

# Part B:

## Minnesota School Bus Driver's Handbook

### A Guide to Safe School Bus Transportation in Minnesota

#### Message from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety

The success of any school bus transportation operation depends largely on the performance and degree of dedication displayed by those involved. The role of the school bus driver is critically important to the safety record of Minnesota's school transportation systems.

#### The School Bus Driver's Commandments of Safety

1. A school bus driver's paramount responsibility is the safety of their transported students.
2. Know and obey the Minnesota motor vehicle laws.
3. Utilize correct and safe procedures when crossing railroad tracks.
4. Be positive the vehicle is mechanically safe before going onto a route.
5. Drive defensively and always expect other drivers or pedestrians to do the unexpected.
6. Know where all emergency equipment is located and how to use said equipment.
7. Never take undue risks.
8. Know and obey the pupil transportation rules and regulations set forth by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) and your local school district.

#### School Bus Laws and Rules

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS) Division has prepared this section of the Commercial Driver's Manual as a study guide for the safe operation of school buses in Minnesota. This is not intended to be a precise legal statement of Minnesota laws and rules regarding school buses and school bus operation. Studying this handbook will help you pass the required tests administered by the Department of Public Safety, DVS Division.

#### General Requirements

Except as otherwise noted, the following general requirements apply to all regular school buses (types A, B, C and D) and Type III vehicles.

A school bus endorsement must be accompanied with a passenger endorsement. A road test must be passed in a school bus with a passenger capacity of more than 15, including the driver. If the school bus you use for the road test is 26,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) or less, you will receive a Class C license.

#### Definitions

**"School bus"** means: a motor vehicle used to transport pupils (grades K-12) to or from a school or to or from school-related activities, by the school or a school district, or by someone under an agreement with the school or a school district. A school bus does not include:

- A motor vehicle transporting children to or from school for which parents or guardians receive direct compensation from a school district.
- A motor coach operating under charter carrier authority.
- A transit bus.
- A vehicle otherwise qualifying as a type III vehicle when it is properly registered and insured and being driven by an employee or agent of a school district for non-scheduled transportation.

**"School bus driver"** means - a person with a school bus endorsement on a valid Minnesota driver's license or a person with a valid Minnesota driver's license who drives a type III vehicle used as a school bus that has a passenger seating capacity of ten or fewer, including the driver, or a multifunction school activity bus.

**"Head Start bus driver"** means - a person with a valid Minnesota driver's license who drives a vehicle used as a Head Start bus that has a passenger seating capacity of 15 or fewer, including the driver; or who has a school bus or passenger endorsement and drives a Head Start bus.

**"Disqualifying offense"** means - any felony offense, drug violation, fifth degree criminal sexual conduct, interference with privacy, indecent exposure, or a violation of DWI laws; while driving, operating, or being in physical control of a school bus or a Head Start bus.

**"Reportable offense"** means - misbehavior causing an immediate and substantial danger to self or surrounding people or property.

**"Gross vehicle weight rating" (GVWR)** means - the value specified by the manufacturer as the loaded weight of a single vehicle.

## Types of School Buses

**Type A:** A Type "A" school bus is a van conversion or bus constructed utilizing a cutaway front section vehicle with a left-side driver's door. This definition includes two classifications: Type A-I, with a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating(GVWR) less than or equal to 14,500 pounds; and Type A-II, with a GVWR greater than 14,500 pounds and less than or equal to 21,500 pounds.

**Type B:** A Type "B" school bus is a conversion or body constructed and installed upon a van or front-section vehicle chassis, or stripped chassis, with a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 10,000 pounds, designed for carrying more than ten persons. Part of the engine is beneath or behind the windshield and beside the driver's seat. The entrance door is behind the front wheels.

**Type C:** A Type "C" school bus is constructed utilizing a chassis with a hood and front fender assembly. The entrance door is behind the front wheels. A "type C school bus" also includes a cutaway truck chassis or truck chassis with cab, with or without a left side door, and with a GVWR greater than 21,500 pounds.

**Type D:** A Type "D" school bus is a body installed upon a chassis, with the engine mounted in the front, mid ship, or rear, with a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 10,000 pounds, designed for carrying more than ten persons. The engine may be behind the windshield and beside the driver's seat; it may be at the rear of the bus, behind the rear wheels or mid-ship between the front and rear axles. The entrance door is ahead of the front wheels. A type D school bus has a maximum length of 45 feet.

**Type III:** Type III school buses are restricted to passenger vehicles and buses having a maximum manufacturer's rated seating capacity of ten or fewer people, including the driver, and a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less. A "type III school bus" must not be outwardly equipped and identified as a type A, B, C or D school bus or type A, B, C, or D Head Start bus. A van or bus converted to a seating capacity of ten or fewer and placed in service on or after August 1, 1999, must have been originally manufactured to comply with the passenger safety standards.

**Multifunction School Activity Bus:** A "multifunction school activity bus" is a school bus that meets the definition of a multifunction school activity bus in Code of Federal Regulations, title 49, section 571.3. A vehicle that meets the definition of a type III vehicle is not a multifunction school activity bus.

## Drug Testing Requirements

Employers are required to conduct pre-employment, reasonable suspicion, random, post-accident and return to duty/follow-up testing for safety-sensitive employees. Safety-sensitive employees includes all school bus drivers.

For more information contact MnDOT Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations at (651) 215-6330 or FMCSA/Office of Motor Carriers at (651) 291-6150.

