roadside signs indicating the distance to the next runaway truck ramp (e.g., "Runaway Truck Ramp 1 Mile Ahead").

- **Prepare the Passengers:** Instruct all students to firmly brace themselves in their seats, fasten their safety belts tightly (if equipped), and protect their heads.

- **Commit to the Ramp:** As you approach the ramp opening, steer straight into the center of the lane. Keep your hands locked tightly onto the steering wheel. Do not attempt to pump or apply your failed brakes, and do not try to swerve out of the bed once you enter.

What Happens Inside the Arrester Bed

The moment your front tires hit the loose gravel, you will feel a violent deceleration force, similar to hitting a wall of thick mud. The gravel will fly up around the vehicle, and the steering wheel will yank hard as the tires sink into the stones.

- **Maintain Steering Control:** It is vital to keep your grip locked onto the steering wheel to prevent the bus from jackknifing or sliding sideways.

- **The Stop:** The loose stones will swallow the wheels and bring the bus to a complete, stable stop. Because the gravel packs tightly around the frame and axles, the bus will be securely anchored and cannot roll backward or tip over.

Post-Incident Requirements and Recovery

- **Keep Passengers Inside:** Once the bus stops, evaluate your passengers for injuries. Do not allow anyone to step off the bus into the gravel bed. Walking on an arrester bed is dangerous because the gravel is loose and deep, and your students could twist an ankle or fall. Furthermore, the undercarriage of your bus (exhaust pipes and catalytic converters) will be extremely hot, posing a fire hazard if dry debris or clothing comes into contact with it.

- **Mandatory Towing:** A vehicle that enters a runaway truck ramp cannot drive out under its own power. The gravel holds the wheels completely locked. A heavy commercial tow truck must be dispatched to winch the bus backward out of the bed.

- **The Mechanical Inspection Requirement:** Under CDE and commercial safety rules, any vehicle that enters a runaway truck ramp is strictly prohibited from carrying students again until it has been towed to a certified shop and has undergone a complete structural and brake-system teardown inspection**.** A mechanic must verify why the brakes failed and ensure that the immense forces of the gravel bed did not bend the suspension, snap air lines, or damage the steering linkages.

PART 9: MOUNTAIN ROADWAY OBSTACLES (TOURISTS AND BICYCLISTS)

Mountain roads attract a wide variety of road users whose behavior can be highly erratic or unpredictable. Because your school bus is the largest vehicle on the pass, you must actively anticipate these unique roadway hazards.

Navigating Around Sightseeing Motorists and Tourists

Many drivers on Colorado mountain passes are tourists who are completely unfamiliar with high-altitude driving, sharp curves, and steep drop-offs.

- **The Lane-Crowding Hazard:** Motorists who are afraid of heights or steep cliffs will often look away from the drop-off and subconsciously steer toward the mountain wall. This causes them to hug the yellow center line or cross it, crowding into your lane.
- **The "Tire-to-Ground" Scan:** Do not look at the body of an oncoming car to guess where it is going. Instead, look directly at their front tires where they touch the asphalt. The tire-to-ground contact gives you the exact, immediate position of their vehicle and tells you if they are drifting into your lane long before the car's body appears to move.
- **Blind Shoulder Parking:** Tourists frequently pull over unexpectedly around blind curves to take photos or look at wildlife. Expect to find vehicles parked half-on and half-off narrow mountain shoulders, and watch out for pedestrians who may suddenly step into the traffic lane.

Sharing Mountain Lanes with Bicyclists

Mountain biking and road cycling are incredibly popular on Colorado passes. Because many mountain roads lack a paved shoulder, cyclists are legally permitted to ride directly inside the main traffic lane.

- **The Hill Climbing Delay:** Cyclists moving uphill will travel at a very slow pace, which can tempt hurried motorists behind them to make highly illegal and dangerous passing maneuvers around blind curves.
- **The Downhill Wobble:** Cyclists descending a mountain can reach speeds over 40 mph. At high speeds, loose gravel on the pavement, strong crosswinds, or hit potholes can cause a cyclist to wobble violently or crash out into the center of the lane.
- **The Passing Rule:** When passing a bicycle, you must wait until you have a completely clear view of the road ahead with zero oncoming traffic. Give the

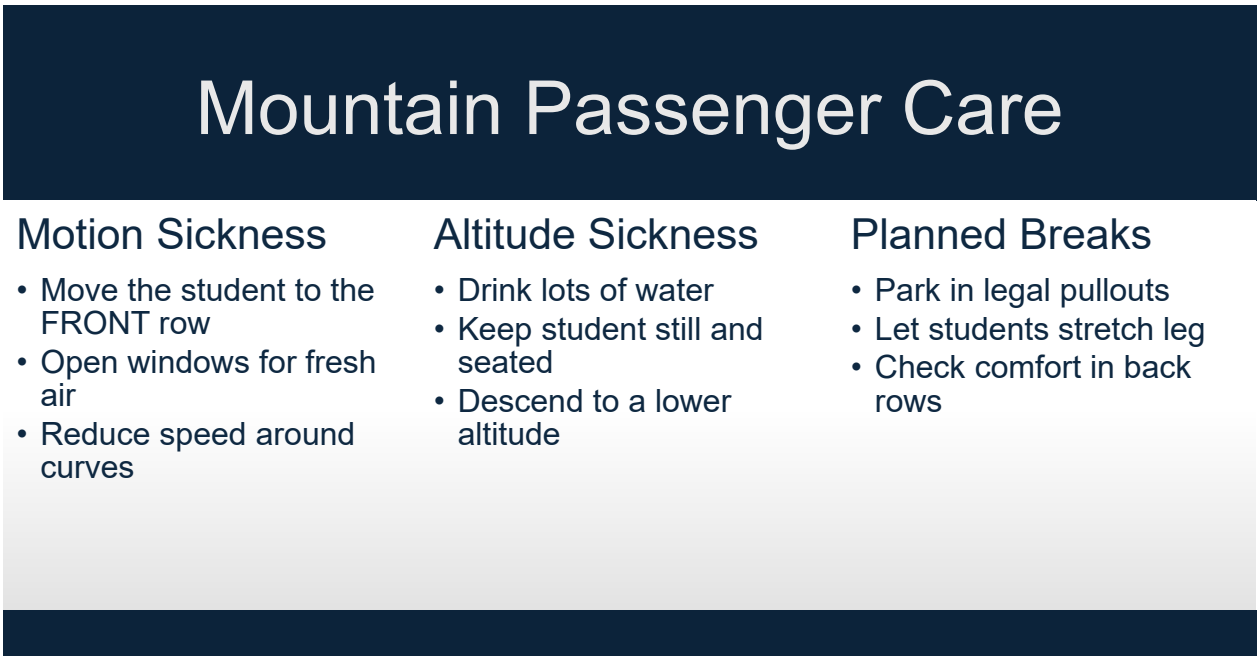
cyclist at least 3 to 4 feet of wide clearance as you pass. If the cyclist is a child, double your safety cushion; children lack advanced balance skills and can steer unpredictably.

The Golden Rule of Mountain Visibility

Never outdrive your ability to stop within the distance you can see. If you are approaching a sharp, blind curve flanked by a mountain wall, you cannot see what is hidden on the other side. Always reduce your speed *before* the curve so that if a car is stopped dead in the lane, a tourist is standing in the road, or a rock has fallen onto the asphalt, you have more than enough time to bring your heavy bus to a complete, controlled stop.

PART 10: MANAGING DRIVER AND PASSENGER WELL-BEING IN THE MOUNTAINS

The physics of mountain driving (sharp curves, rapid altitude changes, and high elevations) can place severe physical stress on your passengers. You must actively manage the cabin environment to keep everyone safe and comfortable.



Preventing and Managing Motion Sickness

The continuous side-to-side swaying of a bus rounding sharp mountain curves frequently triggers motion sickness (carsickness) in young passengers. This effect is heavily amplified in the back rows of the bus, where the tail-swing creates a whipping motion.

- **Proactive Speed Management:** Take mountain curves significantly slower than the posted speed limit. A speed that feels perfectly comfortable to you in the driver's seat can feel like a violent rollercoaster to a child sitting 40 feet behind you over the rear axle. Regularly check your rearview mirror to observe the physical comfort of the students in the back rows.
- **Immediate Interventions:** If a student begins to feel nauseous, immediately move them to the very front row of the bus, where the vehicle's movement is the most stable. Open their side window slightly to provide a continuous stream of cool, fresh air. Instruct the student to keep their head up and stare straight ahead at the stable horizon line rather than looking down at a book or a phone screen.

Identifying and Treating Altitude Sickness

Altitude sickness occurs when a passenger's body struggles to adjust to the lower oxygen levels found at high elevations (typically anywhere above 8,000 feet). It can affect anyone unexpectedly, regardless of how healthy or physically fit they are.

- **Recognizing the Symptoms:** Monitor your cabin for students complaining of a throbbing headache, sudden dizziness, nausea, unexplained fatigue, shortness of breath, or a pale face.
- **Immediate Care Protocol:** If a passenger shows signs of altitude sickness, take the following actions immediately:
    1. Have the student sit completely still or lie down on a seat to lower their oxygen demand.
    2. Force them to drink clear fluids, preferably water. Dehydration rapidly worsens altitude sickness.
    3. **The Ultimate Cure:** The only true cure for altitude sickness is a physical change in location. You must safely complete your mountain descent and bring the passenger down to a lower altitude as soon as possible, where the air pressure is higher, and oxygen is more abundant.

Organizing Mandatory Rest and Stretch Breaks

Sitting buckled into a seat on a long, winding mountain trip can cause passenger restlessness, cramping, and behavioral problems. You must plan ahead to manage their physical needs.

- **Utilizing Safe Pullout Zones:** Look for official, designated highway rest areas, wide scenic overlooks, or legal pullout zones that are completely separated from

high-speed mountain traffic. Never pull over on a narrow shoulder or a blind curve to let students stretch.

- **The Leaving-the-Bus Safety Rule:** When you park the bus for a stretch break, apply your parking brake, shift into Neutral or Park, and turn off the engine. If students exit the bus to stretch their legs, you or an adult chaperone must maintain a strict security perimeter to ensure no children wander toward the active roadway or approach dangerous, steep mountain drop-offs. Use this time to check your vehicle's tires and ensure your cargo remains securely tied down.

Driver Care

Operators may experience fatigue or minor aches and pains when driving long distances. Before leaving, ensure that your back is completely against the seatback and your feet are flat on the floor.

Consider placing a lumbar roll or a rolled towel between your lower back and the seatback. Adjust the seat height so your hips are a bit higher than your knees. Ensure that the back of your knees does not touch the edge of the seat. Move the seat forward or backward so that your knees are slightly bent when fully pressing the pedals. Your arms should easily reach the steering wheel and controls without requiring much leaning or twisting.

Make sure to adjust the mirrors to prevent twisting your body into uncomfortable positions. To reduce fatigue, be sure to stretch both before and after driving.

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Unit Seven – Crashes and Emergency Procedures

PART 1: HANDLING A VEHICLE CRASH

If you are involved in a collision, you need to stay calm and act immediately. Under Colorado law, your biggest priorities are to keep your passengers safe, secure the area around the bus, and prevent other cars from slamming into the scene.

En route Passing of an Independent Crash Scene

If you are driving your route and encounter a traffic crash that does not involve your bus, practice extreme caution:

- **Keep Moving:** Do not stop completely unless emergency responders explicitly direct you to do so or you are the absolute first vehicle on the scene. Stopping or slowing down excessively to stare ("rubbernecking") creates a high risk of a rear-end collision for the traffic behind you.
- **Brake Early and Smoothly:** Tap your brakes early as you approach the scene to flash your brake lights and warn trailing motorists to slow down.

Mandatory Protocol if Your Vehicle is Involved in a Crash

If your school transportation vehicle is involved in a collision, you must execute the following actions immediately, in accordance with state law and Educational Entity safety policies:

- **Stop and Secure:** Stop the vehicle immediately. Turn off the engine, set the parking brake, and remove the ignition key. Never leave the scene of a crash**.** Conviction for hit-and-run carries severe criminal penalties under Colorado statutes. Stake out your vehicle within 10 minutes.
- **Activate Hazards:** Turn on your four-way amber hazard flashers immediately to maximize visibility.
- **Assess Passenger Safety:** Check all passengers immediately for injuries. Render reasonable first aid assistance if necessary, but never perform medical procedures beyond your specific level of training.
- **Notify Dispatch and Authorities:** Contact your transportation base terminal or school administrator immediately via two-way radio or phone. Report your exact

location, the number of passengers on board, whether injuries are present, and if emergency medical services (EMS) or law enforcement are required.

- **Evaluate Fire Hazards:** Actively check the vehicle for fire or immediate fire risks. Look for and smell for ruptured fuel tanks/lines, electrical wiring short circuits, or hot tires that may ignite due to bent metal rubbing against the rubber post-impact.
- **Do Not Move the Vehicle:** Leave the bus exactly where it came to a rest. Do not move it unless actively instructed to do so by a law enforcement officer or fire department personnel, or as legally required by local highway postings.
- **Exchange Information and Cooperate:** Cooperate fully with the investigating law enforcement officer. Write down the names, license numbers, vehicle registrations, insurance details, and contact info of all drivers and witnesses involved. Never admit fault or liability at the scene.

PART 2: EMERGENCY DOCUMENTS AND PLANNING

Required On-Board Documentation

If you are involved in a crash, law enforcement investigators and school administration will require you to produce specific legal documents. You must ensure these are present in your driver's compartment during your daily pre-trip inspection:

- Valid Commercial Driver’s License (CDL)
- Proof of valid vehicle insurance
- Valid vehicle registration card
- Completed current-day Pre-Trip Inspection documentation
- Current CDE Affidavit of Annual Inspection
- The vehicle's official Emergency Packet (including seating charts, witness information forms, and exchange-of-information cards).

Written Emergency Operations Plans

Under 1 CCR 301-26, Educational Entities are legally required to maintain written emergency procedures and contingency plans. These plans must clearly outline the step-by-step procedures operators must follow during a traffic crash, a sudden

mechanical breakdown, an unexpected school closure, an unforeseen route change, or the emergency relocation of a student stop.

PART 3: STAKING OUT THE VEHICLE (EMERGENCY TRIANGLES)

If your vehicle is disabled or stopped due to a crash on a public roadway, you must place your three emergency reflective triangles within 10 minutes to alert oncoming traffic. When positioning triangles, assemble the triangle, pick it up, and walk towards the placement location, keeping the triangle away from the body and out towards traffic.

Two-Lane Roadway or Undivided Highway Placement

If you are stopped on a standard two-lane road or an undivided highway, place the triangles in this exact sequence:

1. **Triangle 1 (Traffic Warning):** Place it on the traffic side of the vehicle, **10 feet behind** the rear bumper, directly in line with the side of the bus.
2. **Triangle 2 (Rear Warning):** Place it **100 feet behind** the vehicle, centered in the middle of your driving lane.
3. **Triangle 3 (Front Warning):** Walk to the front of the vehicle and place it **100 feet ahead** of the front bumper, centered in the middle of your driving lane, to warn oncoming traffic from the opposite direction.

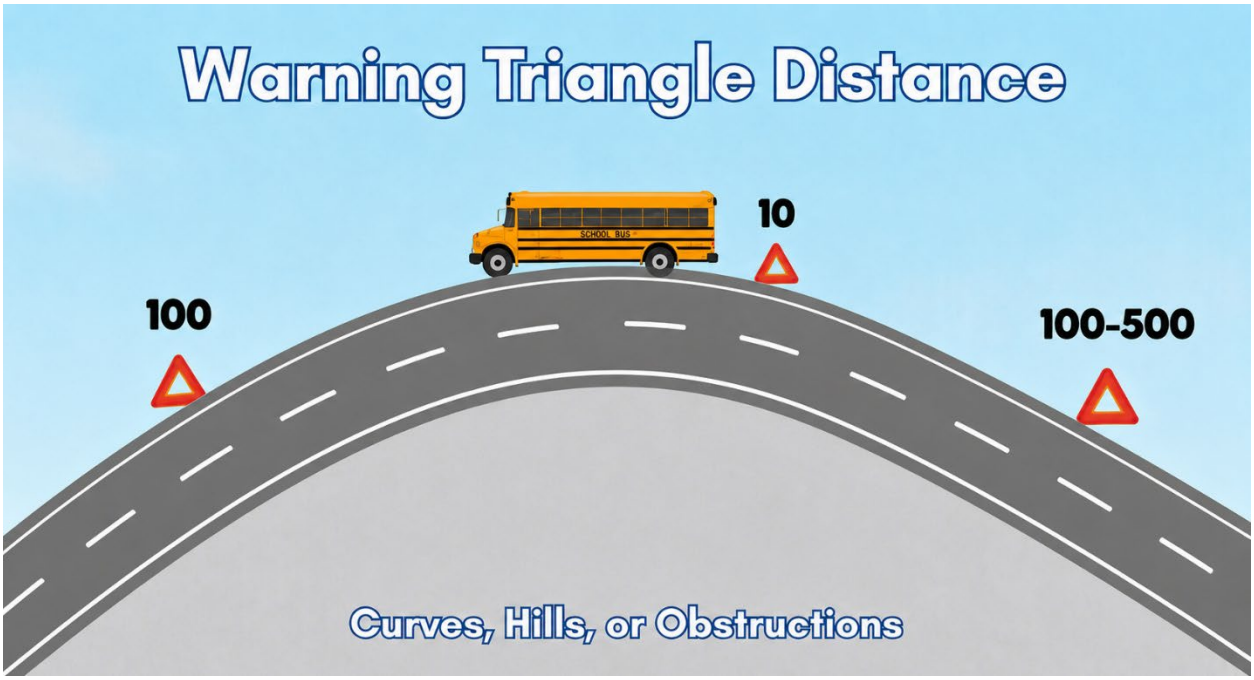
Divided Highway or One-Way Roadway Placement

If you are stopped on a multi-lane divided highway or a one-way road where traffic can only approach you from behind, all three triangles must go behind the bus:

- **Triangle 1:** Place it **10 feet behind** the rear bumper on the traffic side.
- **Triangle 2:** Place it **100 feet behind** the vehicle on the traffic side.
- **Triangle 3:** Place it **200 feet behind** the vehicle on the traffic side.

