

Choose to SOAR

The Elvis Way

A Common Sense Path to Great Pupil Transportation



Garry Puetz
Director

Forsyth County Schools - Transportation Department

SOAR to School: *Safely, Orderly And Respectfully!*

Facts

Numerous studies have revealed that there is no safer way to transport a child than on a school bus.

“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.”

~ *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*

“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 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, Georgia suffered nine student fatalities, six 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.”

~ *Georgia State Department of Education-Division of Pupil Transportation*

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following people, without whom this book would not have been possible:

Our Board of Education, both past and present. Never have I seen a Board so consistently focused on providing what is best for their students. Their vision of “Quality Learning and Superior Performance for All” is embraced and supported whether you teach, coach, clean, cook, or drive a school bus.

Superintendent L.C. (Buster) Evans who has encouraged and supported our efforts to provide high quality school bus transportation in Forsyth County and been instrumental to helping us improve the way we engage all our stakeholders.

The school bus drivers, supervisors and staff of Forsyth County, including our school leaders. Especially those who have done the difficult, daily work that helps us “protect students, support quality learning and improve the community.” There are too many to list, but we welcome them proudly as members of our SOAR Patrol!

Jennifer Caracciolo and Lakeisha Inoni of Forsyth County’s Public Information Office who edited, formatted and spellchecked their way to a vastly improved product.

Steve Monroe of the State Department of Education who served as a sounding board during the editing of the book and who works tirelessly to provide high quality training materials and support to pupil transportation providers.

Cathy Sykes, school bus driver and student trainer who shares Elvis’ passion for protecting students. Her talent, enthusiasm and drive have been indispensable as we’ve worked to make the SOAR Patrol a reality!

Dustin Sharp, former Forsyth County student and graphic illustrator who provided the cover illustration of Elvis. Awesome!

The Elvis Way

A Common Sense Path to Great Pupil Transportation

An invitation to school bus safety stakeholders to learn school bus safety concepts and commit to partnering to protect students traveling on school buses.

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Introduction

“Safety, order and respect are necessary conditions for teaching and learning to occur.”

~ Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and
Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA)

Before we begin, let me admit to my bias that school buses are the safest, most effective form of pupil transportation available, as well as my vested interest in promoting student transportation.

From time to time we all encounter conflict. In my 18 years in pupil transportation, I’ve not found conflicts about transportation to be very different from those that occurred during the time I spent in any of my other places of employment. In general, I’ve found that the source of the tensions that arise as a result of transporting students to school every day is the same source of tensions that occur from the living room to the classroom to the boardroom. The vast majority of conflict I’ve encountered is rooted in poor communication and a lack of understanding. Most of the rest is a result of a lack of commitment to a common, important goal.

I believe that every school bus driver, parent, motorist and school administrator wants exactly the same thing; “their” students to be protected while traveling to and from school! Each individual’s goal is the same; It is the **ONLY** acceptable goal. 100% of the students must be protected 100% of the time while they travel to and from school on the school bus. So the goal, “the destination” is clear.

The path to that destination is not so clear. During the course of any school bus route, hundreds of students, motorists, parents and school bus drivers come to thousands of “decision intersections.” Should I stand 12 feet away from the road or should I “play around” with my classmates in the road? Should I check my mirrors before I leave a stop or should I just pull away so I can get back into traffic

quicker? Should I look both ways before I cross the street or should I assume the cars will stop when they see me? Should I supervise my child at the stop or do I need to get ready for work? Should I honor the child pick-up lights of the school bus or should I pass the bus because I have an appointment downtown? Each decision-maker has to choose which path to follow. Each choice either increases or decreases the risks to its travelers; none is neutral.

Some may choose the path of the individual. This path is filled with danger and is difficult to navigate. They never really know what is about to happen and won't know what to do if something unforeseen does happen! If they arrive at the right destination, it may only be because they were lucky. They might not be so lucky next time.

Others will choose the path of the team member. They will do their part to help others because as a group, they are committed to achieving a single, important goal. This path is straight, with clear visibility. It has been traveled successfully thousands of times and has protections, safeguards and fail-safes built into it. While there are risks, they understand what they are and how to avoid them or react to them when they occur. When they arrive at their destination it is a result of thorough planning, good follow-through and exceptional teamwork. They can depend on the same path to lead to the same destination tomorrow!

The choice seems clear. Student well-being depends on all of us choosing to work together by making good choices that protect them. Won't we all commit to taking that path? But do you understand what is needed? Maybe we need to do a better job of explaining the choices that must be made and understanding where those choices lead. Maybe we need to be more inviting, and work as partners to reach our destination. Perhaps we have to change the way we see school buses, school bus safety and the stakeholders who affect student safety.

