

Public Act 103-0896

School Bus Safety Guidance



Introduction

Pursuant to [Public Act 103-0896](#), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has prepared this guidance for school bus safety procedures in consultation with stakeholders. ISBE would like to thank the following individuals for their involvement in the development of this guidance:

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[This document is provided as a resource and ISBE does not specifically endorse or recommend any of the entities or programs identified.](#)

Millions of children ride school buses each school day,¹ so maintaining an environment on the bus that allows drivers to focus their attention on driving is paramount. Students must understand that failure to follow the rules can jeopardize the safety of everyone on the bus, and drivers must model appropriate behavior and professional conduct.

It is incumbent on a school district to develop a comprehensive student management program to ensure that all persons involved with the process of transporting students are familiar with their responsibilities.² School bus safety is a shared responsibility. Parents, students, school administrators, school bus drivers and private contractors in districts where contract transportation is provided, law enforcement, and social service agencies must be engaged in ongoing efforts to motivate students to engage in good behavior while being transported on school buses.³

¹ [School Bus Safety](#).

² [Administrator Manual For the Safe Transportation of Pupils Grade 12 and Below](#).

³ *Id.* See separate lists of school district, driver, pupil, and parent/guardian responsibilities on pp. 33-36 of the document.

Some basic steps from the [Illinois Professional School Bus Driver Training Curriculum](#) can be taken to assist in maintaining a safe environment on a bus:

1. A district must adopt and communicate a clear and supportive policy regarding student transportation and discipline on the school bus.
 - a. The responsibilities of teachers, coaches, and other chaperones who may be riding the school bus must be clearly identified.
2. Bus drivers must immediately report any action that impairs their ability to ensure the safe operation of the school bus.
3. Parents/guardians should exhibit support for procedures designed to assure the safety and well-being of bus-riding students.
4. A school district must provide instruction to all students in safe bus riding practices at least once during each school year. Part of this instruction includes a mandatory bus evacuation drill (minimum of one per year) at each school building that houses school children ([105 ILCS 128/20\(b\)](#)). It is recommended that districts provide this instruction twice a year (in the fall and spring).⁴

RESOURCES

[Administrator Manual For the Safe Transportation of Pupils Grade 12 and Below](#)

[Illinois Professional School Bus Driver Training Curriculum](#)

[School Bus Safety – What Parents Should Know](#)

[Instructions to School Bus Riders](#)

Evidenced-Based School Bus Safety Practices

Implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, more commonly known as PBIS, is a three-tiered approach to student behavior support that “assist[s] school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students.”⁵ The Center on PBIS describes it as “an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting students’ behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health.”⁶

PBIS is adapted from the premise that positive reinforcement is one of the most impactful ways to increase desired behaviors.⁷ The PBIS approach works by focusing on desirable behaviors and promoting the core values of respect, responsibility, and safety. “It focuses on being proactive and positive, rather than negative and punitive.”⁸ Expected student behaviors must be taught and reinforced, and those behaviors that ensure school bus safety are no exception. As one provider of holistic safety solutions for schools noted, “Extending your schoolwide expectations to the bus can reap big benefits for your entire school culture. Students arrive at school exhibiting positive behavior, which can create a positive start to their day. Positive behaviors can build throughout the day and continue on the ride home.”⁹

⁴ [Illinois Professional School Bus Driver – Training Curriculum](#).

⁵ [PBIS Frequently Asked Questions](#).

⁶ [What is PBIS?](#)

⁷ See [Managing Student Behavior on the School Bus \[–\] A Key to Bus Safety](#) (“Positive reinforcement is one of the most powerful ways of influencing behavior. Positive reinforcement is doing something immediately after a behavior that will increase the likelihood of that behavior being repeated.”).

⁸ [PPT: School Bus Safety Using Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports](#).

⁹ [National School Bus Safety Week – PBIS on the Bus](#).

Research has shown significant effects from schoolwide PBIS implementation on children's behavior problems, concentration problems, social-emotional function, and prosocial behavior; further, the multi-tiered approach allows for more intensive interventions for students who require more support.¹⁰ Similar benefits are also seen in the context of student transportation. One study extending common PBIS strategies and training components to bus drivers showed "a substantial reduction of bus discipline referrals at the middle school level" and "high levels of satisfaction from both the bus drivers and school administrators."¹¹

The [National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) (Center on PBIS) defines the three tiers of PBIS as follows:

1. *Tier 1 systems, data, and practices support everyone across all settings. They establish the foundation for delivering regular, proactive support and preventing unwanted behaviors. Tier 1 emphasizes modeling, teaching, and acknowledging positive social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) skills. Teams, data, consistent policies, professional development, and evaluation are essential components for these practices to work effectively.*
 - *The core principles guiding Tier 1 PBIS include the understanding that we can and should:*
 - *Effectively teach appropriate SEB skills to all students*
 - *Intervene early before unwanted behaviors escalate*
 - *Use research-based, scientifically validated interventions whenever possible*
 - *Monitor student progress*
 - *Use data to make decisions*¹²
2. *Tier 2 supports refers to the practices and systems that enable targeted interventions for students who are not successful with Tier 1 supports alone. The focus at Tier 2 is supporting students who are at risk for developing more serious unwanted behaviors before they start. Essentially, intervention at this level is more targeted than Tier 1 but less intensive than Tier 3.*¹³
3. *At most schools, there are 1-5% of students for whom Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports have not connected. At Tier 3, these students receive more intensive, individualized support to improve their behavioral and academic outcomes. Tier 3 strategies work for students with developmental disabilities, autism, emotional and behavioral disorders, and students with no diagnostic label at all.*¹⁴