Obstruction (Hills and Curves) Placement

If a sharp curve or a hilltop blocks the view of your stopped bus, traffic cannot see you until they clear the obstruction. You must adjust your furthest triangle:



- Move the rear-most triangle further back, up to 500 feet if necessary, so that it sits safely *before* the crest of the hill or the entry point of the curve. This gives drivers ample time to react and slow down before they see your vehicle.

1 CCR 301-25 Minimum Standards, 10.14 Emergency Equipment

10.14.4 Emergency Reflectors:

(A) All School Transportation Vehicles shall carry three bidirectional emergency triangle reflectors in compliance with C.R.S. 42-4-230, and with FMVSS 125 - Warning Devices, contained in a securely mounted case which shall be in full view of the driver, or within a location plainly indicated by appropriate markings.

PART 4: OPERATING THE SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Professional drivers must be proficient in operating the onboard safety equipment before an emergency occurs.

1 CCR 301-25 Minimum Standards, 10.14 Emergency Equipment

10.14.1 All School Transportation Vehicles, except for Small-Capacity Vehicles, shall be equipped with at least one pressurized, 5-pound, dry-chemical fire extinguisher, with a total rating of not less than 2A10BC. The operating mechanism shall be sealed with a type of seal that will not interfere with the use of the fire extinguisher.

(A) The fire extinguisher shall be securely mounted in an extinguisher bracket (automatic type) and located in full view of and readily accessible to the driver within the cab, or in a location plainly indicated by appropriate signage. A pressure gauge shall be mounted on the extinguisher to be easily read without removing the extinguisher from its mounted position.

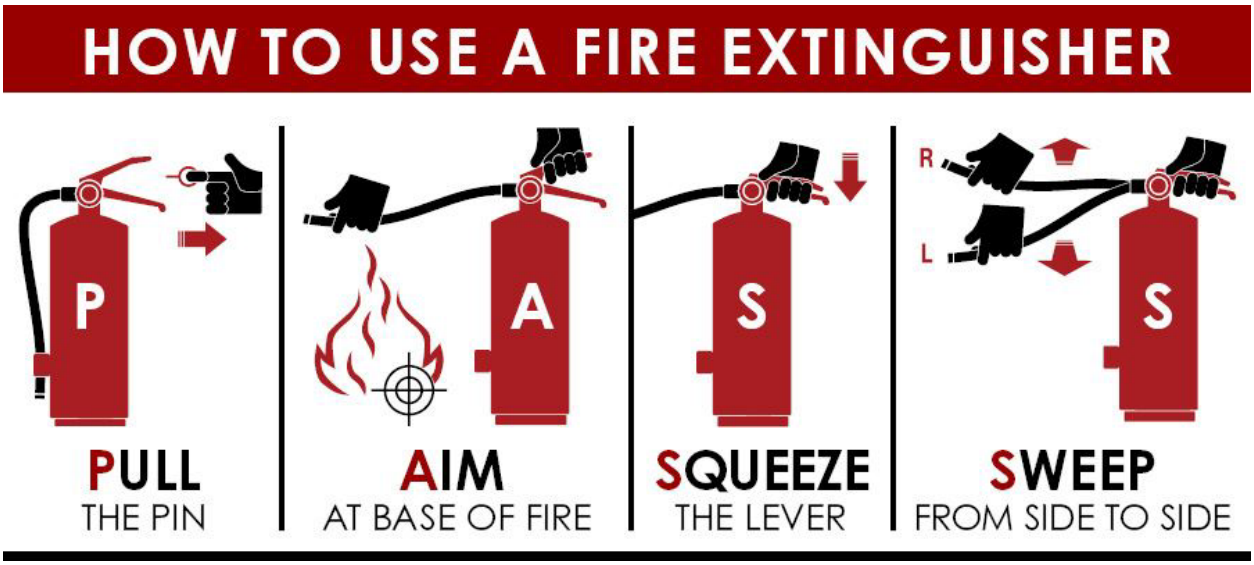
(B) Fire extinguishers shall be inspected annually for charging and certification to standards by a certified fire extinguisher technician.

Utilizing the Fire Extinguisher (The P.A.S.S. Method)

Every school transportation vehicle must be equipped with a securely mounted, fully charged dry chemical fire extinguisher. If a fire breaks out, retrieve the extinguisher, hold it upright, and use the **P.A.S.S.** sequence:

- **P - Pull the Pin:** Pull the safety pin out from the handle to unlock the trigger mechanism.

- **A - Aim Low:** Aim the nozzle or hose directly at the *base* of the fire, not at the flames brushing upward.
- **S - Squeeze the Lever:** Squeeze the handle lever firmly to release the dry chemical extinguishing agent.
- **S - Sweep Side-to-Side:** Sweep the nozzle back and forth across the base of the fire until the flames are completely extinguished.



Medical Kits and Universal Precautions

- **First Aid Kit:** Used for treating minor lacerations, burns, or scrapes. Items used must be replenished immediately upon returning to the terminal.
- **Body Fluid Clean-Up Kit:** Contains specialized barriers, liquid-absorbing powders, scrapers, and disinfectants designed to handle blood, vomit, or other bodily fluids safely.
- **The 36-Month Replacement Rule:** Under 1 CCR 301-26, consideration must be given to replacing the contents of the Body Fluid Clean-Up Kit every 36 months, as the protective materials and chemical agents break down over time. All contaminated waste items must be sealed in the kit's disposal scoop bag and discarded strictly inside an approved hazardous materials (hazmat) container.

1 CCR 301-25 Minimum Standards, 10.14 Emergency Equipment

10.14.2 First Aid Kit:

(A) All School Transportation Vehicles shall carry one 24-Unit First Aid Kit, which shall be securely mounted in full view of the driver or with

the location plainly indicated by appropriate signage. Additional kits may be installed. All first aid kits shall be mounted for easy removal.

(1) The kit shall be sealed, moisture and dustproof, and be of sufficient capacity to store the required items.

(2) The seal verifies the integrity of the contents without opening the kit. The seal shall be designed to allow easy access to the kit's contents. If zip ties are used to seal the kit, they shall be breakaway.

(3) All first aid kit components shall be inspected annually by the Educational Entity. Any items found to be expired, damaged, or previously opened shall be replaced immediately to ensure kit integrity.

(B) The required contents of the 24-Unit First Aid kit are listed in Table 1.

Contents of the 24-Unit First Aid Kit:	
Item	**Unit(s)**
Adhesive tape	1
1-inch bandage compress	2
2-inch bandage compress	1
3-inch bandage compress	1
4-inch bandage compress	1
4-inch x 3-inch plain gauze pads	1
Gauze roller bandage 2-inch wide	2
Plain absorbent gauze – ½ square yard	4
Plain absorbent gauze - 24-inch by 72 inches	3
Triangular bandages	3
Scissors	1
Tweezers	1
Space rescue blanket	1
Non-latex disposable pair of gloves	1
CPR mask or mouth-to-mouth airway	1

Table 1. 24-Unit First Aid Kit

10.14.3 Body Fluid Cleanup Kit:

(A) All School Transportation Vehicles shall have a body fluid cleanup kit, securely mounted in full view of the driver or with the location plainly indicated by appropriate signage. Additional kits may be

installed. All bodily fluid cleanup kits shall be mounted for easy removal.

(1) The kit shall be sealed, moisture and dustproof, and be of sufficient capacity to store the required items.

(2) The seal verifies the integrity of the contents without opening the kit. The seal shall be designed to allow easy access to the kit's contents. If zip ties are used to seal the kit, they shall be breakaway.

(B) All bodily fluid kit components shall be inspected annually by the Educational Entity. Any items found to be expired, damaged, or previously opened shall be replaced as soon as possible to ensure kit integrity.

(C) The required contents of the bodily fluid kit are listed in Table 2.

Contents of the Bodily Fluid Kit:	
Item	**Unit(s)**
Antiseptic BKZ Towelette	1
Disinfectant towelette	1
Absorbing powder (capable of ½ gallon absorption)	1
Non-latex disposable gloves, pair	1
Disposable towels (paper, microfiber, etc.)	2
Disposable biohazard scoop bag with a closure mechanism and scraper	1

Table 2. Bodily Fluid Kit

10.14.5 Seat Belt Cutter:

(A) All School Transportation Vehicles shall be equipped with one durable seat belt cutter having a full-width handgrip and a protected blade. The cutter shall be mounted in a location accessible to and within immediate view of the seated driver.

(B) Seat belt cutters shall be replaced per the manufacturer's recommendation or if there is any sign of rust or corrosion on the blade.

PART 5: FIRST AID, CPR, AND UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

As a transportation operator, you must be prepared to respond to medical emergencies calmly and safely. Unless you are physically disabled from doing so, you should

administer first aid whenever it is apparent that death or severe, permanent injury to others may follow.

Crucial Legal and Safety Limit: Scope of Practice

As a school transportation operator, you must **never attempt any medical intervention that goes beyond your specific level of training and scope of practice**. Trying to perform advanced medical procedures without certification can worsen injuries and expose you and your district to liability. Furthermore, you must adhere strictly to the rule that when providing first aid, no medication of any kind (prescription or over-the-counter) may be administered without a physician's directive**.** Your job is to provide basic, immediate stabilization and life support until professional medical responders arrive.

The information provided here is basic and fundamental and is not intended to replace any official first aid/CPR/Universal Precautions training provided by a certified or registered party. For more detailed information regarding advanced medical procedures, contact your local School Nurse.

Legal Protections: The Colorado Good Samaritan Law

Many operators hesitate to act during a sudden medical crisis due to a fear of being sued if the outcome is not perfect. In Colorado, you are protected by a specific legal shield designed to encourage immediate, life-saving action.

- **Statutory Protection (C.R.S. 13-21-108):** Colorado's Good Samaritan Law explicitly states that any person who, in good faith, renders emergency care or assistance at the scene of an accident or emergency without compensation is exempt from civil liability for damages.
- **What is Covered:** The law protects you against ordinary mistakes made during the high-stress chaos of a rescue effort. For example, if you perform high-quality chest compressions during CPR and accidentally crack a student's rib, that is an accepted risk of the procedure; you are legally protected from civil damages because your actions were performed in good faith to save a life.
- **Employer Protection:** Under C.R.S. 13-21-108(5), this civil liability immunity extends directly to your school district or employer when you render emergency care in the course of your employment, provided your actions meet the good-faith standard.
- **The Exclusions (When the Shield Fails):** You lose Good Samaritan protection only if your actions constitute gross negligence or willful and wanton conduct. This means acting with reckless, conscious disregard for the student's safety, or

intentionally performing an action that no reasonable person with your level of training would attempt (such as attempting a surgical procedure).

- **AED Protection (C.R.S. 13-21-108.1):** If your vehicle or terminal is equipped with an Automated External Defibrillator (AED), separate statutory language protects any bystander who uses it in good faith to rescue someone in cardiac arrest.

The legal takeaway is clear: as long as you act reasonably, stay within your scope of training, and work in good faith to preserve life, Colorado law firmly protects both you and your school district.

Basic First Aid: Managing Immediate Threats

When addressing a medical emergency on a Type A bus or small-capacity vehicle, your immediate priority is to stabilize the student while emergency medical services (EMS) are en route. Focus on the core life-saving measures below:

1. Severe Bleeding Control

Uncontrolled bleeding can become life-threatening in a matter of minutes.

- **Apply Direct Pressure:** Place a clean, sterile gauze pad from your 24-unit first aid kit directly over the wound. Press firmly with both hands.
- **Maintain Constant Pressure:** Do not remove the gauze to "check" if the bleeding has stopped, as this tears away forming clots. If blood seeps through, place additional gauze directly over the first layer and continue applying firm pressure.
- **Elevate:** If the injury is on an arm or leg, elevate the limb above the level of the heart while maintaining direct pressure, provided there are no signs of a fractured bone.

2. Shock Management

Shock occurs when the cardiovascular system fails to circulate enough blood to vital organs. It often follows severe injuries, bleeding, or emotional trauma.

- **Recognize the Signs:** Look for pale, cold, or clammy skin, rapid breathing, a weak pulse, nausea, or changes in mental status (such as confusion or restlessness).
- **Position the Student:** Lay the student flat on their back if it is safe to do so. If no spinal injury is suspected, elevate their feet approximately 8 to 12 inches to encourage blood flow to the core.

- **Regulate Body Temperature:** Use the **space rescue blanket** from your first aid kit to keep the student warm. Protect them from both the cold ground and chilling drafts, but avoid overheating them.
- **Reassure Them:** Keep the student calm and quiet. Do not give them anything to eat or drink, as this can create a severe choking or vomiting hazard.

3. Broken Bones and Dislocations

Fractures (broken bones) and dislocations require immediate immobilization to prevent further soft-tissue, nerve, or vascular damage.

- **Do Not Move or Align the Limb:** Never attempt to push a bone back into place, straighten a deformed limb, or force a dislocated joint back into its socket. Leave the limb in the exact position you found it.
- **Examine for Open Wounds:** If a bone has pierced the skin, do not attempt to push it back in. Control any bleeding by applying pressure around the edges of the wound, not directly on the exposed bone, and cover it loosely with a sterile gauze pad.
- **Immobilize the Injury:** Use the **triangular bandages** from your 24-unit first aid kit to create a supportive sling and swathe for upper extremity injuries (arms or shoulders). This binds the arm securely against the chest to prevent movement. For lower extremities, roll up thick jackets, blankets, or cardboard to create improvised rigid splints along the sides of the leg, tying them loosely in place above and below the injury site.
- **Check Circulation:** Regularly check the student's fingers or toes below the injury. If their skin turns blue, turns cold, or loses sensation, the splint or bandage is tied too tightly and must be loosened immediately.

4. The Priority of Noise: Screaming vs. Silence

In a mass-casualty or multi-injury incident, your triage instinct must be razor-sharp. A common trap for untrained operators is running to the student who is screaming the loudest. You must understand why **a silent child is always your highest priority and most concerning hazard**:

- **Screaming Proves Function:** If a child is screaming, crying, or complaining loudly, they have a functional, open airway, and their lungs are receiving enough oxygen to produce sound. Their neurological status is sufficiently responsive to register and express pain. While they may have painful injuries (like a broken bone), they are currently breathing.

- **Silence Indicates a Critical Threat:** A silent child after a crash or hard brake suggests that their primary life-support mechanisms are failing. Silence frequently points to a completely blocked airway (severe choking), unconsciousness, profound neurological trauma (concussion/coma), severe shock, or cardiac/respiratory arrest.
- **The Golden Rule of Triage:** Always pass the screaming children first to assess and stabilize the silent, motionless passengers. They are the ones closest to death or permanent injury.

Basic Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Protocol

If your assessment reveals a silent, unresponsive student who is not breathing or is only gasping, you must initiate CPR immediately. Follow this standard operational sequence:

1. Check Responsiveness and Shout for Help

- Tap the student firmly on the shoulder and shout loudly, "Are you okay?"
- If there is no response, immediately call dispatch or 911 (or point to a specific student leader or adult chaperone and command: "Call 911 now!").

2. Position the Victim

- To perform effective CPR, the student must be lying flat on their back on a firm, flat surface.
- On a vehicle, this means carefully moving the student out of the passenger seat and onto the flat center aisle floor.

3. Open the Airway and Check for Breathing

- Perform the head-tilt/chin-lift maneuver. Place one hand on the student's forehead and two fingers under their chin, gently tilting the head back to move the tongue away from the back of the throat.
- Look, listen, and feel for normal breathing for no more than 10 seconds. Ignore agonal gasps (occasional, irregular snorting or gasping sounds), as they are not normal breathing and indicate cardiac arrest.

4. Deliver High-Quality Chest Compressions

- Put on your non-latex disposable gloves. Kneel beside the student’s chest.
- Place the heel of one hand in the center of the chest (on the lower half of the breastbone) and place your other hand directly on top, interlocking your fingers.

- Position your shoulders directly over your hands, keep your elbows locked, and push straight down.
- **Compression Depth:** Compress the chest at least 2 inches for a child or adult (or approximately one-third the depth of the chest for an infant, using two fingers).
- **Compression Rate:** Push hard and fast at a rate of 100 to 120 compressions per minute (to the beat of the song "Staying Alive"). Allow the chest to fully recoil between each compression.

5. Provide Rescue Breaths (Using the CPR Mask)

- Retrieve the mandatory CPR mask or mouth-to-mouth airway from your 24-unit first aid kit. Do not perform rescue breaths without this protective barrier.
- Secure the mask firmly over the student's nose and mouth to create an airtight seal.
- With the airway open (head-tilt/chin-lift), pinch the nose if required by your specific mask type, and deliver rescue breaths. Each breath should last about 1 second and cause the student’s chest to visibly rise.
- **The Cycle Ratio:** Maintain a strict ratio of 30 chest compressions followed by 2 rescue breaths.
- Continue this cycle uninterrupted until emergency medical personnel arrive and take over, an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) becomes available, or the student shows obvious signs of life (such as breathing or moving).