## Zero Tolerance Law

It is a crime for anyone to drive, operate, or be in physical control of any school bus or Head Start bus when there is physical evidence present in the person's body of the consumption of any alcohol. Upon a first conviction, a person will lose his or her privileges to drive *any* commercial motor vehicles for one year. A second conviction will result in the loss of commercial driving privileges for life.

## Driver's License Requirements

**Endorsement Requirements.** No one may operate a type A, B, C, or D school bus when transporting school children to or from school or a school-related trip or activity unless s/he has a valid commercial driver's license with a passenger and school bus endorsement. A person who has a valid driver's license but not a school bus or passenger endorsement may drive a type III school bus or a multifunction school activity bus.

**Study of Applicant.** Before issuing or renewing a school bus endorsement, the Department of Public Safety must conduct a criminal history and driver's license record check of the applicant. If the applicant has lived in Minnesota for less than five years, the check also includes a national criminal history check. The commissioner will accept the national criminal history check request and the fingerprints of the applicant and is authorized to exchange fingerprints with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and request that the FBI conducts a criminal history background check.

The Department of Public Safety may also conduct a check at any time while a person is so licensed. The applicant's failure to cooperate with the department in conducting the records check is reasonable cause to deny an application or cancel a school bus endorsement. The results of the criminal record check may not be released to any person except the applicant or their designee in writing.

The Department of Public Safety may issue a temporary school bus endorsement to an otherwise qualified applicant. The temporary endorsement will be effective for no more than 180 days. The applicant must present an affidavit certifying that s/he has not been convicted of a disqualifying offense and a criminal history check from each state of residence for the previous five years. The criminal history check may be conducted and prepared by any public or private source acceptable to the commissioner of public safety.

The department may reissue the temporary endorsement if the national criminal records repository check was submitted in a timely manner, but was not completed within the 180-day period.

**Background Check.** The commissioner will not issue or renew a school bus endorsement if:

- The applicant has been convicted of a disqualifying offense, or
- Within the last five years, the applicant has been convicted of a gross misdemeanor or of violating DWI or implied consent laws, or
- In the last three years, the applicant has been convicted of four moving violations.

**Nonresident School Bus Driver.** A school district or contractor that employs a nonresident school bus driver must conduct a background check of the employee's driving record and criminal history in both Minnesota and the driver's state of residence. Convictions for disqualifying offenses, gross misdemeanors, a fourth moving violation within the previous three years, or violations of DWI or implied consent laws must be reported to the Department of Public Safety.

## Canceling Endorsement for Certain Offenses

**Cancellation.** Within ten days of receiving notice that a school bus driver or nonresident driver has been convicted of a disqualifying offense, the commissioner will permanently cancel the school bus driver's endorsement and, in the case of a nonresident, the driver's privilege to operate a school bus in Minnesota.

Within 10 days of receiving notice that a school bus driver has been convicted of a violation of DWI laws, or a similar statute or ordinance from another state, and within ten days of revoking a school bus driver's license, the commissioner will cancel the school bus driver's endorsement or the nonresident's privilege to operate a school bus in Minnesota for five years. After five (5) years, a school bus driver may apply to the commissioner for reinstatement. Even after five years, cancellation of a school bus driver's endorsement for a DWI or implied consent violation, or a similar statute or ordinance from another state, will remain in effect until the driver provides proof of successful completion of an alcohol or controlled substance treatment program. For a first offense, proof of completion is required only if treatment was ordered as part of a chemical use assessment.

Within ten days of receiving notice that a school bus driver has been convicted of a fourth moving violation in the last three years, the commissioner will cancel the school bus driver's endorsement or the nonresident's privilege to operate a school bus in Minnesota until one year has elapsed since the last conviction.

A school bus driver who has no new convictions after one year may apply for reinstatement. The commissioner will notify the offender of the cancellation in writing, by mailing a notice to the offender's last known address.

**Passenger Endorsement Cancellation.** Within ten days of receiving notice that a Head Start bus driver has committed a crime against a minor, the commissioner of public safety will permanently cancel the passenger endorsement on the offender's driver's license. The commissioner will notify the offender of the cancellation in writing, by mailing a notice to the offender's last known address.

**Waiver.** The commissioner may waive the permanent cancellation requirement for a person convicted of a misdemeanor, a gross misdemeanor, or a non-felony violation of Minnesota Statutes, chapter 152 (drug violation), or a felony that is not a violent crime under Minnesota Statutes, section 609.1095.

The commissioner may waive the permanent cancellation requirement after ten years have elapsed since a person was convicted of a violation of section 609.582, subdivision 2, 3, or 4 (burglary in the second, third, or fourth degree).

## Medical Requirements - Medical Examination

An applicant for a school bus endorsement must be in good physical and mental health, able-bodied, and free from communicable disease. As evidence of physical fitness and mental alertness, the applicant must have a medical examination by a certified medical examiner authorized as provided by the Code of Federal Regulations, title 49, section 391.42. Details for medical examinations are found in 49 CFR 391.43. The medical examiner's certificate must comply with the form prescribed in Code of Federal Regulations, title 49, section 391.43, paragraph (f).

Each school bus driver is required to pass a medical examination at a maximum of every two years. The two year re-examination period starts from the examination date of the most recent medical examiner's certificate submitted by the driver. The Department of Public Safety will send a notice to the driver's last known address 60 days prior to the expiration date of the medical examiner's certificate or waiver that is on file in the driver's record.