The goals for this book then, are the following:

Explain in simple terms, what is needed to protect 100% of our student riders, 100% of the time.

Invite all school bus safety stakeholders to actively participate in the process of learning about school bus safety and applying what they learn to protect students.

Millions of students begin and end school every day by stepping up to, or down from the "safest form of school transportation" available; the yellow school bus! That means for the majority of school age children "the door to the schoolhouse is yellow!" You can help. It only requires two things of you; understanding and commitment. Join Forsyth County Schools as we travel the path that will allow us to reach our goal of fully protecting our students, "The Elvis Way!"

~ Garry Puetz, FCS Director of Transportation



Chapter 1: Elvis is Alive!

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Elvis is an owl. But he is not just any owl. He is the School Bus Safety Owl! He helps drivers and students SOAR to school:

- **S**afely
- **O**rderly
- **A**nd
- **R**espectfully

“Elvis” means wise, and he has grown to be just that; a wise owl who is an expert when it comes to protecting students in and around school buses. He was born on January 17th and shares a birthday with Benjamin Franklin, someone he admires for his common sense. He is the Captain of the SOAR Patrol!

Elvis is a “Transportation Educator”! He’s been helping our department since 2005. While his primary audience is students in elementary school, he has a wide range of admirers and supporters. They include our Superintendent and Board of Education, as well as high school and middle school students. He engages our learning community while they develop and practice Safe, Orderly, And Respectful school bus riding habits. He makes learning about school bus safety fun and easy! This special owl adapted his ability to soar to help children SOAR to school as well! That’s why it’s called “the Elvis way.”

When Elvis appears, whether it’s at a school, a parade or a community event, everyone is happy to see him. They all want to meet him. His message is greeted with enthusiasm. When Elvis “speaks” students listen! People view him as a combination school bus superhero and rock star!

Elvis serves as an example to our department and makes it easier for us to help students learn how to stay safe. Because his message is consistent, upbeat and easy to remember, students respond positively

to him. Drivers and supervisors embrace the opportunity to include Elvis on their school bus! Elvis and SOAR provide a “tried and true” path for each transportation educator (school bus driver) to travel as they transport their students safely, orderly and respectfully to and from school on the school bus!

Finally, Elvis is a “team builder.” He helps us think about how we can BEST teach school bus safety. Actually, Elvis makes it FUN for us to think of new ways to engage our students in learning about school bus safety.



Chapter 2: Why SOAR?

Elvis engages the community. He helps us develop parents, motorists, and business and community members into partners who share our mission of “protecting students, supporting quality learning and improving the community!”

His websites include soarwithelvis.com and gotsoar.com. He connects on Facebook as Elvis The Safety Owl and Elvis Safetyowl, and at Twitter @soarwithelvis. Regardless of where you find him, he communicates the message of school bus safety through the concept of SOAR! You can even ask him questions or give him ideas at elvisthesafetyowl@yahoo.com!

Elvis is indeed alive! He is the face of the transportation department. Elvis is unfailingly positive and holds high expectations for students and employees. He is fun and engages students, drivers and community members while they learn the common sense path to school bus safety. Elvis the Safety Owl and our school bus drivers team to help students SOAR to school; safely, orderly and respectfully!



“Most of the fundamental ideas of science are essentially simple, and may, as a rule, be expressed in a language comprehensible to everyone.”
~ Albert Einstein

In a world of 15 second sound bites and instant messaging, students and drivers have no interest in reciting (reading or remembering) 37 school bus rules (yes, a Michigan school district has 37 school bus rules by which to ride!) SOAR conveys high expectations in everyday language using a limited amount of words. SOAR, developed by Elvis the Safety Owl, describes the types of behavior that are expected on our school buses. Students and drivers are expected to be Safe, Orderly, And Respectful. Period!

These behaviors are expected in the classroom and pupil transportation is simply an extension of the classroom. Think of it this way. Students are expected to be safe, orderly and respectful in a 30 seat classroom managed by an adult who is focused on them, positioned to observe their behaviors and has the opportunity to seek immediate assistance from a supervisor or co-worker in the same building. What types of behavior should be expected from students in a 72 seat, 38 foot long classroom that weighs 25,000 pounds, is supervised by an adult that is seated with their back to them and tasked with navigating traffic while moving at up to 40 miles per hour?

SOAR explains the “big picture”. Our mind is focused on what we SHOULD be doing and why. The ways to stay safe are nearly unlimited! Rules limit our thoughts to what we specifically can not do. What if the rule is not on the list? Are we allowed to do that, even if it’s unsafe? SOAR encourages students and drivers to learn about school bus safety and make decisions that are aligned with keeping them safe. While SOAR is tailored to specific situations on and around school buses, it can also be applied in hundreds of everyday settings.

