

UNIT C - STUDENT LOADING AND UNLOADING

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UNIT C - STUDENT LOADING AND UNLOADING

INTRODUCTION

In Pennsylvania, and across the nation, incidents during student loading and unloading are responsible for more school bus-related fatalities than any other source. While fatalities are very low, you must be vigilant during student loading and unloading to help prevent these incidents from occurring.

Listed below are descriptions of a few fatalities. Unfortunately, students are often killed by their own school bus because the driver could not see them crossing in front of or behind the bus. A particularly hazardous situation is when a student leaving the bus reaches a point of safety, then re-approaches the bus, slipping under the wheels as it proceeds. To prevent these situations, you must be very attentive at all times during student loading and unloading.

FATALITIES DURING LOADING AND UNLOADING

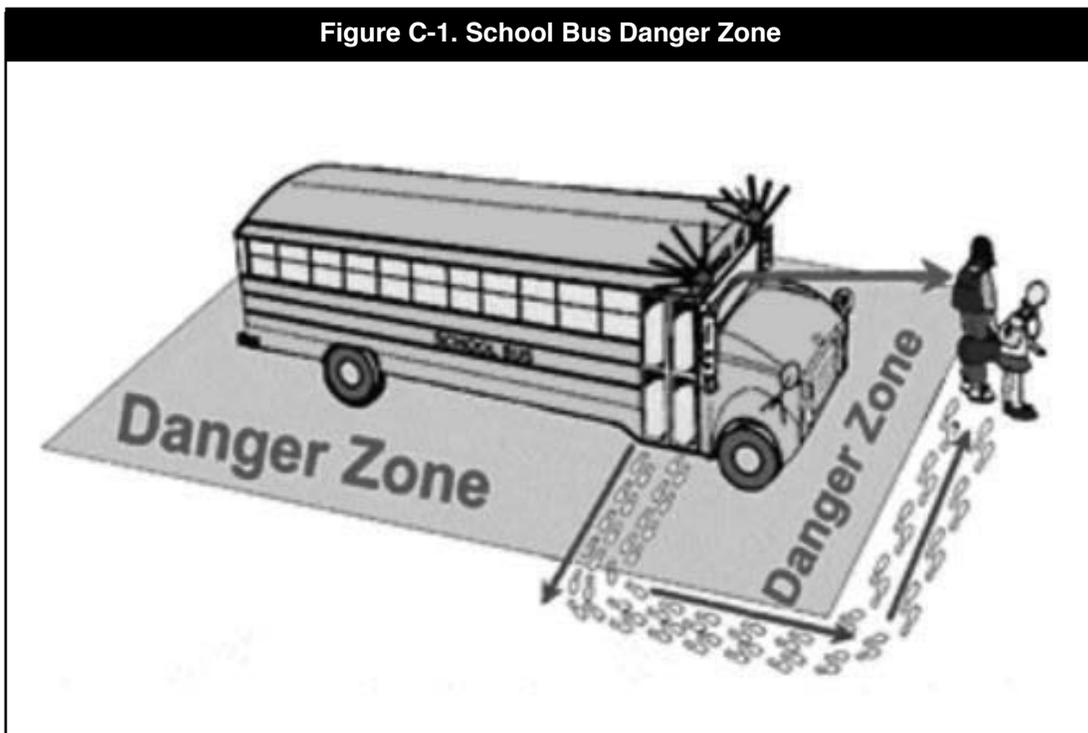
- A student was waiting in his parent's vehicle across the street from the school bus stop. As the school bus slowed to approach the stop with its amber lights flashing, the student exited his mother's vehicle and darted in front of an oncoming vehicle. The student, a 6-year-old male, was struck and killed.
- A student was waiting at his bus stop when a car drove up on the sidewalk striking the student from behind. The student, a 10-year-old male, was killed.
- A student exited the school bus and crossed the street. The bus driver completed student drop off and pulled up to make a left turn. As the driver was turning, the student, a 9-year-old male, chose to run toward the bus and slipped on the ice and slid under the bus, being run over by the left rear duals.
- A student was exiting her bus after dark at her bus stop. An oncoming vehicle failed to stop for the flashing school bus lights and struck her with the left front bumper. There was no evidence the driver applied the brakes. The student, a 5-year-old female, died without regaining consciousness.
- A 5-year-old female student was run over and killed by the left rear wheels of her school bus after she had exited the bus.
- A 6-year-old male student unexpectedly ran back toward the school bus, after he had been discharged from the bus and was struck and killed beneath the left front wheels of the bus.
- A student arrived at his bus stop early and decided to cross the road to a store on the opposite side of the road. When the student came out of the store, he saw the school bus approaching his stop and was in a hurry to get back to the bus stop. As the 9-year-old male ran across the roadway in the direction of his stop, he was struck and killed by a passing vehicle.
- A student and his brother missed their bus at the assigned bus stop location. The students went to their old bus stop, which had been declared unsafe due to sight distance. The bus driver had been instructed by dispatch not to pick up the student at the old location. As the school bus driver was coming up the road, the two students were in the roadway attempting to stop the bus. The school bus driver opened her driver's window to tell the students she could not pick them up at the location when an approaching vehicle came over the hill. One student was able to get out of the roadway, but the other, a 16-year-old male, was struck and killed by an approaching vehicle. The bus did not have the eight-way light system in operation.
- A 4-year-old male student ran back toward the bus to pick up something he had dropped, and was struck and killed by the right rear dual wheels of the bus.
- A student was late getting to her bus. As she ran up on the right to catch her bus, the 10-year-old female was struck and killed by the right rear dual wheels of the bus.