The driver must submit the completed Commercial Driver License Medical Self-certification Form and their valid medical examiner's certificate to the DVS CDL Unit. This can be submitted using the Online Services on the DVS website at <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/dvs/online-self-services/Pages/default.aspxlink>, via mail, fax or submit in person at a location that accepts driver license applications. It must be received on or before the expiration of the last medical examiner's certificate that is on file with the department to keep CDL driving privileges valid

If a driver does not pass the medical examination or submit the medical examiner's certificate within two years of the date of the last examination, the commissioner of public safety will notify the driver that their CDL privileges are no longer valid. If the CDL is downgraded because of failure to submit the required medical examiner's certificate, the driver may reinstate their CDL and endorsements within one year by submitting a valid medical examiner's certificate. If downgraded or voluntarily surrendered for more than one year, the driver must retake the applicable CDL knowledge and road tests and reapply for the CDL.

**Waiver of Physical Qualifications.** An individual who does not meet the physical qualifications for a CDL with a school bus endorsement may request a waiver from the commissioner of public safety. More information may be obtained from the DVS Website at: <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/dvs/forms-documents/Pages/drivers-license-forms.aspx> or by contacting the CDL Unit at (651) 297-5029.

**Training.** A bus driver must have training or experience that allows the driver to meet at least the following competencies:

1. Safely operate the type of school bus the driver will be driving.
2. Understand student behavior, including issues relating to students with disabilities.
3. Encourage orderly conduct of students on the bus and handle incidents of misconduct appropriately.
4. Know and understand relevant laws, rules of the road and local school bus safety policies.
5. Handle emergency situations.
6. Safely load and unload students.

**Annual Evaluation.** A school district's pupil transportation safety director, the chief administrator of a nonpublic school, or a private contractor:

- Must certify annually to the school board or governing board of a nonpublic school that, at minimum, each school bus driver meets the training competencies listed above.
- Must provide in-service training annually to each school bus driver.
- Annually means at least once every 380 days from the initial or previous evaluation.

A school district, nonpublic school, or private contractor shall annually verify at least once every 380 days the validity of the driver's license of each person who transports students for the district with the National Drivers Register or the Department of Public Safety.

The employer shall keep the assessment for the current period available for inspection by representatives of the commissioner.

**Age.** A school bus driver must be at least 18 years of age. No maximum age is set by law, however, some school districts or private contractors may have a mandatory retirement age.

**Testing.** The test or examination required for an initial school bus driver's endorsement on a Minnesota driver's license includes a knowledge test and a road test. School bus drivers are re-tested for current knowledge of school bus laws every four years when renewing their driver's license. The renewal knowledge test is also required when the driver upgrades to a higher-class license. The knowledge test is based on driver's license laws and rules relating to school bus operation, and a general knowledge of the operation of school buses, including knowledge of the equipment, devices and laws specific to school buses. A \$2.50 examination fee must be paid when the initial knowledge test is passed. No fee is charged for the renewal knowledge test.

The road test is given in a school bus. A license issued to an applicant taking the test in a school bus with a GVWR over 26,000 pounds is a Class B. A license issued to an applicant taking the test in a smaller school bus (26,000 pounds or less) is a Class C.

The school bus road test will begin with a vehicle inspection. This inspection is not intended to encompass all items that must be inspected daily according to Minnesota laws and rules.

A checklist is included in section 10 of this manual. It may be used during the vehicle inspection portion of the road test. The items may be checked in any order.

## School Bus Operations

**Rules.** The commissioner of public safety adopted rules governing the operation of school buses used for transportation of school children, when owned or operated by a school or privately owned and operated under a contract with a school. Each school, its officers and employees, and each person employed under the contract is subject to these rules.

**Enforcement.** The operation of a school bus on the public streets or highways in violation of rules concerning the operation of school buses adopted by the commissioner is a misdemeanor. State law enforcement agencies must enforce the rules when a school bus is operated on a public street or highway.

## School Bus Equipment Standards

Types A, B, C, D school buses and multifunction school activity buses used for the transportation of school children shall meet the requirements of the "bus body and chassis specifications" in the most recent edition of the "National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures" adopted by the National Congress on School Transportation. The National Standards for School Buses and School Bus Operations have been adopted by the state of Minnesota for types A, B, C, D school buses and multifunction school activity buses that are owned and operated by a school district or nonpublic school or privately owned and operated under a contract with a school. Each school, its officers and employees, and each person employed under the contract is subject to these standards.

The standards apply to school buses manufactured after August 1 of the year following a year in which a revised edition of the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures is adopted. Buses complying with the

standards when manufactured are not required to comply with standards established later except as specifically provided by law. All school buses must conform to the Minnesota standards in effect on the date the vehicle was manufactured except as specifically provided for in law.

All school buses must have a first aid kit and a body fluids cleanup kit. They must be mounted in an accessible place within the driver's compartment and must be marked to indicate their identity and location.

## Type III Vehicle Standards

A type III vehicle:

- Must not be outwardly equipped and identified as a school bus.
- Must not be 12 years old or older.
- Must have at least one 10BC rated dry chemical type fire extinguisher. It must be mounted in a bracket in the driver's compartment and be readily accessible to the driver and passengers. The pressure indicator must be easily read without removing the extinguisher from its mounted position.
- Must have a minimum of a ten-unit first aid kit and a body fluids cleanup kit. They must be in removable, moisture and dust-proof containers mounted in an accessible place within the driver's compartment and must be marked to indicate their identity and location.
- May not have the words "school bus" on the outside of the vehicle or in any interior location that is visible to motorists.
- Must have one interior and two exterior mirrors (one on each side).
- Road warning devices are not required after August 1, 2012.
- Must display a current certificate of inspection issued by the State Patrol.