SOAR is positive, encouraging appropriate behaviors, not prohibiting negative ones. How do you teach YOUR children? Do you identify every

Chapter 3: Safe at First!

rule that they must obey because you are the parent? Or do you teach them using concepts like staying safe, keeping the room neat (or maybe orderly) and treating others respectfully? Sure, some rules are necessary and different maturity levels require different approaches. But shouldn't our teaching methods reflect the type of individual and organization we strive to be? Shouldn't they develop the type of person we want our children to be? Prisons require compliance with the rules. Schools should emphasize concepts and good decision-making skills with minimal focus on rule-following. Which model do you embrace?

Finally, SOAR is simple. The concepts "Safe, Orderly And Respectful" are easily understood by children. Every child has heard "that's not safe" or "that's not being respectful." With SOAR, Students can think about what keeps them safe rather than trying to remember every rule.

It's easy to apply safe, orderly and respectful habits you learn at home to riding the school bus. Look both ways before crossing the street, applies to both home and school. Look for traffic before you open the car door. Keep up with your own belongings. Students understand treating each other like they would like to be treated as opposed to doing things because they are told by the adult in charge. They already know about being safe, orderly and respectful because these concepts are valued and taught by their parents.

SOAR encourages conceptual thinking and good decision-making. It's positive. SOAR is easily understood and practiced by almost every family in the home, on their streets and in their own vehicle. "SOAR" has the community "seal of approval!"



"Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus."

~ Alexander Graham Bell

Safety is the single overarching priority of every school bus driver. What is safe? A school bus! School buses are designed to be the safest form of student transportation available. A student on the school bus is many times safer traveling to and from school than in their parents' (neighbor's, sibling's or friend's) vehicle. School bus passengers are protected by the structural integrity of the bus, the compartmentalization features of the seats and the height of the floor and seats well above most collision points.

School bus transportation is further enhanced by laws and regulations that reduce risks to students and the public. Speed limits are lower. School buses on routes are limited to 40 mph. School buses transporting children in Georgia are limited to 55 mph at all other times. Traffic is controlled. Motorists must stop when the "eight-way light system" is activated.

School bus drivers are prohibited from using cell phones when the bus is in motion and while loading and unloading students. Equipment (lighting, fuel tanks, seats, exits, paint) is prescribed and regulated to ensure visibility and safety.

School buses are inspected annually by the state and then again monthly by system mechanics. Every day before they are driven to the route, they are inspected yet again by the driver. Wiring, fluids, brakes, tires, horn, lighting, mirrors and emergency exits are checked to ensure that the equipment that is designed to keep students safe is working correctly.

School bus drivers must demonstrate proficiency while driving the school bus. They are trained and tested to ensure that fact. Their training starts before they're even hired and continues for as long as they remain employed. The training is designed to emphasize safety above all else.

In Forsyth County, would-be school bus drivers spend 18 hours in the classroom learning what Safe, Orderly And Respectful means for them. They learn laws, procedures and “best practices.” They learn about our school system and how our mission, “protecting students, supporting quality learning and improving the community” is critical to the success of our students and the school system.

After classroom instruction they spend at least six hours driving without students (with a trained observer) to ensure they are proficient. When they are deemed skilled enough, they spend at least another 6 hours driving with students (again with a trained observer) before they are considered for full-time employment as a licensed school bus driver.

Once employed, their driving skills are assessed annually, both on a driving range and while on routes. Many drivers also participate in our annual School Bus Driver Road-e-o where they improve and polish their bus driving skills while competing against their peers in a rigorous driving skills test. Drivers receive annual professional learning, both from the state and from our department. They are subjected to passing an annual physical and are tested for drug and alcohol use according to Federal D.O.T. requirements.



SOAR enhances student safety by design as well. Students learn, develop and practice riding habits that are safe, orderly and respectful. Sitting within the seat compartment protects students. Sitting with belongings in your lap keeps the bus orderly, respects the personal space of others and minimizes the chances of loose objects becoming projectiles in the case of a “hard stop” or collision.

Students who use classroom voices with their seatmates and respect the personal space and rights of others are much less likely to distract drivers while they perform the other parts of their jobs. They also serve as an example to other students and provide positive energy that helps the driver teach and reinforce appropriate behaviors. Students who understand that body parts (and belongings) need to be controlled and kept in their own space are less likely to stick or throw something out the window and be

Chapter 4: Order Please.

injured, damage a car or cause an accident. Students who understand and practice procedures designed to help protect them while loading or unloading are better prepared to respond quickly and appropriately if an emergency occurs.

Students who do these 4 simple things enhance their safety, the safety of their co-riders and the safety of the public.

