What you should know about riding the bus

Who rides the bus?

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) provides bus service for:

- Elementary school students living more than 1 mile of walking distance from school.*
- Middle school students living more than 1.5 miles of walking distance from school.*
- High school students living more than 2.0 miles of walking distance from school.*
- Students who face hazardous walking conditions regardless of distance from school (multilane highways, construction areas, etc.) as determined by the MCPS Department of Transportation.
- Students in special education, magnet, gifted/talented, and some vocational/education programs that are not offered at the student's home school.

*A tenth of a mile may be added to establish a reasonable boundary.

Bus safety: a team effort

Students

Students are responsible for their behavior and self-control on the bus and at bus stops at all times. Disorderly students can threaten the safety of all riders by distracting the bus operator making the bus ride to and from school an unpleasant and even intimidating experience for other students. School buses are an extension of school, and students are expected to adhere to the same standards of behavior on a school bus as in the classroom.

Students are expected to obey the instructions of the bus operator just as they would follow the instructions of teachers and school administrators. Students must also remember that riding the school bus is a privilege for most students, not a right, which can be revoked if the student fails to observe basic standards of conduct and safety.

Parents

Parents can help further the safety of all students by making sure their children know the bus rules and etiquette that help ensure safe, orderly, and pleasant bus trips. Parents also should make sure their children know their bus route number, located in windows on both the right and left side of the bus, near the front (see Route Numbers section below). The number that is painted on the bus, usually on the body and bumpers is not used for bus route identification.

For elementary and middle school students, it is recommended that a parent or other adults wait at the bus stop with the students to monitor and supervise their behavior and help with any problems, such as a late bus. Both students and adults should stand near the bus stop, not more than 150 feet away, where they can observe the bus as it arrives.

Bus stops are selected to provide safety and convenience for most students, and to economize on fuel and time that students spend on the bus. Parents should not request bus drivers to make additional stops. Regulations prohibit bus operators from stopping between designated bus stops.
Many routes are designed so that students do not need to cross a major roadway to use the bus. This is indicated on route descriptions by “RSO” (right side only) next to the bus stop notation. Parents should not allow their children to circumvent this safety measure by crossing the road to use a different bus stop if there is one on their side of the street.

The school system
To ensure safe, efficient service for students, MCPS follows these procedures:

- No bus may cross a mainline railroad track at grade level in Montgomery County.
- No students are scheduled to cross a divided highway to board a bus, and the number of students who must cross a main artery is kept to an absolute minimum.
- Standing during operation is not allowed on buses except during the first few weeks of the new school year when schedules and routes are being adjusted or occasionally during the year when breakdowns occur or temporary needs arise.
- All roads and bridges must be able to sustain the weight of the bus.
- Turn-around and turning areas are held to an absolute minimum and must be wide enough to allow safe maneuvering.
- Buses are routed along "through" roadways, as much as possible. Dead ends or cul-de-sacs are not traveled, unless no other safe alternative is available.
- Each bus undergoes a regular maintenance program that includes daily checks by bus operators, monthly safety inspections, and three state-required annual inspections.
- All bus operators must have a thorough background check and physical, have less than two points on their driving record, and be highly trained.
- Every school bus has closely spaced, high-back padded seats that keep passengers within the seating compartment in the event of a collision. This is the safest system for children riding in buses and far safer than seat belts. Research shows that seat belts are not the best way to protect students in school buses. Studies have shown that lap belts can cause serious injuries to children, including pelvic injury and hyperextension of the neck and upper spinal cord. Restraints are provided for some preschoolers and students with disabilities.
- Buses may be equipped with an audio and visual recording device.

The community
All motorists are required by law to stop when the red lights on buses are flashing. Passing a bus when the red lights are flashing is the biggest threat to student safety. Failure to stop for a school bus when the flashing red lights are operational can result in a traffic ticket and a fine of up to $1,000.

In addition, motorists should be forewarned that the red flashing lights and the stop sign may be engaged shortly after the amber lights are on. All traffic should slow and prepare to stop when motorists see a school bus beginning to slow down and when students are present at the roadside.

In some neighborhoods, residents of houses near the bus stop permit students to stand in a carport or garage in bad weather. This is acceptable as long as the resident agrees to such an arrangement, it does not create an additional stop or delay, and substitute bus operators can easily locate the students.
School bus rules

At the bus stop, students are expected to:

- Arrive five minutes before the scheduled time.
- Maintain an orderly line in preparation to board the bus promptly, without shoving or pushing.
- Stay out of the roadway.
- Be considerate of nearby yards, driveways, houses, buildings, and private property.
- Move toward the bus only after it stops and the driver has signaled that it is safe.

