School Bus Stops

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This should be viewed as a reference document only. Laws and regulations that have changed since 1992 are not reflected here. If you have questions about any material contained within, please check our website at https://www.p12.nysed.gov/schoolbus/ or call our office at (518) 474-6541 and ask to speak to Paul Overbaugh.

School bus stops are established by weighing a multitude of factors existing at every stop. There is no formula for districts that does not involve a judgment call. Courts require that a district choose a stop with "reasonable" safety, not the "safest stop."

This manual can help districts define "reasonable." It can make transportation departments aware of safety issues by proposing guidelines adaptable to local use, by examining possible local concerns or situations which might need to be considered by your district, and by suggesting procedures for review.

Getting to the Stop

In the discussion of students getting to the bus stop, no assumptions are made about how students will travel to the stop. Students are not told to "walk" to bus stops, because there are any number of ways for them to get to the stop—including parents driving them there.

Parents are responsible for assisting children to get to the stop and home from the stop. The district is not required to provide a protected corridor from students' homes to the bus stop any more than it is to provide that service for students who do not ride buses and must travel from home to school.

In response to legitimate concern and an understanding that most children do indeed walk to the bus stop, some districts do not require students to cross high traffic state highways or railroad tracks, or to travel streets without sidewalks or that are considered hazardous by other local criteria.

It is important to note that one school district will make all home pickups because of lack of sidewalks, and another district will expect students to travel one mile along similar roads to the bus stop. These are district decisions based on criteria established by the school board and must be applied equally to all district students in like circumstances.

It is important to be sure that the concern is realistic, and the district's definition of hazard is not just a method to require the district to provide home pickups or transportation for ineligible students. The commissioner of education has ruled that districts are not required to provide any transportation to protect children from a hazardous condition. If parents push the district to provide this service, the district will have to bear the full cost. Be sure to consider if a less expensive

option is available to remove the hazard such as providing a crossing guard and traffic control device to help students cross that busy highway.

Distance Between Stops

The distance students must travel to stops needs to be established and the criteria strictly adhered to within the district. Education Law 3635 requires that students be provided transportation if they live more than two miles (K-8) or three miles (9-12) from school. Students can not be asked to go further than this to a school bus stop, unless the school board determines that the road where the student lives is too hazardous for school bus travel. Districts can choose to provide a higher level of service. There must be voter approval for any lesser distances and there will be no state reimbursement for distances under one and a half miles.

Few districts ask students to travel these distances to a school bus stop. Distances of up to one mile are not uncommon within New York State and an increase in distance may sometime become financially appealing.

Advantages of Frequent Stops

- Parents like to be able to see their children at the stop.
- Getting to a bus stop can he difficult, given lack of sidewalks, snow-narrowed roads, and density of traffic.
- Less students at stops can mean less behavior problems and less possible property damage.

Disadvantages of Frequent Stops

- Route takes longer because of additional bus stops and loading time requiring additional equipment and personnel to transport all students.
- Stopping and starting creates more traffic hazards and delays, and more vehicle maintenance.
- More side roads would have to be included on routes.
- Most school bus fatalities occur while school buses are
- stopped to load/unload children. More stops mean
- greater potential for school bus fatalities.

Instead of or in addition to establishing a maximum distance a student may be required to travel to a bus stop, it is possible to establish a minimum distance between stops. This assures proper distance for bus drivers to leave one stop, move into traffic, and correctly signal their intention to stop again. Common distances used for this strategy are one- or two-tenths of a mile. Trying this out on the road conditions in the district will determine a reasonable distance to accomplish this procedure.

Number of Students at Stop

Characteristics of each stop location—such as road speed limit and traffic, actual space to congregate 15 feet from the road, and other hazards in the vicinity--must be considered in determining how many students can safely wait there.

The State Education Department Transportation Supervisor's Handbook suggests that not more than 15 students gather at one bus stop. This can serve as a helpful rule of thumb, but a high density setting such as a trailer park, development, or apartment building may make this impossible to maintain.

Road conditions could necessitate a large stop because it might be impossible to stop along the road or negotiate the road at all due to inclines, curves, or lack of public maintenance. In cases where stops have as many as 30 students, some sort of supervision or control might be considered. Options include a voluntary cooperative schedule developed by parents of students who can be at the stop, a program of trained students similar to a student crossing patrol, or assignment of a district employee such as a bus monitor who might join the route in progress.