Loading and unloading maneuvers expose students and drivers to many hazards. You must be aware of the proper procedures for driving the bus and maintaining student behavior while performing these maneuvers. Driving procedures can be found in Units F and G.

This unit presents procedures for maintaining safety during loading and unloading. These procedures include: controlling traffic; assisting students crossing streets or highways; seating the students; and loading and unloading the students. The procedures below also cover proper use of the eight-way light system at the bus stop.

THE LOADING/UNLOADING AREA

While children are safest on the school bus, the school bus loading and unloading area is a dangerous location because children are at a greater risk of being struck. The 10-foot area immediately around the bus is known as the danger zone because it is the area where children entering and exiting the school bus are at greatest risk of being hit by a motor vehicle, or accidentally run over by their bus driver. It is shown below in Figure C-1.



To help alleviate the danger in the loading and unloading area, the school bus driver has a number of tools at their disposal.

EDUCATION

Educating children on how to be safe pedestrians is fundamental to school bus safety. Beginning with their first step onto a school bus, children must learn how to safely arrive at the school bus stop, board the bus, behave during the bus ride, exit the bus, and arrive home safely. Most of the time, children only get this information from the school bus operator. If the school bus operator doesn't instruct them on these items, chances are no instruction will be received until they get in trouble.

As a school bus operator, not only are you educating the students that ride your bus, you must also adequately warn (educate) other motorists of your actions when loading or unloading students. This is accomplished through different devices on the school bus.

PHYSICAL TOOLS

All school buses in Pennsylvania are equipped with a school bus eight-way light system. This system consists of two amber flashing lights and two red flashing lights mounted on the front and rear of the bus.

School buses also have a side stop arm with a stop sign and a crossing arm. The crossing control arm, which is attached to the front of the bus, causes students to walk far enough in front of the bus so the bus driver can easily see them.

WHEN LOADING AT A BUS STOP, FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES CAREFULLY!

1. Load students only at designated bus stops approved by the school board. NEVER change a bus stop without approval by your supervisor. Student loading zones should be on the right side of the highway where visibility is clear. Refer to Chapter 104 of Title 67 for loading zone standards. Visit www.pacode.com.
2. Students should wait at a specific designated place. This place should be at least 10 feet from the edge of the highway at the approved bus stop. You may often have to remind students after they board to stay back from the bus as it approaches.
3. Tell students to be on time according to district policy. Typically this means students are to be at the bus stop five minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. The driver and students share the responsibility of maintaining the bus schedule.
4. As a bus operator, if you are running late, don't speed to make up the lost time. Remember, it is safety first and schedule second.
5. If you arrive at a pick-up location early or on time and the student is not present, proceed with extreme caution. The student may be running late and be rushing to catch the bus. If you proceed without double checking, you may miss the location of the approaching child.