**Note:** Type III vehicles may carry the fire extinguisher, first aid kit and warning triangles in the trunk or trunk area of the vehicle, if a label in the driver and front passenger area clearly indicates the location of these items.

When a vehicle otherwise qualifying as a type III vehicle, whether owned and operated by a school district or privately owned and operated, is used to transport school children in a nonscheduled situation it will be exempt from the vehicle requirements and licensing requirements if the vehicle is properly registered and insured and operated by an employee or agent of a school district with a valid driver's license.

## Type III Driver Requirements

The holder of a Class A, B, C, or D driver's license, may operate a type III vehicle without a school bus endorsement when the following requirements are met:

- Driver is an employee of a school district or school bus company that owns, leases, or contracts for the school bus transportation.
- The driver's employer has a policy that provides for annual training and certification in:
  - safe operation of a type III vehicle
  - understanding student behavior, including issues relating to students with disabilities
  - encouraging orderly conduct of students on the bus and handling incidents of misconduct appropriately
  - knowing and understanding relevant laws, rules of the road and local school bus safety policies
  - handling emergency situations
  - proper use of seat belts and child safety restraints
  - performance of pre-trip vehicle inspections
  - safe loading and unloading of students, including, but not limited to:
    - utilizing a safe location for loading and unloading students at the curb, on the non-traffic side of the roadway, or at off-street loading areas, driveways, yards, and other areas to enable the student to avoid hazardous conditions;
    - refraining from loading and unloading students in a vehicular traffic lane, on the shoulder, in a designated turn lane, or a lane adjacent to a designated turn lane;
    - avoiding a loading or unloading location that would require a pupil to cross a road, or ensuring that the driver or an aide personally escort the pupil across the road if it is not reasonably feasible to avoid such a location;
    - placing the type III vehicle in "park" during loading and unloading;
    - escorting a pupil across the road under item (iii) only after the motor is stopped, the ignition key is removed, the brakes are set and the vehicle is otherwise rendered immobile;

- when loading or unloading school children, it is recommended the driver use the vehicle's four-way hazard lights.
- compliance in reporting certain convictions to the employer within ten days of the date of conviction.
- A background check or background investigation of the driver has been conducted by the employer. A driver is not allowed to operate a type III vehicle if:
  - the applicant has been convicted of a disqualifying offense, or
  - within the last five years, the applicant has been convicted of violating DWI or implied consent laws, or
  - in the last three years, the applicant has been convicted of four moving violations.
- Drivers operating a type III vehicle shall submit to a physical examination.
- Drivers operating a type III vehicle must comply if their employer requires pre-employment drug and alcohol testing for driver positions.
- The driver's license record check is verified annually by the employer.
- A driver who sustains a conviction of a moving violation or disqualifying offense shall report the conviction to their employer within ten days of the date of the conviction.
- A type III driver whose driver's license is suspended, revoked, canceled, or disqualified in Minnesota or another state must notify their employer in writing. The driver must notify their employer before the end of the business day immediately following the day the driver received notice of loss of driving privileges.
- Type III driver requirement documentation must be maintained under separate file by the employer. The employer is responsible for maintaining these files for inspection.
- An employee of a school or of a school district, who is not employed for the sole purpose of operating a type III vehicle, is exempt from the physical examination and pre-employment drug/alcohol testing requirements.

## Student School Bus Safety Training

Each school district must provide public school pupils enrolled in kindergarten through grade 10 with age- appropriate school bus safety training. Upon completion of the training, a student must be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following areas:

1. Transportation by school bus is a privilege and not a right (a student's privilege to ride a school bus may be revoked for a violation of school bus safety or conduct policies).
2. District policies for student conduct and school bus safety.
3. Appropriate conduct while on the school bus.
4. The danger zones surrounding a school bus.
5. Procedures for safely boarding and leaving a school bus.
6. Procedures for Safe Street or road crossing.
7. School bus evacuation.

Each nonpublic school located within the district must provide all nonpublic school pupils enrolled in kindergarten through grade 10 who are transported by school bus at public expense and attend school within the district's boundaries with training as required above.

The school transportation safety director in each district must certify to the superintendent of schools annually that all students transported by school bus within the district have received the school bus safety training as described above. The principal or other chief administrator of each nonpublic school must certify annually to the school transportation safety director of the district in which the school is located that all of the school's students transported by school bus at public expense have received training.

School districts and nonpublic schools with students transported by school bus at public expense must provide students in kindergarten through grade 5 with education on bicycling and pedestrian safety. In providing this training, these districts and schools must make reasonable accommodations for pupils known to speak English as a second language and for pupils with disabilities.

School districts must provide school bus safety training twice during the school year for students enrolled in kindergarten through grade 3.

## Recording Device

If a video or audio recording device is placed on a school bus, the bus must also contain a sign or signs, conspicuously placed, notifying riders that their conversations or actions may be recorded on tape.