While the district is required to select a safe site for the bus stop, it is ultimately not responsible, because it cannot

supervise what takes place at the stop while students are waiting. Parents are responsible for their children's behavior, and local police may be called to settle any altercations which might arise.

Mix of Students at Bus Stop

Age and ability levels of those at the stop must also be considered. Kindergarten students, on their own, cannot be expected to maintain a very high degree of self-control and safety at a bus stop. Kindergarten students waiting in a K-6 mix will be much safer due to the supervision provided by the older students.

Expanding the mix to K-12, as a non-public school run or a single-trip policy, does not necessarily increase the comfort level, although it may be successful in some settings. Older students might provide a mix of behavior and language that could cause concern for the younger students and their parents. The potential behavior of mainstreamed students with disabilities must also be considered in evaluating the mix of students at any one stop.

In general, the greater the homogeneity among the group, except for kindergartners alone, the more likely it is that unwanted behaviors will have to be controlled.

Visibility

In order for a school bus to correctly execute a school bus stop, and for traffic to respond properly, there must be adequate visibility in both directions at the bus stop. Motorists must have sufficient distance to react to the bus and to stop their vehicles in a controlled way.

In addition to simple distance, any other factor which might affect a vehicle's ability to stop must also be considered, such as speed, a steep incline, glare, or frequent slippery road conditions. The only suggestion given in regulation is in sections 230.2 and 236.3 of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. It regulates the use of "School Bus Stop Ahead" signs.

Based on the regulations for posting distances, motorists need 500 feet to 1000 feet of visibility depending on speed, to adequately react to a stopping bus. Actual braking distances range up to 500 feet or 600 feet for a truck at 60 mph under ideal conditions.

The NYS Basic School Bus Driver Training Manual, Unit VI, page 21, contains excellent stopping distance information which should be considered in determining if various classes of vehicles could, in fact, stop in time for a stopped school bus.

Rather than trying to establish a sight distance at every speed, it is recommended that a minimum of 500 feet of visibility at 35 mph or below and 1000 feet of visibility above 35 mph be the goal. In order to best simulate real conditions, visibility distance will mean the distance at which a car driver can see the eight-light warning system and top third of the bus. Each stop has characteristics such as slope, road surface, truck traffic, real vs. posted speed, which must all be considered when evaluating stop safety.

Signing

If it is not possible to meet the visibility recommendations for a safe stop, DOT approved signs can be used to warn motorists of the presence of the school bus stop. The NYS DOT Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices provides a school bus stop ahead sign (W6-4.)

Section 236.3(a)(1) reads, "This sign is for use, as necessary to warn of locations where school buses are not visible for at least five hundred feet when stopped to pick up or discharge passengers." Section 230.2 establishes posting distance from the stop based on the speed of travel on the road with a minimum posting distance established by 236.3(b) as 500 feet.

Traffic speed vs. posting distance

Traffic Speed	Posting Distance
up to 35mph	500ft
40mph	545ft
45mph	649ft
50mph	735ft
55mph	830ft
60mph	920ft
65mph	1015ft

Section 236.3(a)(2) states that the school bus stop ahead sign is not intended for general use anywhere school buses stop. It should be used only where terrain and roadway features limit approach sight distance and it is impractical to move the school bus stop to a more visible location. This mandate places responsibility on the district to seek every possible relief from placing the stop at a location of reduced visibility.

When the behavior of motorists rather than visibility is threatening bus stop safety, the state law sign can be used. The purpose of State Law Signs Section 2129.1(a) reads, "...it is sometimes necessary to remind highway users of certain basic statutory rules where violations are causing significant safety or highway problems.

The state law stop for school bus sign (R9-2) is available for use according to Section 219.3(a) "where it is deemed necessary to remind motorists of the requirements of section 1174 of the vehicle and traffic law."

In general, the stop ahead sign is used in a suburban and rural setting where traffic is traveling at higher speeds and hazards may preclude students walking to a safer stop location.

The state law sign can be used in any setting, even school grounds, where motorists are passing buses with red lights flashing. This, rather than visibility is often the problem than urban setting, and this sign can help to raise the level of awareness of proper school bus procedure in an area with chronic offenders.

Stop Characteristics

The school bus stop itself must meet certain standards to protect the children waiting at the stop and the owner of the property, as well as allowing the school bus driver to successfully negotiate the loading and unloading process.

