

# Best Practice - Student Management

Chris Darling, IPTA Executive Director



Student management continues to be a challenge for school bus drivers, teachers, and parents all across this nation. Each of them manage children in different environments: inside the cabin of a moving school bus, classrooms, playgrounds, lunchrooms, and at home. However some of the same management strategies still can be effective at each location.

After the Covid-19 years studying at home, students are still adjusting to the more restrictive rules on the school bus and in school buildings. It is understandable that children may struggle a little separating the comforts of home and family, and now dealing with a rambunctious group of new friends or perceived potential adversaries that they find on the school bus. With a little preparation and the right attitude, managing them doesn't have to be that hard.



During the school year it is not uncommon to add a new student to your assigned school bus route. This new rider may spring onto the school bus excited and ready for this new adventure and some will be reluctant and have some tears, and often cling to a parent not wanting to board the bus. At school bus stops, your stop arm is extended, red lights are flashing and you have traffic stopped in both directions, if you're a substitute driver you may still be in the process of learning everyone's names, and making sure they have boarded the correct school bus. You also are managing the students that have boarded the bus at the earlier bus stops.

Sounds a little hectic, and on top of all that you also have to diligently attempt to remain on the school bus schedule provided to you by the school district. At this point the reluctant child outside the door of your school bus becomes an additional challenge. How you handle the situation sets the tone for the child, the parent and for all of your riders for the remainder of the school year.

There is that old saying that is still true today, "People may not remember what you said, but they do remember how you made them feel!" That still rings true today. In this situation no matter how stressful and hectic your day has been up to this point it's a **best practice** to take the time to do a little nurturing by saying something encouraging like, "I know you can do it!" and "You're going to have a great day!" is a very important investment of your time. If they have a stuffed animal with them ask them its name, sometimes that little connection will get them to talk, and feel a little less threatened by the big noisy yellow school bus, and yes, the scary bus driver. Be reassuring and let the student and the parent know that you can assign them a seat with another student that is their age, or possibly from their school to sit with them until they feel more

A school bus driver's attitude has a strong influence on how children view riding the school bus. Stay positive, children pick up on their school bus drivers' feelings, react to them, and often magnify them. When you have time while waiting at a transfer point or during unloading time at a school it is a good idea, or another **best practice** to review the district bus rules with your bus riders. This is not a one-time expectation, the rules need to be reviewed a couple times each month, and more often when needed. We all know as adults that we should not speed in our cars, but from time to time we need to be reminded. It's the same with children sometimes they also need to be reminded more frequently of the bus rules. School bus drivers can minimize the number of referrals on their assigned bus route by using positive bus rule reinforcement.





**What do we mean by positive rule reinforcement?** To start with, never use the written bus referral as the first warning; that is not an effective child management strategy. The strategy of using the bus referral for a first time offence removes the ability for you as the driver to build a long term positive relationship with the student. The goal is to make riding the bus enjoyable and safe for all your riders and for you the driver. When you have problems, start with nicely reviewing the bus rules with the students and change seating arrangements or move them to what is currently called an assigned seat.

Maybe change the name to the learning seat taking away the negative connotation of the dreaded assigned seat. Then use the learning seat to take the time when you can to review the rules and discuss why the rules are necessary for everyone's safety. If you are not successful and have tried several child management strategies and behavior redirections, you still have other options at your disposal before issuing the student a bus referral. When possible provide students with a choice of a referral or to do something nice, apologies to another rider is always a good beginning. Referring to the earlier speeding example; which would you rather have, a speeding ticket or a warning? Giving students a choice of a bus referral or a consequence is a form of student-to-student restitution. What is Restitution?



**Restitution** is an innovative approach to discipline based on the recognition that young people will make mistakes. By focusing on how young people can correct their mistakes, restitution emphasizes solutions rather than punishment. Restitution teaches students self-discipline, a respect for the needs of others, and helps them hone the skills needed to accept personal responsibility for one's actions. Restitution is a positive approach for students to learn problem-solving strategies they can use for a lifetime.

It is a **best practice** to make every effort to correct the student's behavior on the bus before you get to the last resort of issuing the student a written school bus referral.

Remember to think before you react to any student situation. Continually work to keep a positive environment inside your school bus. It is very important that all drivers, and bus associates are consistent and maintain the same rules from one bus to another. Students can make the right choices, and learn how to resolve their own problems with just a minimal amount of adult redirection and guidance.

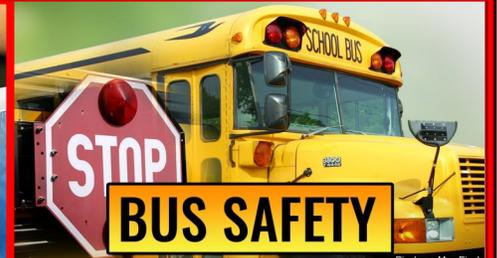
Note: When you do write up a student, it is a **best practice**, and most school districts require that you inform the student of the referral and the reason for the referral, before they leave the bus.



These strategies work with many students and can be a sensible alternative to the dreaded "bus referral." 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. With this approach and a friendly smile working with the students and driving a school bus will be more enjoyable for the students and the driver.

## BUS SAFETY UPDATE!

If a school bus is equipped with lap/shoulder belts, students must wear those belts at all times while the bus is in motion. State law now requires all new school buses to have these seatbelts moving forward.



You never have to throw seeds to grow weeds. You do need to throw seeds to plant positivity!