

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

Q. Where is the Transportation Administrative Office located?

A. The physical address is 1430 Hwy 60 East in Bartow. We are located just East of the overpass at the intersection of Hwy 60 and Hwy 17.

Q. How do I find out what bus my child will ride this year?

A. Please call the school your child will attend. Transportation releases bus routing information to the schools as soon as the routes are finished. If the school your child will attend does not have the information it means that the route is not ready for public release so please check the school again at a later date. Transportation will not provide information on routes that have not been released to schools.

Q. My student attends a “Charter School.” Is transportation provided by the Polk County School Board?

A. Possibly. Polk District School transportation to “Charter Schools” is **not** automatic. It is a purchased service. By design a “Charter School” operates for the most part as a private school with charter and oversight provided by the local school board. Each “Charter School” is totally responsible for the educational needs of its students to include transportation. In order to utilize public school busses, a “Charter School” must contract (purchase) the transportation services of the local school board. It is very important to understand that Polk County Transportation Services cannot directly address a “Charter School’s” parental transportation issue or concerns. A “Charter School” must create or appoint a staff member to serve as a transportation liaison. This liaison will address parents concerns and in turn negotiate the issues with the local school board. All students, including contracted “Charter Schools,” riding Polk District busses will abide by and be governed by the Code of Conduct. A “Charter School” has the option to procure school busses and provide its own transportation services to students or contract with a private firm to meet its students transportation needs.

Q. I live less than two miles from my child’s school, is he/she eligible for transportation?

A. By law, the State of Florida provides transportation funding only for regular education students that live 2 or more miles from the school. The Polk County School Board does not provide additional resources to transport students living within 2 miles of school.

Q. How is a bus stop location determined?

A. Bus stops are located as a function of safety, neighborhood logistics, State regulations, and Transportation requirements. We try to locate bus stops so as to serve the entire needs of a neighborhood for years to come. They cannot be located as a function of personal convenience or schedule. State regulations require that when practical we place bus stops no more than 1.5 miles from the residence of a student. State regulations do not address sidewalks or grade level above 5th grade in the determination of stop placement. Florida Law mandates that we do not place stops closer than 300 feet and consider carefully all traffic conditions before said placement. Bus drivers do not have the authority to create or delete bus stops.

Q. Who can authorize a bus stop location change?

A. As bus stops are placed as a function of safety and regulation, only Transportation Administrative staff can make changes to stop locations. Bus drivers cannot add or change bus stops.



Q. *Can my child bring a friend home on the bus? Can they ride the bus to school the next morning?*

A. No. We are directed by the State of Florida funding program to maximize the efficiency of our school busses. This means filling every seat on the bus on each run. We cannot allow additional students not assigned to an individual bus to ride an already “maxed-out” bus as a convenience. In addition to not having seating for the additional passengers, we also have no emergency data for the student in case there is an accident. Services we provide for one student we must be prepared to provide for all. Therefore, our policy is to not allow convenience riders unless it is a pre-coordinated emergency situation.

Q. *My child missed the bus. Can I follow the bus in my car and allow my child to board the bus at another stop?*

A. If your child misses the bus, for safety reasons, do not attempt to chase, pass, or block the bus along its route. Any action taken to impede or delay the progress of an official school bus is unlawful. If possible, take a different route to a stop ahead of the bus and let your child board there. When in your car directly behind a school bus, it is very dangerous for a child to attempt to run from the car along the side of the bus to board. Nationwide, fatalities have occurred where students have fallen in front of the rear wheels of a departing bus after they jumped out of a parent’s car to run up and board the bus.

Q. *My son/daughter was just going out our front door this morning and the bus driver did not wait. Why?*

A. Due to very tight time schedules and extreme traffic conditions; our drivers are trained in accordance with operational policy not to wait for late students. For safety and timing reasons, students must be standing at the bus stop when the bus arrives. We do not have the latitude to wait for students to get out of the car, come out of the house, walk over from the next yard etc. Drivers must maintain safety at all times when loading students. If there are stragglers or late students loading, this increases exposure to impatient motorists, which increases the safety risk for the children.

Q. *My pre-kindergarten child must be accompanied at the bus stop. What do you do if I have an emergency and I cannot notify you or be there to meet my child?*

A. Arrangements must be made to meet your child. Transportation Services will attempt to deliver the student to the regular bus stop. If no one is there to meet the child we will return the child to the school. If the school cannot take custody of the child, Transportation Services has no choice but to seek help from Children and Family Services.

Q. *Why does my pre-kindergarten child have to be met at the bus stop?*

A. As agreed by the parents upon registration in the pre-kindergarten program, a designated responsible individual will be available to accompany the pre-kindergartner at the bus stop. A child of this age simply cannot be left alone at a bus stop. Three failures by a designated responsible individual to meet a pre-kindergartner student will result in forfeiture of the privilege to ride the school bus.

Q. *Someone told me the bus was late because the run was being “covered.” What does this mean?*

A. When there are more school bus drivers out due to illness than we have substitute drivers, we must split up entire bus runs to “cover” all the students in an area and get them to school. This may mean shifting entire loads or just a few stops. This process is a logistical nightmare for our operations staff and drivers, but it is a necessary procedure designed to ensure a timely (although often late) arrival/delivery for students. The only way to prevent “covering” is to have enough substitute bus drivers so that we can simply fill regular driver vacancies created as they occur. We hire and train drivers monthly; we simply have not had good response to our continuing recruiting efforts, thus the shortage of substitutes.

Q. Why doesn't the Transportation Office call me when the bus is delayed in the A.M. or P.M.? Is there a place I can call for information about a bus delay?

