

Bus Referrals - It's That Time Of Year!



Each year school bus drivers, students, teachers and administrators start counting the days until summer vacation begins. Just like last spring, there is another little issue that also begins to raise that not so fun head - Accumulated bus referrals! Maybe it's just the nicer weather, or a little cabin fever that sets in before spring arrives; but every year about this time during the driving season, complaints about student behaviors begin to be on the rise. For the first 5 months, of the school year drivers have diligently reviewed the bus safety rules many times, and have worked through a wide range of behavior issues. Regular route drivers have held many face-to-face conversations with riders, changed seating assignments and unfortunately have had to write one or more of those dreaded school bus referrals. The majority of the bus riders are following the bus rules, and enjoying the daily bus ride to and from school.

Each district has board policy that clearly spells out what steps are required to be taken before the removal of any student from a school bus. All riders are expected to be aware of the bus rider rules, and understand what will happen if multiple infractions occur. Districts inform and expect all parents/guardians to discuss with their children the rules and the consequences for violations of the rules. Serious issues pertaining to weapons, dangerous objects, "look-a-likes," and other items used as a weapon are not allowed in school, on school grounds, at school events, or in school vehicles are in most cases covered under this same board policy.

Using a simple formula, if you have a student that is at his/her 6th bus referral, it is time to remove this rider from the bus for a serious amount of time and possibly the remainder of the year. When a student reaches the 6th referral they have had assigned seats on several occasions, they have been redirected by the driver at least 5 to 6 times for every referral for a total of 25 to 30 conversations about changing their behavior. At some point, any rider that needs this much redirection endangers other students or him/herself, or makes it basically impossible for the driver to complete a safe trip. The consequences need to be advanced to coincide with the seriousness of the offense.

For the remaining weeks left of this school year, it is time well spent to place an emphasis on effective student bus rider management. Make every effort to minimize the number of referrals by the use of, "Positive Reinforcement or Student Restitution." It is never a good strategy to use the bus referral as the first warning. That is not the way the process is designed to function at any school district. When you have problems with a student, continue to begin first with communication, reviewing the bus rules with the students and change seating arrangements or assign seats as needed.

When possible, provide students with a choice of a referral or to do something nice. Giving students a choice of a bus referral or a consequence is a form of student-to-student restitution. This could be a sensible alternative to the dreaded "bus referral." No, realistically it will not eliminate the bus referral entirely. There will always be times when there is no alternative to writing a bus referral due to serious student behavior that may arise on your bus.

Make every effort to correct the student's behavior on the bus before you write him/her up. When you do write up a student, most districts require that you inform the student of the referral and the reason for the referral before they leave the bus. Like earlier in the school year, it is still a good idea to remember to think before reacting to any student situation. Work together with riders to create a positive and friendly environment inside your school bus. It is very important that all drivers and bus associates try not to play favorites, be consistent and maintain the same rules from one bus to another. That creates a fair and understandable working environment for all students that transfer between buses.

All provisions of the "School Discipline Policy" and the "School Bus Rules" will apply to all students transported in a school-owned vehicle. Using these basic guidelines, it is the driver's responsibility to safely manage his/her bus, enforce the district bus rules and school board policy. On some days that is not as easy as it sounds. Giving students a choice does provide drivers with a positive alternative for working with bus riders to solve daily minor infractions. Keep an open mind - ask yourself, is the student management strategy you're currently using on your bus working effectively? If not, then having students make a choice, when possible, is not a bad idea, perhaps it could work on your bus as well.

The majority of students will make the right choices and learn how to resolve their own problems with just a minimal amount of adult redirection and guidance. The ultimate goal for everyone is to provide each student with a safe and friendly ride to and from school.