## General Operating Rules

1. The school board of the district may adopt additional operating rules as deemed necessary to meet local conditions and needs, providing they do not conflict with state laws and rules.
2. Only pupils assigned to the school bus by the school board or designated administrative officer of the school district will be transported at district expense.
3. The administrative officer must see that no materials, including guns, loaded or unloaded; gasoline cans, empty or full; animals or any other object of dangerous or objectionable nature are transported in the school bus when children are being transported.
4. No pupils are allowed in the bus while the fuel tank is being filled.
5. On leaving the vehicle when pupils are in the bus, the driver must stop the motor, remove the key, set the brake and otherwise render the bus immobile.
6. The driver of a school bus must keep the aisle and emergency exit of a school bus clear at all times when children are being transported.
7. The entrance door must be closed when students are being transported and the bus is in motion.
8. School district authorities establish loading and unloading stops. The driver is not allowed to change them without permission from school authorities. The only exception to this policy is when the immediate safety of the students is threatened.
9. Pupils are not to be evicted from the bus along the route for a breach of discipline. The bus driver must report all breaches of discipline to the designated school official. If the official has reason to believe that a student has committed a "reportable offense" on a school bus or in a bus loading or unloading area, s/he must notify the local law enforcement agency where the misbehavior occurred. The reporting school official must also notify the school superintendent and submit a report about the incident to the commissioner of public safety.
10. School buses may pull a trailer on co-curricular or extracurricular trips, but not when transporting children to and from school. If the trailer exceeds 10,000 lbs. GVWR, a Class A license is required. Other states may not allow school buses to pull a trailer at anytime.
11. To compensate for the greater braking distances of school buses, drivers need to watch ahead for danger, slow earlier and drive defensively.
12. The greater weight of school buses means slower acceleration. This is especially important at intersections and railroad crossings. It takes longer for a bus to clear an intersection than it would for a car. After a stop, a car can clear an intersection in 4-5 seconds while a school bus will take 9-10 seconds.
13. On curves, it is best to compensate for the increased height and weight of a school bus by slowing before the curve, accelerating slightly through the curve and resuming normal speed after the curve.
14. A bus is about two feet wider than a standard sized car. It takes about one-third more space in a lane of traffic. When meeting oncoming traffic on a two-lane roadway, it is best to plan ahead, slow down slightly and move to the right of your lane.
15. When a school bus meets a truck on a two-lane highway, it is first hit by a shock wave of air and then it is pulled toward the truck. A school bus driver can compensate for this condition by planning ahead, reducing speed slightly, moving to the right of the lane and keeping a firm grip on the steering wheel.
16. A person who boards a school bus when the bus is on its route or otherwise in operation, or while it has pupils on it, and who refuses to leave the bus on demand of the bus driver, is guilty of a misdemeanor.

## Speed Limits, Seat Belts, Lighted Head Lamps, Strobe Lamps,

### Speed Limits:

- School bus drivers must not exceed the posted speed limits at anytime.
- School bus drivers must never drive at a speed that is faster than reasonable under existing conditions.

**Seat Belts.** School buses manufactured after July 1, 1969, must be equipped with driver seat belts and seat belt assemblies. A properly adjusted and fastened seat belt, including both the shoulder and lap belt (when vehicle is equipped), shall be worn by the driver. School buses equipped with seat belts and type III vehicles must comply with Minnesota laws regarding seat belt and child passenger restraint system use.



**Lighted Head Lamps.** The driver must display lighted headlamps (low beam) during daylight hours when transporting children.

**Strobe Lamps.** Type A, B, C and D school buses may be equipped with a roof mounted 360-degree flashing strobe lamp that emits a white flashing light. A strobe lamp may not be used unless the school bus is actually being used as a school bus.

## Railroad Crossings

All school buses, (except type III vehicles), are required to stop for railroad crossings, unless an "EXEMPT" sign is posted.<sup>1</sup> The stop is required whether or not there are students aboard the bus.

The school bus driver must turn on the four-way hazard warning lights at least 100 feet from the nearest rail. The Master Switch must be off. It is illegal to use the 8-light system at a railroad crossing. The presence of an "EXEMPT" sign does not relieve a driver of the duty to use due care.

State and Federal law requires that school buses stop at least 15 feet back and no more than 50 feet from the nearest rail. A good rule of thumb is to stop about one bus length from the nearest rail.

When checking railroad tracks:

1. Be sure the Master Switch is OFF.
2. Make sure passengers are quiet.
3. Open the door and driver's window.
4. Listen and look in both directions.
5. Check in both directions again.

Before crossing the tracks, the driver should close the service door. The driver must not shift gears while crossing the railroad tracks. After the crossing is completed, the driver will have to turn off the hazard warning lights and turn on the Master Switch if there will be more loading and unloading stops. A school bus or Head Start bus must not be flagged across railroad crossings except when it is authorized by the local school administrative officer.

## Passenger Capacity and Inspection

**Passenger Capacity.** The number of pupils or other passengers in a school bus must not be more than the number of pupils or passengers that can be fully seated. Seating capacity will be adjusted according to the passengers' individual physical size, but not to exceed the manufacturer's rated capacity. No person will stand while the bus is in motion.

### Inspection:

1. No school bus will be registered for the first time in this state unless it has been certified that it conforms to all minimum standards and laws for buses.
2. The Minnesota State Patrol must annually inspect every school bus. In addition to the annual inspection, the Minnesota State Patrol has authority to conduct random, unannounced spot inspections of any school bus or Head Start bus being operated within the state.
3. No school bus may be driven without displaying a current valid inspection certificate.
4. Drivers should never operate a school bus that is improperly equipped or in an unsafe condition.

<sup>1</sup> School buses are not required to stop before crossing light rail tracks that are located in a public street when the crossing occurs within the intersection of two or more public streets; when the intersection is controlled by a traffic-control signal; and the intersection is marked with signs indicating to drivers that they are not required to stop.