LOADING PROCEDURES

APPROACH AND CHECK

1. When approaching the designated stop, start slowing down in preparation for the stop. Evaluate the stop as far in advance as possible and approach at a slow rate using extreme caution. Look for pedestrians, traffic or people who may not belong at the school bus stop.
2. Always watch for late-arriving students who may be running to the bus stop. Use the mirrors to check for students to the rear of the bus.
3. When the loading zone is between 150-300 feet away (at most the length of a football field), activate the amber flashing lights of the school bus eight-way light system to warn other vehicles. Brake gradually with the transmission in gear while approaching the stop. The greater your approach speed, the greater the distance away you should activate your amber lights.
4. Check all mirrors to see if traffic is clear and it is safe for you to stop.
5. Approach students with extreme care giving due consideration to the surface on which you are going to stop:
 - a. When road and traffic conditions are normal, require students to stand at least 10 feet from the edge of the road. If students are not complying with this, remind them as they board the bus, before the next pickup.
 - b. When road surfaces are hazardous (e.g., slippery, rough), stop short of the bus stop, by as much as 20 feet, and ease the bus carefully to the stop. Instruct students to always wait a safe distance from the flow of traffic, especially in inclement weather.

STOP

1. Come to a full stop;
2. When stopped, set the parking (emergency) brake;
3. Place the transmission in neutral;
4. Open the service door slightly (note this may not be possible with some automatic doors), activating the red flashing lights, side stop arm, crossing arm, and automatically deactivating the amber flashing lights of the eight-way light system; and
5. Check traffic to assure all traffic is stopped, and open the door completely ONLY after traffic stops.

LOAD

1. Instruct students not to move toward the bus until the bus stops and the door opens. Make sure to count all the students while loading. This will let you know if you have picked up all of the students assigned to that stop on your roster.
 - a. When students must cross a roadway before getting on the bus, you must be able to see them at all times. When crossing in front of the bus, students should cross in front of the arm and should be able to see your face (at least 10 feet in front of the bus). If you have concern with a particular bus stop being at an unsafe location for students to cross the street (poor sight distance, long crossing distance for the student, etc.), let your transportation director/supervisor know immediately.
 - b. Be alert to warn students of an illegally passing motorist. Stress that students must look both ways before crossing the street or highway in front of the bus. Do not tolerate crowding or pushing. Have students board the bus slowly, in single file, and using the handrail.

2. Seat students according to local policy. Refer to Unit B for Seating Plans.
 - a. Keep in mind that seating capacity is limited according to the inspection sticker affixed on the bus by the Pennsylvania State Police. However, this rating is not an absolute; it is a maximum. Refer to Section 4552(d) of Title 75 as well as Sections 42, 69, and 144 of Chapter 171 of Title 67 for additional information on aisle and seating requirements.
 - Aisles shall be unobstructed at all times. Passengers may not be seated so as to encroach on the minimum aisle clearance.
 - A seating space at least 13 inches wide shall be provided for each passenger.
 - b. Remember that passengers are not permitted to stand while the bus is in motion.

CHECK AND PROCEED

1. Check all mirrors around the bus for students.
2. When all students are accounted for, prepare to leave. Close the service door, which turns off the red lights, and retracts the stop arm and the crossing arm.
 - a. Wait for everyone to be seated before putting the bus in motion. Otherwise, you cannot expect your passengers to remain seated while the bus is in motion. You may consider requiring students to be seated before the door is shut to help prevent a driver behind your bus accidentally rear-ending the bus and causing standing students to fall.
 - b. Know the students assigned to your bus and be careful not to leave students stranded. Account for all the students on your bus.
 - c. When all passengers are seated, prepare to proceed to the next stop.
3. Using all mirrors, check traffic, put the transmission into proper gear, then release the parking brake.
4. Check child safety, recheck the mirrors and proceed safely to your next stop.