Bloodborne Pathogen Protection & Universal Precautions

It is natural to feel concerned about contracting a disease when assisting an injured person. To protect yourself from bloodborne pathogens, including infectious diseases, bacteria, or viruses found in body fluids, you must implement universal precautions.

A simple rule of thumb to remember is: **If a fluid is wet, warm, and NOT yours, use universal precautions.**

Your employer is required by law to provide you with detailed, comprehensive training in bloodborne pathogen procedures.

Basic Guidelines to Reduce Disease Transmission

Following these core safety guidelines will drastically reduce the risk of disease transmission while you provide first aid on your vehicle:

- **Be Prepared:** Always ensure your vehicle's first aid kit and body fluid cleanup kit are fully stocked with protective equipment and supplies, such as non-latex disposable gloves and biohazard bags, before leaving the terminal.
- **Use Protective Barriers:** Before providing care, place a barrier between the victim's body fluids and yourself. Utilize your kit's face mask, eye protection, non-latex disposable gloves, or even a clean, dry cloth.
- **Protect Your Own Skin:** Keep any cuts, sores, scrapes, or active skin conditions on your own hands and arms completely covered.
- **Avoid Direct Contact:** Minimize direct contact with blood or body fluids whenever possible. Do not touch objects that appear soiled with blood or body fluids.
- **Maintain Personal Hygiene During Care:** Do not eat, drink, or touch your mouth, nose, or eyes while administering first aid.
- **Follow Disposal Policies:** Dispose of all materials contaminated with blood or body fluids strictly as directed by your employer's specific bloodborne pathogen and hazardous waste policy.
- **Wash Thoroughly:** Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water immediately after you finish giving first aid, even if you wore disposable gloves.
- **Report and Evaluate Immediately:** If you experience an exposure incident (such as blood or potentially infectious material contacting your broken skin, eyes, mouth, or mucous membranes), you must report it to dispatch or your supervisor immediately upon securing the scene. Follow your Educational Entity’s policy to obtain an immediate, confidential medical evaluation.

PART 6: EMERGENCY EVACUATIONS

Evacuating a school transportation vehicle is an absolute last resort. In a crash or breakdown, the inside of the vehicle is generally the safest place for students because it protects them from high-speed traffic on the roadway.

The Three Mandatory Reasons to Evacuate

You are permitted to order an emergency evacuation *only* if one of these three catastrophic conditions exists:

1. **Fire or Threat of Fire:** The vehicle is actively on fire, or you smell fuel leaks or burning electrical insulation.

2. **Unsafe Vehicle Position:** The vehicle is stalled or stopped in a position where a secondary collision is highly likely (such as being stuck across a railroad track or stopped just past the crest of a blind hill in heavy fog).
3. **Hazardous Environmental Location:** The vehicle is at risk of being swept away or submerged by an active natural hazard (such as a flash flood, a mudslide, or an avalanche path).

General Procedures for a Safe Evacuation

If an evacuation is deemed mandatory, you must maintain total command of the cabin:

- **Maintain Order:** Remain calm and use a clear, commanding voice. Students will mirror your behavior; if you panic, they will panic.
- **Assign Student Leaders:** Appoint two mature student leaders to assist at the evacuation door. One leader will exit first to help students down, and the second leader will direct students to a safe assembly zone.
- **Leave Belongings Behind:** Instruct students to leave all backpacks, books, coats, and personal items inside the bus. Taking belongings slows down the evacuation and creates tripping hazards in the aisle.
- **The Safe Assembly Zone:** Move all evacuated students to a designated safe zone completely away from the roadway and at least **100 feet or more away from the bus**. Ensure they are grouped together and supervised so no child wanders back toward traffic or the vehicle.
- **Final Bus Sweep:** Take your first aid kit, body fluid kit, and passenger roster. Walk to the very back row of the bus and check under every seat to ensure no injured, frightened, or unconscious children are left behind.

Choosing Your Evacuation Exit Routes

Modern school buses feature multiple emergency exit paths that you can utilize depending on how the vehicle is positioned post-crash:

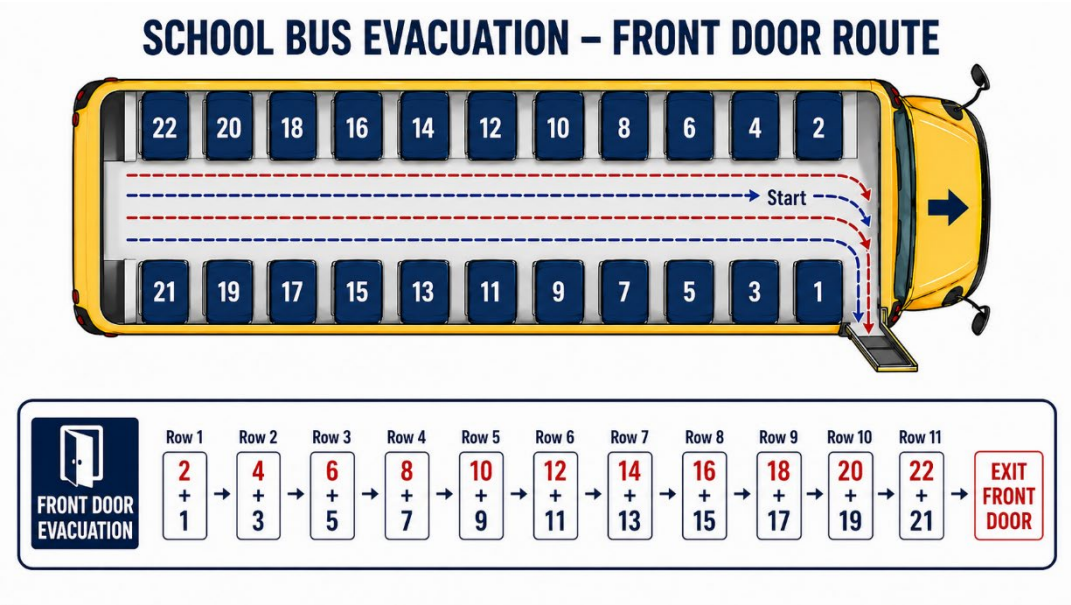
Emergency Exit Options

Front Door
- Primary option
- Fastest clearance
- Use if clear

Rear/Side Door
- Secondary option
- Essential if front is blocked

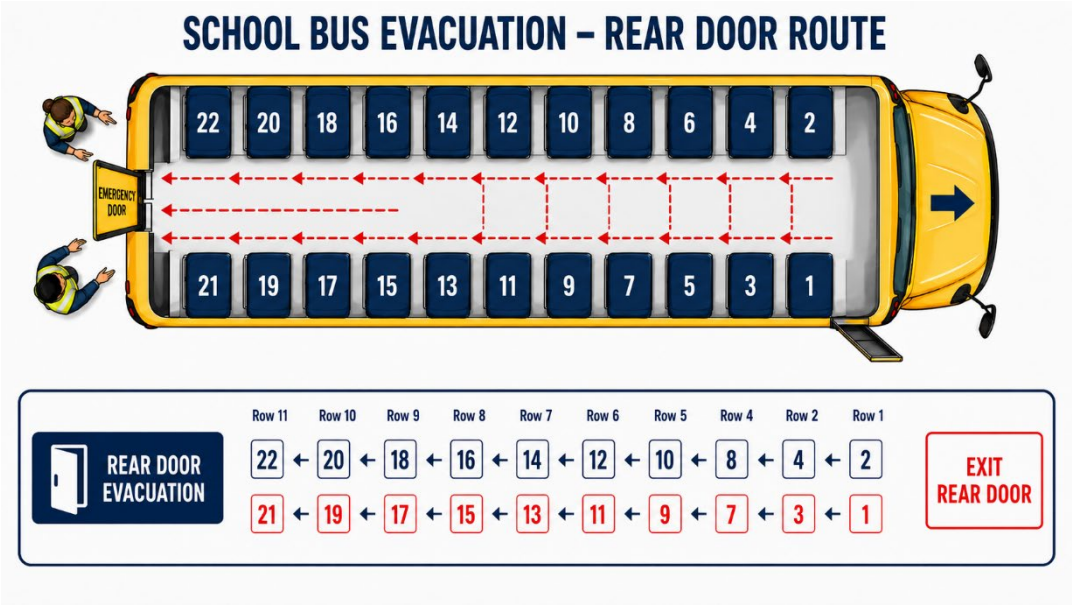
Windows and Hatches
- Use ONLY if doors are jammed, blocked, or if the bus is rolled over

- **Front Door Evacuation:** This is your primary, fastest route under normal circumstances. Students exit row by row, alternating between the left and right sides of the aisle, starting at the front of the bus.

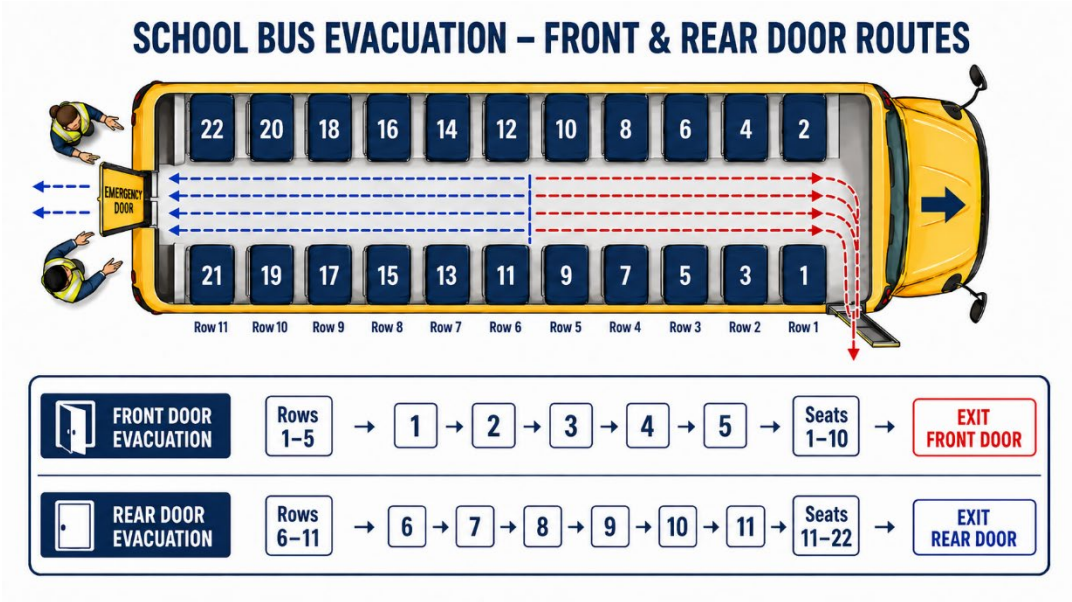


- **Rear Emergency Door Evacuation:** Utilized if the front door is jammed or blocked by fire/debris. Open the door fully until it locks in the wide-open position. Assign your helper leaders outside. Students exit row by row, alternating between the left and right sides of the aisle, starting at the rear of the bus. Instruct students to walk down the aisle, crouch at the rear door sill, and drop

safely with assistance from the outside student leaders. **Do not let students jump out wildly**, as this causes severe ankle and leg injuries.



- **Combined Front and Rear Evacuation:** If the threat is urgent and both doors are completely clear, split the cabin. Rows 1 through 5 exit out the front door, while rows 6 and back exit through the rear door.



- **Side Emergency Doors:** Present on larger buses, they operate identically to the rear door evacuations and are highly effective if the bus is blocked at both the front and rear bumpers.

- **Emergency Windows and Roof Hatches:** These are restricted exit routes. They should **only be used if all doors are completely jammed or blocked, or if the bus has rolled onto its side**. Roof hatches are excellent for ventilation or exit if a vehicle is partially submerged in water.

Evacuating Students with Functional or Special Needs

Evacuating a bus carrying students with physical disabilities or functional needs requires specialized prep and coordination:

- **Know Your Roster:** You must know exactly which students are non-ambulatory (cannot walk) and which have cognitive or sensory sensitivities.
- **Wheelchair Lift Failure:** In an emergency evacuation, do not waste time attempting to operate the electric wheelchair lift. It moves too slowly, and a loss of engine power will disable it completely.
- **The Manual Carry Technique:** You must manually unbuckle or cut the wheelchair securement straps. Carefully lift the student out of their wheelchair using proper body mechanics (bending your knees) or a specialized evacuation blanket/sling. Carry them down the aisle to the nearest functioning emergency exit door, and carefully hand them off to your adult chaperones or emergency responders outside. Follow your Educational Entity policies.

16.0 Emergency Evacuation Drills

16.1 Mandatory Route Operator Evacuation Drills

16.1.1 Small-Capacity Vehicle Operators, as defined in these rules, are exempt from this requirement.

16.1.2 All School Transportation Vehicle Route Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants shall conduct emergency evacuation drills with students at least twice during each school year.

(A) One drill shall be conducted in the fall, and the second drill shall be conducted in the spring.

(B) Substitute and Multifunction bus operators shall be trained on how to conduct emergency evacuation drills.

16.1.3 Special Needs Provisions

(A) Physical evacuation drills are not required to be conducted for students with functional or special needs.

(1) For these students, at a minimum, a detailed written emergency evacuation plan shall be maintained on file by the transportation department. This plan shall be reviewed by Transportation Personnel at least twice per school year to ensure accuracy and safety.

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Unit Eight – Transporting Students for Route and Activity Trips

PART 1: THE DANGER ZONES AND MIRROR SCANNING

The physical act of loading and unloading students is the single most hazardous phase of school transportation operations. Statistically, more students are injured or killed outside the bus by passing motorists or by the bus itself than while riding inside the vehicle.

Mapping the "Danger Zone"

The "Danger Zone" is the entire perimeter extending 10 feet completely around the school bus. Because of the bus's high ground clearance and large structural frame, a child standing in these areas can be completely invisible to the operator without proper use of the mirrors.

- **The Front Danger Zone:** Extends up to 30 feet from the front bumper, with the first 10 feet being the most blind.
- **The Side Danger Zones:** The areas immediately in front of the left and right rear wheels are highly critical, as students can easily trip or fall under the tires.
- **The Rear Danger Zone:** Extends 10 feet directly behind the rear bumper. The driver has zero direct rear visibility; backing up at a student stop is strictly controlled.

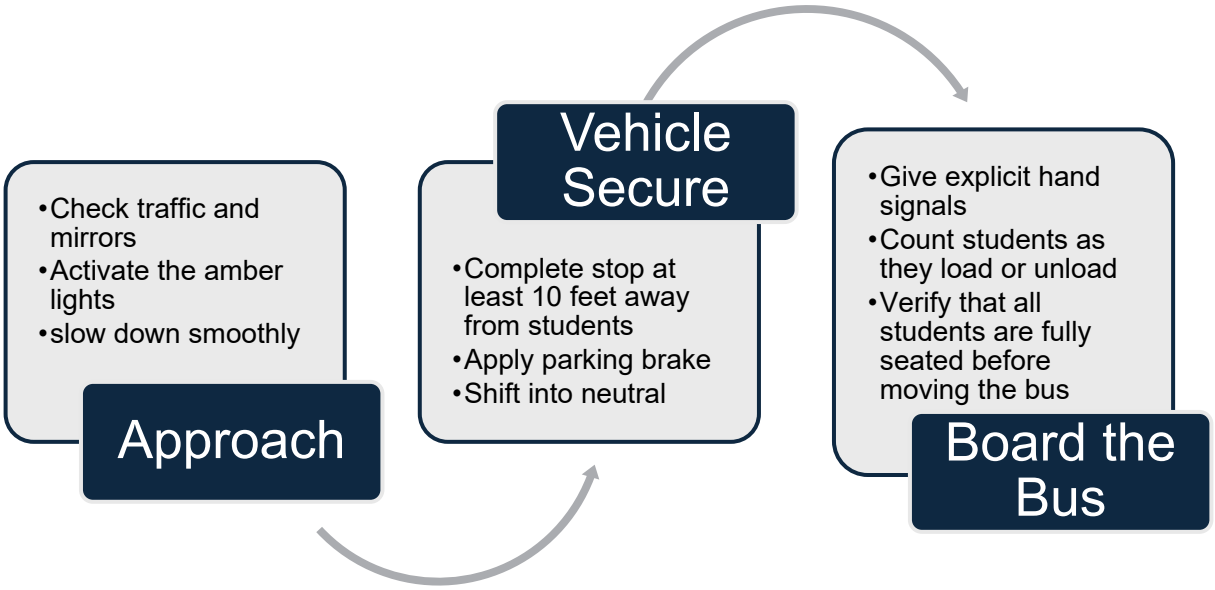
Standardized Mirror Scanning Matrix

Operators must maintain a continuous, rapid mirror-scanning habit throughout the entire loading and unloading cycle.

- **Crossover Mirrors:** Used to monitor the entire front bumper area at ground level up to the point where direct vision is possible. Drivers must verify that the front tires are completely clear of children before moving.
- **Side Convex Mirrors:** Positioned to eliminate the blind spots immediately along the left and right sides of the bus frame, displaying the entry door area and the ground leading to both rear tire sets.
- **Flat Mirrors:** Used to monitor long-distance traffic trailing behind the bus or passing along the left side.

