Wicomico County Public Schools



Family Guide for Student Transportation

Your Children's School(s)

_____

_____

Bus Contractor(s) Name _____

Bus #_____

Bus Contractor's Phone #_____

Bus Driver's Name_____

Phone Number(s) _____

Transportation Services Department: (410) 677-4499

Updated August 2025

Dear WCPS families,

Every school day school vehicles travel close to 12,000 miles to transport over 12,300 Wicomico County Public School students to and from school. Another 3,400 or so students arrive to school as walkers or by private vehicles.

It is the mission of the Transportation Services Department to support the learning process by promoting the safety of your student(s) whether transported by school vehicles or by other means. The safety of your student(s) requires the commitment of many partners including parents, students, transportation staff, school administrators, school vehicle drivers and school vehicle contractors.

For those families who use our school vehicle transportation services, it is our commitment to transport all students safely, efficiently, and economically in compliance with federal, state and local laws, regulations, policies and procedures. For families whose students arrive by other means, we are equally committed to establishing guidelines which ensure that students are safe as they enter and exit our school buildings.

This document highlights general operating procedures, parent and student responsibilities, and school vehicle conduct rules which are in place solely for the safety of your children. We ask that you review the contents of this guide and discuss student responsibilities with your children. Your cooperation and support of these rules will enable us to provide all students with safe and efficient transportation services.

Best wishes for a successful school year,

Desmond D. Hughes
Director of Transportation Services

Micah C. Stauffer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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*Note: The words "parents" and “families” are used interchangeably in this document and are inclusive of adult guardians of children in the school system.

Riding a school vehicle is a **privilege**. There are no federal or state mandates for school systems to provide regular transportation.

When a school system elects to provide transportation as Wicomico County Public Schools does, it follows the rules for safety as stated in COMAR 13A.06.07.03:

> A local school system is responsible for the safe operation of its student transportation system and shall conform to the regulations promulgated by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maryland State Board of Education, and the procedures and guidelines established by the Department.

GENERAL STANDARDS, OPERATING PROCEDURES, AND EXPECTATIONS

The Wicomico County Board of Education and Wicomico County Public Schools are committed to every student being in class, every day.

To achieve that goal, the school system offers transportation to and from school for elementary students living more than one (1) mile from their school and for secondary students living more than 1.5 miles from their school.

Eligible students are assigned to a particular route staffed by a school vehicle driver accredited by Wicomico County Public Schools. That route can only be changed in conjunction with the Transportation Office of Wicomico County Public Schools.

For students who are walkers or arrive by private vehicle, each school has established arrival and dismissal procedures which include designated entrances and exits, all designed to keep students safe.

Our BASIC Rules:

A school vehicle driver's primary responsibility is to operate the school vehicle safely.

A school vehicle rider's primary responsibility is not to interfere with the driver's ability to operate the school vehicle safely.

All personal or private vehicles entering school property to drop off or pick up students must use designated traffic areas.

Every effort is made to keep SEPARATE the drop off areas for buses and private vehicles.

Operators of school and private vehicles are also charged with maintaining the safety of entry areas for student walkers.

The safety of all students is our primary goal.

Thanks for your support and cooperation.

SAFETY OF SCHOOL VEHICLE RIDERS

1. **PARENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENTS AS THEY WALK TO/FROM AND WAIT AT THE SCHOOL VEHICLE STOP.** Parents are responsible for the supervision and safety of their children from the time the student leaves home in the morning until they board the school vehicle and at the end of the day when they get off the school vehicle as they walk home.

   Once the student enters the school vehicle, the responsibility lies with the school vehicle driver and the school administration until students disembark the school vehicle at the end of the day.

2. **PARENTS, TOGETHER WITH THEIR STUDENTS, SHOULD DEVELOP A ROUTE TO AND FROM THE SCHOOL VEHICLE STOP.** To reduce unnecessary risk to student safety, parents or responsible adults should provide supervision of their children to and from the school vehicle stop.

