

BUS OPERATORS AND ATTENDANTS

THE DAY STARTS AND ENDS WITH YOU



HOW BUS PERSONNEL SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF ALL STUDENTS

Every day, approximately 96,000 students in the Montgomery County Public Schools board a school bus in the morning. At that moment, their day of learning has begun. Though the greatest concern and focus is and always will be safety, bus operators and attendants are in a unique position to affect student achievement by the quality of their interactions and commitment to students.

Every employee is involved in the mission of the Montgomery County Public Schools. The core goal is to improve teaching and learning for all students. Every job is important. This is clear in the school system's strategic plan, *Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence*. The plan describes how employees work together on a common mission. This brochure illustrates the role of bus operators and attendants.

SAFETY FIRST

"All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free and conducive to learning."— *Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence*.

Research has shown that a student's environment has an enormous impact on his or her learning. That environment begins with the morning bus ride, when drivers and attendants teach and model procedures to ensure the safety of all students. In such a protected atmosphere, students begin their day with the knowledge that they are cared for and valued.

As part of their commitment to safety and the preservation of children's health and well-being, bus personnel must—

- convey important safety procedures and rules that become lifelong skills,
- engage in safe, courteous driving to prevent accidents and student injury,
- be able to alter their driving techniques in response to changing traffic and weather conditions,
- know certain details about the condition of special education students in case of a crisis,
- manage crises in a fast, effective manner—both on the bus and on the road, and
- be able to provide basic first aid and deal safely with blood-borne pathogens.



A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

“Each area is involved in detailed strategic planning to provide the highest quality products, resources, and services in support of high-quality teaching and learning.”— Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence.

In traveling to and from school each day, students make important transitions. The success of these transitions can be greatly affected by the tone set by bus operators and attendants. A calm and orderly bus ride can have a big influence on a student's attitude toward school and homework. Such a positive experience on the bus can help—



- improve readiness to learn in the morning, and
- foster the positive attitude needed to complete homework.

EXTENDING THE CLASSROOM

“MCPS promotes character education and creates and maintains learning environments in all schools that are safe and conducive to learning.”— Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence.

While many people think that learning begins and ends in the classroom, the daily bus rides provide unique and significant opportunities to further instruction.

Under the guidelines set by the bus operator, students in the regular educational program—



- practice and reinforce the principles learned in character education, and
- learn and practice basic safety procedures.

For special education students, many of whom have long daily commutes to specialized programs, the bus ride itself is an important part of their learning. Bus operators and attendants—

- teach and reinforce basic safety rules and appropriate behavior,
- teach safety skills that complement the Fundamental Life Skills courses, and
- carry out key elements in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

DID YOU KNOW ...

- MCPS has about 1,600 bus operators and attendants, who transport about 96,000 students daily?
- County bus operators drive a total of 19 million miles per year?
- MCPS has the lowest accident rate of any school system in the state—only 3.2 preventable accidents per million miles driven?
- MCPS has 1,227 buses, the eighth largest public school system-owned fleet in the nation?
- MCPS bus personnel handle 1,100 routes daily?

SUPPORTING ENHANCEMENTS

"MCPS provides alternate models to the traditional school day in order for students to earn high school credit." — Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence.

Through complex scheduling, many bus operators and attendants make possible a variety of afterschool and summer activities that support and enhance the curriculum. Bus personnel transport students for—

- magnet programs and individual instructional courses at other schools and centers within the county and beyond county and state lines
- extended day programs,
- special education programs,
- field trips, and
- events for school athletic teams.

In each instance, the atmosphere established by bus personnel can profoundly affect students' attitudes toward their chosen activity. For magnet and special education students, who often face a long daily ride, a good rapport with bus personnel can help make the commute a positive part of their school day. For students on field trips and other activities, the bus ride can affect their enthusiasm for the activity.

In establishing good communications with all children, bus personnel must draw on their abilities to respond to a variety of students with sensitivity and understanding.

A PERSONAL EFFORT

"MCPS creates and maintains a learning environment that recognizes and supports a diverse student population."— Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence.

An essential requirement of every bus operator and attendant is a love of children. Each day bus personnel must bring to their jobs the same sensitivity, patience, and caring required of teachers and other staff who have direct contact with students.

In addition, bus personnel must have—

- a variety of interpersonal skills to gain the respect of students—a key element in maintaining a positive, safe environment on the bus;
- an ability to convey caring and respect for all students;
- an ability to adjust their responses to communicate effectively with students of different ages—from preschool to high school;
- effective problem-solving skills to deal with any conflicts that may arise between students; and
- basic first-aid skills and quick thinking to handle crises—both inside the bus and on the road.



A LASTING COMMUNICATION

"MCPS fosters participation and involvement with the greater community to promote healthy children and families." — Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence.

More than most other employees, bus personnel interact with a variety of different "communities" every day—students, parents, school staff, and the general public. In all cases, bus operators and attendants must have and use excellent communication and problem-solving skills.



- Students:** First and foremost are the students. Bus operators and attendants cope with a variety of issues each day—for example, a young child reluctant to leave a parent, a student having a conflict with another student, a child who is unhappy or ill, a student engaging in aggressive or dangerous behavior, or a student in crisis. In each case, bus personnel must respond in an effective manner to resolve the issue or to contain the problem until additional help arrives or the matter can be turned over to school staff.
- Parents:** Interactions with parents often are required, particularly when dealing with problems concerning their children or understanding the changing needs of special education students. Through their responses and skills, bus staff inspire a sense of confidence among parents.
- School staff:** Though bus personnel must take immediate action to preserve the safety of all students, and call emergency personnel when necessary, bus operators and attendants report serious issues to school staff. This communication helps school staff arrive at an appropriate plan for the students concerned.
- General public:** Bus operators must cope daily with the challenges of negotiating crowded suburban streets in a safe, timely fashion. Their responses to other drivers, their knowledge of local laws, and their skills in operating a heavy vehicle on narrow neighborhood roads as well as on busy thoroughfares must be excellent.

As staff members who travel 19 million miles of local roads a year, bus personnel have more contact with the general public than anyone else in MCPS. Their behavior while behind the wheel can greatly affect public opinion toward the school system. In that sense, bus personnel are perhaps the most visible ambassadors for MCPS.

THE BIG PICTURE

In the complex process of educating children of all ages, races, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, and personalities, every staff member plays an important role. Bus personnel, by their sustained contact with students, hold within their grasp the possibility of having a positive, lasting effect on students. Bus operators and attendants serve as constant adult figures in the daily life of students. Such consistent contact can be a critical factor in encouraging students to be eager to attend school and eager to learn.



OUR CALL TO ACTION: A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Our Call to Action: The Pursuit of Excellence was adopted by the Board of Education in June 2003. This strategic plan guides the work of all MCPS schools, offices, and employees in their commitment to achieving specific goals for student success through a detailed system of strategies, initiatives, and implementation schedules.



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