

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

Q. Where is the Transportation Administrative Office located?

A. The physical address is 1430 Hwy 60 East in Bartow. We are located just east of the overpass at the intersection of Hwy 60 and Hwy 17.

Q. How do I find out what bus my child will ride this year?

A. Please call the school your child will attend. Transportation releases bus routing information to the schools as soon as the routes are finished. If the school your child will attend does not have the information, it means that the route is not ready for public release. Please check the school again at a later date. Transportation will not provide information on routes that have not been released to schools.

Q. My student attends a “Charter School”. Is transportation provided by the Polk County School Board?

A. In some cases, the Polk County School Board Transportation Department provides transportation to Charter Schools. The School Board and Charter School enters into a contract for this service. You may contact the Charter School your child attends to find out if this is provided. If the Charter School doesn't have a contracted service agreement, then the School Board cannot provide transportation to the students attending the Charter School.

Q. I live less than two miles from my child's school. Is he/she eligible for transportation?

A. By law, the State of Florida provides transportation funding only for traditional education students that live 2 or more miles from the school. The Polk County School Board does not provide additional resources to transport students living within 2 miles of school.

Q. How is a bus stop location determined?

A. Bus stops are located as a function of safety, neighborhood logistics, State regulations, and Transportation requirements. We try to locate bus stops so as to serve the entire needs of a neighborhood for years to come. They cannot be located as a function of personal convenience or schedule. State regulations require that, when practical, we place bus stops no more than 1.5 miles from the residence of a student. State regulations do not address sidewalks or grade level above 5th grade in the determination of stop placement. Florida Law mandates that we do not place bus stops closer than 300 feet together and consider carefully, all traffic conditions before placement. Bus drivers do not have the authority to create or delete bus stops.

Q. Can my child bring a friend home on the bus? Can they ride the bus to school the next morning?

A. No. We are directed by the State of Florida funding program to maximize the efficiency of our school buses. This means filling every seat on the bus on each run. We cannot allow additional students, not assigned to an individual bus, to ride an already “maxed-out” bus as a convenience. In addition to not having seating for the additional passengers, we also have no emergency data for the student in case there is an accident. Services we provide for one student, we must be prepared to provide for all. Therefore, our policy is to not allow convenience riders, unless it is a pre-coordinated emergency situation.

Q. My child missed the bus. Can I follow the bus in my car and allow my child to board the bus at another stop?

A. For safety reasons, if your child misses the bus, do not attempt to chase, pass, or block the bus along its route. Any action taken to impede or delay the progress of an official school bus is unlawful. If possible, take a different route to a stop ahead of the bus and let your child board there. When in your car, directly behind a school bus, it is very dangerous for a child to attempt to run from the car along the side of the bus to board. Nationwide, fatalities have occurred where students have fallen in front of the rear wheels of a departing bus after they jumped out of a parent's car to run up and board the bus.

Q. My pre-kindergarten child must be accompanied at the bus stop. What do you do if I have an emergency and I cannot notify you, or be there, to meet my child?

A. Arrangements must be made to meet your child. Transportation Services will attempt to deliver the student to the regular bus stop. If no one is there to meet the child, we will return the child to the school. If the school cannot take custody of the child, Transportation Services has no choice but to seek help from Children and Family Services.

Q. Why does my pre-kindergarten child have to be met at the bus stop?

A. As agreed by the parents upon registration in the pre-kindergarten program, a designated responsible individual will be available to accompany the pre-kindergartner at the bus stop. A child of this age simply cannot be left alone at a bus stop. Three failures by a designated responsible individual to meet a pre-kindergarten student will result in forfeiture of the privilege to ride the school bus.

Q. Someone told me the bus was late because the run was being “covered”. What does this mean?

A. When there are more school bus drivers out due to illness than we have substitute drivers, we must split up entire bus runs to “cover” all the students in an area and get them to school. This may mean shifting entire loads or just a few stops. This process is logistically challenging for our operations staff and drivers, but it is a necessary procedure designed to ensure a timely arrival/delivery for students. The only way to prevent “covering” is to have enough substitute bus drivers so that we can fill regular driver vacancies as they occur.