3. **STUDENTS NEED TO BE AT THE SCHOOL VEHICLE STOP BETWEEN FIVE TO TEN MINUTES PRIOR TO THE SCHEDULED ARRIVAL TIME OF THE SCHOOL VEHICLE.** Being at the bus stop 5 to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled arrival of the school vehicle ensures that students arrive to school safely and on time. In addition, to reduce unsafe student behavior (i.e., jostling, running) at the school vehicle stop, students should not arrive more than 10 minutes prior to the school vehicle's scheduled arrival time. Students are

to be visible to the school vehicle driver as the school vehicle approaches the school vehicle stop.

Note: School vehicle drivers are not required to activate the school vehicle's red warning lights when no students are visible. School vehicle drivers are trained to approach the stop with yellow warning lights activated, and then stop and look for students. If no students are visible, the school vehicle will proceed on its route.

4. **DAYCARE LOCATIONS.** Daycare locations receive the same consideration as any family residence and are not provided special exceptions. It is the responsibility of the daycare to provide an appropriate level of supervision to enhance student safety. Parents should have a conversation with their daycare provider regarding the supervision of students walking to, waiting at and walking from the school vehicle stop.

5. **TRANSPORTATION OF PRIMARY GRADE STUDENTS REQUIRES APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION.** Our youngest students must have appropriate supervision at bus stop areas both to board or to exit the bus. Parents are responsible for making arrangements to have appropriate supervision (a responsible adult or sibling over twelve years of age) at the school vehicle stop for students in grades Pre-K through 2 (ages 4-7).

   Please note: If a pre-kindergarten or kindergarten student is the only student being discharged at the

school vehicle stop, that student will not be released unless appropriate supervision is present.

If appropriate supervision is not provided, the driver will return the student to school. REPEATED INSTANCES OF APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION NOT BEING PRESENT AT THE SCHOOL VEHICLE STOP MAY RESULT IN THE SUSPENSION OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR THE STUDENT AND/OR OTHER REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDENT'S SAFETY.

6. **ONE PICKUP LOCATION AND ONE DROPOFF LOCATION SHALL BE ALLOWED FOR EACH TRANSPORTED STUDENT.** School vehicle drivers are trained to discharge students only at their assigned school vehicle stop or at their assigned school. Exceptions will be made only in case of an emergency or when an extenuating circumstance exists and shall be approved by the school administration.
Secondary students (grades 6-12) are only permitted transportation to and from their home address.

7. **RIDING THE SCHOOL VEHICLE IS A PRIVILEGE.**
In Maryland, children must attend school until age 18 (compulsory attendance). Wicomico County Public Schools are committed to ensure that students do not miss school because of transportation. Riding school buses, however, is a privilege – it is not legally mandated by federal or state law. Therefore, students or parents failing to follow the guidelines may have riding privileges temporarily denied or permanently revoked when a student jeopardizes the

safe operation of the school vehicle or the safety of students riding the school vehicle.

8. **STUDENTS MAY NOT RIDE SCHOOL VEHICLES OTHER THAN THOSE TO WHICH THEY ARE REGULARLY ASSIGNED.** The primary purpose of the school vehicle is to provide transportation from the student's home or day care to school and back. A request to the administration for a student to ride a different school vehicle home or to school is to be reserved for emergencies. Students are safest when using a consistent school vehicle stop.

9. **UNAUTHORIZED PASSENGERS ARE NOT PERMITTED TO BOARD THE SCHOOL VEHICLE.** Only students of Wicomico County Public Schools or other passengers authorized by a Wicomico County Public Schools administrator are eligible to board a school vehicle under contract with the Board of Education. To protect their passengers, drivers have been instructed to contact law enforcement if an unauthorized passenger refuses to get off the school vehicle. Under no circumstances should anyone intentionally block the school vehicle doorway or otherwise hinder the operation of the school vehicle. Violators may be subject to prosecution.