On the bus, students are expected to:

- Behave appropriately, just as if they were in a classroom.
- Keep the aisle and emergency door clear of obstructions.
- Keep their arms, feet, and head inside the bus at all times.
- Be seated and make room for others to sit as well. Once ridership has been adjusted at the beginning of the school year, standing is not permitted.
- Discard trash in appropriate containers.
- More: [Ride by the Rules]

On returning home, students are expected to:

- Walk 10 feet in front of the stopped bus, if they must cross the road, and cross only after the bus operator has indicated that it is safe.
- Refrain from trying to direct traffic upon leaving the bus.

At all times, students may not:

- Bring animals, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, weapons, glass containers, or explosives on the bus.
- Use vulgar language or gestures, fight, or engage in sexual harassment or other improper and/or illegal conduct.
- Throw any papers or objects in the bus or out the windows.
- Operate the emergency door without permission.
- Smoke, drink, eat, or play radios without headphones.
- Damage or deface any part of the bus.
- Ride a different bus than the one they have been assigned to, unless they have written permission from a parent and permission from the principal.

Large objects that cannot be held on a student's lap, such as some musical instruments, class projects, etc., should not be transported on the bus. Parents should make other arrangements to transport such items to and from school.

Bus operators and attendants may assign specific seats to students.
Consequences of misconduct

The bus operator notifies the principal of details pertaining to a disciplinary problem with a student on the school bus. A bus operator may return a student to the school, or call the police, if the student poses a serious threat to the safety and health of other riders.

Students who violate the behavior and safety rules may have bus-riding privileges denied temporarily or permanently by the school principal in accordance with the following procedures:

- The principal will warn the student of the possibility of denial of bus-riding privileges.
- If the disciplinary problems continue, the principal will confer with the parent/guardian and student prior to the suspension of riding privileges or, depending on the severity and nature of the behavior problem, suspend riding privileges immediately. The principal will notify the parent/guardian in writing of complaints received and the suspension of the student's riding privileges.
- The student's riding privileges may be restored by the principal after a conference with the student and/or parent and consultation with the transportation supervisor. The principal will notify the bus operator in writing of the reinstatement of the student's riding privileges.

In addition, students may be suspended from school as a result of misconduct on buses or receive lengthy bus riding suspensions for serious infractions.

What if the bus is late?

Buses follow a routine schedule and typically arrive at their stops within a few minutes of the schedule. Except for snowy or icy mornings, parents and students should wait at the bus stop for at least 20 minutes past the scheduled arrival time before calling the appropriate bus depot (see For More Information section). On days of inclement weather, students and parents should expect some delays due to road and traffic conditions.

It is recommended that only one student or parent at a bus stop call the transportation office to determine the length of the delay. Students should not leave the bus stop unless advised by the transportation office that there will be no bus.

What about snow days?

During snowy or icy weather conditions, school officials may close school all day, delay opening by two hours, or close early. Parents should have contingency plans in place to take care of children on such days.

These decisions are announced on local radio and television stations, MCPS Cable TV Channel 34, and on the MCPS Web site at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org. Other ways to receive emergency information
Delayed opening

If the opening of school is delayed, buses will pick up students at their normal stops two hours later than usual. Typically, such decisions are announced by 6 a.m. on that day. Morning pre-kindergarten (pre-k), Head Start, other early childhood programs, and field trips will be canceled, as well as other activities and programs that begin at 10:30 a.m. or earlier. Afternoon pre-k and other programs are held as usual unless otherwise announced.

Because weather or road conditions may deteriorate further after a delay is announced, parents and students should continue to monitor media announcements for a possible change from a delay to a closure.

Early closing

When a snow storm or other weather-related emergency begins in the morning after students arrive at school, the school system may find it necessary to close schools early. This ensures that students will arrive home safely in a reasonable amount of time. Typically, schools are closed two-and-a-half hours early, and the announcement is made around 11 a.m. Afternoon pre-k, and Head Start classes will not be held on these days.

Typically, day care centers in elementary schools remain open until about 6 p.m. However, parents should check with their center for its inclement weather policy. When schools close early, buses will drop students at the regular bus stops. Head Start and pre-k students will be dismissed at 10:30 a.m. and taken to their regular drop-off locations.

Questions and/or concerns about student behavior on the bus, please contact the main office at Diamond Elementary at 301-840-7177.

Questions and/or concerns about bus procedures, bus routes, late bus schedule, please contact our transportation cluster supervisor, Ms. Sharon Stream, (301) 353-0822.