

▶ *Hanover Risk Solutions*

## School Bus Loading and Unloading

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in every crash involving a child being struck by a school bus, driver error was indicated when the driver “lost” sight of the child during loading or unloading. If the driver had taken proper precautions, the student would not have been struck. Drivers should consider the following suggestions to assure that the loading and unloading of the school bus is done safely.

- Before you start your trip, inspect the bus to make sure there are no problems with the equipment. Make sure that the mirrors are properly adjusted, so you can see what you are supposed to see.
- Loading and unloading requires all your concentration. If you are running late on a route, do not hurry. Check all mirrors slowly and carefully, especially as you move away from a stop.
- Stay to the right side of the roadway when loading and unloading. Do not try to block all traffic. Stay in the traffic lane, not on the shoulder (unless your state/local laws or procedures say differently). Stop before you get to the students. Make them walk to you, so you can see them.
- Secure your bus whenever you load or unload—set the emergency brake and put the bus in neutral/park. Assure that all safety devices have been activated.
- Back up only when absolutely necessary. If you **MUST** back up near a bus stop, keep all students on the bus. Where possible, use a lookout—a reliable student inside the bus or a bus attendant outside the bus. Open your window, and sound your horn. Back up **VERY** slowly.
- Use a hand signal or head nod to tell the students when it is safe to cross the street. The hand signal should not be confused with a wave because waiting motorists might think you are telling them to pass. You also can use the external public address system, if you have one. Teach the students what horn signal you will use to signal danger. The signal will mean to “return to the side of the road they started from—**AT ONCE!**”
- Know how many students should get **ON** at a stop; count them. If any are missing, ask if they were at the bus stop. If yes, secure the bus (brakes set, engine off), and check around and underneath the bus.
- As the students get **OFF** at a bus stop, count them. Then, before you move the bus, count them again as they move away. Do not move until you are sure that they are all away from the bus. If you cannot account for a student outside the bus, secure the bus, and check around and underneath the bus. If a student drops something outside the bus, make sure they tell you and follow your instructions for retrieving the item. Remember, clothing, drawstrings, and straps can catch in handrails, doors, the step outside the door, fire extinguishers, etc. Only proceed when you are sure all students are clear of the bus.

- Watch for stragglers (students who do not cross with the group) or students running for a missed bus.
- Check the bus at the end of a run to assure no students fell asleep in the bus.
- Assume the worst from approaching motorists. Even though they are supposed to stop, motorists may pass a stopped school bus. Make a record of anyone who passes illegally, and give it to your supervisor.
- Constantly search for traffic in front, in back, and on both sides of the bus. Make sure that you give plenty of warning that you are going to stop by turning on your yellow flashers early. Do not let the students off until you are sure it is safe.
- If you hear an emergency vehicle's siren and students are UNLOADING, make sure all students are out of the danger zone, then turn off the bus flashers. If you hear a siren and students are STILL ON the bus, do not allow students to get off the bus until you are sure it is safe.

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