Q. Why doesn't the Transportation Office call me when the bus is delayed in the A.M. or P.M.? Is there a place I can call for information about a bus delay?

A. School buses, like any form of mass transportation, are significantly affected by many uncontrollable factors. These factors may include a shortage of drivers due to sickness or other (weather, road repair/closure, traffic) conditions, run coverage, etc. When a bus is running late, the students are instructed to wait at the stop, and to not go back home. If the bus is late, and the student rides it to school, he/she will not be counted tardy. If the student goes home, and then is taken to school, the school will count the student tardy. Transportation Services strives to keep all our buses running as close to the published time schedule as possible. We do ask that the students arrive at least 10 minutes early to the stop location. This ensures that we account for seasonal traffic conditions and differences in individual watch settings. While we would like to notify parents of late buses, we simply do not have the resources to do so. We do notify schools as soon as we confirm late buses. If you feel the bus is running more than 30 minutes late, please contact the school for the latest information. You can also view updated arrival times by going to www.polk-fl.net, Keyword: *Bus Delays*.

Q. Where can I get a copy of the bus rules?

A. A copy of the bus rules may be obtained in the office of your local school. Additionally, copies of the bus rules are posted in every school bus and all bus drivers review the rules with the students during the first week of school.

Q. Who can authorize a bus stop location change?

A. As bus stops are placed as a function of safety and regulation, only Transportation administrative staff can make changes to stop locations. Bus drivers cannot add or change bus stops.

Q. If my child goes on a field trip, do the same rules of bus discipline apply?

A. Yes, the school bus is considered an extension of the classroom. Therefore, all the rules apply all of the time.

Q. Can the school bus driver suspend my child from riding the bus?

A. A school bus driver does not have disciplinary authority or choice of disciplinary action. A driver can only refer observed student actions (via a bus referral) to the school for due process. The Polk County School Board has an approved “Code of Conduct” which outlines and guides school based administrators as to the disciplinary action that is appropriate for each situation and grade level.

Q. What if my child is suspended from the A.M. bus? My child rides a different bus in the P.M. What is the procedure?

A. Many students ride different buses in the morning and in the afternoon. However, when a student is suspended from any bus, it is a suspension from all transportation.

Q. Who is responsible for resolving discipline problems that occur on the bus?

A. Bus drivers attempt to correct inappropriate behavior, but often it requires the intervention of a school administrator. The principal of each school is responsible for the administration of school bus discipline.

Q. Can a bus driver or transportation official change a bus disciplinary ruling?

A. No, discipline hearings are exclusively conducted and decided at the school level.

Q. If the bus has a video camera, can parents see the tape?

A. Parents/guardians may only be given the opportunity to review a video if it is pertaining to a disciplinary issue relating to their own child. Video recordings of school buses are additional tools school administrators and Transportation officials utilize to sample the “total environment” of the bus. Our legal department has advised that due to student “confidentiality” issues, parents may not view the videotapes of non-disciplinary issues.

Q. I would like to talk to my child’s bus driver about a problem on the bus. How do I go about this? Couldn’t I just meet the driver at the bus stop location?

A. Parents are not allowed on a school bus unless specifically authorized. Parents who decide to board a bus, ignoring the warning of the bus driver, are subject to arrest and prosecution under the law. To talk with a driver, please contact the school your child attends and request a conference with the driver. Please provide the bus number and or driver name, if possible. The school will be more than happy to coordinate with Transportation Services and set up a conference. It is important to understand that bus drivers are only available for conference between 9:00 AM and 12:00 PM., Monday - Friday.