10. **STUDENTS SHOULD RESPECT THE PROPERTY OF OTHERS AND THE SCHOOL VEHICLE.** Students should demonstrate consideration and respect for the property of others whose homes and businesses are located along their routes to and from the school

vehicle stop. Property owners complaining of vandalism to their property will be instructed to contact the appropriate law enforcement agency and file a complaint. Students maliciously causing damage to a school vehicle or to other students' personal property may have their riding privileges suspended until restitution for the damage has been received.

11. **PARENT CONCERNS ARE NOT TO BE RESOLVED AT THE SCHOOL VEHICLE STOP.** When a parent has a concern about something that happened on the school vehicle, the parent should contact the school vehicle driver/contractor after all children have been dropped off. The school bus stop is not the place to speak with the driver. Additionally, parents are not allowed to board the school bus and should avoid doing so. If a resolution has not occurred, parents should call their child's school or contact the Transportation Office at 410-677-4499 for further assistance.

12. **USE OF AUDIO/VISUAL CAMERAS ON SCHOOL VEHICLES.** All school vehicles under contract with Wicomico County Board of Education are equipped with audio and video surveillance systems. The use of school vehicle video and audio systems supports the efforts of the transportation staff and school administrators to protect school vehicle passengers, school vehicle personnel and property. These systems help deter bullying, vandalism, and other offences; reinforce driver and student accountability; document chain of events; and substantiate or refute

allegations of wrongdoing. School vehicle audio/visual recordings can only be retrieved by authorized Transportation staff at the request of a school administrator, law enforcement official or Transportation administrator. To maintain student confidentiality, school vehicle recording can only be viewed by authorized Transportation staff, Central Office Executive staff, WCPS legal counsel, WCPS insurance carrier, school administrators and school resource officers. Any other requests to view recorded material must be received in writing and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

13. **TRANSPORTING STUDENT ARTICLES ON THE SCHOOL VEHICLE.** The primary purpose of school vehicle transportation is to provide students access to their instructional programs. Since the school vehicle is an extension of the classroom, every effort will be made to support co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

    Students must be able to safely carry items in front of them as they enter and exit the school vehicle without delay. On the school vehicle, items must be secured on the student's lap or on the floor between the student's legs. If there is a seat space available, items may be placed on the seats provided it does not take a seating position away from another student. All items must be properly secured as loose objects can be a danger to student safety by becoming projectiles in the event of accident or compromise safety if blocking the aisles in the event of an emergency evacuation.

On school vehicles, the school system's policy on POSSESSION and USE of personal electronic communication devices (cell phone, pager/beeper or any wireless communication device) is in effect. Possession and use of these devices are prohibited by elementary and middle school students. For high school students, the use of these devices are limited during the instruction day. Such devices must not jeopardize the safety of those being transported.

TIPS for Students

Obey the school vehicle driver at all times so the driver can focus on driving the vehicle safely.

Walk safely to the school vehicle stop and wait in a safe manner away from traffic.

Do not approach the school vehicle until it has come to a complete stop and the door is opened.

Use the handrail when getting on or off the school vehicle.

Enter and exit the school vehicle in an orderly manner, without pushing or shoving.

Always look left, right, then left again to check for traffic before crossing any street.

Also, students are not allowed to bring the following items on board the school vehicle:

- **a.** Sizable music instruments
- **b.** Bulky items (An item may be too bulky if the item cannot be carried on the student's lap, cannot be placed on the floor between the legs of the student, or if the item must take space needed for passengers)
- **c.** Live insects
- **d.** Animals
- **e.** Articles made of glass
- **f.** Other items prohibited by WCBOE policies or procedures

The school vehicle driver has the authority to determine whether an article can be transported on the school vehicle.

TIPS for Parents/Families

Coach your children on how to safely carry book bags, small instruments, and others items on and off the school vehicle.

Walk with your children to develop a 'safe' route to and from the school vehicle stop, reviewing traffic rules, signs, and signals.