PART 2: PROCEDURAL STEPS FOR LOADING STUDENTS

To establish absolute behavioral consistency, operators must perform the loading sequence in the exact order detailed below.



The Approach Phase

1. **Scan Ahead:** Look far ahead to locate the waiting students and scan for conflicting traffic hazards. Students must wait at their designated location, facing the bus as it approaches, and arrive at least five minutes early to their stop location.
2. **Signal Intent:** Activate your 8-way amber warning lights (or hazard lights, depending on vehicle classification) at least 200 feet before the stop (or as locally regulated) to alert traffic.
3. **Smooth Braking:** Apply light brake pressure to slow the vehicle down smoothly, signaling trailing motorists with your brake lights.

Securing the Vehicle at the Stop

1. **The 10-Foot Cushion:** Bring the bus to a complete stop 10 feet away from the waiting students. Never pull the bus directly up to or alongside the children, as a slip or a push in line could send a child under the wheels. Each bus stop should have a location where the students can safely wait for the school bus at least 10 feet off the roadway.
2. **Lock the Controls:** Once stopped, keep your foot firmly on the service brake pedal, apply the parking brake, and shift the transmission into **Neutral** (or Park for smaller automatic units). This prevents the bus from rolling if your foot accidentally slips off the brake pedal while assisting students.

   Remember that the parking brake is always the first thing on and the last thing off at each stop.

Boarding and Seating Protocol

1. **Signal the Students:** Open the service door to activate the red crossing lights and stop arm (if equipped). Look directly at the students and give them an explicit, pre-arranged hand signal to board.
2. **The Entry Count:** Count the students as they walk up the steps to ensure your passenger manifest matches exactly.
3. **Enforce Seating Rules:** Instruct students to immediately move to a seat, sit completely upright, and face forward with their backs against the seat cushion while the vehicle is in motion. Operators must consider passenger size when determining how many students can safely occupy a single seat.

12.5 Passenger Management and Capacity

12.5.2 Seating and Capacity

(A) Occupancy on any School Transportation Vehicle shall not exceed the manufacturer-specified maximum seating capacity of the vehicle.

(1) Small vehicle capacity shall not exceed the number of factory-installed safety belts.

(B) Passengers shall not be permitted to stand in any School Transportation Vehicle while the vehicle is in motion.

(1) This does not preclude authorized persons (such as School Transportation Bus Attendants) from completing their duties as required.

(C) Educational Entities shall consider the size of the passengers when determining the number of passengers that can safely occupy a School Transportation Vehicle seat.

PART 3: PROCEDURAL STEPS FOR UNLOADING & CROSSING

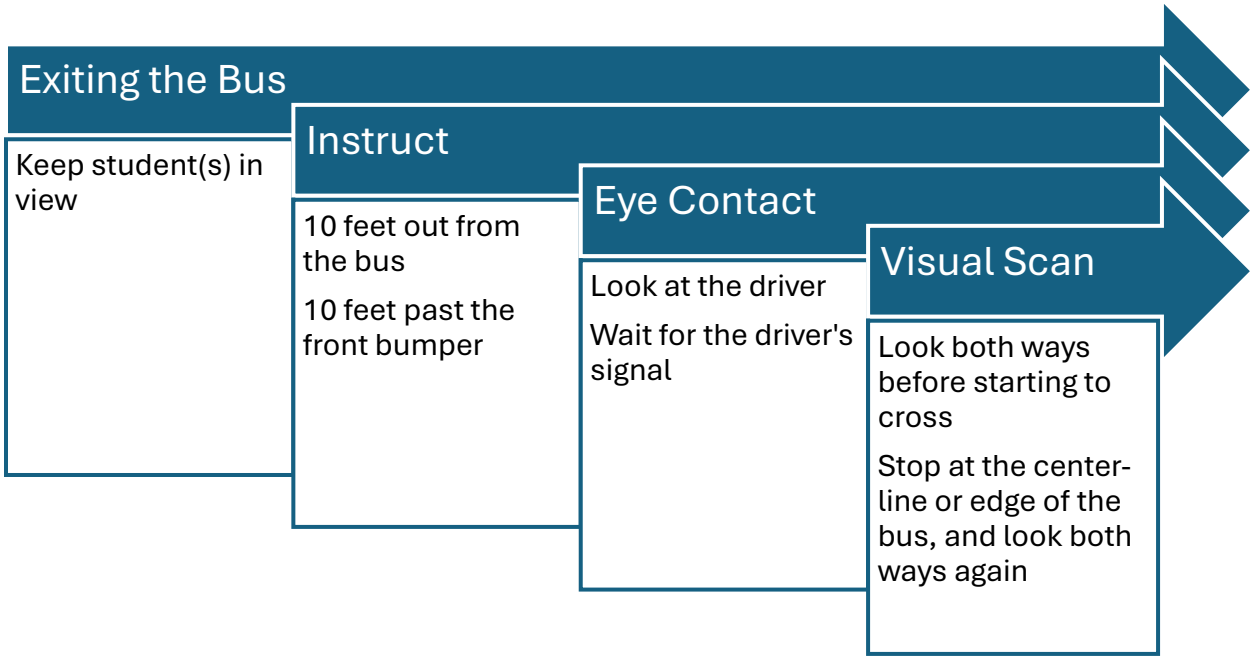
Unloading poses a heightened risk because students are moving away from the vehicle and into uncontrolled environments.

Unloading Mechanics (No Crossing Required)

1. **Secure the Bus:** Bring the vehicle to a full stop at the designated stop location, apply the parking brake, and shift to Neutral.
2. **Orderly Discharge:** Open the door and count students as they step off the bus.
3. **The Clearing Scan:** Instruct students to exit and immediately walk completely out of the 10-foot Danger Zone. Before releasing the parking brake, scan all exterior mirrors to account for every child dropped off and verify that none have lingered near the dual wheels or bumpers.

High-Risk Passenger Crossing Sequences

Under Colorado law, if a student must cross the street to reach their destination after disembarking, specific crossing safeguards must be rigidly executed:



1. **Walk 10 Feet Forward:** Upon stepping off the bus, the student must walk at least **10 feet straight out** in front of the front bumper, ensuring they remain fully visible to the driver's crossover mirrors.
2. **Establish Eye Contact:** The student must stop on the shoulder or curb and look directly at the driver, waiting for an explicit "Safe to Cross" signal.
3. **The Center-Line Stop:** Once signaled, the student walks to the front left corner of the bus bumper, stops completely, and looks both ways (left, right, left) down the highway to check for illegally passing vehicles before stepping into the open traffic lane.
4. **Alert if Traffic Doesn't Stop:** If the school bus operator observes that oncoming or following traffic isn't slowing down for the red lights, they should honk the horn to alert students and guide them safely back to the correct side of the road.
    a. If you are unloading students and a vehicle passes your red lights, your primary responsibility is to the safety of the students. Honk your horn to warn the students of the oncoming hazard and direct them back to safety.

5. **Absolute Prohibition:** Students are strictly prohibited from crossing any lanes of traffic behind the bus or crossing any multi-lane highway where traffic is not legally required to stop.
6. **No Unauthorized Relocation:** School transportation operators are strictly prohibited from changing or relocating a student stop without formal, written administrative approval from the district or service provider.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-1903 School buses – stops – signs – passing – penalty – definition

(1)

(a) The driver of a motor vehicle upon any highway, road, or street, upon meeting or overtaking from either direction any school bus that has stopped, shall stop the vehicle at least twenty feet before reaching the school bus if visual signal lights as specified in subsection (2) of this section have been actuated on the school bus. The driver shall not proceed until the visual signal lights are no longer being actuated.

(b)

(I) A driver of any school bus who observes a violation of paragraph (a) of this subsection (1) shall notify the driver' s school district transportation dispatcher. The school bus driver shall provide the school district transportation dispatcher with the color, basic description, and license plate number of the vehicle involved in the violation, information pertaining to the identity of the alleged violator, and the time and the approximate location at which the violation occurred. Any school district transportation dispatcher who has received information by a school bus driver concerning a violation of paragraph (a) of this subsection (1) shall provide such information to the appropriate law enforcement agency or agencies.

(II) A law enforcement agency may issue a citation on the basis of the information supplied to it pursuant to subparagraph (I) of this paragraph (b) to the driver of the vehicle involved in the violation.

(2)

(a) Every school bus as defined in section 42-1-102 (88), other than a small passenger-type vehicle having a seating capacity of not more than twelve, used for the transportation of schoolchildren, must:

(I) Bear upon the front and rear of such school bus plainly visible and legible signs containing the words “SCHOOL BUS” in letters not less than eight inches in height; and

(II) Display eight visual signal lights meeting the requirements of 49 CFR 571.108 or its successor regulation.

(a.5) Every multifunction school activity bus as defined in section 42-1-102 (60.1) must bear on the front and rear of the bus the words “ACTIVITY BUS” in black letters not less than eight inches in height.

(b)

(I) The red visual signal lights shall be actuated by the driver of the school bus whenever the school bus is stopped for the purpose of receiving or discharging schoolchildren, is stopped because it is behind another school bus that is receiving or discharging passengers, or, except as provided in subsection (4) of this section, is stopped because it has met a school bus traveling in a different direction that is receiving or discharging passengers and at no other time; but such lights need not be actuated when a school bus is stopped at locations where the local traffic regulatory authority has by prior written designation declared such actuation unnecessary.

(II) A school bus shall be exempt from the provisions of subparagraph (I) of this paragraph (b) when stopped for the purpose of discharging or loading passengers who require the assistance of a lift device only when no passenger is required to cross the roadway. Such buses shall stop as far to the right off the roadway as possible to reduce obstruction to traffic.

(c) The alternating flashing yellow lights shall be actuated at least two hundred feet prior to the point where the bus is to be stopped for the purpose of receiving or discharging schoolchildren, and the red lights shall be actuated only at the time the bus is actually stopped.

(3) Every school bus used for the transportation of schoolchildren, except those small passenger-type vehicles described in subsection (1) of this section and multifunction school activity buses, must be equipped with school bus pedestrian safety devices that comply with 49 CFR 571.131 or its successor regulation.

(4) The driver of a vehicle upon a highway with separate roadways need not stop upon meeting or passing a school bus that is on a different roadway. As used in this section, “highway with separate roadways” means a highway that is divided into two or more roadways by a depressed or raised median, physical barriers, or other intervening space serving as a clearly indicated section or island that physically divides the roadways.

(5) Every school bus shall stop as far to the right of the roadway as possible before discharging or loading passengers; except that the school bus may block the lane of traffic when a passenger being received or discharged is required to cross the roadway. When possible, a school bus shall not stop where the visibility is obscured for a distance of two hundred feet either way from the bus. The driver of a school bus that has stopped shall allow time for any vehicles that have stopped behind the school bus to pass the school bus, if such passing is legally permissible where the school bus is stopped, after the visual signal lights, if any, are no longer being displayed or actuated and after all children who have embarked or disembarked from the bus are safe from traffic.

(6)

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this subsection (6), any person who violates any provision of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of this section commits a class 2 misdemeanor traffic offense.

(b) Any person who violates the provisions of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of this section commits a class 1 misdemeanor traffic offense if such person has been convicted within the previous five years of a violation of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of this section.

(7) The provisions of this section shall not apply in the case of public transportation programs for pupil transportation under section 22-51-104 (1)(c), C.R.S.

Colorado Revised Statutes 42-4-1904 Regulations for school buses – regulations on discharge of passengers – penalty – exception – definition

(1) The state board of education, by and with the advice of the executive director of the department, shall adopt and enforce regulations not inconsistent with this article to govern the operation of all school buses used for the transportation of schoolchildren and to govern the discharge of passengers from such school buses. Such regulations shall prohibit the driver of any school bus used for the transportation of schoolchildren from discharging any passenger from the school bus which will result in the passenger’s immediately crossing a major

thoroughfare, except for two-lane highways when such crossing can be done in a safe manner, as determined by the local school board in consultation with the local traffic regulatory authority, and shall prohibit the discharging or loading of passengers from the school bus onto the side of any major thoroughfare whenever access to the destination of the passenger is possible by the use of a road or street which is adjacent to the major thoroughfare. For the purposes of this section, a “major thoroughfare” means a freeway, any U.S. highway outside any incorporated limit, interstate highway, or highway with four or more lanes, or a highway or road with a median separating multiple lanes of traffic. Every person operating a school bus or responsible for or in control of the operation of school buses shall be subject to said regulations.

(2) Any person operating a school bus under contract with a school district who fails to comply with any of said regulations is guilty of breach of contract, and such contract shall be canceled after notice and hearing by the responsible officers of such district.

(3) Any person who violates any provision of this section commits a petty offense.

(4) The provisions of this section shall not apply in the case of public transportation programs for pupil transportation under section 22-51-104 (1)(c), C.R.S.

14.3 Route Prohibitions and Constraints

14.3.2 Operational Constraints and Exceptions

(D) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall not relocate a student stop without the approval of the Educational Entity.

14.4 Loading and Unloading Procedures

14.4.1 School Bus 8-way System Student Stop Procedure

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators of School Transportation Vehicles equipped with flashing amber/red systems shall adhere to the following sequence:

(1) Approach cautiously at a slow rate of speed.

(2) Continuously check all mirrors.

(3) Activate alternating flashing amber warning lights at least 200 feet before the school bus stop.

(4) Turn on the right turn signal indicator about 100-300 feet before pulling over.

(5) Continuously check mirrors to monitor the danger zones for students, traffic, and other objects.

(6) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall stop as far to the right of the roadway, highway, or private road as possible before discharging or loading passengers - allowing sufficient area to the right and front of the vehicle but close enough to the right to prevent traffic from passing on the right - so that students may clear the vehicle safely while in sight of the School Transportation Vehicle Operator.

(a) Exception: The School Transportation Vehicle Operator may block the lane of traffic when passengers being received or discharged are required to cross the roadway.

(7) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall bring the bus to a complete stop with the front bumper positioned not less than 10 feet from students at each designated stop to ensure that students approach the vehicle within the School Transportation Operator’s line of sight and to enhance visibility of student movement.

(8) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall keep their foot on the service brake, apply the parking brake, and shift the vehicle into neutral prior to opening the service door of a bus.

(9) Activate the alternating 8-way red lights warning lights system when traffic is a safe distance from the school bus and ensure the stop arm is extended.

(10) Make a final check to see that all traffic has stopped before completely opening the door and signaling students to approach or allowing them to disembark.

(11) After all students have loaded or disembarked:

(a) If the students have disembarked, the School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall verify that all students have crossed or are away from the vehicle, and are counted, prior to moving the vehicle.

(b) Close the service or passenger door.

(c) Shift from neutral, engage the transmission, and release the parking brake.

(d) Turn on the left turn signal and deactivate the eight-way system.

(e) Check all mirrors, allow congested traffic to disperse, and enter the flow of traffic when it is safe to do so.

14.4.2 Small-Capacity and Type A-1 Multifunction Bus Student Stop Procedure

(A) When a Type A-1 Multifunction Bus or Small-Capacity Vehicle is used for Route transportation, students shall be prohibited from crossing any roadway, highway, or private road to board or exit the vehicle.

(B) When using a Type A-1 Multifunction bus or small-capacity vehicle for Route:

(1) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall stop as far to the right of the roadway, and/or off the roadway when possible, to reduce obstruction to traffic.

(2) Activate the right turn signal prior to turning on the four-way hazard warning lamps a minimum of 200 feet prior to the student stop.

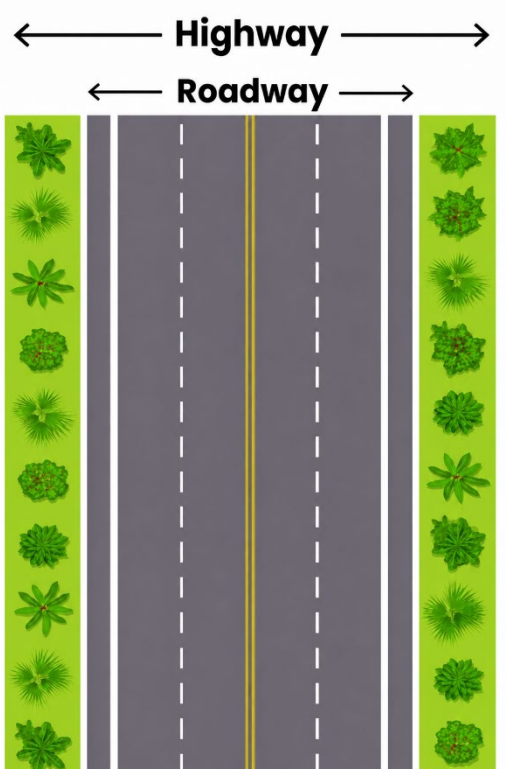
(a) School Transportation Vehicle Operators of Type A-1 Multifunction buses or Small-Capacity Vehicles shall place the vehicle into park and engage the parking brake prior to opening the passenger door(s) of the vehicle.

(3) Continue to display the four-way hazard warning lamps until the process of discharging or loading passengers has been completed.

(4) Deactivate the four-way hazard lamps before resuming motion, activate the left turn signal, allow congested traffic to disperse, and enter the flow of traffic when it is safe to do so.