## **Safety of School Children: Bus Driver's Duties**

The school bus endorsement of a driver who is convicted of violating the provisions of Minnesota Statute 169.443 will be revoked for 30 days. This statute regulates the use of bus signals and stop signal arms; when signals are not used; street crossings; moving the bus after children are unloaded; and type III vehicles.

### **Cell Phone Use Prohibited**

A school bus driver may not operate a school bus or type III vehicles while communicating over, or otherwise operating, a cellular phone for personal reasons, whether handheld or hands free, when the vehicle is in motion or a part of traffic.

### **Use of 8-Light Warning System, Stop Signal Arm, Student Loading or Unloading (Type A, B, C, D)**

School buses are equipped with a system of alternately flashing amber and red lights called an 8-light system. The purpose of the flashing amber lights is to warn other drivers that the school bus is preparing to stop to load or unload students. The flashing red lights indicate to other drivers that the school bus is stopped and is in the process of loading or unloading students.

It is most important that school bus drivers are utilizing all mirrors and use their best observation skills when loading and unloading students, especially when using the 8-light warning system.

In order to safely load and unload students the school bus driver must:

1. Scan the entire area of the student stop.
2. Identify potential hazards.
3. Predict how those hazards may affect them.
4. Decide on the proper course of action.
5. Properly execute that decision.

The observation skills a school bus driver has and the decisions they make based on them are one of the keys in safely transporting students.

### **Stop Signal Arm**

The stop signal arm of a school bus must be used in conjunction with the flashing red signals only when the school bus is stopped on a street or highway to load or unload school children.

A local authority, including a tribal government, may require by ordinance that a school bus use the stop signal arm and flashing red signals while stopped to load and unload school children at a location other than on a street or highway. The ordinance must designate each location where the requirement is imposed. The requirement is effective only if the local authority has erected signs at or near the location to provide adequate notice to other vehicles that school buses may use this area to load or unload students.

### **8- Light Warning System, Student Loading**

To load in areas where the 8-light warning system will be used, follow these steps:

1. Check traffic in all directions.
2. Activate alternately flashing amber lights:
  - a. 300 feet before stopping in a speed zone of more than 35 mph.
  - b. 100 feet before stopping in a speed zone of 35 mph or less.
3. As the bus nears the stop, count the students. It is a safe practice to plan to stop 6-8 feet before reaching the waiting students. Roll slowly forward until in proper position. The bus should be stopped in the middle of the right lane.
4. After stopping and putting the transmission in neutral, check traffic to make sure it is able to stop.
5. Open the service door just a crack to activate the alternately flashing red lights and activate the stop signal arm.

6. Make sure that all traffic is stopped before opening the door fully.
7. Students who must cross the road should cross at least ten feet in front of the bus, after being signaled by the driver that it is safe to do so.
8. A long, steady blast of the horn can be used as a warning to students that it is **NOT** safe to cross.
9. Count all students as they enter the bus.
10. The driver must not retract the stop signal arm nor turn off the flashing red signals until the loading is completed and the students are safely seated.
11. Always recheck side and crossover mirrors and close the service door before moving the bus.

## **8- Light Warning System, Student Unloading**

To unload in areas where the 8-light warning system will be used, follow these steps:

1. Check traffic in all directions.
2. Activate alternately flashing amber lights:
  - a. 300 feet before stopping in a speed zone of more than 35 mph.
  - b. 100 feet before stopping in a speed zone of 35 mph or less.
3. Slow gradually and stop in the middle of the right lane.
4. After stopping and putting the transmission in neutral, check traffic to make sure it is able to stop.
5. Open the service door just a crack to activate the alternately flashing red lights and activate the stop signal arm.
6. Make sure that all traffic is stopped before opening the door fully.
7. Count the students as they leave the bus.
8. Pupils should walk away from the bus and not go toward the rear of the bus.
9. Students who must cross the road should move out at least ten feet in front of the bus, make eye contact with the driver and wait for the driver to signal that it is safe to cross. Check traffic carefully before giving the signal to cross.
10. A long steady blast of the horn can be used as a warning to students that it is **NOT** safe to cross.
11. Always check your mirrors and recount your students before moving the bus.

### **For any TYPE Bus:**

1. Never permit pupils to get up from their seats or get on or off the bus while it is in motion.
2. Bring the bus to a full stop and disengage gears by shifting the gearshift lever into the neutral position or the selector into the neutral or park position before loading or unloading pupils.
3. Loading and unloading pupils within an intersection is prohibited.
4. When children are getting off a school bus, the driver must look to make sure that the children will be a safe distance from the bus before moving the bus.

### **For Types A, B, C and D:**

1. Never load or unload pupils where the view is obstructed to other motorists for 500 feet in either direction on a roadway with a speed limit of 35 miles per hour or greater. When the speed limit is less than 35 miles per hour the view must be unobstructed for 100 feet in either direction.
2. Buses must load and unload in the right lane of the roadway and only at pupil stops designated by school district authorities on approved bus routes.
3. Loading or unloading passengers in a designated right-turn lane or in a lane immediately adjacent to a designated right-turn lane is prohibited unless:
  - a. It is a school bus stop designated by the school district;
  - b. The bus is stopped at the extreme right side of the right-turn lane; and
  - c. The driver activates the eight lamp warning system and stop arm, unless the school board provides written direction to the driver not to do so.
  - d. After loading or unloading passengers, the school bus driver may re-enter the right-hand lane of traffic without turning right. The school bus must indicate the intent to enter the right-hand lane of traffic by activating a flashing left turn signal
4. Whenever a bicycle lane has been established on a roadway, a school bus may load and unload passengers provided the school bus activates the 8-light warning system and the stop signal arm is extended.

