

The PTA's Role in School Bus Stop Student Safety – Evading Tragedy at Your School

Numerous studies have revealed that there is no safer way to transport a child than on a school bus. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has stated:

American students are nearly eight times safer riding in a school bus than with their own parents and guardians in cars. The fatality rate for school buses is only 0.2 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) compared to 1.5 fatalities per 100 million VMT for cars.

Georgia's school buses move over 1,000,000 students each morning and again each afternoon as they travel the equivalent of more than 30 trips around the earth daily. Although fatal crashes involving Georgia school bus occupants are extremely rare events, student fatalities and serious injuries continue to occur at Georgia school bus stops, caused by a variety of circumstances and errors on the part of the student, the school bus driver and the passing motorist. During the 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, Georgia suffered thirteen student fatalities, several serious injuries and numerous near misses when students were getting on and off the school bus. These heartbreaking events point out the need to look at ways to reduce the possibility of similar tragedies ever happening again.

While there are on-going efforts to focus on school bus stop public awareness and school bus driver training, recent national and Georgia statistics show the necessity for students to be trained on the proper procedures for loading and unloading their school bus. As a result, the Georgia State Department of Education (GaDOE) has developed and distributed School Bus Safety Training Curriculum for grades K-12 which is included in the GaDOE Health and Safety Curriculum and covers the following:

- Safety procedures while waiting at school bus stops;
- Recognition of the danger zones around the school bus;
- Safety procedures for loading and unloading the school bus;
- Safety procedures for crossing the road to and from the school bus and school bus stop;
- Safety procedures for unloading and loading the school bus at school;
- Safe school bus riding practices; and
- Emergency school bus evacuation procedures.

Student safety training is the cornerstone of providing a safety net that protects students at their school bus stops. **The PTA parent leader at the local school level can play an important role in . . .**

1. Recognizing school bus stop student safe behaviors that may have been absent in past Georgia student fatalities and serious injuries. The *Georgia Handbook - Pupil Transportation Safety and Instruction Manual* found at the GaDOE link in #2 below has some instructional items marked with "***" that indicate a history of severe student injury or student death in Georgia. The manual also has highlighted text that provides further instructional detail on these essential high priority safe behaviors that must be taught to ensure student safety.

2. Explaining where to find resources for available school bus safety training. Caution must be employed to limit what instructional content resources are used. Resources found at the GaDOE Pupil Transportation web site are targeted to focus on the safe student behaviors

required to reverse the current trend of Georgia school bus stop fatalities and injuries. This site should be the primary or sole source for instructional content.

<http://www.gadoe.org/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Pupil-Transportation/Pages/School-Bus-Safety.aspx>

If PTA parent leaders have questions or need clarification regarding resources, they should contact Steve Monroe, GaDOE Pupil Transportation Consultant at smonroe@doe.k12.ga.us or 678-492-0819.

3. Instructing parents on essential safe student behaviors that they should require of student riders at their school bus stop. If students are to execute safe behaviors at the school bus stop, it is essential that parents know what to look for and what to teach, reinforce and enforce. Use of the following GaDOE School Bus Safety Materials is recommended:

- *Georgia Handbook - Pupil Transportation Safety and Instruction Manual* (for parent on-line access)
- Print ready instructional handouts on pages 10-14 in the *Georgia Handbook - Pupil Transportation Safety and Instruction Manual*. These handouts cover essential safe student behaviors that, when missing, have historically resulted in severe student injury or student death in Georgia. These are essential high priority safe behaviors that must be taught and fully developed in the classroom and in the home to ensure student safety. (for duplication and distribution to the home)
- Grade appropriate student curriculum (Power Points w/narratives, videos, etc. for parent training in meetings, workshops, publications, etc.)

4. Analyzing how to engage various members of the school community in keeping students safe at school bus stops. PTA parent leaders are connected in the school community and in a position to identify and engage available school community instructional resources (puppet shows, skits, local school news announcements, mentoring by older students, school produced public service announcements, newsletters, etc.).

5. Facilitating collaboration among partners within the school community on the delivery of school bus safety student training. This training involves (at a minimum) school system central office and local school administrators, teachers, students, parents and school bus drivers. PTA parent leadership is in a position to help facilitate (if necessary) that these partners are all aligned and working together in their effort.

6. Evaluating the local school's on-going student training program for school bus safety. Are school administrators embracing and supporting the training? Are they holding students accountable if reported for unsafe behaviors? Are responsible staff members actually delivering the training? Are parents informed on required student safe behaviors? Are they supportive of the school community's effort to change unsafe behaviors? Are school bus drivers providing the follow-up training required to protect students (school bus drivers are receiving training through the local school system Pupil Transportation Department and from the GaDOE Pupil Transportation Division)? Etc.

What is currently happening in your local school community in the teaching of high priority student safe behaviors required when at the bus stop, when near the school bus, when loading and unloading and when riding the school bus? As a PTA parent leader, you can play a key role in protecting **YOUR** school's students and reversing the current heartbreaking trend of tragic student fatalities and injuries in Georgia.