- 1) Sit safely (within the compartment, “bottom to bottom and back to back”.)
- 2) Speak quietly (use classroom voices and speak to those next to you).
- 3) Be orderly and follow procedures (learn and practice the steps that are designed to help you stay safe; look both ways, stay out of the danger zone, hold the handrail, etc.)
- 4) Respect the space (and rights) of others.

Ask any school bus driver whether they would welcome students who follow those simple steps. I’m willing to bet you get an emphatic “YES”! School bus drivers with students who exhibit these behaviors serve to develop model citizens who will be safe, orderly and respectful when they use public transportation, travel in the vehicles of others or drive their own vehicles on shared roadways.

The safest driver, driving the safest equipment, can only protect their students effectively if the students help the driver SOAR too. Wouldn’t you agree that helping students learn and develop safe, orderly and respectful habits is a worthy goal? Isn’t it worth it for both the safety of the individual student as well as the benefit of the community as a whole?

School buses are designed to be safe. School bus drivers are trained to be safe. But that’s not enough. It is imperative that students commit to learn and develop safe school bus riding practices as well.

“The Chains of Habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.”

~ Samuel Johnson

If safety is the number one goal of every school bus driver, order is probably the most important ingredient to the safety recipe. It is also probably the ingredient that varies most in terms of quality. Order on a school bus complements both the design of the school bus and the expertise of the driver. Order on a school bus means one of three things:

- 1) A calm environment, with few distractions.
- 2) Organization, with all stakeholders understanding and fulfilling their specific roles.
- 3) Following procedures.

Limited Distractions

Studies conclude that the safest driver in the safest vehicle is still many times more likely to be in an accident when he or she is distracted by something, either inside or outside the vehicle. Order limits distractions.



Students who sit safely, speak quietly and respect the space of others are far less likely to be a distraction to the school bus driver. Students who understand the importance of the loading and unloading process are far less likely to distract the driver or other students during the most dangerous time of a school bus route. A focused school bus driver is much more likely to be paying attention to the critical process of driving defensively, following established procedures, and identifying dangerous situations that threaten student safety.

If we truly believe that the school bus is an extension of the classroom, then shouldn't bus routes reflect the same type of environment? A school bus should be an environment where students learn how to travel safely, orderly and respectfully while allowing the driver to focus on protecting them. Order should be expected in an environment that is many more times more dangerous than a classroom!

Organization

The effective organization of a school bus and bus route clarifies expertise, ownership and responsibility. School bus safety is dependent on everyone doing their part to protect students. Students, parents, motorists and school bus drivers have to work in partnership with each other. Partnerships by their very nature require clear understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of each group. Each partner is responsible for a critical piece of the transportation process and each relies on other partners to help protect the students.

Parents and school staff can SOAR too!

- Support
- Oversee
- Advocate
- Reinforce



Both groups have similar, critical roles. First, they are teachers. Parents and school staff who take an active part in learning about school bus safety teach children that safe orderly and respectful school bus riding habits are an important part of everyday life, both at school and home. They understand the how and why of the school bus transportation process and support and reinforce the behaviors that help to protect their children.

Parents are our partner on the ground and as such they oversee the transportation process between home and the bus stop. Parents teach and reinforce safe walking habits that protect students on the way to the school bus stop. They teach safe waiting habits that protect them until the bus arrives. Parents develop a plan that teaches children what to do if they have trouble anywhere along the path they take between home and their school bus stop.

Parents serve as the first line of defense against hazards and dangers in their neighborhoods. School bus stops are never completely safe, regardless of the location, unless the child knows what to do if they have trouble on the way to or at the stop. No child is safe at the stop unless they are receiving supervision that is appropriate to his or her maturity level, and to the environment in which the stop is located. High school students require one level of instruction and supervision while kindergarten students require quite a different level. Parents are both the legal and practical partner responsible for providing that instruction and supervision.

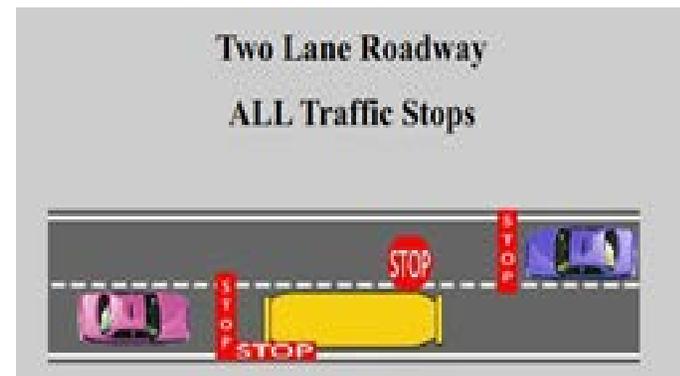
Parents and administrators partner with transportation departments when they serve as advocates. They advocate for the transportation process and for appropriate behaviors with the student. Parents and administrators advocate for the school bus as an extension of the classroom and not a playground. They help the driver by working with their children to improve behaviors that are not safe, orderly and respectful.