Constantly remind your children to walk ten (10) feet in front of the school vehicle and to look BOTH ways before crossing in front of the school vehicle.

Instruct your children to tell the driver if they have dropped something and that they are NEVER to pick up papers or objects that are dropped near the side or in the front of the vehicle.

Assure that your children are dressed appropriately for weather conditions.

Cooperate with all those who have the responsibility of getting your child to and from school safely.

SCHOOL VEHICLE DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

To ensure the safety of our students, Wicomico County Public Schools require that school vehicle drivers, substitute drivers, and vehicle assistants undergo rigorous training for certification.

All drivers must operate the vehicle in compliance with all laws, regulations, policies and procedures to provide safe transportation for students.

They must successfully complete an annual Department of Transportation medical exam and submit to a federally required pre-employment, random, reasonable suspicion, and post-accident drug/breath alcohol testing program.

Drivers and vehicle assistants must maintain a safe, orderly and respectful environment on the school vehicle. They are responsible for communicating behavioral expectations to students and enforcing the rules for riding a school vehicle safely.

They also have the responsibility to report unacceptable student school vehicle behavior violations to the school administrator and/or parent.

SCHOOL VEHICLE CONTRACTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Wicomico County Public Schools contracts with school vehicle contractors to provide safe and efficient transportation to and from school for students.

School vehicle contractors must provide a school vehicle that meets all federal, state, and local specifications. They must maintain the school vehicle in a safe and sanitary condition.

If they are not driving their vehicle, they must employ a qualified driver, substitute driver and, if required, school vehicle assistant services in compliance with all laws, regulations, policies and procedures.

In addition, to ensure student safety, contractors must provide access to the school vehicle for scheduled and unscheduled inspections, installation and maintenance of Board of Education-owned radios, digital video/audio recorders, and global positioning systems.

They must submit all required reports in a timely manner.

TRANSPORTATION OFFICE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Work collaboratively with parents, school administrators, school vehicle contractors and school vehicle drivers to provide students with safe, adequate, efficient and economical school vehicle transportation services
- Route, schedule and tier school vehicles in compliance with federal, state and local laws, regulations, policies, and procedures to provide eligible students with access to safe, equitable, adequate and economical school vehicle transportation
- Establish school vehicle stop locations in compliance with state laws, Maryland Department of Education regulations and Wicomico County Board of Education policies
- Effectively address concerns from parents, school administrators, school vehicle drivers, school vehicle contractors, law enforcement and the motoring public regarding the operation of school vehicles under contract with Wicomico County Board of Education
- Recommend, revise, create, implement and enforce laws, regulations, policies and procedures related to transporting public school students
- Inspect all school vehicles in accordance with federal, state and local statutes and regulations
- Comply with all state and local reporting requirements
- Provide parents and schools with information regarding school vehicle assignments, stop locations and approximate stop times
- Notify parents in advance of any permanent changes involving school vehicle assignments or stop times

IN THE EVENT OF A CONCERN

SCHOOL VEHICLE DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES

These procedures refer to school vehicle driver reports of unsafe student behaviors. School vehicle drivers are to report only those inappropriate behaviors they see or hear. Other incidents of misbehavior will be communicated to the school and/or Transportation Office for investigation.

A school vehicle driver has the authority to remove a student's riding privileges for one day for serious inappropriate behavior provided the driver contacts the parent/guardian notifying them of the inappropriate behavior and the loss of riding privilege for one day.

A school vehicle behavior report must be submitted to the school documenting the student's inappropriate behavior and the suspension of riding privileges.

- **1st School Vehicle Behavior Report**: School vehicle driver may suspend riding privileges for one day. Additional discipline is at the discretion of the school administration or designee.

- **2nd School Vehicle Behavior Report**: School vehicle driver may suspend riding privileges for one day. Additional discipline is at the discretion of the school administration or designee.