V.T. 1174 establishes that there needs to be sufficient room when the students get off the bus for them to move 15 feet away from the bus and off the road or on the sidewalk. If there is no room for students to move perpendicularly 15 feet away from the bus's position on the side of the road, they must move 15 feet in front of the bus along the shoulder. There is a danger that students walking alongside the bus would fall under the rear wheels. In order to avoid that possibility, stops should be established so students will only have to walk in front of the bus. For instance, if children from three houses got on at the same stop, the stop should be established at the first house so the other students would remain in front of the bus as they traveled home.

V.T. 1174 implies that children must be 15 feet away front where the bus stops and off the road or on a sidewalk to be safe at a bus stop. This standard would require that there be sufficient room 15 feet from the road for all the students assigned to a stop to wait comfortably.

Many bus stops are established where students can wait in a driveway and move safely to the bus. Parked cars in an urban setting and snow banks in suburban and rural settings detract from safe loading and unloading.

The only other stop location which would provide a break in snow banks or parked cars is an intersection stop where

sidewalks break through the snow banks also. **But these are not recommended.**

The location of bus stops on private property must be addressed sensitively to maximize public cooperation. Solve problems before they escalate by writing a letter to the property owner and establishing rules students must follow; provide the name of a contact person to call if problems develop.

Establishing a stop on the property of one of the students at the stop can help to increase cooperation. It is an important issue, when dealing with the property owner, to be aware exactly where the private property starts. The public right of way extends back from the road onto what >many property owners consider “my property.”

Most sidewalks are actually on public property, not on the front of private property. Students may be able to wait without actually going onto private property.

The issue of visibility at, not visibility to, the bus stop should also be addressed. As a bus driver approaches the stop, he or she should be able to see the stop clearly. If out-buildings, trees or shrubs, parked vehicles, or anything else provides a hiding place for students, they could dash out in front of the bus as it approaches. If the obstruction is on public property, the local municipality can be contacted to seek a solution. On private property the owner may be willing to help out if the safety aspect is emphasized.

Proximity to Hazard

Bus stops should not be located near known hazards. Possible hazards that should be avoided include cliffs, rivers, railroads, drug houses, intersections, and high speed highways.

There is no legal definition of what constitutes a hazard; it is up to the district to identify them by their community standards. Hazards can be relative. Rather than deny a stop, the hazard might limit the stop.

For instance, a district may decide to limit the number of children at stops along a busy highway since a larger number of students might produce more horseplay and potential for running out into traffic. Districts often prohibit stops where students have to cross a busy highway.

Intersection Stops

Historically, in urban and suburban settings, school bus stops have often been placed at intersections. Research shows real difficulties arise with safely executing intersection stops. Traffic at an intersection must be carefully evaluated and alternatives explored before considering an intersection stop. Some districts have eliminated intersection stops altogether.

The school bus is designed to alert traffic in two directions: behind and in front of the bus. An intersection involves traffic in two more directions that cannot be alerted. If a bus releases children who might immediately cross any one of the available streets, the children could be hit by traffic that was not controlled by the bus’s red lights.

If the bus unloads children and then makes an immediate right turn, it could run over an unsuspecting student who has just been discharged, because the rear wheels track closer to the curb than do the front wheels.

These concerns have led to recommendations of making mid-block stops in an urban setting, and moving stops back a minimum of 100 feet before the intersection in other settings. When the bus is going to make a turn at an intersection, the stop should be established on the road with less traffic.

In general, making the stop after the turn will provide a higher level of safety by blocking turning traffic with the bus. If the bus is continuing on the same road, the stop should be established past the intersection with at least 100 feet from the intersection to the back of the bus. This option puts the bus between the children and any turning traffic.

Safe Enough?

If an alternative to an intersection stop is not available, the traffic volume of the two streets, common traffic patterns at the intersection, and location of students home(s), must all be considered to determine if the stop is "safe enough."

If, for any reason, an intersection stop is deemed necessary, avoid making right-hand turns after picking up students at an intersection. Such a turn would double the danger, because the rear wheels track closer to the curb than the front and could strike a pedestrian.

These recommendations create serious changes in "the way we always did it," but many districts that have implemented these policies are providing a higher level of safety.

Crossing to the Bus

In order to pick up students at bus stops on both sides of a road, school bus drivers have historically "crossed' students to the bus in the morning or "crossed" them to their stop in the afternoon.

