



INDIANA  
DEPARTMENT *of*  
EDUCATION

2023

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY  
GUIDELINES AND BEST  
PRACTICES



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## 2023 School Bus Safety Guidelines

As required by Indiana Code (IC) 20-27-10-0.5, the state School Bus Committee, in consultation with the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) shall develop school bus safety guidelines which include procedures to ensure that students do not enter a roadway until approaching traffic has come to a complete stop.

The importance of school bus safety is abundantly clear when transporting students to and from school. This guidance covers a range of topics that will be helpful to students, parents, families, and others on our Indiana roads in providing awareness of the current laws and requirements surrounding school bus safety.

## Statutory Requirements

### Bus Stop Locations

Aside from the statutory requirements listed below, exact bus stop locations are determined locally, creating an essential responsibility for local officials to establish and review bus stop locations and make them as safe as possible for students.

As prohibited by IC 9-21-12-20, unless no other safe alternatives are available, bus stops on U.S. or state routes (highways) **outside of city limits** should never require a student to cross the roadway to board the bus.

If no other safe alternative exists and an elementary student, as defined in IC 9-21-12-20.5, must cross a U.S. or state route (highway) **outside of city limits** to board the bus, the superintendent, or designee, must present the proposed school bus route to the local governing body and the route **must be approved** to allow for the elementary student to utilize the proposed bus stop. As best practice, these circumstances should be exceedingly rare and avoided if at all possible to ensure the safety of students.

Further, on any road, the designated bus stop should provide for students to be loaded and unloaded as close as **practicable** to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway to ensure a protected area to the right of the bus for students to load and unload.

### School Buses on Roadways

Ensuring that all rules of the road are followed when transporting students to and from school should be top of mind for school transportation drivers as complying with all traffic laws is imperative to the safety of Indiana students.

Examples of school buses violating IC 9-21-8-2 include:

- Stopping in the middle of a two lane road to prevent other motorists from a stop arm violation;
- Angling a bus across an entire roadway for students to cross behind oncoming traffic; or
- Blocking intersections.

## Stop Arm Violations

As outlined by IC 9-21-12-1, those driving a vehicle that does not stop before reaching a school bus with a stop arm extended or those proceeding before the stop arm has fully collapsed, commits a Class A infraction.

Further, a driver's license may be suspended for 90 days, or one year, if the driver has committed a previous offense under IC 9-21-8-52(b).

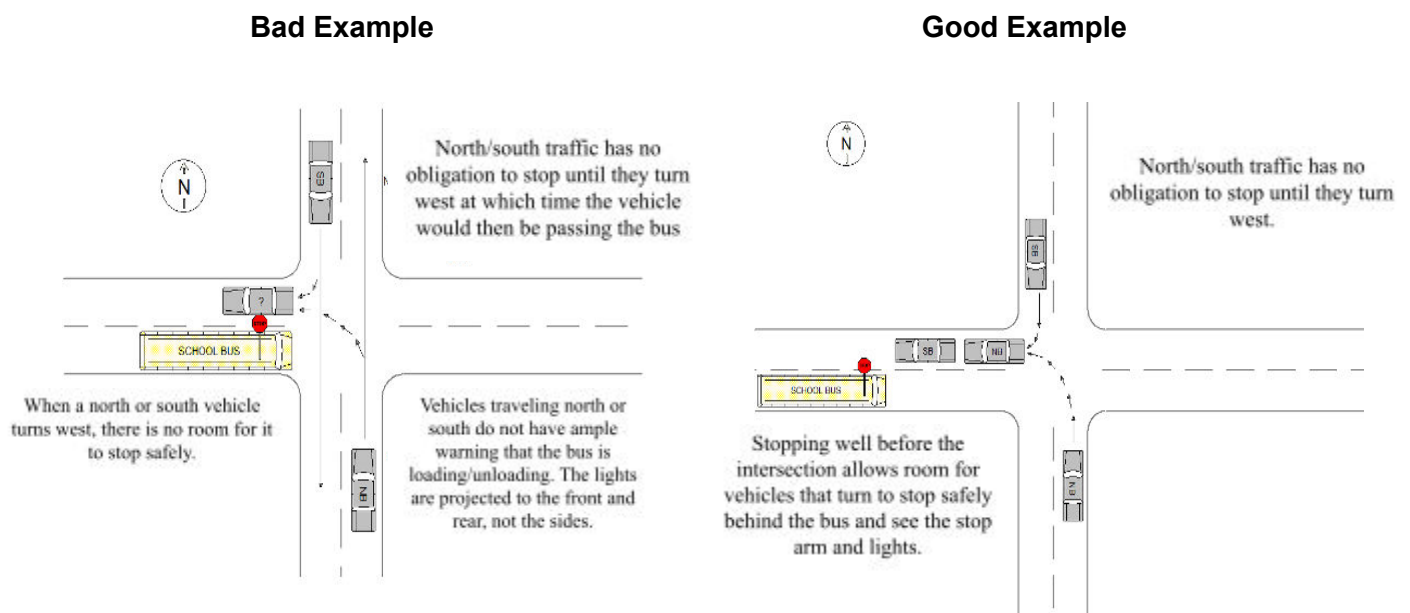
As outlined in IC 9-21-8-52(b), those recklessly passing a school bus with its stop arm fully extended commits a Class A misdemeanor.