They advocate when conditions on the school bus require it. No driver can see everything. Children should be taught how and when to talk with the driver when the child has a problem. If a child is unable to solve the problem, a parent advocates for the child with the driver or supervisor. By understanding the process, a parent is able to communicate effectively to solve problems. Most drivers welcome parent participation. It improves communication and provides information that is needed by the driver to help protect the student.

Remember though, the least effective method of communicating is at the stop or on routes. The driver must focus attention on the students, traffic and pedestrians at the stop. That is not the time to be discussing issues and concerns. One effective way to communicate may be to have your student give the driver a note at the school asking to be contacted with appropriate contact information. You can always talk with a supervisor by phone.

Parents and staff can advocate for the yellow school bus with the school system! Ask your system to support effective school transportation services at levels that protect students. Ask that schools teach safe, orderly and respectful school bus riding habits and remove students from the bus who are unwilling to practice them. Parents should insist that neighbors and strangers respect the laws regarding loading and unloading and operate their vehicles accordingly.

Finally, parents and administrators can advocate in their communities. Student transporters need partners to advocate for appropriate funding that allows service providers to operate effectively, and funding for mandates that prescribe what must be done with no regard to the cost. Parents should expect supportive legislation, appropriate enforcement and effective consequences for non-compliance.

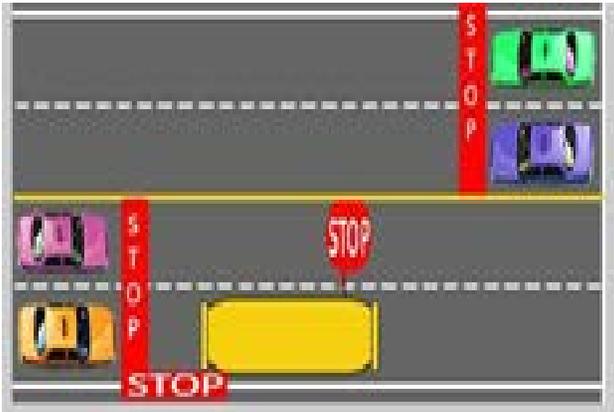


Motorists

Motorists have only one job when they see a yellow school bus! They need to SOAR! ANY time a motorist sees a school bus they should:

- Slow down (or STOP if the lights are activated).
- Observe the surrounding area.
- Analyze what is happening at and around the bus.
- Respond appropriately (and defensively) to the situation.

A school bus means children, and children mean unpredictability. You NEVER know what MAY happen when children are around! If you see a school bus, SLOW DOWN. If you see a school bus with its eight-way lights activated, STOP! There is absolutely NO REASON to pass a school bus that has activated its eight-way loading and unloading lights! If you're confused and don't know what to do, STOP! Partner with us and you just might save the life of a child!



School Bus Drivers, Students and Transportation Staff

School bus drivers, students and transportation staff are obviously partners in the process. They need to be orderly (organized) as well. School bus routes need to be designed to be safe. Stops need to be evaluated and set in locations that provide adequate visibility and allow a safe area for students to wait. Students need to be prepared at the stop (five minutes early). They need to wait in the designated spot. Routes must be run “on-time” and stops made at the approved bus stop location.

When students are on time, they won't need to run after the bus that arrives on schedule. Students won't need to wait more than five minutes before their scheduled school bus arrives. Drivers won't be “surprised” by a student at a different stop, an unauthorized location or a different time. The ability to provide transportation service that is dependable and consistent allows students, drivers and motorists to develop and practice routines that help keep them safe.

A well-trained, professional school bus driver teaches students the proper way to wait, load and unload at the school bus stop. They should train students to respond effectively to a designated warning signal and help them to learn how to recognize and avoid danger if necessary. The professional school bus driver builds an effective “teacher/student” relationship with their students and helps them to understand their responsibilities towards making good decisions and choices that will protect themselves.

Students should learn and practice those procedures and develop safe routines while parents supervise their children and reinforce the importance of following the directions of the driver.

Imagine a school bus where chaos rules. No one knows when the bus (or the students) will arrive at the stop. Students are loud and out of their seats. Bickering, arguing and teasing are prevalent on the bus. Every student does things his or her way. Some cross behind the bus. Others walk along the bus. Some wear earphones while loading or unloading, preventing any communication from occurring.

Imagine motorists who pass school buses at their whim and “assume” no students will be crossing the street. Parents don't follow (or support) safety procedures and riding behaviors that minimize risk. Everyone insists on doing things “their” way.