PART 4: STUDENT STOPS

Highway and Roadway



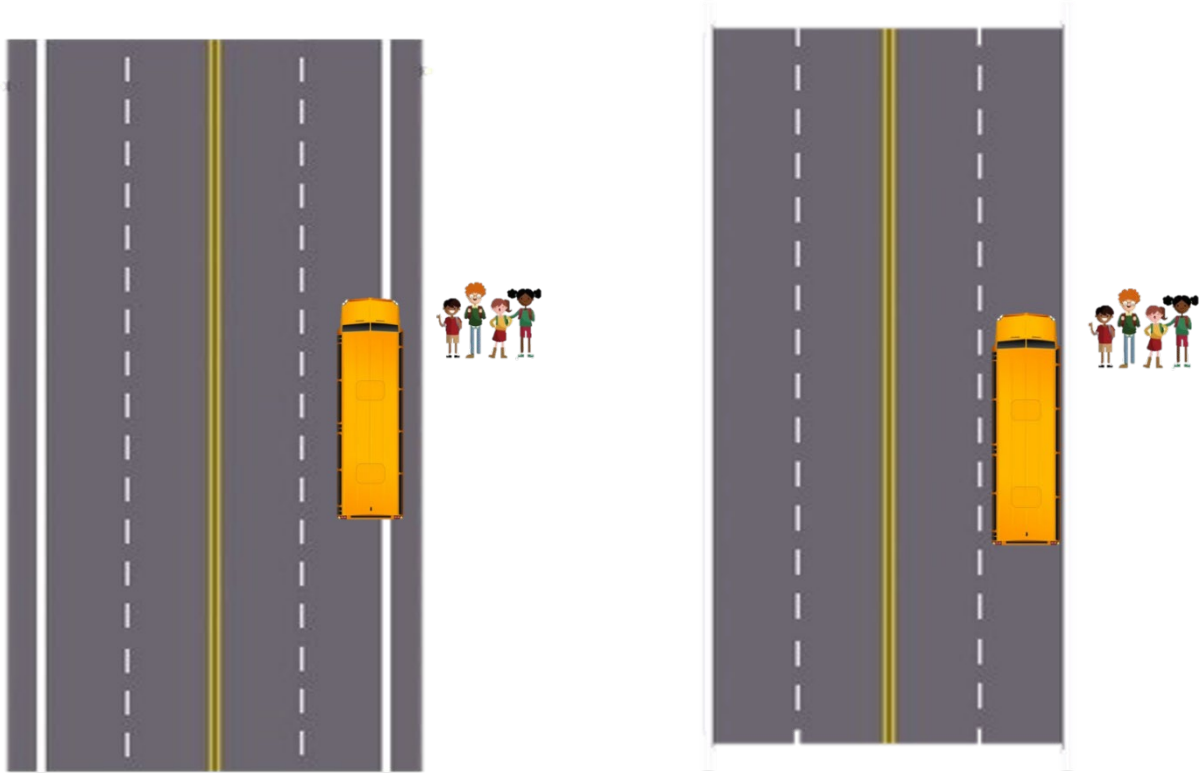
Highway

“Highway” means the entire width between the boundary lines of every way publicly maintained when any part thereof is open to the use of the public for purposes of vehicular travel or the entire width of every way declared to be a public highway by any law of this state. [§42-1-102(43), C.R.S.] “Highway” includes bridges on the roadway and culverts, sluices, drains, ditches, waterways, embankments, retaining walls, trees, shrubs, and fences along or upon the same and within the right-of-way. [§ 43-1-203(1), C.R.S.]

Roadway

"Roadway" means that portion of a highway improved, designed, or ordinarily used for vehicular travel, exclusive of the sidewalk, berm, or shoulder even though such sidewalk, berm, or shoulder is used by persons riding bicycles or other human-powered vehicles and exclusive of that portion of a highway designated for exclusive use as a bicycle path or reserved for the exclusive use of bicycles, human-powered vehicles, or pedestrians. In the event that a highway includes two or more separate roadways, "roadway" refers to any such roadway separately but not to all such roadways collectively.

School Bus Stop – Students Not Crossing Paved Road

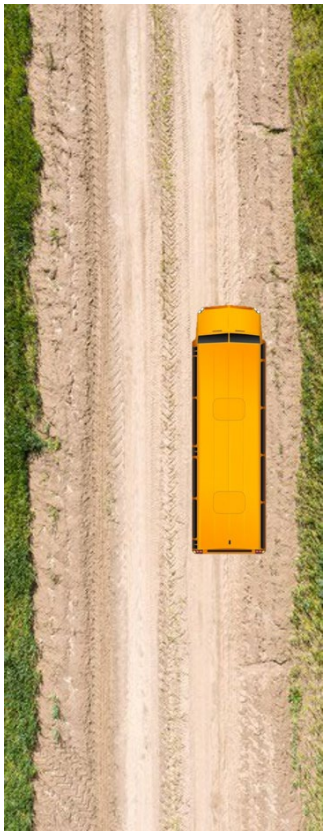


14.4 Loading and Unloading Procedures

14.4.1 School Bus 8-way System Student Stop Procedure

(6) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall stop as far to the right of the roadway, highway, or private road as possible before discharging or loading passengers - allowing sufficient area to the right and front of the vehicle but close enough to the right to prevent traffic from passing on the right - so that students may clear the vehicle safely while in sight of the School Transportation Vehicle Operator.

School Bus Stop – Students Not Crossing Unpaved Road

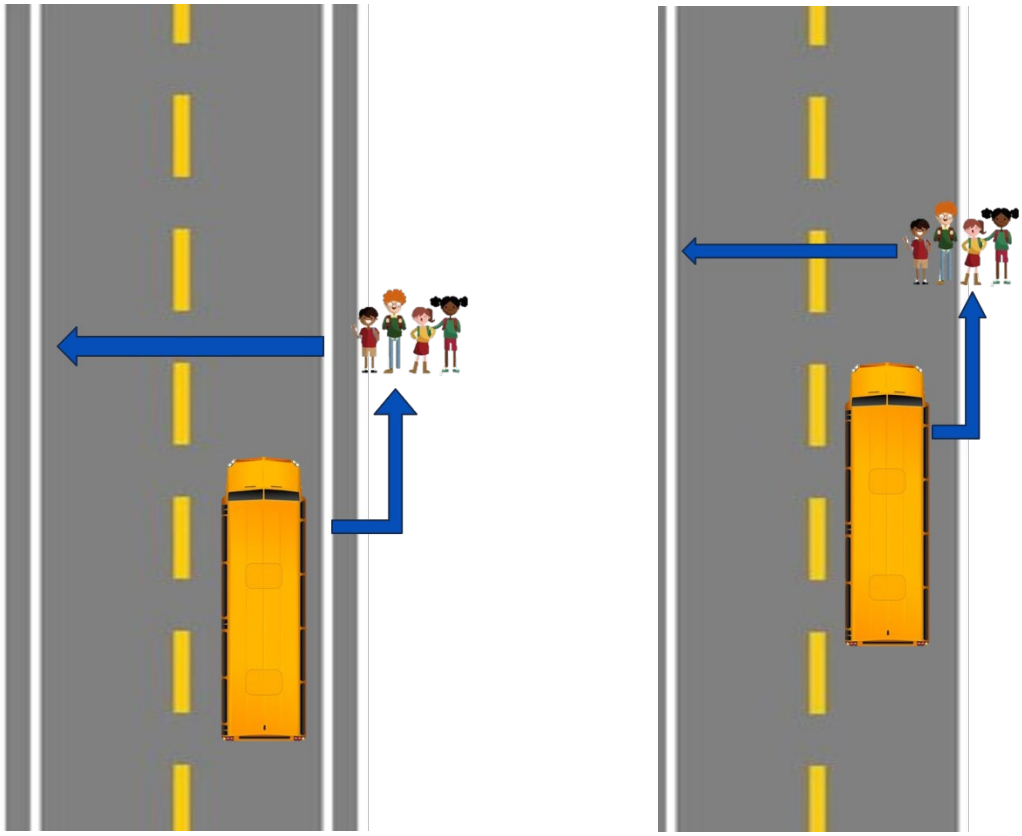


14.4 Loading and Unloading Procedures

14.4.1 School Bus 8-way System Student Stop Procedure

(6) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall stop as far to the right of the roadway, highway, or private road as possible before discharging or loading passengers - allowing sufficient area to the right and front of the vehicle but close enough to the right to prevent traffic from passing on the right - so that students may clear the vehicle safely while in sight of the School Transportation Vehicle Operator.

School Bus Stop – Students Crossing



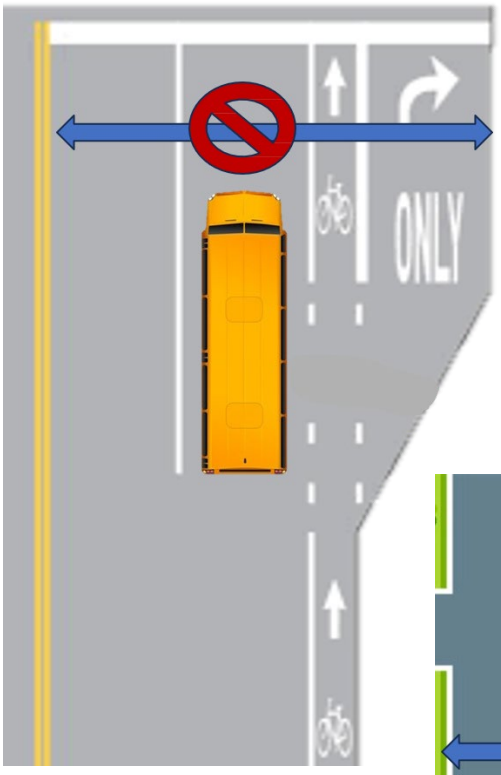
14.4 Loading and Unloading Procedures

14.4.1 School Bus 8-way System Student Stop Procedure

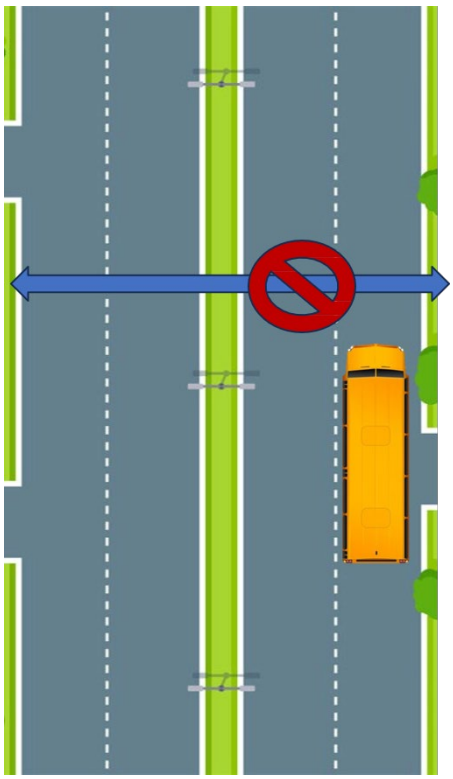
(6)

(a) Exception: The School Transportation Vehicle Operator may block the lane of traffic when passengers being received or discharged are required to cross the roadway.

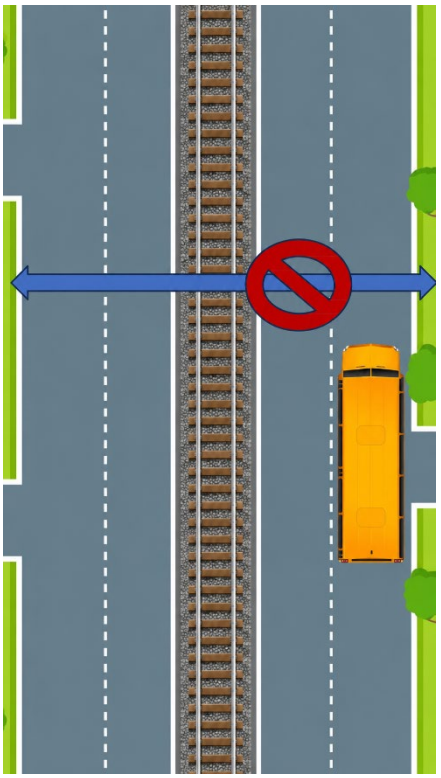
School Bus Stop – PROHIBITED Students Crossing



Multiple Lanes of Traffic



Median



Railroad Tracks

14.3 Route Prohibitions and Constraints

14.3.1 Crossing Prohibitions

(A) Educational Entities shall ensure that if students are required to cross a roadway, highway, or private road to access the student stop, the student(s) are prohibited from the following:

(1) Crossing any roadway constructed or designed to permit three or more separate lanes of vehicular traffic in either direction, including turn lanes;

(2) Crossing any roadway constructed with a median (raised, depressed, or painted) separating multiple lanes of traffic.

(3) Crossing any railroad crossings not designated for pedestrian crossings.

PART 5: COMPLIANCE ON FIELD AND ACTIVITY TRIPS

Field and activity trips require operating in unfamiliar territories, managing irregular schedules, and transporting specialized gear.

1. Chaperone and Sponsor Jurisdictions

- **The Chain of Command:** As the driver, you are in total command of the bus at all times. While coaches, teachers, or adult chaperones are there to manage student behavior and discipline, you have the final say on anything that affects the vehicle's and passengers' safety. This means you have ultimate authority over seating capacity, safety rules, and emergency procedures.
- **Pre-Trip Briefing:** Before departing on any activity trip, the driver must conduct mandatory evacuation instructions. This includes identifying all emergency exit locations, reviewing expectations for vehicle behavior, and assigning adults to positions next to emergency doors.

16.0 Emergency Evacuation Drills

16.2 School-Related Event Instructions

16.2.1 For all School-Related Events (field trips, athletics, etc.), passengers must receive a verbal emergency evacuation briefing prior to the initial departure of every trip. This briefing must include the location and operation of emergency exits.

16.2.2 Educational Entities shall maintain records documenting that the required evacuation drills were conducted and/or evacuation instruction was given.

2. Cargo and Equipment Rules

The transportation of sports gear, luggage, and miscellaneous cargo is heavily regulated under Colorado state safety standards to prevent internal projectile hazards during a crash.

- **Aisle Clearance:** All passenger aisles, paths to emergency doors, and window exit zones must remain completely free of obstructions at all times.
- **Oversized Gear Storage:** Large items such as ski equipment, athletic gear bags, band instruments, or luggage must be stored in under-floor cargo compartments or securely tied down in designated interior luggage racks using commercial cargo straps.
- **Hazardous Materials Ban:** The transportation of loose chemicals, flammable liquids, pressurized tanks, or generic cleaning supplies not approved by district safety personnel inside the student cabin is strictly prohibited.

12.7 Transportation of Miscellaneous Items

12.7.1 General Cargo and Medical Supplies

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall ensure that all carry-on items are properly handled to minimize the danger to all others.

(B) All baggage, articles, equipment, or medical supplies (except those held by individual passengers) shall be secured in a manner that assures unrestricted access to all exits by occupants, does not restrict the driver's ability to operate the bus, and/or protects all occupants against injury resulting from falling or displacement of any baggage, article, or equipment.

(1) Oxygen cylinders that are medically necessary meet this standard if they are securely attached to a wheelchair or otherwise secured in the vehicle and do not impede access to any exit. Educational Entities shall use reasonable care in determining the number of cylinders that may be safely transported at one time.

12.7.2 Chemicals and Cleaning Supplies

(A) All chemicals and cleaning supplies carried on a School Transportation Vehicle shall meet the following precautions:

(1) The container is non-breakable;

(2) The container is labeled with contents;

(3) The container is secured in a bracket, or in a closed compartment in the driver's area, or a compartment on the exterior of the bus; and

(4) The containers and/or quantities of products are no more than 32 ounces in size.

(B) Pressurized aerosols are prohibited.

12.7.3 Interior and Exterior Decorations

(A) Interior decorations shall not be located within the driver's area (including the space in front of the front barriers, the step-well, dash, walls and ceiling, the windshield, the entry door, the driver's side window, and all windows in front of the front barrier), the first two passenger windows on both sides of the vehicle or all windows on the rear of the School Transportation Vehicle.

(B) Other decorations within the passenger compartment shall not:

(1) Cover any required lettering;

(2) Impede the aisle or any emergency exit;

(3) Hang from the walls and/or ceiling.

(C) Per the effective date of these rules, School Transportation Vehicles owned or leased by the Educational Entity that are used for student transportation shall not have the windows obstructed in any way by advertising, decorations, or vehicle wraps.

(1) Exception: Tint applied by the vehicle manufacturer to industry standards, as permitted in 1 CCR 301-25.

(2) Exception: Route identification is permitted per 1 CCR 301-25.

3. Federal & State Hours of Service (HOS) Mandates

Driving while tired is incredibly dangerous. To fight driver fatigue, Colorado has strict limits on how many hours you can legally spend behind the wheel or on duty:

- **The 10-Hour Driving Limit:** An operator is legally prohibited from driving a school vehicle for more than **10 cumulative hours** without taking a mandatory break.
- **The 14-Hour On-Duty Limit:** An operator cannot drive after being "on-duty" for **14 consecutive hours**. On-duty time encompasses all work performed for any employer, including pre-trip inspections, route or activity driving, mandatory waiting time, and end-of-the-day paperwork.
- **The 10-Hour Off-Duty Reset:** Once either limit is hit, the driver must complete **10 consecutive hours off-duty** before they are permitted to operate a student transportation vehicle again.
- **Off-Duty Criteria at Events:** Waiting time at a school sport or special event can only be legally logged as "off-duty" if the driver is entirely relieved of all custody, care, and responsibility for the students and the vehicle, and is completely free to leave the premises to pursue personal activities.