Q. Why do I have to fill out an information card and give it to the driver? Doesn’t the school have the information?

A. It is absolutely imperative that the school bus drivers have the most recent emergency contact information available on the bus. This is necessary in case of an accident, medical emergency or some other event that your student may be involved in, which may require immediate parental/guardian notification.

Q. Why are there “bus attendants” on some buses?

A. Bus Attendants are there to assist with students who have documented special needs; physical, medical, etc.

Q. What happens if a school bus is involved in an accident?

A. If your student’s bus is involved in an accident, the driver will immediately radio our dispatcher with vital information. The dispatcher will notify the appropriate emergency personnel to respond. The school the bus was servicing at the time of the accident will be notified and an appropriate school representative may be asked to go to the scene of the accident, depending on how serious the situation may be. If your child needs to be transported anywhere, for any reason, by emergency medical technicians at the scene, we will notify you or the emergency contact listed on the student information card as soon as possible. If your student is not injured, you will not be notified and your child will be transported to the school or home, as appropriate, as soon as a release is given by local law enforcement. Your student will not be counted tardy or absent.

Q. My child is in a wheelchair and the brakes on the chair are not working. Can he/she be transported?

A. No. Broken or otherwise non-operable wheelchairs or other specialty student assistance devices cannot be safely transported. All student support equipment must be fully operational at the time of bus boarding.

Q. My child has a leg cast. Can he/she stand on the lift to enter the bus and be transported?

A. No. If a student has a cast which prohibits him/her from riding a regular education bus, we can usually accommodate and transport with a wheelchair bus. A wheelchair lift is not designed to safely board students standing. A student must be secured, sitting in a wheelchair, to ride a lift to board a bus.

Q. Can Teen Parenting mothers feed their babies on the bus?

A. No. Eating and drinking activities are prohibited on all of our buses. Teen parents must feed their children prior to boarding our school buses.

Interesting Facts Concerning School Transportation

- Nationally every school day, some **450,000 school buses** transport more than **24 million children** to and from schools and school-related activities. This makes school buses the **largest mass transit program** in the U.S.
- Polk County School Board transports nearly **50,000 students** to and from school each day, utilizing **510 buses**, traveling **approximately 46,000 miles a day**, while navigating **2641 routes**.
- Nationally, the average school bus transports **54 student passengers**, replacing approximately **36 family vehicles**.
- Polk County averages around **81 student passengers**, based on our three bell tier system. This consists of transporting our High School students first, then our Elementary school students and last, but not least, our Middle School students.

Students are about 50 times more likely to arrive at school alive if they take the bus than if they drive themselves or ride with friends. But, did you also know that your child is much safer riding the bus than being driven by you? Add in the environmental and financial benefits, and it's hard to find a reason to send your kids to school any other way. Find out what you don't know about school bus ridership. Learn the facts and play it safe.

Today's school buses are built with safety in mind. They are tougher, cleaner and more diligently maintained than ever before. School bus drivers are required to receive special security and medical training, and undergo regular drug and alcohol testing to provide a safe ride for your child. And, school bus traffic laws are strictly enforced. Find out what you don't know about school bus ridership. Learn the facts and play it safe.

Safety starts at the bus stop.

Your child should arrive at the bus stop at least ten minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive. Visit the bus stop with your child so you can show your child where to wait for the bus: at least three giant steps (six feet) away from the curb. Remind your child that the bus stop is not a place to run or play.



Get on and off safely.

When the school bus arrives, your child should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop, the door opens, and the driver signals that it's okay before approaching the bus door. Your child should use the handrails to avoid falling.

Use caution around the bus.

Your child should never walk behind the school bus. If your child must cross the street in front of the bus, tell your child to walk on a sidewalk, or along the side of the street, and to a place at least five giant steps (10 feet) in front of the bus before crossing. Your child should make eye contact with the bus driver, before crossing, to make sure the driver can see your child. If your child ever drops something, like a ball or book, near the school bus, the safest thing is for your child to tell the bus driver right away. Your child should not try to pick the item up because the driver might not be able to see your child.