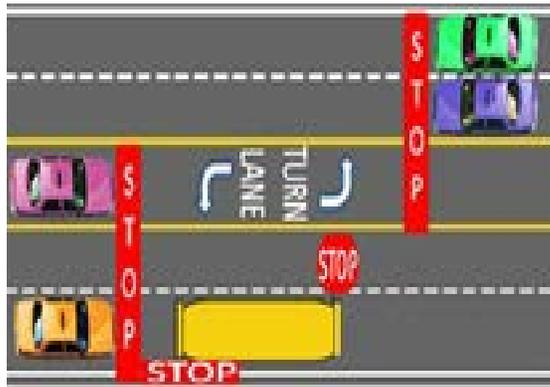
Imagine the school bus driver who only wants to get the students off the bus as quickly as possible. When empty, driving the bus is a dream. When it's full it is a nightmare, something barely to be tolerated.

It's easy to imagine how a student could be injured in this scenario isn't it? Each individual example increases the risk that a tragedy will occur. In combination, the risk to the students rises exponentially when procedures are not followed, “best practices” ignored and the driver is distracted from the job at hand.

Order requires everyone to do their part to protect students.

Following Procedures:

Order means following procedures that have been taught and implemented during the school transportation process. In most cases procedures have been developed, revised and improved over years to protect students from evolving risks. Procedures are designed to maximize protection and minimize distraction. The following are just a few examples of common student transportation procedures that help provide order during the school bus route.



1) Students should never get within 12 feet of the school bus (except when the bus door is open and the driver has motioned the students to approach the bus by the path to the door). Why? Students are in grave danger when they are within 12 feet of the bus because the driver can't see them. Student injuries and death sometimes occur when the student's own bus strikes them. A driver that can't see a student can't protect a student.

2) Students should look both ways before getting off the bus and before crossing the street. Why? Believe it or not, there are motorists (or maybe bicyclists or motorcyclists) that pass the bus; EVEN ON THE RIGHT SIDE, at the passenger door! One extra second, glancing each way to make sure the way is clear may prevent one student from stepping off the bus or curbing into injury or death.

3) Students should enter and exit the school bus single file and use the handrail. They should never fool around when loading or unloading. Why? The most dangerous time of a school bus route is when loading or unloading students. A driver must focus on the students, the traffic and the pedestrians around the bus. Any distraction that breaks the driver's concentration compromises the process. A distracted bus driver may not notice a hazard or risk that could jeopardize student (or pedestrian) safety.

4) Students should sit "bottom to bottom and back to back". Why? While school buses are the safest form of student transportation available, students must remain within the "compartment" formed by their seat and the seat in front of them. When outside the compartment, students lose the protection of the seat padding and structure that helps cushion, contain and stop them in the case of an accident or "hard stop".

5) Students should NEVER stoop to pick up something they dropped until they signal the driver and the driver returns their signal. Why? Any time a driver might lose sight of a student there is a serious risk of injury. No possession is important enough to take that risk. Signal the driver first. If there is any doubt the driver has seen you, the student should leave the belonging, go home and get a parent to assist.

Order reduces distractions. Order clarifies, organizes and simplifies. Order protects. Society values order as a necessary part of protecting its citizens. We value order in our schools and classrooms. Shouldn't we expect and value an orderly environment for children who ride our school buses?



Chapter 5: R.E.S.P.E.C.T

“Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being.”

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Respect for self as well as for others is often one of the character traits that schools deem important to the development of the individual student. In Forsyth County Schools, our graduates are expected to “understand and respect one’s own culture and other cultures.” It is one way we expect our students to “engage and compete in a global environment.”

Respect is important to maintaining order as well. Respect for authority is a necessary condition for a civil society. Respect for all stakeholders (the passengers, parents, motorists, the school bus driver and school staff) and the importance of each group’s role in the process is necessary to ensure students receive maximum protection. Mutual respect, between drivers, passengers, parents and school administrators enhances the climate of safety on a school bus.

Respect leads to trust and trust reinforces the importance of all these stakeholders to the protection of students who ride the school bus.

Students are most effectively protected when everyone “respects the rules.” As stated before, procedures are part of an evolving process of identifying and reducing risks. Each rule or procedure is based on sound safety principles developed by experts in the field of student transportation. Each enhances the safety of students using school bus transportation. While a school bus is safe, there are risks inherent to its use as well. When students are outside the bus, visibility is limited; especially in the danger zone (within 12 feet of any part of the bus.) Students are at greatest risk whenever they are off the bus, in the danger zone or otherwise out of the driver’s field of vision.