13.0 Hours of Service for School Transportation Vehicle Operators

13.1 Maximum Driving and On-Duty Time

13.1.1 School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall not drive, and an Educational Entity shall not require or permit a School Transportation Vehicle Operator to drive, in violation of the hours-of-service limits established in this Section.

13.1.2 All School Transportation Vehicle Operators shall document that they are in compliance with this Section.

(A) A School Transportation Vehicle Operator’s daily log, or equivalent, shall be completed for the trip in the School Transportation Vehicle Operator’s own handwriting when the trip requires a scheduled or unscheduled overnight stay away from the work reporting location.

13.1.3 Definitions

(A) “Day” means any consecutive 24-hour period beginning at a time designated by the Educational Entity.

(B) “On-Duty Time” means all time worked for all employers, including all driving and non-driving duties.

(1) “On-Duty Not-Driving” means all time spent for pre-trip/post-trip inspections, loading and unloading students, cleaning the bus, administrative paperwork, or if the School Transportation Vehicle Operator is not free to leave the location of a School-Related Event.

(2) “On-Duty Driving” means the period during which the School Transportation Vehicle Operator is at the controls of a School Transportation Vehicle while it is in motion.

(C) “Off-Duty Time (Rest/Waiting)” means the time spent by School Transportation Vehicle Operators of School Transportation Vehicles during special events, meal stops, and School-Related Events, regardless of compensation, as off-duty, provided that the subsequent criteria are satisfied.

(1) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall be relieved of all duty and responsibility for the care and custody of the students, and

(2) The School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall be at liberty to pursue activities of their choice, including leaving the premises on which the School-Related Event is located.

13.1.4 Daily Limits

(A) A School Transportation Vehicle Operator shall not drive after accumulating 10 hours of driving time or after 14 consecutive hours of on-duty time until the required off-duty period is completed.

(1) The required 10 hours off-duty shall consist of:

(a) One period of at least six consecutive hours; and

(b) The remaining off-duty time accumulated in no more than two additional periods.

(2) This would include on-duty time for all employers.

13.1.5 Weekly Limits

(A) School Transportation Vehicle Operators are prohibited from driving after being on duty for more than 70 hours in any seven consecutive days.

13.1.6 Emergency Exception

(A) In case of an emergency, an operator may complete the trip without being in violation if such a trip reasonably could have been completed absent the emergency.

13.1.7 Federal Compliance Option

(A) In lieu of section 13.0 of these rules, an Educational Entity may comply with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, 49 C.F.R. § 395.

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Unit Nine – Student Management

At the end of the day, managing your passengers is all about safety. When the kids are acting right and keeping the noise down, it takes a massive weight off your shoulders. It means you aren't constantly checking the overhead mirror or stressing about distractions, allowing you to give 100% of your focus to the road ahead and drive defensively.

PART 1: THE EXTENSION OF THE CLASSROOM

A school bus must be universally looked upon as a literal extension of the classroom. The same behavioral boundaries, codes of conduct, and parameters of respect mandated within a school building apply to the school transportation vehicle.

The Dynamics of the Bus vs. The Classroom

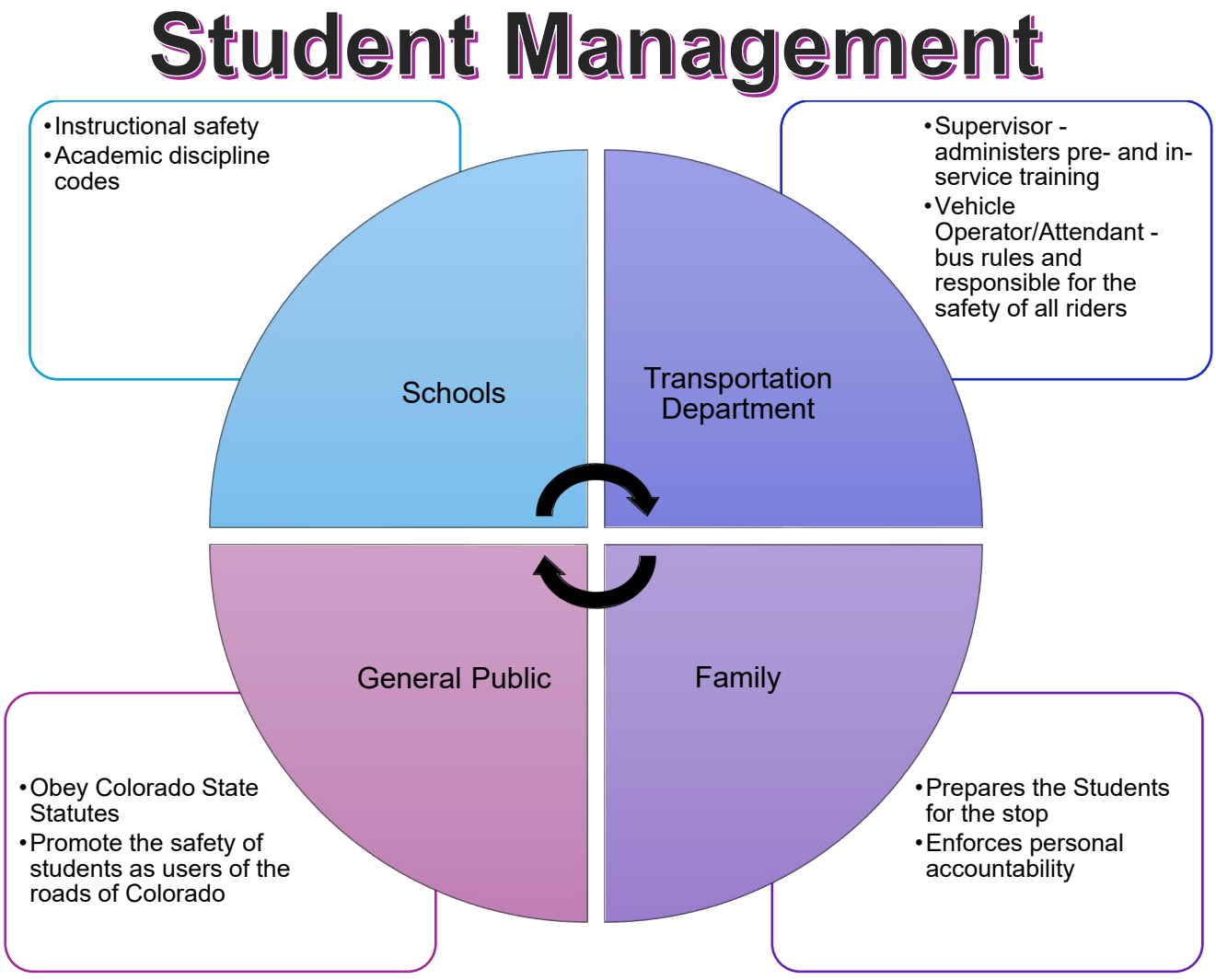
Managing student behavior on a vehicle presents distinct challenges that standard classroom teachers do not face:

- **Managing Different Age Groups:** Unlike a standard school classroom that isolates one specific age group, a school transportation vehicle operator frequently transports a highly diverse mix of elementary, junior high, and high school students simultaneously.
    - **Young Riders:** Small children can be overwhelmed or get lost in the fray of a school bus. To maintain their safety and your peace of mind, keep the youngest riders in the front seats of the bus so they remain visible to you.
- **The Mirror Barrier:** A teacher stands facing their class with full direct vision. A school bus operator must control up to 70 students seated completely *behind* them, with their primary visual tool being a single interior rear-view mirror positioned above their forehead.
    - **Behavior Issues:** Unlike in a classroom, space to address behavioral issues on a bus is limited. A good solution is to seat the child in one of the front seats so they remain visible to you, either in the rearview mirror or by turning your head.
- **The Divided Objective:** A driver cannot compromise vehicle safety to break up an escalation. The operator's main focus must remain on managing traffic, curves, and split-second roadway hazards.

- Clearly convey the rules at the beginning of the year or at the first opportunity. Let the students know what the expectations are for behavior on the bus.

Working with Your Safety Team

Maintaining safety requires active communication and cooperative problem-solving across four foundational segments of the educational ecosystem:



- **The Role of the School Administrators:** When a student misbehaves, the school principal and building staff are the ones who actually hand out discipline at the school level. It is also the administration's job to provide you with all the vital medical and behavioral information you need before you transport students. This includes ensuring you know exactly which students require specialized

safety gear, such as safety vests or harnesses (CSRS). Legally, because you are responsible for these kids, you have a right to this information before the trip starts.

- **The Role of the Transportation Supervisor:** Supervisors must establish clear, standardized behavior guidelines that are administered uniformly across the fleet. They provide robust pre-service and in-service training programs centered on modern child psychology, de-escalation techniques, and student behavioral patterns. School transportation departments must implement instructional programs to teach students proper safety rules at bus stops and while riding buses.
- **The Role of the Professional Operator:** As the driver, you set the emotional mood for the entire bus the second the kids walk through the door. You need to keep your cool, look and act like a professional, and treat every student exactly the same way every single day. Ultimately, you are responsible for the health, safety, and well-being of every child on your bus.

  To do this effectively, always remember the **Three Fs**:

  - **Firm:** Be prepared to follow through. Avoid giving a directive that you cannot enforce.
  - **Friendly:** Be approachable to the students while keeping in mind that you, the driver, are in charge.
  - **Fair:** Be consistent in disciplining students.
- **The Role of the Parents/Guardians:** Families bear the primary responsibility for ensuring their children are prepared, arrive at the bus stop five minutes early, and actively understand that appropriate conduct is non-negotiable.
- **The Role of the General Public:** The public must obey the Colorado State Statutes. Also, they are to promote the safety of school-age children as pedestrians and road users in Colorado.

5.3 Required Training and Documentation

5.3.1 Transportation Documentation and Personnel Training

(A) Educational Entities shall present all School Transportation Vehicle Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants with the applicable CDE School Transportation Vehicle Operator or School Transportation Bus Attendant Guide prior to transporting students.

5.3.2 Transporting Students with Special Needs

(A) Educational Entities shall provide School Transportation Vehicle Operators and School Transportation Bus Attendants with all documentation necessary to safely transport assigned students, including Child Safety Restraint System requirements and other relevant medical or behavioral information, prior to the initiation of transportation services.

(1) When an Educational Entity enrolls, transfers, or assumes responsibility for a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that includes transportation services, the Educational Entity shall ensure that all documentation applicable to transportation is provided to the appropriate transportation personnel or provider prior to the initiation of services, and as soon as practicable following any determination or revision of the student's transportation needs, to support safe and appropriate transportation.

(B) Any School Transportation Vehicle Operator and School Transportation Bus Attendant assigned to students eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shall receive documented training on the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Per 34 C.F.R. § 300.156, this training shall include, but is not limited to:

(1) Behavioral intervention strategies;

(2) Personalized Learning Systems (PLS) protocols;

(3) Individualized health care plan implementation.

PART 2: THE 3-PILLAR THEORY OF BUS DISCIPLINE

Discipline on school buses is historically classified as a primary stressor for professional operators. Success rests on a driver's commitment to treating a safe bus ride as a fundamental right for all passengers.

Pillar 1: Proactive Management

- **The Clean Bus:** Data shows that a driver who keeps their vehicle swept, sanitized, and structurally immaculate experiences significantly fewer discipline problems. Students subconsciously recognize that the driver takes great pride in the vehicle, and they adjust their behavior to reflect that respect.

- **The Assigned Seating Strategy:** Do not wait for a problem to emerge. Proactively assign seats based on age groups, behavioral concerns, or individual student needs. Operators must carefully gauge passenger size when pairing students to ensure seating capacity limitations are never compromised.
- **The Positive Greeting:** Establish command the second a student crosses the step-well. Greeting students by name establishes professional rapport, which significantly lowers the likelihood of behavior concerns.

Pillar 2: Driver Self-Control

When a student triggers a behavioral breakdown, the operator must strictly adhere to the following behavioral boundaries:

- **Never Argue or Yell:** Raising your voice displays a loss of control and escalates cabin tension. Use a clear, firm tone that carries authority without carrying anger.
- **Never Threaten Empty Consequences:** Only state actions that you are legally and administratively authorized to perform.
- **Removal of a Student:** An operator is strictly prohibited from putting a student off the bus on the side of a road as a disciplinary measure**.** A student can only be legally discharged from a vehicle at their designated home stop or directly at their school building/transportation department.

Pillar 3: On-Route Escalation

If an immediate behavioral emergency occurs while the vehicle is in active motion, execute the following actions in strict sequence:

1. **Prioritize the Roadway:** Keep your eyes on the road. Do not try to lock eyes with the disruptive student in your overhead mirror while navigating traffic.
2. **Locate a Safe Haven:** Find a secure, legal location to pull completely off the roadway (such as a wide shoulder or a parking lot).
3. **Secure the Bus:** Set the parking brake, shift the transmission into Neutral, and turn off the ignition.
4. **Address the Bus:** Stand up, turn to face the passengers completely, and deal with the situation using a calm, objective demeanor. Once order is re-established, restart the engine and resume the route.

Unfortunately, it seems the undisciplined riders will set the tone and pace for the majority of the riders.

PART 3: REPORTING UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

When verbal corrections and seat changes fail to correct structural misbehavior, the operator must immediately move the issue into the formal administrative tracking system.

1. Documenting with the Bus Conduct/Disciplinary Report – "Write-Ups"

Operators must prepare and submit formal bus conduct reports to the transportation supervisor or designated building principal. This document must be completed with pure, data-driven objectivity:

- **State the Facts:** Record the exact date, time, route number, and specific rule violated. Avoid using emotional or subjective language (e.g., write *"Student stood up while the bus was moving at 35mph"* instead of *"Student was acting wild and being dangerous"*).
- **Detail Prior Strategies and Approaches:** Clearly document what actions you took *before* writing the referral (such as verbal warnings given or documented seat assignments).
- **Timely Submission:** Turn the report in immediately upon finishing your run to ensure administrators can act before the student returns to the bus the following morning.

2. High-Priority/Zero-Tolerance Violations

Certain infractions pose an immediate, catastrophic threat to life safety and must result in the instantaneous suspension of riding privileges and law enforcement notification:

- Physical assault or fighting inside the cabin or at the bus stop.
- Possession of weapons, firearms, knives, or explosive devices.
- Possession, consumption, or distribution of controlled substances, tobacco, or alcohol.
- Tampering with emergency exits, roof hatches, or the rear door interlock systems.

PART 4: IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is an illegal form of discrimination that directly compromises the psychological and physical safety of the transportation environment. School bus operators are legally mandated to identify, document, and report these incidents instantly.

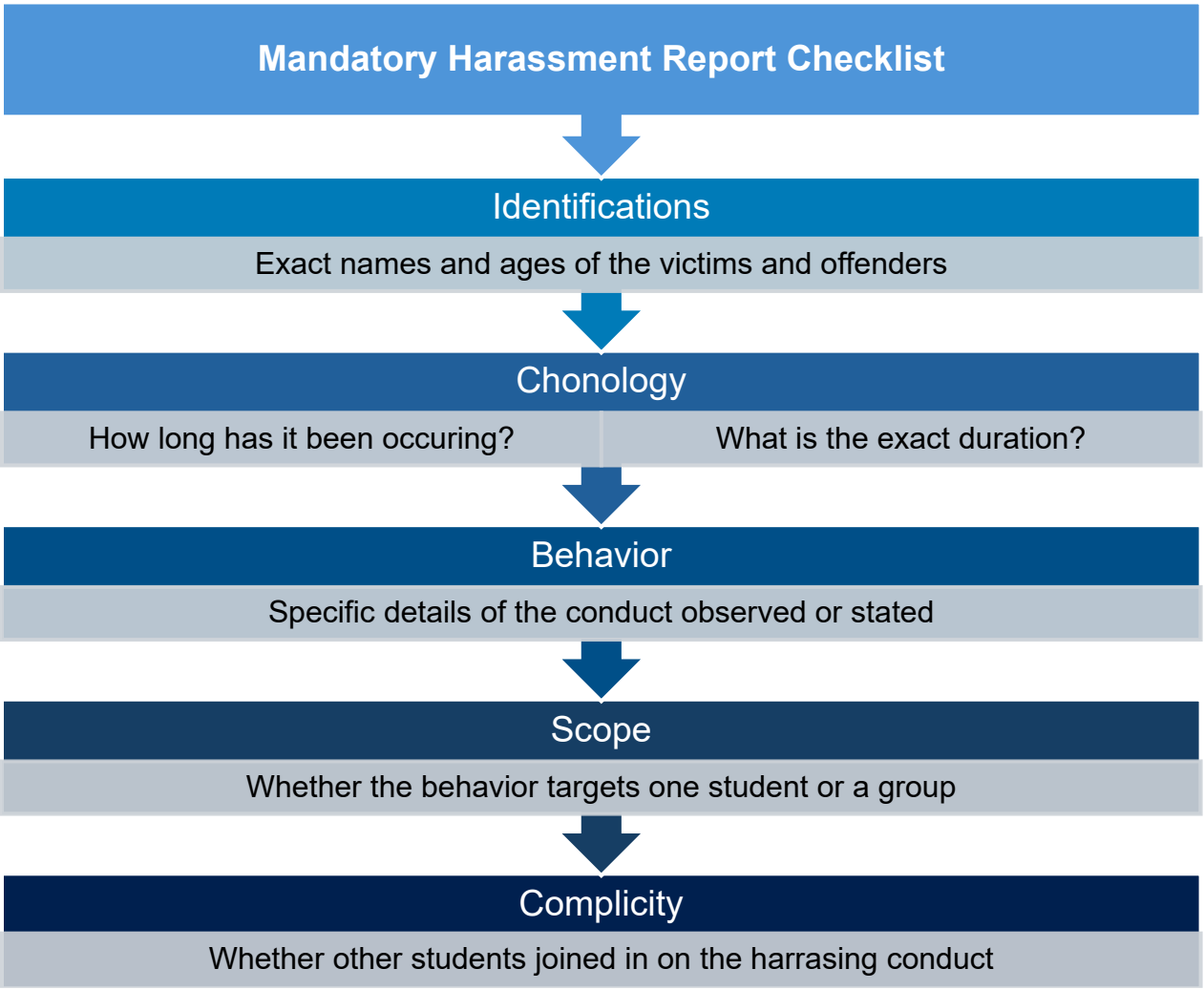
1. Understanding the Forms of Harassment

Harassment within a student transportation vehicle can manifest across three explicit categories:

- **Verbal:** Indecent propositions, suggestive remarks, sexual jokes, or explicit comments regarding a passenger’s body or clothing.
- **Physical:** Unwelcome touching, brushing against another student's body, pinching, or blocking someone's physical path down the center aisle.
- **Visual/Digital ("Sexting"):** The act of taking, displaying, or sending sexually explicit messages, text communications, or photographs using mobile phones inside the cabin. Under Colorado law, this can be classified and prosecuted as a severe child pornography offense.