A. School busses like any form of mass transportation are significantly affected by many uncontrollable factors. These factors may include a shortage of drivers due to sickness or other, weather, season, road repair/closure, traffic conditions, run coverage, etc. When a bus is running late, the students are instructed to wait at the stop, do not go back home. If the bus is late and the student rides it to school, he/she will not be counted tardy. If the student goes home and then is taken to school the school will count the student tardy. The Transportation Division strives to keep all our busses running as close to the published time schedule as possible. We do ask that the students arrive at least 10 minutes early to the stop location. This ensures that we account for seasonal traffic conditions and differences in individual watch settings. While we would like to notify parents of late busses, we simply do not have the resources to do so. We do notify schools as soon as we confirm late busses. If you feel the bus is running late please contact the school for the latest information or for an updated arrival time please call our dispatcher at (863) 534-7300 with the bus number and school name.

Q. Where can I get a copy of the bus rules?

A. A copy of the bus rules may be obtained in the office of your local school. Additionally, copies of the bus rules are posted in every school bus over the entrance door and all bus drivers review the rules with the students during the first week of school.

Q. If my child goes on a field trip do the same rules of bus discipline apply?

A. Yes, the school bus is considered an extension of the classroom, therefore all the rules apply all of the time.

Q. Can the school bus driver suspend my child from riding the bus?

A. A school bus driver does not have disciplinary authority or choice of disciplinary action. A driver can only refer observed student actions (via a bus referral) to the school for due process. The Polk County School Board has an approved "Code of Conduct" which outlines and guides school based administrators as to the disciplinary action that is appropriate for each situation and grade level.

Q. What if my child is suspended from the AM bus? My child rides a different bus in the PM. What is the procedure?

A. Many students ride different busses in the morning and in the afternoon, however, when a student is suspended from a bus, any bus, that means it is a suspension from all transportation.

Q. Who is responsible for resolving discipline problems that occur on the bus?

A. Bus drivers attempt to correct inappropriate behavior but often it requires the intervention of a school administrator. The Principal of each school is responsible for the administration of school bus discipline; however, the responsibility is often delegated to another appropriate staff member, typically an Assistant Principal.

Q. Can a bus driver or transportation official change a bus disciplinary ruling?

A. No, discipline hearings are exclusively conducted and decided at the school level. While appropriate transportation and or school staff members are often called to testify or clarify policy, final disciplinary rulings are the instrument of the Principal and or the Polk County School Board's Director of Discipline.

Q. If the bus has a video camera can parents see the tape?

A. No, parents may not view bus videotapes. Video recordings of school busses are additional tools school administrators and transportation officials utilize to sample the “total environment” of the bus. Our legal department has advised that due to student “confidentiality” issues parents may not view the videotapes.

Q. I would like to talk to my child’s bus driver about a problem on the bus. How do I go about this? Couldn’t I just meet the driver at the bus stop location?

A. If you would like to talk to a driver about your child, please do not approach the driver at the bus stop. A bus driver is on a very strict timing schedule. Any extra seconds of delay at a bus stop could translate into as much as 30 minutes late arrival at school if each parent of 60 (typical busload) children talked for as little as 30 seconds. Security and safety of our driver and student passengers are of greatest concern at bus stops. Some parents get very emotional, angry, and try to board the bus. Parents are not allowed on a school bus unless specifically authorized. Parents who decide to board a bus ignoring the warning of the bus driver are subject to arrest and prosecution under the law.

To talk with a driver, please contact the school your child attends and request a conference with the driver. Please provide the bus number and or driver name if possible. The school will be more than happy to coordinate with Transportation Services and set up a conference. It is important to understand that bus drivers are only available for conference between 9:00 AM and 12:00 PM., M-F.

Q. Why do I have to fill out an information card and give it to the driver? Doesn’t the school have the information?

A. It is absolutely imperative that the school bus drivers have the most recent emergency contact information available on the bus. This is necessary in case of an accident, medical emergency or some other event that your student may be involved in, which may require immediate parental/guardian notification.

Q. What happens if a school bus is involved in an accident?

A. Statistically most of the accidents that occur involving school busses are rear end collisions. In all but a few cases, school busses are generally hit in the rear end just before, during, or just after a pupil or railroad stop. Injuries are rare and students are for the most part frightened only. If your student’s bus is involved in an accident the driver will immediately radio our dispatcher with vital information. The dispatcher will notify the appropriate emergency personnel to respond. The school the bus was servicing at the time of the accident will be notified and an appropriate school representative may be asked to go to the scene of the accident depending on how serious the situation may be. If your child needs to be transported anywhere for any reason by emergency medical technicians at the scene, we will notify you or the emergency contact listed on the student information card as soon as possible. If your student is not injured you will not be notified and your child will be transported to the school or home as appropriate as soon as a release is given by local law enforcement. Your student will not be counted tardy or absent.

Q. Why are there “bus attendants” on some busses?

A. As provided by the State of Florida, bus attendants are funded for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) busses only. They are there to assist with students who have very special needs, physical, medical, etc. Bus attendants are not funded for regular education busses.

Q. Can Teen Parenting mothers feed their babies on the bus?

A. No. Eating and drinking activities are prohibited on all of our busses. Teen parents must feed their children prior to boarding our school busses.



Q. *My child is in a wheelchair and the brakes on the chair are not working. Can he/she be transported?*

A. No. Broken or otherwise non-operable wheelchairs or other specialty student assistance devices cannot be safely transported. All student support equipment must be fully operational at the time of bus boarding.

Q. *My child has a leg cast. Can he/she stand on the lift to enter the bus and be transported?*

A. No. If a student has a cast, which prohibits him/her from riding a regular education bus, we can usually accommodate and transport with a wheelchair bus. A wheelchair lift is not designed to safely board students standing. A student must be secured sitting in a wheelchair to ride a lift to board a bus.