## Blocking Intersections

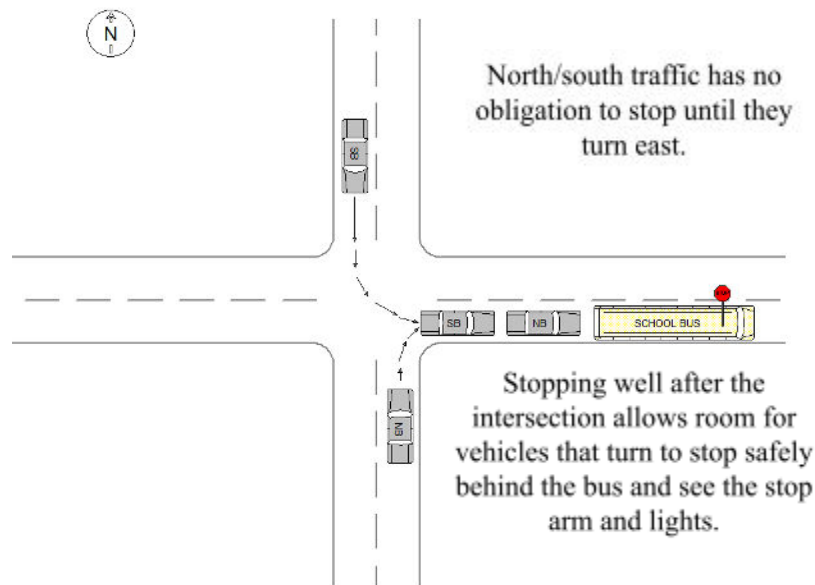
To further protect students when stopped close to an intersection, school transportation drivers should be increasingly mindful as perpendicular traffic may not always see warning lights indicating children are unloading or loading the school bus. Further, as outlined in IC 9-21-16-5, stopping within an intersection, except when necessary to avoid conflict with other traffic or the law, is prohibited.

It is essential to note that when referring to a vehicle stopping before reaching a school bus with its stop arm extended, the statutory language "meets or overtakes" in IC 9-21-12-1 is not applicable to intersections if a stopped school bus is blocking the intersection as it is only referencing the roadway the bus is currently on and not the intersecting roadway.

Examples of bus stops located prior to an intersection:



Best practice for bus stops located after an intersection:



## Bus Route and Policy Review

As required by IC 20-27-10-0.5, each school corporation, charter school, and accredited nonpublic school shall review their bus routes and policies annually by September 1.

### Best practices and considerations when determining bus stop locations:

- Avoid students crossing the road when loading or unloading, if at all possible, particularly for the following:
  - High speed roads at or above 40 mph
  - Roads with more than one lane in each direction
  - Obstructed views – blind curves, hills, valleys, etc.
  - Roads with wide shoulders
- Avoid bus stops in roundabouts/traffic circles.
- Consider whether students can walk to and from the bus stop safely.
  - Are sidewalks available?
  - Is street lighting available and appropriate?
  - Does this stop require a student to pass at or near sexual predator residences?
  - Does this stop require students to cross intersections?
- Consider whether the bus is properly positioned in the roadway at the bus stop.
  - If there is a turn lane to the right, is the bus in that turn lane for the bus stop?
  - If it is a one-way street, is the bus stop as far right as practicable?
  - Is there enough room for the student to load and unload the bus safely?

- Consider whether the bus stop is safe for all students already on the bus, as well as those waiting to load the bus, and other motorists encountering the bus.

During the bus route and bus stop safety policy review process, including the following entities below would support a more robust, comprehensive review to ensure our school transportation drivers and students are as safe as possible:

- School corporation legal team
- Insurance carrier
- Local police department
- County Safe Schools Committee
- Local traffic planning and highway departments

### **Proper Bus Stop Safety Practices**

It is essential that school transportation drivers ensure students are familiar with proper bus stop safety practices, as tragedies can occur even at the safest bus stop locations. Bus stop safety best practices include:

- Students should always stand at least 20 feet away from the bus stop.
- Students should always be waiting at the bus stop before the bus arrives at its scheduled time.
- There should be no horseplay at the bus stop.
- Drivers should only pick up and drop-off at district-designated bus stops.
- Students crossing the street should always be signaled, loaded, and unloaded prior to any other students loading or unloading the bus.
- Students should never board the bus, or cross the street, unless signaled to do so by the driver.
  - All drivers in a district must use the same hand signal to let students know when to load or cross.
- Students crossing the road at the bus stop should be held on the bus until all traffic has come to a complete stop.
- Students crossing the road at the bus stop should stand far enough in front of the bus so the driver can see the feet of all of the students when crossing.
- When crossing the road, students should stop at the left side of the bus and either look, left, right, and left again or look back at the driver for a signal to continue crossing; whichever method district policy designates.
- Drivers should continuously reinforce proper crossing procedures.