2. Mandatory Reporting Protocol

The moment sexual harassment is suspected or identified, the operator cannot attempt to handle it internally. You must document the following details flawlessly and hand them directly to your supervisor and building administrators:



- **Continuous Monitoring:** Following the initial submission of the report, the operator must continue to rigorously monitor the students involved. Move the victim to a highly visible seat in the front row near the driver's station to ensure an immediate, bulletproof safety bubble while the official district investigation is being conducted.

PART 5: BEHAVIORAL PROFILING & DE-ESCALATION

Every student misbehaves for a reason. To manage a cabin successfully, you must learn to look past the disruptive action itself and identify the underlying behavioral type. This allows you to apply the correct strategy to de-escalate the tension without losing control of the bus.

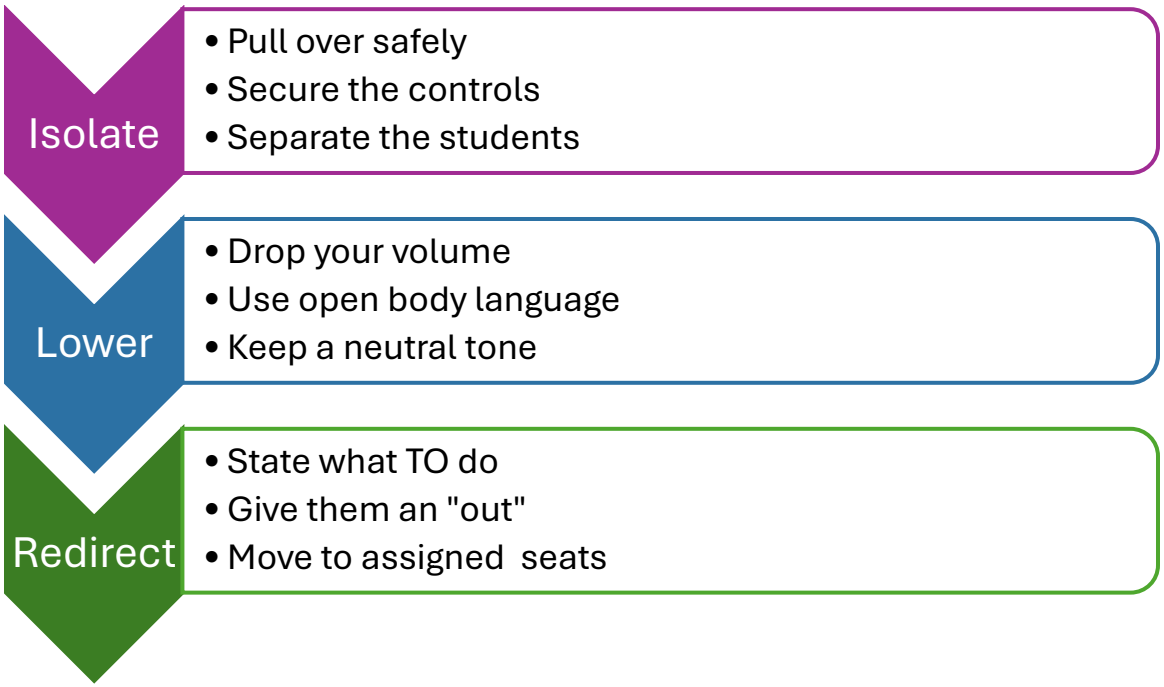
The Four Profiles of Problem Behavior

Most school bus disruptions fall into one of four distinct student profiles:

- **The Attention Seeker:** This student acts out, uses loud language, or breaks minor rules primarily because they want the driver or their peers to notice them.
    - *The Strategy:* Do not give them a massive reaction, as an angry outburst from the driver gives them exactly what they want. Instead, use a calm, quiet, direct verbal correction or a private seat reassignment. Keep your attention focused on rewarding students who behave correctly.
- **The Power Seeker:** This student intentionally defies your instructions (e.g., refusing to sit down or refusing to move seats) to challenge your authority in front of the other passengers.
    - *The Strategy:* Never engage in a public power struggle. Do not argue back or try to force an immediate showdown while driving. Calmly state the rule and the clear consequence once, then give the student a moment to comply. If they refuse, do not keep yelling; safely pull over, secure the bus, and document the defiance on a formal Bus Conduct Report for administrative suspension.
- **The Revenge Seeker:** This student feels mistreated or unliked by the driver or their peers, and they lash out maliciously by damaging the bus (vandalism) or verbally attacking others to "get even."
    - *The Strategy:* Remain completely objective. Do not take their comments personally. Treat them with strict fairness and respect, remove them from the target situation immediately by moving their seat, and involve school counselors or principals to address the root cause.
- **The Distanced/Withdrawn Student:** This student completely isolates themselves, ignores interactions, or displays extreme helplessness, which can occasionally hide deeper emotional distress or trauma.
    - *The Strategy:* Check on them quietly without drawing embarrassing attention to them. Establish a basic, friendly rapport during loading and unloading by greeting them by name, ensuring they feel secure and included in the cabin environment.

Standard Steps for Verbal De-escalation

When a conflict or a loud argument breaks out between students while you are on your route, you must use targeted communication to defuse the situation before it turns into a physical fight:



1. **Lower Your Volume and Pitch:** When a student is yelling, your natural instinct is to talk louder to overpower them. **Do the opposite.** Speak in a quiet, slow, and deeply controlled voice. To hear what you are saying, the student will naturally have to stop shouting and lower their volume, immediately bringing the emotional energy on the bus down.
2. **Use "What" and "How" Open-Ended Questions:** Avoid asking "Why did you do that?" as "Why" questions automatically make a child defensive and combative. Instead, use neutral, problem-solving questions like, *"What do we need to do right now to fix this seat problem?"* or *"How can we make sure everyone is safe for the rest of this ride?"*
3. **Focus on Directives, Not Restrictions:** Tell the student exactly what you want them **to do**, rather than what you want them to stop doing. For example, instead of shouting *"Stop standing up and causing chaos!"*, say, *"I need you to slide your back completely against the seat cushion and face forward so it is safe for me to drive."* Clear, positive instructions give the child a simple path to compliance.
4. **Offer a Dignified Out (Choice-Giving):** Avoid cornering a student or making them lose face in front of their friends. Frame your directive as a clear choice with an immediate consequence. For example: *"You can choose to sit quietly in this front row for the rest of the route, or you can choose to leave your seat unassigned and have your riding privileges suspended by the principal tomorrow morning. The choice is yours; let's make a smart one so we can get home."*

PART 6: STUDENT CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PRIVACY (FERPA & IDEA)

Operating a school transportation vehicle grants you access to highly sensitive, personally identifiable information (PII) regarding the students on your route. Protecting student privacy is not just a matter of professional courtesy; it is a strict legal requirement governed by overlapping federal and state statutes.

The Legal Framework: FERPA and IDEA

- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** This federal law protects the privacy of student "education records." Under FERPA, a student's route assignment, home address, pickup/drop-off times, behavior logs, disciplinary referrals, and even bus surveillance video are legally classified as education records and must remain confidential.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** When school transportation is written into a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) as a "related service," transportation personnel are granted access to specific medical, physical, and behavioral intervention plans to ensure a safe ride. This federal statute demands strict safeguarding of all specialized student data.
- **The Legitimate Educational Interest Threshold:** School districts are legally permitted to share confidential student records with you only because you are designated as a "school official with a legitimate educational interest." This access is a privilege tied directly to your operational duties. You are strictly prohibited from redisclosing this information to anyone outside of the authorized educational team.

Practical Safeguards: Maintaining Privacy on the Road

To remain compliant with federal privacy regulations during your daily runs, you must integrate active data-protection habits into your routine:

- **Physical Record Security:** Never leave student seating charts, route sheets, medical emergency cards, or IEP documentation in plain sight on your dashboard or driver's side console. When leaving the vehicle, store all physical records face down, in a binder, or locked in a secure driver compartment.
- **Airwave Protocol (Two-Way Radio Communications):** Your fleet radio is an open frequency that can be intercepted by parent scanners, nearby motorists, or other students. When reporting a behavioral incident or medical issue to dispatch, never transmit a student's full name or specific medical diagnosis. Instead, refer to students by route number, student stop location, or pre-assigned

seat numbers (e.g., *"Dispatch, I have a behavioral issue with the student in seat number three"*).

- **Digital and Camera Privacy:** School transportation video and audio recordings are protected under FERPA. You may not show video footage of an incident to a parent, even if their child was involved, without explicit administrative approval. If a parent demands to see a clip of an altercation, direct them to building administrators or your transportation supervisor.

Navigating Everyday Scenarios: "Need to Know" vs. "Want to Know"

A driver's legal obligation to protect student privacy is frequently tested by well-meaning but unauthorized individuals. You must apply the strict "Need to Know" standard:

- **The Inquisitive Parent:** If a parent at a student stop asks about another child's behavior, routing, or suspension, your response must be immediate and professional: *"To protect the privacy of all our families, I cannot discuss other students. If you have concerns about route safety, please contact the transportation department or the school principal."*
- **The Substitute Driver Transition:** When turning a route over to a substitute driver, you are legally allowed to share essential medical and behavioral notes necessary for safe transit (such as seizure protocols or safety harness requirements). However, do not share subjective, gossipy personal histories (e.g., *"This kid's family is a nightmare"*). Focus strictly on actionable, documented safety accommodations.
- **Peer-to-Peer Venting:** Avoid discussing specific student behavior issues casually in the driver breakroom, in communal hallways, or on social media. Limit student behavioral discussions exclusively to formal meetings with your supervisor, the school principal, or the child's designated education team.

PART 7: MANDATORY REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Under Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.) § 19-3-304, all school transportation vehicle operators are designated as legally mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. Because you are often the first representative of the school system to see a child in the morning and the last to see them in the afternoon, your vigilance is critical to student safety.

The Legal Mandate and Standards of Suspicion

- **The Threshold of "Reasonable Cause":** The law does not require you to prove that abuse or neglect has occurred, nor does it require you to investigate. Your

sole legal responsibility is to report when you have reasonable cause to know or suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, or has been placed in a situation that would reasonably result in harm.

- **The 24-Hour Reporting Window:** Under Colorado law, a mandated reporter must file an official report **immediately** upon suspecting abuse or neglect, and no later than 24 hours after the initial suspicion or observation.
- **The Personal Obligation Rule:** Reporting your suspicions to a supervisor is a critical step in district communication, but it does not legally fulfill your personal statutory duty. If your supervisor disagrees or fails to act, you are still legally obligated to contact law enforcement or child protective services directly. You cannot delegate your legal liability to anyone else.

Recognizing the Warning Signs on Your Route

As a transportation professional, you must remain highly sensitive to physical, emotional, and environmental indicators during boarding, transit, and off-loading:

- **Physical Indicators of Abuse:** Unexplained, patterned, or symmetrical bruising (especially on the face, neck, upper arms, or thighs); human bite marks; cigarette burns; weld-like marks from cords or belts; or a student who winces or displays extreme discomfort when sitting down or navigating the bus steps.
- **Signs of Severe Neglect:** A child who is consistently dressed inappropriately for Colorado's extreme weather changes (e.g., wearing a thin t-shirt, shorts, and no shoes during a winter snowstorm); consistent, severe body odor or unwashed clothing; severe, untreated dental decay; or constant, overwhelming hunger or dehydration (e.g., begging for food or water every day upon boarding).
- **Behavioral Red Flags:** An abrupt, radical shift in student behavior; extreme withdrawal or depression; hyper-vigilance (always watching adults as if waiting for a blow); sudden, extreme aggression toward younger students; or an intense, verbalized fear of going home at the end of the school day.

Step-by-Step Reporting Protocol

If you observe signs of abuse or neglect, execute this formal reporting sequence immediately:

1. **Do Not Investigate:** Do not cross-examine the student, pull up their clothing to inspect wounds, or attempt to contact the child's parents to ask questions. Investigating can compromise active law enforcement inquiries.

2. **Contact the State Hotline:** Immediately call the Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at **1-844-CO-4-KIDS (1-844-264-5437)** or contact local law enforcement. If you believe a student is in immediate, active life-safety danger (e.g., being dropped off to a visibly intoxicated caregiver or an empty home in freezing weather), bypass the hotline and call **911** immediately.
3. **Provide Objective Information:** When speaking with the hotline intake specialist, be prepared to provide:
    - The student's name, age, school, and home address (if known).
    - The date, time, and specific location where you observed the issue.
    - A completely objective description of what you saw or heard, using exact student quotes if they spoke to you.
    - The names and contact information of the parents or guardians (if available).
4. **Secure the Hotline ID and Document:** Request and record the official **Hotline Referral ID number** and the name of the intake specialist. Document the exact date and time you made the call. Keep this information in your personal, secure files as proof of compliance with Colorado state law.

Legal Protections and Severe Penalties

- **Good-Faith Immunity:** Colorado law provides complete civil and criminal immunity from prosecution, civil lawsuits, or employer retaliation for any mandated reporter who makes a report in good faith. You are legally protected even if a professional investigation later concludes that no abuse occurred.

Penalties for Non-Reporting: Intentionally failing to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a Class 2 misdemeanor in the State of Colorado. A conviction carries severe personal penalties, including up to 120 days in jail, fines of up to $750, immediate termination of school district employment, and direct civil liability for any subsequent injuries the child suffers due to the unreported abuse.

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Unit Ten – Addendum

This addendum is intended to support the use, understanding, implementation, and documentation of the Colorado Department of Education School Bus and Multifunction Bus Operator Guide 2026. It does not replace federal law, Colorado law, Colorado State Board of Education rules, or local Educational Entity policy. Operators are responsible for following all requirements applicable to their assigned job responsibilities.

- Certificate of Receipt and Understanding
- Operator Responsibility Statement
- Sample Training and Documentation Checklist
- Emergency Procedures Quick Reference
- Accident/Incident Reporting Instructions
- Railroad/Light Rail Safety Reference
- Special Transportation Needs Reference
- Confidentiality Reminder
- Communication
- Child Safety Restraint Systems Quick Reference
- Wheelchair Securement Quick Reference
- Pre-Trip/Post-Trip Reference
- Local Educational Entity Policy Insert
- FAQ/Glossary

COLORADO
Department of Education
School Finance and Operations Division

Certification of Receipt and Understanding

I, _____ certify that I have been provided with, or have access to, the Colorado Department of Education School Bus and Multifunction Bus Operator Guide 2026.

I further certify that I have been provided with, or have access to, the Colorado Rules for the Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection of School Transportation Vehicles, 1 CCR 301-26.

I understand that, as a school transportation vehicle operator, I am responsible for operating a school transportation vehicle in accordance with the applicable requirements of 1 CCR 301-26 and the laws of the State of Colorado, as they relate to my assigned job responsibilities.

I acknowledge that I must receive the training and documentation required under the School Transportation Vehicle Operator Requirements set forth in 1 CCR 301-26, 4204-R-6.00, as applicable to my assigned job responsibilities, prior to transporting students in the State of Colorado.

By signing below, I certify that I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the applicable requirements referenced above.

Driver Signature:_____ Date:_____

School District/Charter/Service provider:_____

Trainer(s) Name (Please Print):_____

Trainer(s) Signature:_____

Sample Operator's Responsibility Statement

As a school transportation vehicle operator, I understand that student transportation is a safety-sensitive responsibility. I acknowledge that I am expected to operate in a professional, lawful, and safe manner at all times while performing assigned duties.

I understand that I am responsible for:

1. Operating only vehicles I am properly qualified, licensed, endorsed, trained, and authorized to operate.
2. Following applicable federal law, Colorado law, State Board of Education rules, and Educational Entity policies.
3. Conducting required vehicle inspections and reporting defects, concerns, or unsafe conditions according to local procedures.
4. Maintaining safe control of the vehicle and passengers.
5. Following assigned routes, stops, loading procedures, unloading procedures, railroad crossing procedures, and emergency procedures.
6. Maintaining confidentiality regarding students, families, medical information, behavioral information, educational information, and other sensitive information.
7. Reporting crashes, incidents, safety concerns, student concerns, route hazards, and vehicle concerns through the appropriate chain of communication.
8. Asking for clarification when a rule, procedure, route, student need, or assignment is unclear.