- **3rd School Vehicle Behavior Report**: After parental contact is made by the school, a student's riding privileges will be suspended until a successful conference involving the student, parent/guardian and transportation administrator is held. During this conference, a decision will be made as to when the student's riding privileges will be reinstated.

- **4th School Vehicle Behavior Report**: Student's riding privileges are suspended for 30 school days (weekends, holidays, and other school closing days are not included).

- **5th School Vehicle Behavior Report**: Student's riding privileges are suspended for the remainder of the school year.

- **Suspension of riding privileges at the end of a school year may be extended into the next school year.**

Based on the seriousness of a student's inappropriate behavior, the school/transportation administration or designee may, at any time, remove a student's riding privilege for an extended period of time or for the remainder of the school year.

The school administration or designee may also suspend a student's riding privileges as a result of an investigation conducted by school and/or transportation administrators.

SAFETY OF SCHOOL WALKERS

1. **PARENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENTS AS THEY WALK TO AND FROM SCHOOL.** Parents are responsible for the supervision and safety of their children from the time the student leaves home in the morning until they arrive at school as well as from the time of dismissal from school until the child returns home.

2. **CROSS WALKS AND CROSSING GUARDS ARE PROVIDED TO ASSIST WITH SAFETY OF STUDENTS WALKING TO AND FROM SCHOOL.** Parents are asked to review the rules of safe walking to and from school with their students. Student are encouraged to use the sidewalks at all times. When crossing a road, they should look to the right and to the left and cross only when the road is clear of vehicles.

   At the crossing areas near the school, students should walk in the designated areas and follow the instructions of the school crossing guard.

   Students who walk to and from school must use the designated entrance for walkers. To ensure safety, at no time, should they enter the pathway of school vehicles or private vehicles.

   The Transportation Office and school administrators recognize that there are some instances when discharge areas are shared by private vehicles and walkers. School staff work to ensure that all students are safe as they enter and exit the school.

SAFETY OF PRIVATE VEHICLE RIDERS

1. **PARENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR STUDENTS' SAFETY AS THEY TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL.** Parents who bring their children to and from school are responsible for discharging their students in the designated zone.

2. **STUDENTS MUST LOOK OUT FOR VEHICLES.** If students are discharged in a parking area, they must be instructed to look in **BOTH** directions- then look again prior to crossing a road that may be used by other vehicles.

3. **SCHOOLS PROVIDE ENTRY SUPPORT**. The Transportation Office and school administrators recognize that there are some instances when discharge areas are shared by private vehicles and walkers.

   School staff are assigned student entry duty to assist students to be as safe as possible as they enter and exit the school.

School Safety … Family Involvement … Student Success

Researchers find that students whose families are involved in their learning display more positive attitudes toward school. They also tend to behave better in and out of school, earn better grades and enroll in higher-level programs (such as taking advanced placement courses). These students are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

Thank you for supporting student and school safety in Wicomico County Public Schools.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS, DELAYED OPENINGS, AND EARLY DISMISSALS DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER

Decisions to delay the opening of school or closing the school due to inclement weather will be announced no later than 5:30 a.m.

Decisions to dismiss schools early due to inclement weather will be announced by:

12:00 noon for a one hour early dismissal
11:00 a.m. for a two hour early dismissal and
10:00 a.m. for a three hour early dismissal.

The delayed opening, closing, or early dismissal of schools will be announced via the:

Parent Link* automated calling system
Wicomico County Public Schools (WCPS) website at wicomicoschools.org
Television stations WMDT-TV, WBOC-TV, and WRDE-TV
Radio Stations: WOLC, WOCP, WQKZ, WSCL, WESM, WOCM, WEES, and WCEI.

*To ensure that you receive notification of early dismissals or school opening delays, please provide your student's school with a home, work or cell phone number and/or email address for Parent Link notifications.

Who to Contact

School _____
Administration _____
Telephone and Email _____

Transportation Staff (410) 677-4499