Motorists pose a risk to students. Walking from the stop to home, or crossing the street to get home poses risks to students. Students, drivers and motorists should respect these risks and follow all safety



procedures. Parents should teach children how to walk safely to and from the bus stop and what to do if they have any trouble walking to or waiting at the stop. Families should have plans for emergencies and stay actively involved in identifying risks. Parents should always provide supervision that is appropriate to the maturity level of their student(s) respecting their role in helping to protect their child.

A school bus should be respected as a learning community, a mobile classroom where students learn good or bad safety habits that will either help protect them or place them at greater risk. Respect for the learning process requires that students, drivers and parents learn, practice and reinforce habits that enhance safety.

Positive student behaviors should be encouraged, developed and rewarded. Drivers should teach students, students should practice what has been taught and drivers should correct and re-teach when appropriate. Drivers should welcome parents, respecting their place in the process. They should enlist the help of parents to help change inappropriate student behaviors when necessary.

Chapter 6: And?

School bus drivers are professionals and should be respected as such. They drive safely through traffic, while maintaining an orderly and respectful environment with dozens of school children behind them. They serve as teacher, chauffeur, nurse, referee and mediator. Parents, supervisors and administrators should support the driver's efforts to teach students. They should reinforce appropriate lessons and help to modify and correct inappropriate behaviors.

Every person, every family, every organization needs respect to succeed. Respect builds trust and trust is necessary to any healthy relationship. Every student is better protected when they respect the risks inherent to school bus transportation as well as the procedures by which those risks are reduced. Respect yourself and respect others. Respect the risks and respect the rules. **RESPECT THE BUS!**



"In matters of style swim with the current; In matters of principle, stand like a rock."
~ Thomas Jefferson

While "and" is the smallest of the four words that characterize "SOAR" it carries equal weight to the others in terms of importance to the concept.

Nearly every school bus transportation department includes the word "safe" in their mission statement. It is simply put, the one, overarching priority of every school bus driver. The problem is, although "safety" is simple to say, it is not that simple to achieve. In reality, it's much harder to "walk the safety walk" than it is to "talk the safety talk!"

"Protecting students" requires thousands of "moving parts" to operate seamlessly, each doing exactly what is needed to move students safely to school. Think that's hype? School bus drivers, students, parents, pedestrians and motorists all have a stake, and therefore a responsibility to protect students. How many of those parts do your school buses pass or interact with on routes every day?

In the perfect school bus world, each partner fulfills that responsibility completely by following laws, procedures and "best practices" designed to protect students. In the perfect school bus world, each partner needs to be prepared to serve as the "failsafe" if any of the others fail to perform appropriately.

Drivers should keep students on the bus until all vehicles stop. Students should look both ways before exiting the bus and before crossing the street. They should be prepared to move to safety if a motorist decides to disobey the law by passing a school bus.

Motorists should slow down ANY TIME they are around a school bus. By slowing, observing, analyzing and responding, motorists may prevent a tragedy if a student (or toddler, parent, pedestrian, etc) fails to follow procedures designed to protect them.

Chapter 7: Elvis Wants YOU!

As we've stated (and the DOE agrees), teaching and learning school bus safety behaviors is required to fully protect our students. We believe, as do the Georgia Associations of School Boards and School Superintendents, that each of our pillars of school bus safety (safe, orderly, respectful) is necessary to teaching and learning.

None of these three pillars however, is sufficient in and of itself. Any one or two may provide limited stability (picture a one-legged or two-legged stool). But complete stability, 100% protection is only possible when all three are present, tied to each other to provide the most stable of bases.

Safe, OR orderly, OR respectful transportation practices are not enough. None of the three alone can effectively protect students. None of the three alone can provide an effective learning environment where students are taught school bus riding habits and decision-making skills that help them protect themselves (and each other).

We believe the school bus and bus driver provide the safest transportation service available to students as they travel to and from school. We also believe that with help from our partners and attention to detail, we can improve that safety record while teaching students valuable lessons that they can apply in the larger world!

To do so we must help all stakeholders develop habits and behaviors that are safe AND orderly AND respectful! We must develop and reinforce those behaviors in students AND drivers AND parents AND motorists!

We believe safe is not enough! We strive to be professional AND caring employees. Our goal is to "protect students" AND "support quality learning" AND "improve the community." We can only succeed by teaching AND modeling safe, orderly and respectful transportation behaviors!

Protect-Support-Improve

"Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

~ Vince Lombardi

It really doesn't matter whether you're a bus driver, student, parent or motorist. Are you a police officer, school system superintendent, transportation director, community member or school principal? You have a stake in school bus safety!

No accident is as emotionally charged as an accident involving a school bus and the children who ride it. No job is more important than protecting students as they travel to and from school. Elvis the Safety Owl wants you! Why? Because students can only be protected effectively when everyone does their part to help students SOAR to school; Safely, Orderly And Respectfully!