I understand that failure to comply with applicable requirements may result in corrective action, retraining, removal from service, or other action as determined by the Educational Entity and/or the applicable authority.

Operator Signature: _____ Date:_____

Sample Training and Documentation Checklist

This checklist is intended to help document that the operator has received or been provided access to the applicable training, information, and documentation related to assigned job responsibilities. Not all items apply to every operator or assignment.

Operator Information

Operator Name: _____

Position/Assignment: _____

Educational Entity: _____

Supervisor/Trainer: _____

School Year: _____

Applicable Vehicle Type

Check all that apply:

☐ School Bus
☐ Multifunction Bus
☐ Small Vehicle Route
☐ Activity Trip Vehicle
☐ Substitute / Relief Operator
☐ Other: _____

Required / Applicable Training and Documentation

Item	Applicable	Date Provided / Completed	Trainer / Verifier	Operator Initials
Access to Operator Guide	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Access to applicable rules/procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Vehicle familiarization	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Pre-trip inspection procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____

Post-trip inspection/child check procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Route procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Loading and unloading procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Student management procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Emergency evacuation procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Railroad crossing procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Light rail safety, if applicable	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Crash/incident reporting procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Confidentiality expectations	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Special transportation needs information, see Rule for more requirements	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Child safety restraint system procedures, if applicable	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Wheelchair securement procedures, if applicable	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Radio/communication procedures	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____
Local Educational Entity policy review	☐ Yes ☐ No	_____	_____	_____

Operator Signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor/Trainer Signature: _____Date: _____

Emergency Procedures Quick Reference

Operators shall follow Educational Entity procedures during emergencies. The following quick reference is intended to support immediate decision-making and does not replace local emergency protocols.

General Emergency Priorities

In any emergency, the operator should:

1. Safely stop and secure the vehicle as appropriate.
2. Protect students and passengers from immediate danger.
3. Contact dispatch, transportation administration, emergency services, or law enforcement as required by the situation and local procedure.
4. Follow the Educational Entity's chain of communication.
5. Document the facts of the incident as soon as practicable.

Crash or Collision

If involved in a crash or collision:

1. Stop and secure the vehicle.
2. Check for injuries.
3. Contact dispatch or the appropriate supervisor immediately.
4. Request emergency assistance if there are injuries, fire, hazardous conditions, or blocked traffic.
5. Keep students supervised and accounted for.
6. Do not release students except according to the Educational Entity policy or procedure.
7. Do not admit fault or speculate about cause.
8. Document facts only.

Fire, Smoke, or Suspected Fire

If there is fire, smoke, or a suspected fire:

1. Stop the vehicle in a safe location, if possible.
2. Evacuate passengers when continued occupancy creates a hazard.

3. Move passengers to a safe location away from traffic and the vehicle.
4. Contact dispatch and emergency services.
5. Use emergency equipment only when safe and appropriate.
6. Do not allow passengers to re-enter the vehicle until authorized.

Medical Emergency

If a student or passenger experiences a medical emergency:

1. Safely stop and secure the vehicle, if necessary.
2. Contact dispatch and request emergency medical assistance, if warranted.
3. Follow the student's known medical plan or local procedure, if applicable and available.
4. Keep the student under observation.
5. Protect the student's privacy.
6. Document the event according to local procedure.

Student Left on Bus/Missing Student Concern

If an operator discovers or suspects that a student has been left unattended, is missing, or was not released according to procedure:

1. Immediately contact dispatch or transportation administration.
2. Follow local emergency communication procedures.
3. Do not delay reporting while attempting to resolve the matter independently.
4. Document the facts as directed.

Severe Weather or Road Hazard

If severe weather, road closure, flooding, ice, low visibility, downed power lines, or another hazard affects safe operation:

1. Reduce speed and increase following distance.
2. Do not proceed through unsafe conditions.
3. Contact dispatch or transportation administration for directions.
4. Follow approved route deviation procedures.

5. Document the condition or hazard as required.

Accident/Incident Reporting Instructions

Operators shall report crashes, incidents, student injuries, vehicle damage, route hazards, parent/guardian concerns, student behavior concerns, equipment concerns, and other safety issues according to the Educational Entity procedure.

General Reporting Expectations

Reports should be:

1. Timely.
2. Factual.
3. Objective.
4. Complete.
5. Submitted through the appropriate chain of communication.

Operators should not speculate, assign blame, diagnose medical conditions, or include personal opinions in official reports.

Information Commonly Needed

Depending on the type of event, operators may be asked to provide:

- Date and time
- Vehicle number
- Route or trip number
- Location
- Weather and road conditions
- Names of involved persons, if appropriate
- Witness information, if available
- Description of what occurred
- Actions taken
- Notifications made
- Injuries or reported complaints of injury
- Vehicle or property damage

- Law enforcement or emergency response involvement

Immediate Notification Required

Operators should immediately notify dispatch or transportation administration when any of the following occur:

- Crash or collision
- Injury or possible injury
- Student left unattended or a missing student concern
- Vehicle fire, smoke, or mechanical failure
- Medical emergency
- Threat, weapon, assault, or serious behavior incident
- Unsafe road or route condition
- Railroad crossing or light rail emergency
- Vehicle immobilized on or near railroad tracks
- Any situation requiring emergency response.

Railroad Crossing and Light Rail Safety Reference

Railroad crossings, light rail crossings, and street-running rail areas require heightened awareness and strict compliance with applicable procedures.

Railroad Crossing Safety

Operators must follow all applicable railroad crossing procedures, including Educational Entity procedures and requirements applicable to the vehicle being operated.

Operators should remember:

1. Trains may approach from either direction.
2. Multiple tracks create multiple hazards.
3. A train clearing one track does not mean all tracks are clear.
4. The vehicle must not be driven onto a crossing unless there is sufficient space to completely clear the tracks.
5. Operators must never stop on railroad tracks.
6. If warning devices activate, operators must not proceed until it is safe and lawful to do so.
7. If the vehicle stalls or becomes trapped on or near tracks, evacuate passengers immediately and move them away from the tracks in the safest direction according to emergency procedures.

Light Rail Safety

Light Rail Vehicles may operate within or near the same roadway used by motor vehicles. These areas require additional caution because tracks may be embedded in the street, may run parallel to traffic, and may not be separated by curbs, medians, or barriers.

Operators should remember:

1. Light Rail Vehicles may approach from either direction.
2. Light Rail Vehicles are often quiet and may appear to be moving more slowly than they actually are.
3. Tracks may be difficult to see in certain weather or lighting conditions.
4. Operators must pay attention to all sets of tracks.
5. Operators must not stop on tracks or within the track spacing.

6. Operators must use caution near parking areas, intersections, turns, and crossings where motorists may become confused.
7. Operators must comply with traffic control devices, warning devices, and local procedures.

Operator Initials: _____ Date: _____

Special Transportation Needs Reference

Students may have transportation-related needs identified through an IEP, Section 504 plan, medical plan, behavioral plan, safety plan, seating plan, or other Educational Entity process. Operators must receive and follow information necessary to safely transport students, as applicable to their assigned duties.

Operator Expectations

Operators are expected to:

1. Follow transportation-related instructions provided by the Educational Entity.
2. Review applicable student-specific information before transporting the student, when provided and required.
3. Protect student confidentiality.
4. Ask questions when the student needs, equipment, procedures, or emergency instructions are unclear.
5. Report changes, concerns, incidents, or safety issues through the appropriate chain of communication.
6. Avoid modifying student supports, equipment, seating, or securement procedures unless authorized and trained to do so.

Examples of Information Operators May Need

Depending on the assignment, operators may need information related to:

- Loading and unloading assistance
- Seating location
- Behavior support procedures
- Medical alerts or emergency response procedures
- Communication needs
- Evacuation assistance
- Child safety restraint systems
- Wheelchair securement
- Specialized equipment
- Adult support or paraprofessional/aide responsibilities.

Confidentiality Reminder

Operators may receive, observe, or have access to student information while performing transportation duties. This may include student names, addresses, disabilities, medical needs, behavioral information, family information, discipline information, IEP information, Section 504 information, or other sensitive information.

Operators must protect confidential information and use it only for legitimate transportation and safety purposes.

Operators Shall Not

1. Discuss student information with unauthorized individuals.
2. Share student information with other students.
3. Discuss one student with another student's parent or guardian.
4. Post student information, photos, videos, route information, or incident information on social media.
5. Leave documents containing student information unsecured.
6. Use student information for any purpose unrelated to assigned duties.

Operators Should

1. Direct parent/guardian concerns to the appropriate transportation or school administrator.
2. Report confidentiality concerns through the appropriate chain of communication.
3. Ask for clarification when unsure whether information may be shared.
4. Follow Educational Entity policy for handling, storing, and returning confidential documents.

Operator Initials: _____ Date: _____

Communication and Chain of Command

Clear communication is essential to safe transportation operations. Operators shall follow Educational Entity communication procedures and use the appropriate chain of command.

Standard Communication Expectations

Operators should:

1. Use professional language.
2. Keep communication brief, factual, and appropriate.
3. Avoid discussing confidential student information over open channels unless necessary for immediate safety.
4. Notify dispatch or supervision of delays, route hazards, incidents, unsafe conditions, or emergencies.
5. Follow local procedures for parent/guardian communication.

Suggested Chain of Communication

Operator → Dispatcher / Route Coordinator → Transportation Supervisor → Transportation Director / Administrator → District or Educational Entity Administration

Local Educational Entity may modify this chain of communication.

Communication Notes

Local radio channel/procedure:

Dispatch phone number:

Transportation supervisor contact:

After-hours emergency contact:

Child Safety Restraint System Quick Reference

This section applies when an operator is assigned to transport a child using a child safety restraint system or other approved passenger securement system.

Operators shall only use child safety restraint systems and equipment that they have been trained and authorized to use.

General Expectations

Operators should verify that:

1. The restraint system is appropriate for the student and vehicle assignment.
2. The restraint system is installed according to manufacturer instructions and Educational Entity procedures.
3. Harnesses, straps, buckles, and securement points are properly positioned.
4. Straps are not twisted, damaged, loose, or improperly routed.
5. The student is positioned and secured according to training and procedure.
6. Concerns are reported before transportation occurs when a safety issue is identified.

Operators Must Not

1. Modify restraint equipment.
2. Use damaged or incomplete restraint equipment.
3. Add unauthorized padding, accessories, or extensions.
4. Transport a student in equipment the operator has not been trained to use, unless authorized through local procedure.
5. Ignore improper fit, missing components, or securement concerns.

Wheelchair Securement Quick Reference

This section applies when an operator is assigned to transport a student or passenger using a wheelchair or mobility device.

Operators shall only perform wheelchair loading, unloading, and securement if they have been trained and authorized to do so.

General Expectations

Operators should verify that:

1. The wheelchair is positioned according to vehicle and securement system requirements.
2. The wheelchair is secured using the required securement points.
3. Securement straps are attached to appropriate locations on the wheelchair frame.
4. Lap and shoulder belts are used as required by training, equipment instructions, and local procedure.
5. Wheel locks, power controls, or other stability features are addressed according to procedure.
6. The lift, ramp, floor tracking, securement hardware, and occupant restraints appear serviceable before use.
7. Any concern is reported immediately.

Operators Must Not

1. Attach securement straps to removable parts, wheels, armrests, footrests, or weak components unless specifically authorized by equipment instructions.
2. Transport a wheelchair that cannot be safely secured.
3. Leave a passenger unattended on a lift.
4. Use damaged securement equipment.
5. Modify securement equipment or wheelchair components.

Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Inspection Reference

Operators are responsible for conducting required inspections according to applicable rules, training, and Educational Entity procedures.

Pre-Trip Inspection Focus Areas

Before operating, operators should verify applicable items, including but not limited to:

- Driver credentials and required documentation
- Exterior condition
- Tires and wheels
- Mirrors
- Lights and reflectors
- Windshield and wipers
- Horn
- Brakes
- Steering
- Emergency exits
- Emergency equipment
- Passenger area
- Seats and securement equipment
- Communication equipment
- Fuel/charge level
- Leaks or visible damage
- Warning equipment, if applicable
- Vehicle-specific equipment

Defects, damage, missing equipment, or unsafe conditions must be reported according to local procedure before the vehicle is operated.

Post-Trip Inspection / Child Check

At the end of each route, trip, or assignment, operators shall complete post-trip procedures according to training and Educational Entity policy.

Operators should:

1. Walk through the vehicle.
2. Check all seats and floor areas.
3. Check under seats.
4. Check the rear of the vehicle.
5. Look for sleeping students, personal belongings, damage, spills, or safety concerns.
6. Complete any required child-check system procedure.
7. Secure the vehicle.
8. Report concerns as required.

Operator Initials: _____ Date: _____

Local Educational Entity Policy Insert

This section may be completed by the Educational Entity to identify local procedures, contacts, and expectations.

Educational Entity: _____

Transportation Department Contact: _____

Transportation Office Phone: _____

Emergency Contact / After-Hours Number: _____

Dispatch Contact: _____

Maintenance Contact: _____

Local Procedures

Crash/incident reporting procedure:

Student behavior reporting procedure:

Vehicle defect reporting procedure:

Fueling / charging procedure:

Radio/communication procedure:

Weather delay/closure procedure:

Route deviation procedure:

Parent/guardian communication procedure:

Confidential document handling procedure:

Other local requirements:

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Am I responsible for knowing every rule in 1 CCR 301-26?

Operators are responsible for understanding and following the requirements that apply to their assigned job responsibilities. Operators should ask for clarification when a requirement, procedure, route, vehicle, or assignment is unclear.

2. What should I do if I am assigned to operate a vehicle I am not qualified or trained to operate?

Do not operate a vehicle if you are not properly qualified, licensed, trained, authorized, or comfortable operating safely. Immediately notify the appropriate supervisor or transportation administrator.

3. What should I do if I identify a vehicle defect during pre-trip?

Report the defect according to the Educational Entity procedure. Do not operate a vehicle if the defect creates an unsafe condition or if local procedure requires the vehicle to be removed from service.

4. What should I do if I believe a route, stop, or roadway condition is unsafe?

Notify dispatch, your supervisor, or transportation administration as soon as safely possible. Provide factual information about the concern, including location, time, condition, and any immediate hazard.

5. What should I do if a parent or guardian asks about another student?

Do not discuss another student. Refer the parent or guardian to the appropriate school or transportation administrator.

6. What should I do if I receive student medical, behavioral, IEP, or Section 504 information?

Use the information only for legitimate transportation and safety purposes. Protect the information from unauthorized disclosure and follow the Educational Entity procedures for handling confidential information.

7. What should I do if I have not received the information I need to safely transport a student?

Notify your supervisor or transportation administrator before transporting the student, when possible. Ask for the information, training, or clarification necessary to safely perform your assigned duties.

8. What should I do if a student refuses to follow directions?

Follow student management procedures and local reporting expectations. Do not escalate the situation unnecessarily. Maintain safe control of the vehicle and report the behavior according to the Educational Entity procedure.

9. What should I do if I am involved in a crash?

Stop, secure the vehicle, check for injuries, notify dispatch or supervision, request emergency assistance if needed, supervise students, and document facts according to local procedure.

10. What should I do if I am unsure about a procedure?

Ask for clarification from dispatch, your supervisor, transportation administration, or the appropriate Educational Entity representative. Operators should not guess when student safety, vehicle operation, or regulatory compliance is involved.

Glossary of Common Terms

Activity Trip/School-Related Event

Means any academic, athletic, or extracurricular activity officially sponsored, organized, or sanctioned by an Educational Entity, regardless of whether the activity occurs on or off school grounds or within or outside of regular school hours.

Educational Entity

A school district, charter school, institute charter school, board of cooperative services (BOCES), or other entity responsible for providing or arranging school transportation services, as applicable.

Multifunction Bus

A vehicle designed to transport students that may be used for school transportation purposes, but is not equipped with traffic control equipment used on a school bus for loading and unloading students.

Post-Trip Inspection

A required inspection or check that is completed after a route, trip, or assignment to ensure the vehicle is clear of passengers, belongings, damage, or safety concerns.

Pre-Trip Inspection

A required inspection that is to be completed before vehicle operation to determine whether the vehicle appears safe and ready for service.

Route

means a documented and authorized itinerary approved by an Educational Entity for the transportation of students. A Route consists of travel between identified locations—including student stops, school campuses, or other approved facilities—operated by a vehicle and driver meeting all applicable state and federal safety standards. This definition includes regular daily schedules, shuttle services, and specialized transport, regardless of whether the itinerary follows a fixed timetable.

School Bus

A motor vehicle that meets applicable school bus construction, equipment, and use requirements and is used for transporting students to or from school or school-related activities.

School Transportation Vehicle

A vehicle used by an Educational Entity, or on behalf of an Educational Entity, to transport students as permitted by applicable law, rule, and policy.

School Transportation Vehicle Operator

Means an employee of an Educational Entity, as defined in these rules, who is responsible for safely transporting students for Routes, and/or School-Related Events.

Safety-Sensitive Function

A duty or activity that directly affects the safe operation of a school transportation vehicle or the safety of students, passengers, motorists, pedestrians, or the public.

Special Transportation Needs

Transportation-related needs arising from a student's disability, medical condition, behavior plan, IEP, Section 504 plan, safety plan, or other documented need requiring specific transportation supports or procedures.