5. The driver is responsible for safely delivering the pupils, who must cross the street or highway, to the left side of the road by one of the following methods:
  - a. The pupil must pass around in front of the bus and cross the road only when directed to by the driver, OR
  - b. The pupil must pass around in front of the bus and be conducted across the road by the school bus patrol or monitor, OR
  
6. The driver must personally escort the pupils across the road. If the driver escorts the vehicle must be rendered immobile. This includes but is not limited to: turning off the motor, removing the ignition key and setting the brakes.

## **8-Light Warning System, Not Used**

School bus drivers must not use the flashing amber warning signals or flashing red signals and shall not use the stop signal arm:

1. In special school bus loading areas where the bus is entirely off the traveled portion of the roadway and where no other motor vehicle traffic is moving or is likely to be moving within 20 feet of the bus.
2. When directed not to do so, in writing, by the local school board.
3. When a school bus is being used on a street or highway for purposes other than the actual transportation of school children to or from school or a school-approved activity.
4. At railroad crossings.
5. When loading and unloading people at designated stops where people are not required to cross the street or highway, while the bus is completely off the traveled portion of the roadway that has adequate shoulders. The driver must drive the bus completely off the traveled portion of this roadway before loading or unloading people.

Where school children must cross a roadway before getting on or after getting off the school bus, the school bus driver or a school bus patrol may supervise the crossing, using the standard school patrol flag or signal approved by the commissioner of public safety. Before moving the school bus, the driver of the bus must look to make sure that all children have crossed the roadway and that those who are to do so have boarded the school bus.

## **Non 8-Light Warning System, Student Loading**

The driver should be thoroughly familiar with local policies regarding loading and unloading procedures. The following procedure is recommended when the 8-light system is not used.

1. Check traffic in all directions.
2. Activate right turn signal at least 100 feet (or 8-10 seconds) before the stop. (Some local policies call for the use of hazard warning lights. Be familiar with the procedures used in your school district.)
3. Touch brake pedal to activate brake lights.
4. Make sure 8-light Master Switch is OFF.
5. Move to the right next to the curb. Plan to stop 6-8 feet before reaching students. Allow bus to roll forward slowly.
6. After stopping put transmission in neutral. After students are on board and seated:
7. Turn off hazard warning lights if used.
8. Turn on left turn signal.
9. Check mirrors.
10. Pull away from the curb when safe to do so.

## **Non 8-Light Warning System, Student Unloading**

Unloading in areas where the 8-light system is not used is basically the same as for pickups. There are a few items that are different.

1. Make sure all students remain seated until the bus is completely stopped.
2. Count the students as they leave the bus.
3. Students should walk away from the bus and not go toward the rear of the bus.
4. Check your crossover and side mirrors.
5. Count the students again. Be absolutely certain that all students are safely away from the bus before pulling away from the curb.

## **Student Loading and Unloading at Schools**

### **Unloading**

1. Securely park in the designated bus unloading area with 4-way hazard lights on.
2. Have the students remain seated until the bus is stopped, secure and they are told to exit.
3. Have the students exit in an orderly fashion.

4. Observe students as they step from the bus to see that all move promptly away from the unloading area.
5. Walk through the bus and check for hiding/sleeping students and items left behind.
6. Check all mirrors. Make certain no students are returning to the bus.
7. If you cannot account for a student outside the bus and the bus is secure, check around and underneath the bus.
8. When all students are accounted for, turn on the turn signal if applicable, check all mirrors again and when safe, pull away from the unloading area.

## **Loading**

1. Securely park in the designated bus loading area with 4-way hazard lights on.
2. If feasible, turn off engine and remove key.
3. Stay near the driver's area and observe the students boarding the bus.
4. When the bus is loaded, check all mirrors. Make certain no students or other pedestrians are near the bus.
5. If you cannot account for a student outside the bus and the bus is secure, check around and underneath the bus.
6. When all students are accounted for, turn on the turn signal, check all mirrors again and when safe, pull away from the loading area.

**Note:** *Buses should not be operated in reverse on schools grounds if possible.*

## **Safety of School Children**

### **Requirements of Other Drivers when Children are Getting On or Off School Bus**

When a school bus is stopped and has its stop arm extended and its red lights flashing, the driver of a vehicle approaching the bus must stop at least 20 feet away from the bus. The driver must not allow the vehicle to move until the school bus stop arm is retracted and the red lights are no longer flashing.

### **Violations by Other Drivers**

1. A driver who doesn't stop for a school bus as required is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not less than \$500. The driver may also have his/her driving privileges suspended. The driver may have his/her driving privileges revoked if two or more violations occur within five years.
2. A person is guilty of a gross misdemeanor and is subject to revocation if the driver doesn't stop for a school bus as required and commits either or both of the following acts:
  - a. Passes or tries to pass the school bus on the right-hand, passenger-door side of the bus; or
  - b. Passes or tries to pass the school bus when a school child is outside on the street or highway used by the school bus or on the adjacent sidewalk.

## **School Bus Accident Procedures**

The school bus driver's prime responsibility in accident situations is the safety and well-being of the students being transported.

### **Standard Accident Procedures:**

1. Stop and remain at or near the accident.
2. Evacuate students from the bus if:
  - a. There is a fire or danger of fire.
  - b. The bus is in an unsafe position.
  - c. There is danger of drowning.
3. Try to prevent other accidents. Set out emergency warning devices. Use hazard warning lights.
4. Aid the injured.
5. Send two members of the patrol or other responsible students for help. The driver must remain with the bus.
6. Give and collect information. You are required by law to give your name, address, date of birth, driver's license information, vehicle information and insurance information. Get the same information from the other driver. Get names and other information from witnesses.
7. Report to the proper authorities.