UNLOADING PROCEDURES

When unloading students, you must make sure all of your students get safely across the street and out of the danger zone. Unload students only at properly designated bus stops. Use the following procedures when unloading students at a bus stop:

APPROACH AND CHECK

1. When approaching the designated bus stop, start slowing down in preparation for the stop.
2. As you approach the bus stop, look in your mirrors to check traffic conditions.
3. When the loading zone is between 150-300 feet away, activate the amber flashing lights of the school bus eight-way light system to warn other vehicles. Brake gradually with the transmission in gear while approaching the stop.
4. Do not allow students to stand until the bus has come to a full stop.
5. Check all mirrors to see if traffic is clear and it is safe for you to stop.

STOP

1. Come to a full stop;
2. When stopped, set the parking (emergency) brake;
3. Place the transmission in neutral;
4. Open the service door slightly (if physically possible), activating the red flashing lights, side stop arm, crossing arm, and automatically deactivating the amber flashing lights of the eight-way light system; and
5. Check traffic and open the door completely after traffic stops, and ONLY after traffic stops.

UNLOAD

1. Do not permit students to leave the bus except at regularly assigned stops, unless they have written permission from a school administrator (Refer to school district policy). It is illegal for you to discharge students at places other than designated bus stops as per Section 3345(i) of Title 75.
2. Have students exit in an orderly fashion, counting them as they exit; this will let you know if you have dropped off all of the students assigned to that stop. Observe students as they step from the bus to see all move promptly away from the danger zone. Recount the students as they reach a place of safety outside of the danger zone, i.e. sidewalks, curbsides, or inside houses for door to door routes.
 - a. Instruct students who must cross a roadway after getting off of the bus to stand on the side of the roadway far enough in front of the bus to see your face (at least 10 feet). Be alert for passing motorists so you may warn students. The students are to look both ways before stepping into the roadway. They should cross in front of the crossing arm.
 - b. Instruct students who do not have to cross the roadway after unloading exactly where they should walk or wait until the bus pulls completely away. Tell them to never re-approach the bus.
 - c. Students should never cross the roadway behind the bus.
 - d. Take extra time with elementary school age students to make sure they understand these procedures. Be overly cautious when loading and unloading these students.

CHECK AND PROCEED

1. Check all mirrors for students, and make sure students are not returning to the bus, and check for traffic and other pedestrians;
2. Close the service door to deactivate the flashing red lights, side stop arm, and crossing arm;
3. Check the mirrors, put the transmission in gear, release the parking (emergency) brake; and
4. Recheck child safety, recheck mirrors, and proceed safely to your next stop.

If you cannot account for a student outside the bus, secure the bus, (engage emergency brake, shut off the engine and remove keys) and get out and check around and underneath the bus.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CHECK IT OUT!

The following is an example of an alert, quick acting driver who prevented a tragedy:

- During a noon return of kindergarten students at a stop with a wide shoulder, the bus was stopped and a student was unloading. The driver saw a car in her mirrors that was obviously committed to passing the bus on the right side. The bus door was open, and the child was going down the steps. The driver grabbed the child's coat and pulled her down onto the bus step.

Hopefully, you will be prepared to act in a similar manner if the situation arises.

UNIQUE DANGERS OF LOADING AND UNLOADING ZONES

1. Dropped or Forgotten Objects - Always focus on students as they approach the bus and watch for any who disappear from sight. Students may drop an object near the bus during loading and unloading. Stopping to pick up the object or returning to pick up the object, may cause the student to disappear from the driver's sight at a very dangerous time. Students should be told to leave any dropped items and move to a safe place out of danger and attempt to get the driver's attention to retrieve it.
2. Handrail Dangers - Students have been injured or killed when clothing, accessories or even parts of their body get caught in the handrail or door as they exit the bus. You need to closely observe all students exiting the bus to confirm they are in a safe location prior to moving the bus.
3. Schools - Another area where serious incidents occur is the loading and unloading zones at the schools. You as a driver must train your students not to push and shove other students when they get on or off the bus. Teach the students to use handrails and go directly to their seats and face forward at all times.
4. **Students Left on the Bus - After your last drop off, in a safe location, make sure to walk to the back of your bus and check for sleeping or hiding students before returning to the yard.**