¹⁰ [Effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports on child behavior problems.](#)

¹¹ [Extension of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports from the School to the Bus: A Case Study.](#)

¹² See [Center on PBIS – Tier 1.](#)

¹³ See [Center on PBIS – Tier 2.](#)

¹⁴ See [Center on PBIS – Tier 3.](#)

The Center on PBIS has published an example of a schoolwide [PBIS expectations matrix](#) for expected student behaviors in various areas, including on the bus. The example is based upon the “Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe” tenants of PBIS.

Authors Jamie Goldin and Dr. Sara McDaniel argue in [Reducing Discipline and Safety Issues: A District-Wide Bus-PBIS Initiative](#) that although maintenance of discipline on the school bus poses unique challenges (minimal training for drivers; only one adult to supervise), it is still possible to address student behaviors proactively “using researched-based interventions that can be extended from the school,” such as PBIS.¹⁵ The authors identify five steps for supporting student behavior through the implementation of a bus-PBIS (B-PBIS) framework. These include establishing leadership, creating the framework, training, implementation, and monitoring/regeneration.¹⁶

Interventions for Inappropriate Bus Behavior

Restorative justice and restorative practices help create and reinforce safe, inclusive, and supportive spaces in schools. As noted by the Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law,

*[T]he purpose of the [restorative approach to discipline] process is to restore someone’s sense of belonging with in the school or classroom committee ... Restorative practices, when broadly and consistently implemented, will promote and strengthen positive school culture and enhance pro-social relationships within the school community.*¹⁷

Restorative approaches focus on:

1. Proactively building community and strengthening the relationships between students, teachers, and administrators.
2. Addressing student discipline issues by focusing on who or what was impacted and how harm can be repaired.

Through restorative approaches, students are supported to address and take accountability for their behavior and to resolve conflicts. Student behaviors are viewed as opportunities to teach social-emotional and conflict resolution skills rather than incidents that require students to be punished.¹⁸

Restorative approaches can be equally as effective in the context of student transportation as in the classroom. Strong relationships among students, the driver, and any other adults on the bus are a necessary precursor, as these approaches rely on shifting student mindset to view misbehavior “as an offense against people and relationships, not just rule-breaking.”¹⁹ Some examples of restorative practices that can be used to address misconduct on the school bus include conferences, restorative questions, peer mediation, and helping with cleanup or reconstruction of anything that was damaged.

¹⁵ [Reducing Discipline and Safety Issues: A District-Wide Bus-PBIS Initiative](#).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ [The Restorative Approach and its Strategies](#).

¹⁸ See, e.g., [School-Wide Restorative Practices: Step-by-Step](#).

¹⁹ [The Restorative Approach and its Strategies](#) (quoting the San Francisco Unified School District, Administrator’s Guide).

This chapter on [Restorative Practices in the Classroom](#) by the International Institute for Restorative Practices includes an in-depth discussion on how a restorative conference was effectively used to resolve a significant harassment problem on a school bus.

The following links provide resources, guidance, and research related to the implementation of restorative practices:

- International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School: [Restorative Practices in Schools -- K-12 Education](#)
- University of Chicago Education Lab: [Evaluation](#) on restorative practices within Chicago Public Schools
- Learning Policy Institute: [Improving Student Outcomes Through Restorative Practices](#)
- RAND Corp.: [Restorative Practices Help Reduce Student Suspensions](#)
- National Center for School Safety: [Restorative Practices at a Glance](#)
- SchoolSafety.gov: [Find Resources to Create a Safer School](#)

Traditional discipline measures may be needed to address more serious instances of misconduct. However, it is important to recognize that school bus suspensions, while not technically an exclusionary discipline measure, can function as exclusionary discipline if the student has no other way to get to and from school. Pursuant to Illinois law, each school district's required policy for makeup work by suspended pupils must include pupils suspended from the school bus who do not have alternate transportation to school. The law places the responsibility on the parent or guardian to notify school officials when they have no alternate transportation options (105 ILCS 5/10-22.6(b-30)).

Special note: Public schools may not withhold play time from students in kindergarten through Grade 5 as a disciplinary or punitive action, except when the student's participation poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others (105 ILCS 5/27-6.3(e)).

Strategies for School Bus Bullying

The [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)²⁰ has developed a two-module training course to empower school communities to address bullying on school buses. The course “is designed for trainers to assist school bus drivers in cultivating meaningful relationships with students while creating a positive climate on the school bus.”

Module 1 - See Something. Do Something: Intervening in Bullying Behavior

Addresses how to identify and effectively intervene when bullying occurs (including tips on de-escalation).

Module 2 - Creating a Supportive Bus Climate: Preventing Bullying

Considers effective strategies to build a school bus climate where bullying is less likely to occur.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#)

HMH: K-12 Adaptive Learning Company, [Using PBIS on the School Bus to Manage Student Behaviors](#)

Intervention Central, [School-Wide Strategies for Managing ... BUS CONDUCT](#)

²⁰ The contents of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments website were assembled under contracts from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Supportive Schools to the American Institutes for Research.