8. If the accident results in death or bodily injury to a person who immediately receives medical treatment away from the accident scene, or one or more motor vehicles incurring disabling damage that requires transport away from the scene by a tow truck or other motor vehicle, do not use the school bus to transport students unless the vehicle:
  - a. Has been inspected by the Minnesota State Patrol and the State Patrol has determined that the vehicle may safely be operated; or
  - b. Has been granted a waiver by the state trooper or designee of the Minnesota State Patrol called to the scene of the accident. The waiver may be granted if the trooper or designee determines that a post-crash inspection is not needed or cannot be done without unreasonable delay. The trooper or designee must give the driver a written statement that the inspection has been waived. The written statement must include the incident report number assigned to the accident by the State Patrol.

## Reports

The driver must make the following reports:

1. All accidents involving personal injury or death, or property damage of \$1,000 or more must be reported to the commissioner of public safety.
2. Drivers must make reports, and keep copies of reports, as required by the employer.

## School Bus Driver Immunity from Liability

A school bus driver, while on duty gives; care, advice, or assistance at the scene of an emergency or on the way to a hospital or clinic; is not liable for any civil damages because of anything the driver did or didn't do for the person who was injured.

## Backing

Backing should be avoided whenever possible when driving a school bus. School districts' policies may vary regarding backing. The school bus driver should be thoroughly familiar with any local policy regarding backing. If it is necessary to back the bus, make absolutely certain that:

1. It is necessary.
2. You activate the 4-way hazard warning lights.
3. You have an unrestricted view. You should be able to see if any moving vehicles are within 500 feet in either direction.
4. You have enough space. Remember the overhang of the bus.
5. No pupils are outside the bus when it is backing. When there is a student pick-up or unloading at a backing point, you must always load before backing and unload after backing.
6. It is quiet on board. You want to be able to hear sounds or the warnings of passengers or bystanders.
7. It was necessary, especially if the maneuver is to be repeated, and that you can justify the turnaround.

## Following Distance

Minnesota law requires that trucks and buses maintain a following distance of at least 500 feet on highways. This law does not apply when passing another vehicle or when traveling in a designated truck lane.

A good way to judge a safe following distance behind another vehicle is to use the time interval method. The time interval works like this:

1. Choose a reference point on or near the road (a shadow, road repair patch, telephone pole, tree).
2. Count off the seconds it takes from the time the back of the vehicle ahead passes the reference point until the front of your vehicle passes the same point.

An interval of about 8 seconds is required to maintain a following distance of 500 feet at 45 mph. While on residential or business streets, allow for at least 4 seconds for dry conditions and 6 seconds for wet or icy conditions. Finally, maintain at least a 50-foot interval when following another bus entering or leaving the school grounds.

## Passing

The time interval method can be used in passing situations. When passing:

1. Stay back at least 4 seconds.

2. Check for signs and road markings.
3. Check traffic ahead.
4. Check traffic behind and to the left.
5. Signal lane change to the left.
6. Double check signs, markings and traffic.
7. Move to the left and proceed to pass.

Remember that it will take 10 to 20 seconds to complete the pass. Pull back to the right only when you can see enough space between your bus and the other vehicle. Remember speed limits at all times. If you feel it will be necessary to speed in order to pass, you should not pass.

## **Daily Safety Check**

No school bus may be driven unless the driver or other designated person has inspected the vehicle to ensure that, at a minimum, the following parts and accessories are in good working order:

1. Service brakes, including trailer brake connections.
2. Parking (hand) brakes.
3. Steering mechanism.
4. Lighting devices and reflectors.
5. Tires.
6. Fluid levels.
7. Horn.
8. Windshield wiper or wipers.
9. Rear-vision and crossover mirrors, including their proper adjustment.
10. Eight-light warning system.
11. Stop arm.

A copy of the current daily pre-trip inspection report must be carried in the bus. Local pre-trip inspection policies may vary widely. Every driver should be familiar with the policies of his or her employer.

## **Pre-trip Inspection**

State law requires that a daily pre-trip inspection must be conducted for each school bus. Local policies may vary as to who is responsible for the pre-trip inspection. In most cases, the school bus driver will personally perform the inspection.

## **School Bus Safety Patrol**

The organization and use of a School Bus Safety Patrol is recommended to assist the bus driver in the safe operation of the vehicle. These patrols can be very helpful in maintaining order and preventing accidents on buses, and in assisting pupils safely across highways.

School Safety Patrols for buses should be appointed, organized and governed in the same manner as regular School Safety Patrols.

The school bus driver should be present at the organization of the School Bus Safety Patrol and should be familiar with all rules and regulations governing the duties of patrol members.

When it appears that the patrol member is having difficulty carrying out his or her duties, the driver must promptly give necessary assistance. The driver must maintain supervision over the School Bus Safety Patrol and is responsible for the safety of the pupils. The presence of a School Bus Safety Patrol member in no way relieves a driver from such responsibility.

When selecting members for a School Bus Safety Patrol, personality, strength and physical size should be taken into consideration. Alternates should be appointed to serve during the absence of the regular patrol members. There should be two regular members of the School Bus Safety Patrol for each bus — one in the rear of the bus near the emergency door and the other to supervise the operation of the regular entrance door and perform such other duties that may be assigned to the position.