

June 2018

Bus rider safety training yields success

by Doug Palmer transportation consultant

Many school administrators are collectively breathing a sigh of relief as the school year comes to a close. Now is a good time to reflect on programs that went well and review programs you would like to see improved. Planning your safety training at the end of the school year is a good way to enhance the training's effectiveness and communicate it to parents.

Ohio Revised Code Section 3327.16 requires all students who are offered bus transportation to receive safety training. Students in kindergarten through third grade must receive this training within the first 10 days of school. Ohio Administrative Code 3301-83-09 suggests these topics for students: safe walking practices, where and how to wait for the bus, how to enter and exit the bus and what to do if the bus does not arrive. The focus is on teaching safety.

The start of school always is hectic. Having this training planned early will help ensure that students have started to learn safe behavior around the bus. One way we learn is through repetition.

Consider hosting an open house just before school starts as a way to introduce safety rules early. This is a great way to engage parents and communicate to them your daily efforts to safely transport their children.

Hosting an event like this takes planning. You do not have to reinvent the wheel, as there are many schools that include transportation in their back-to-school events. If you know a district that discusses transportation issues at its open house, contact the supervisor for ideas.

Staging drivers and buses at all of the elementary schools' open houses is one option for community engagement. Transportation managers also can be there to answer routing questions. Webpage links and handouts can be helpful for distributing bus passenger instructions. Promoting early exposure to bus safety helps students understand how to be safe, and parents are more comfortable with their children riding the bus. Schools that include parents are more certain everyone has a good understanding of the operation.

Once school begins, safety training really gets in gear. To keep students excited and interested, different presentations each year work well. Young students are excited to see Buster the School Bus, a remote-controlled minibus that drives around the classroom, talks to students and shows them how to use safe rider practices. The Ohio Department of Education's transportation department can help schedule Buster for use, but you must register early.

Review the material for students in higher grades to make sure they receive grade-level appropriate training. The safety training can include railroad crossing procedures as well as safe practices for walking, biking and bus-riding behavior.

Planning for October's School Bus Safety Week should take place now as well. Many schools use that week, Oct. 22-26 this year, to reconnect with parents. Districts should contact the local media and share positive stories, emphasizing the transportation department's performance. The media also likes personal interest stories, including how many years bus drivers have worked for the district; the community activities they are involved in; and how students have been positively affected by their bus drivers. The district's outstanding safety record is another good story for the media.

Districts use social media, as well as the district's webpage, to communicate with parents. June is a good month to plan what information will be published and establish a timeline.

An easy way to plan communication is with an annual workflow. Prepare an outline and topic for each month. Consider the following:

- August — Route information.
- September — Information on student safety training taking place.
- October — School Bus Safety Week activities. Invite the local media to the district.
- November — Remind students of bus stop safety.
- December — Information on inclement weather notifications and how they will be communicated to parents.
- January — Revisit safe bus-riding rules.
- February and March — As

kindergarten enrollment begins, make sure parents receive transportation information with other materials sent to them, including how to request bus service.

- April — Highlight bus drivers participating in the annual Ohio School Bus Driver Safety ROAD-E-O, where drivers show off their bus-handling skills.
- May — Communicate to parents about fall bus routes.