WHEN POSSIBLE, DON'T DEAL WITH ON-BUS PROBLEMS WHEN LOADING AND UNLOADING

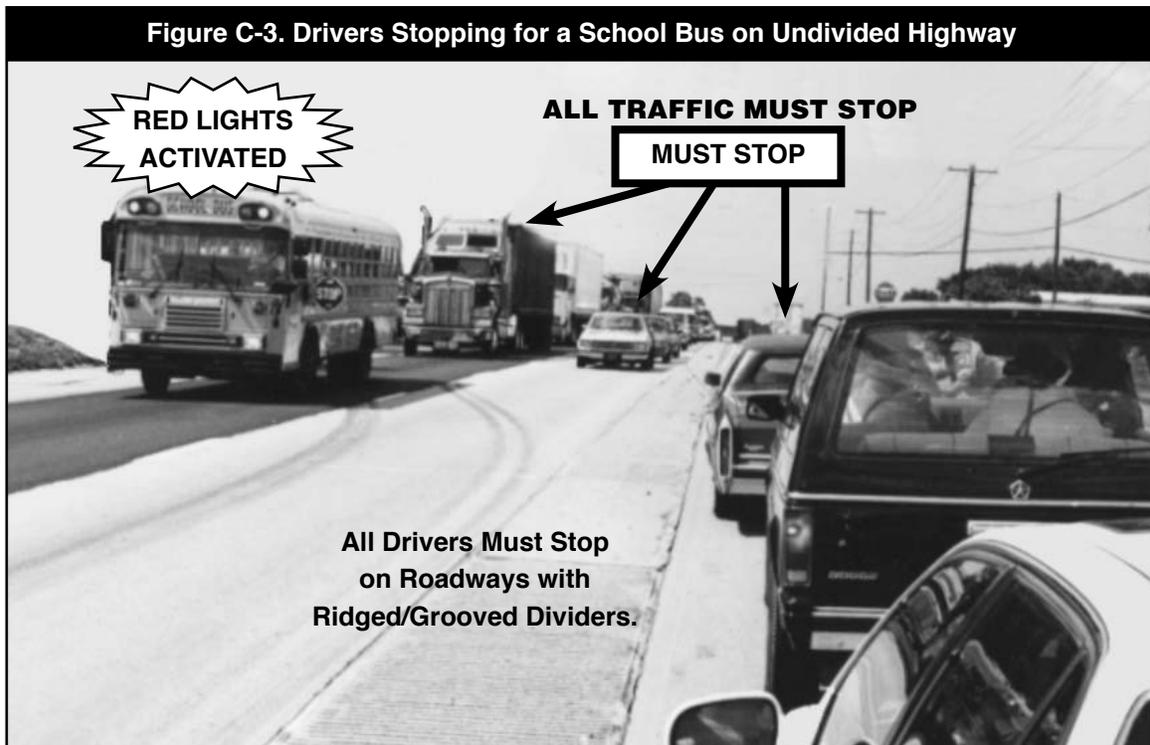
As outlined in Unit B, in order to get students to and from school safely and on time, you need to be able to concentrate on the driving task. Loading and unloading requires all your concentration, especially considering the number of injuries and other incidents that occur during these times. Don't take your eyes off of what is happening outside the bus. If there is a behavior problem on the bus, wait until the students have finished loading or have unloaded to a place of safety. If necessary, pull the bus over to handle the problem.