Elvis, Captain of the SOAR Patrol invites you to adopt his way to protect your student(s). His way is simple and effective!

Teach students to travel SAFELY.

Expect students to be ORDERLY.

Encourage students to act RESPECTFULLY.

AND make sure all three of these pillars of school bus safety are taught, developed and practiced to ensure the greatest degree of stability (protection) possible.

These behaviors are meaningful and relevant. They are applicable to a wide range of activities, embraced by your families and your community as well as society as a whole. Learn about school bus safety. Follow the procedures that the driver teaches the students. Demonstrate safe walking and waiting behaviors to and at the bus stop. Encourage your students to follow the rules by supporting the driver.

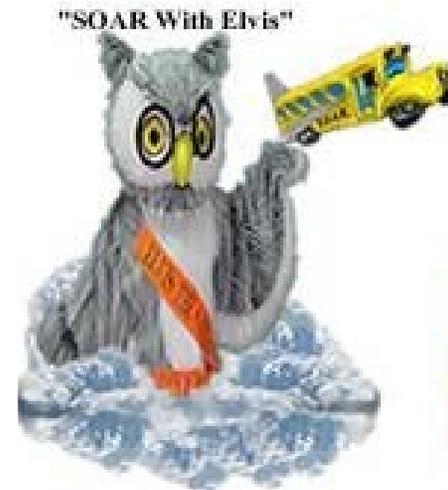
One very effective method of teaching is by example. The support and encouragement you provide will reinforce the importance of each of these concepts to your students. Elvis and I hope you will take an active interest in protecting students. We hope you'll do your part to ensure the school bus stays the safest form of school transportation available to students!

Elvis and I invite you to help us reach our goal; providing the safest, most orderly and most respectful transportation service to the safest, most orderly and most respectful students around. Join our team and take the path that protects students; The Elvis Way! As Elvis says, "SOAR always my friends!"



Have a question or comment? I'd love to know what YOU think! Let me know at gpuetz@forsyth.k12.ga.us.

Want to talk with Elvis? Here's his contact information.



Elvis the Safety Owl S.O.A.R. Patrol Captain

Forsyth County Schools
3710 Matt Highway
Cumming, GA 30028
www.gotsoar.com
www.soarwithelvis.com



Follow *Elvis the Safety Owl*



Follow Elvis @[soarwithelvis](https://twitter.com/soarwithelvis)



elvisthesafetyowl@yahoo.com

Facebook

Elvis The Safety Owl (School Bus Safety Page)

Elvis Safetyowl (Individual Page)

Twitter:

[@soarwithelvis](https://twitter.com/soarwithelvis)

On the Web:

www.gotsoar.com

www.soarwithelvis.com

Email:

elvisthesafetyowl@yahoo.com

Department:

<http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=845>

Links and Resources

Associations

Georgia Association of Pupil Transportation
<http://www.gaptonline.org>

Georgia School Superintendents Association
<http://www.gssanet.org>

National Association of Pupil Transportation
<http://www.napt.org>

National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation
<http://www.nasdpts.org>

Southeastern States Pupil Transportation Conference
<http://www.sesptc.com/>

Publications

Unreported Miracles: What you probably do not know about your child's school bus, Dr. Cal Lemon

School Bus Fleet
<http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/>

School Transportation News
<http://www.stnonline.com/stn/>

State and Federal Agencies

Georgia Department of Education- Pupil Transportation Division
<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Pupil-Transportation/Pages/default.aspx>

Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety
<http://www.gohts.state.ga.us/>

Georgia Homeland Security
<http://www.gahomelandsecurity.com>

<http://www.gahomelandsecurity.com> Homeland Security
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>

NHTSA
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/menuitem.e712547f8daccabbbf30811060008a0c/>

SchoolBus Information Council
<http://www.schoolbusinfo.org>

Traffic Safety Kid's Page
<http://www.nysgtsc.state.ny.us/kids.htm>

Training Sites

American School Bus Council
<http://www.americanschoolbuscouncil.org>

About School
<http://www.aboutschool.com/busstop.htm>

Georgia Department of Education - Pupil Transportation Division
<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Pupil-Transportation/Pages/School-Bus-Safety.aspx>

North Carolina School Bus Safety Web
<http://itre.ncsu.edu/GHSP/NCBUSSAFETY.html>

Operation Lifesaver
<http://www.oli.org/>

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute
<http://www.ptsi.org/>

Safe Schools
<http://www.2safeschools.org/>

School Bus Information Council
<http://www.schoolbusinfo.org/>

School Bus Driver's Webring
<http://w.webring.com/hub?ring=busdriver>

Choose SOAR!