In most states, the driver remains in the driver's seat and surveys traffic, giving the signal to cross when all traffic has stopped. The extreme case is in California where drivers leave the bus and walk a child across the road. Bus attendants can play a useful role by getting out of the bus and supervising the crossing procedure. Some districts have gone even further and established that no children will be required to cross the road to get to the bus stop.

A more common procedure is for a district to identify certain roads within a district as "no crossing" roads because of the speed and density of traffic. On these roads, students would not be required to cross the road from the bus stop to the bus or vice versa. If a district has so identified a road or roads within a district, no exceptions should be made, even by parental request. Once the district has identified the acceptable level of safety for its students, it is required to provide that safety. Parents cannot choose the level of safety which will be provided for their children.

If a bus travels a road in both directions on its route, the bus driver should be aware of requiring students to disembark as non-crossers; even if this means keeping them on the bus longer. Crossing the road is the most hazardous aspect of riding a school bus and it should be eliminated whenever and wherever possible. Parenthetically, parents cannot request that their child practice gymnastics without spotters, or that their child who walks to school ignore the crossing guard, or play varsity football without pads. The district sets standards which pertain to all children.

If a change to a no-crossing policy means a longer bus ride for some students, it is acceptable, as long as the length of ride remains within state and district guidelines.

Curves and Hills

Road characteristics such as hills and curves make stop placements very difficult. Careful evaluation of such stops must be done to provide a reasonable level of safety to these students. Crossings at stops on curves or hills should be avoided because of the extra danger

Visibility in both directions on a curve can be maximized by putting the stop at the point of the curve. The outside point of a curve, where motorists have greatest visibility, would be in the path of a vehicle which is losing control. That relative danger must be weighed against crossing or moving the stop along the road to a safer location.

A vehicle cresting a hill needs sufficient time to react to the presence of a school bus stop. Stops must not be near the crest of the bill in order to allow sufficient stopping distance. Different concerns exist for establishing the stop on the downgrade or upgrade of the hill.

A bus stopping on the downgrade of a hill faces two dangers: the bus could lose control as it tries to stop and slide into waiting students, and a vehicle could slide into the back of the bus. Students must remain back 15 feet from the road until the driver signals them to approach the bus. Students are protected from vehicles approaching from the rear by the bulk of the bus, but a truck out of control could spell disaster. Vehicles approaching from the front will have the whole

incline for visibility and reaction time.

Caution must also be exercised when establishing a stop on the upgrade. Vehicles coming downhill might lose control when trying to stop, but should be able to stay on their own side of the road. Vehicles approaching from the rear should not have any trouble stopping. The concern in particularly icy weather would be that the bus might not be able to start up again, and would have to back down the hill.

If both sides of the hill were equal—they almost never are—then the best choice would be placing the stop on the upgrade. There is no substitute for visual evaluation of the site, determination of sight distances at different locations, and a review of types of traffic expected on that road.

Stop Review

Districts cannot afford to assume that once stops have been established as safe they will always be safe.

Because of changing conditions, it is a good idea for a district to observe school bus routes and stops once a year to ensure the safety of students. Useful forms for this purpose are included in the Exhibits Section. A record of this review must be kept on file to document the ongoing supervision which the district is providing. In addition to this review by transportation administrative staff, bus drivers must be trained to evaluate stops and report any problems which might arise on a day-to-day basis. The handout “SCHOOL BUS STOPS YES/NO” in the Exhibits Section can be used for sensitizing drivers.

School Sites

The school site is a very special bus stop because hundreds, if not thousands, of students use it every day. All regulations governing other bus stops must be observed and even more detailed plans must be made for safe and efficient traffic control. The principal and transportation manager must work together with the buildings and grounds department and representatives of all user groups to create a plan which creates safe access for all to the school site. A “School Bus Loading Zone Evaluation” has been included in the Exhibits Section to help identify potential problem areas.

Responding to Complaint

In order to satisfactorily address a complaint about a bus stop location, a district must have established criteria to define what is a “reasonable” stop, and how far that stop can be from a student’s home.

A “Stop Review Form” (See Exhibits Section) should be created that contains all relevant information in a structured manner. Parents bringing the complaint may be aware of traffic patterns in the area or hazards that where not evident at the time the stop was established. Listen carefully to their concerns.

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