- Drivers should report any bus stops that they consider to be unsafe.

## National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Recommendations

In 2020, NTSB adopted its *Vehicle Collision With Student Pedestrians Crossing High-Speed Roadway to Board School Bus Rochester, Indiana, October 30, 2018, NTSB/HAR-20/02* report which was released in response to the tragic school bus crashes that occurred across Indiana, Georgia, and Mississippi within just a few days of one another in fall 2018.

In the report, NTSB recommends that local districts implement a process to monitor the status of school transportation driver and parent or caregiver complaints regarding the safety of school bus routes, stops, or operations until a resolution has been determined. This process directly correlates to the requirements outlined in IC 20-27-10-0.5 in ensuring all bus stops, routes, policies, and procedures have the safety of students, families, and school transportation drivers as a top priority. As such, IDOE recommends that all school districts implement a safety complaint monitoring process to address any safety concerns as soon as possible.

Further, NTSB recommends that local school districts implement trainings for school transportation drivers and students on crossing procedures, including training on proper crossing and danger hand signals. Crossing hand signals are used in instances where a student crossing a roadway cannot be avoided and exact signals may vary across districts. As best practice, school transportation drivers should wait until all traffic has come to a complete stop before signaling the student to cross. This is especially important because even if a car is a significant distance away from a bus stop, there is no guarantee the driver will stop in time or even recognize the school bus is loading or unloading.

## Alternative Transportation

Several changes have been made to state law in recent legislative sessions to provide for additional vehicles to be used to transport students to and from school. Districts and schools using alternative vehicles to transport students to and from school must be mindful when determining bus stop locations, as these vehicles do not have the functional overhead warning lights and stop arms that traditional school buses do, and thus, cannot load or unload students on the roadway.

### Appropriate vehicles

As defined by IC 20-18-2-1.7, an appropriate vehicle is a vehicle that:

- Is owned by a school corporation or contracted for by the school corporation; and
- Has a seating capacity of not more than 15 passengers, including the driver.

An appropriate vehicle may include a car, truck, sport utility vehicle, or minivan, or van.

This definition of an appropriate vehicle was modified during the 2022 legislative session to include a nine to 15 passenger full size van; however, federal law currently prohibits the purchase and use of those full-size vans. As such, IDOE recommends using appropriate vehicles carrying **eight** passengers or less.

## Special Purpose Buses

As defined by IC 20-27-2-10, a special purpose bus means a motor vehicles that:

- Is designed and constructed for the accommodation of more than 10 passengers;
- Meets the federal school bus safety requirements under 49 U.S.C. 30125, except the:
  - Stop signal arm required under federal motor vehicle safety standard (FMVSS) no. 131; and
  - Flashing lamps required under federal motor vehicle safety standard (FMVSS) no. 108;
- When owned by a school corporation and used to transport students, complies with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations as prescribed by the U.S.Department of Transportation Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, as set forth in 49 CFR Chapter III Subchapter B; or
- When owned by a school corporation and used to transport students, is a motor coach type bus; and
- Is used by a school corporation for transportation purposes appropriate under IC 20-27-9-5.

This definition was amended to remove the capacity and weight specifics for the motor coach.

## Appropriate Vehicle and Special Purpose Bus Uses

IC 20-27-9-5 provides for appropriate vehicles and special purpose buses to be used for transportation of any student for any reason, including home to school transportation. As these vehicles do not have overhead warning lights and stop arms, they cannot be used to load or unload students on the roadway.

## Appropriate Vehicle and Special Purpose Bus Driver Requirements

IC 20-27-9-5 outlines that the driver of an appropriate vehicle or special purpose bus must be at least 21 years old and pass both an expanded criminal history check and expanded child protection index check. Further, special purpose drivers must meet all requirements for a school bus certification, or yellow card.

## Additional Resources

### Contacts

For any questions related to this guidance or any other topic related to school transportation, please contact IDOE's Office of School Transportation at (317) 232-0890.



## **Additional Helpful Materials**

[National Congress on School Transportation \(NCST\): Specification and Procedures](#)

[National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services \(NASDPTS\)](#)

[National Association for Pupil Transportation \(NAPT\)](#)

[Safe Routes to School - Determining School Bus Stop Locations](#)

[National Highway Safety Administration \(NHTSA\) - School Bus Safety](#)

[National Highway Safety Administration \(NHTSA\) - School Bus Regulations](#)

[Uniform Guidelines for State Highway Safety Programs – Pupil Transportation Safety](#)