



Illinois Department of Transportation

Division of Traffic Safety

1340 North 9th Street / P.O. Box 19212 / Springfield, Illinois / 62794-9212

September 9, 2011

Dear Illinois School Bus Operator:

School is once again in session throughout Illinois and it is time to focus on school bus safety. It is important that motorists help protect our children by being especially careful while driving near schools. Students should be reminded to avoid the danger zones around a school bus and to be particularly careful when crossing in front of a school bus. Students should be instructed to always make sure that the school bus driver can see them when walking near a school bus. Most importantly, school bus drivers must remember that school bus safety begins with them. They must always be focused and alert. A momentary lapse in concentration could result in tragedy.

The following new laws from the 97th General Assembly impact school transportation. Please note the summaries below focus on how these laws impact the Department of Transportation's programs or regulations and do not address the new laws' impact on any regulation or law implemented by the Secretary of State or the State Board of Education.

Public Act 97-0378, effective August 15, 2011, amends the definition of a multifunction school activity bus (MFSAB). The new definition allows an MFSAB to transport 11 or more persons and no longer limits the passenger capacity to 15. **No amendments were made to the use of multifunction school activity buses.**

Public Act 97-0224, effective July 28, 2011, requires first division vehicles, including a taxi which is used for a purpose **that requires a school bus driver permit**, to be inspected at an Illinois Official Testing Station every six months or 10,000 miles, whichever occurs first. **NOTE:** A first division vehicle is defined as any vehicle designed to transport 10 passengers or less, including the driver.

Other issues to address:

Overcrowded School Buses

Illinois law requires a school bus' passenger capacity be marked on the exterior surface of the bus. That capacity provides only 13 inches for each student seated on a 39-inch-wide seat. Illinois law also prohibits any school bus to be operated if it is occupied by more passengers than what is posted on the exterior of the bus. While state law allows a school bus to be filled to its maximum passenger capacity, 13 inches is sometimes not enough space for an older student. (One wheelchair counts for four designated seating positions.)

Industry standards recommend three students to a seat if passengers are in grades K through 5, and two per seat in grades 9 through 12. For students in grades 6 through 8, school districts vary the number of passengers depending on the size of the students.

The Department of Transportation strongly urges school districts to follow industry standards when determining how many students to transport on a school bus. Compartmentalization is key to the safety of students on a school bus and compartmentalization is only effective if each student is provided adequate space on the seat. The child must be completely protected by the seat back or guard barrier in front of his or her seat. At no time has the Department of Transportation indicated that this capacity recommendation is mandated by law. Districts and contractors are advised that this is a recommendation for safety reasons.

School Bus Brake Inspections

The Department requires school bus brakes to be visually inspected every 10,000 miles or once a year (whichever occurs first). This brake inspection is separate from and in addition to the 10,000 mile or semi-annual safety inspection performed at an Illinois Official Testing Station. The brake components must be inspected to verify the manufacturer's specifications are being met or exceeded at the time of the brake inspection. A School Bus Brake Inspection Report (SBBR) must be completed for each school bus inspected and a valid SBBR must be presented at the time of the safety inspection performed at an Illinois Official Testing Station. Additional requirements and certain exceptions also apply (see the Department's administrative rulemaking at www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/092/09200447sections.html). The School Bus Brake Inspection Report can now be found online at www.dot.il.gov/trafficsafety/tsforms.html (see form #TS 2258 under Commercial Vehicle Safety).

If you have any questions, contact Dan Thompson at the Illinois Department of Transportation's Division of Traffic Safety at 217/785-3046 or by email at dan.f.thompson@illinois.gov. Please have a safe school bus transportation year!

Sincerely,



Michael R. Stout
Director