ENFORCING THE SCHOOL BUS STOPPING LAW

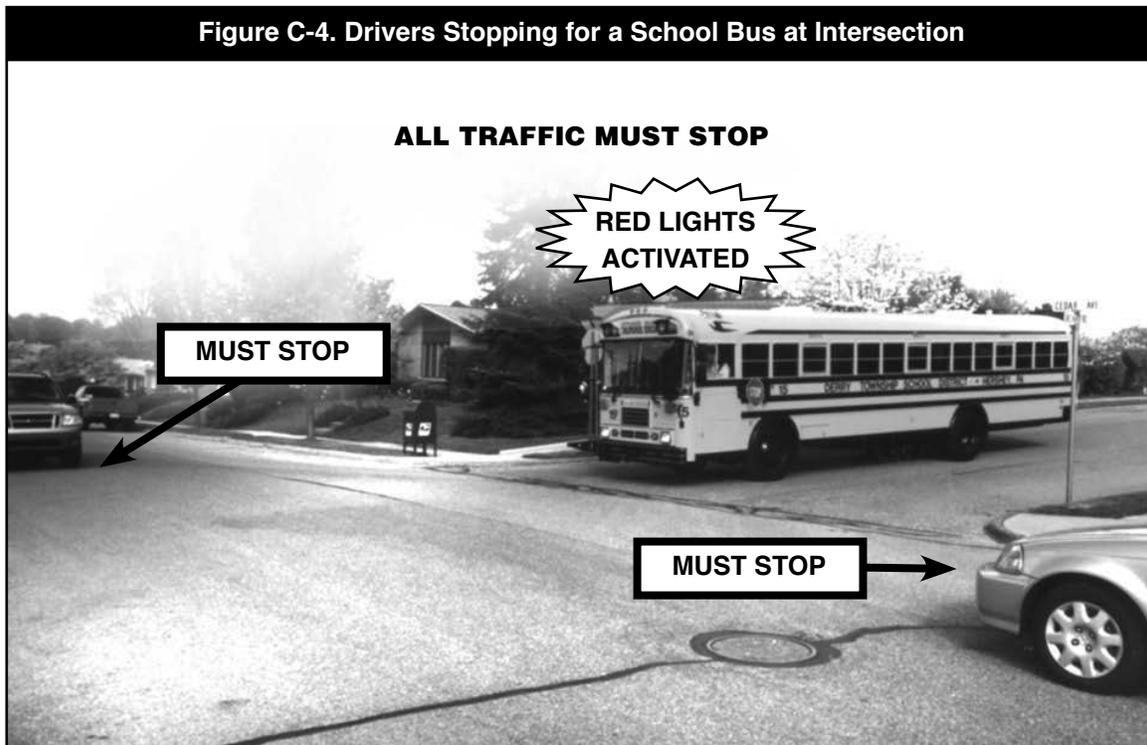
While loading or unloading, check to make certain traffic in all directions obeys the red flashing lights as required by Section 3345 of Title 75 (Pennsylvania Vehicle Code). The following summarizes this section and provides some requirements for school bus operators to follow to help with enforcement. Note that Figures C-2, C-3, and C-4 illustrate examples of required motorist stops for school buses.

- On highways or trafficways not separated by a physical barrier, traffic in all directions must stop at least 10 feet away from the bus and remain stopped until every child has entered the bus (when loading) or has reached the sidewalk or side of highway (when unloading). Painted center lines, ridged or grooved roadway dividers, or a center turning lane do NOT create separate roadways or constitute a physical barrier; all traffic must stop on highways with these markings.





- On highways or trafficways separated by a physical barrier, traffic moving in the same direction as the bus must stop as described above. Traffic approaching the bus from the opposite direction may proceed with caution. A highway with separate roadways is divided into two or more roadways with physical barriers such as: concrete median barrier, metal median barrier, non-mountable curb or clearly indicated dividing sections (e.g., concrete mountable curb, trees or shrubs, rock or boulders, stream grass) to block traffic between the roadways.
- The driver of a vehicle approaching an intersection where a school bus is stopped to load or unload students must stop the vehicle at the intersection until the flashing red signal lamps are no longer actuated.
- You, as a school bus driver, should not be stopping in the middle of an intersection.
- If you are having difficulty at an intersection or drop off location, work with your transportation director or supervisor to find a better location.



- Emergency vehicles (fire engines, ambulances and police cars) must also obey the red flashing warning lights of a loading or unloading school bus. In fact, Section 3105(h) of Title 75 states “... the driver of an emergency vehicle shall come to a complete stop when a school bus flashes its red signal lights and activates its side stop signal arms. After stopping, the driver of the emergency vehicle may pass the school bus only after exercising due diligence and caution for the safety of the students in a manner that will not risk the safety of the students.”

If you see another vehicle disobeying these laws:

- Try your best to warn students before they attempt to cross the highway;
- Note the license plate number, color and type of the vehicle; time and location of the incident; and identity of the driver (as much as you can tell). You must deliver a signed, written report containing this information within 48 hours to the state or local police with jurisdiction where the incident occurred.

When someone is convicted of violating Pennsylvania’s School Bus Stopping Law, they will receive a 60-day driver’s license suspension, five points on their driving record and a \$250 fine, plus court costs.

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