

South Carolina
School Bus
Driving Procedures

Section IV

School Bus Driving Procedures

A. Loading and Unloading

School bus safety involves much more than the period of time when students are riding on the bus. It entails the entire trip from home to school and back again, including the times when students are walking to and from the bus stop, waiting for the bus, crossing the road to get to and from the bus, and getting on and off the bus.

You face a tremendous responsibility when loading and unloading students on and off the school bus. **It is at this time that students are in the greatest danger of being injured or killed.**

- You must constantly watch for other motorists, who often ignore the laws.
- You must carefully monitor students as they cross the road and as they are getting on and off the bus.
- You must be especially alert to what is happening in the “danger zones” around the bus.

THE DANGERS OF LOADING AND UNLOADING

Loading and unloading is the **most dangerous time** for bus drivers and students:

- An average of thirty school-aged children (ages five through nineteen) die in school bus-related crashes in the United States each year.
- Nearly three out of every four of those children are killed outside the bus, as pedestrians during loading and unloading.
- Nearly half of all school-aged pedestrians killed in school bus-related crashes are five to seven years old.
- Most are killed during the day and in clear weather. (Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

BUS ROUTES AND STOPS

Bus stops are selected by district school officials and are subject to approval by the State Department of Education’s Office of Transportation. It is important that you understand the requirements and regulations governing routing and stops.

- If you ever start to feel that a bus stop is unsafe, notify your transportation supervisor *in writing* as soon as possible.

Laws and Regulations Governing Routing and Bus Stops

- A. Bus drivers must never change their routes or regular stops except in an emergency or detour. Any changes must be reported to school and transportation officials as soon as possible.
- B. Bus stops must be at least **two-tenths of a mile** or more apart.

- C. Bus stops should be made where there is an unobstructed view for at least 600 feet in either direction. If a bus stop is necessary on hills or curves where sight distance is less than 600 feet, motorists must be warned of the bus stop. "School Bus Stop Ahead" signs must be located at a point at least 600 feet in each direction of the stop. **Bus stops should never be placed on blind curves, steep grades, or near the crest of a hill.**
- D. In emergency bad weather, the driver can stop at the safest point nearest the house of each passenger on the regular route if he or she has at least 600 feet of visibility in both directions. However, the bus cannot leave the regular route.
- E. Bus stops should never be made within **100 feet of an intersection.**
- F. Buses cannot provide transportation for students living within **one and a half miles of the school**, except under certain conditions made known to the driver by the school official.
- G. Buses shall be routed in the most direct way over publicly maintained highways and streets, to provide service within **three-tenths of a mile** of each child who qualifies for transportation service.

Stopping for a School Bus That Is Loading or Unloading

- A. When a school bus is stopped and has **red lights flashing**, all vehicles **approaching from either direction** must stop if the bus is on a two-lane highway.
- B. When a school bus is stopped on any multi-lane highway and has **red lights flashing**, all vehicles **approaching from the rear** must stop.
- C. When a school bus is stopped and has **amber lights flashing**, vehicles **approaching from the rear** cannot pass.

What to do if a vehicle illegally passes your bus:

1. Record the license plate number, if possible.
2. Identify the driver and vehicle, if possible.
3. Write down the date, time, and location of the violation.
4. Report this information to the principal and/or your supervisor.

SEATING CHARTS

Establish a student seating chart according to district policy. Your supervisor can provide you with a state-approved seating chart form. Most districts recommend that you set up your seating chart according to your loading and unloading sequence. The center of the bus provides the safest ride. Therefore, most experts recommend that students be taught to fill up the center of the bus first, leaving the front and back part of the bus for students to be loaded last and unloaded first. Seat student helpers near the exits. Principals and teachers can provide help with student names and other pertinent information.

A seating chart is necessary for maintaining order on the bus, reducing vandalism, and assisting substitute drivers. It is also an essential tool for accounting for students in the event of a crash.

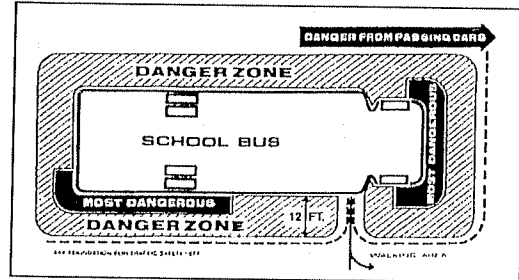
You may want to write students' first names on paper or index cards and tape them above the windows above the seats. This helps students locate and remember their assigned seats.

THE DANGER ZONES

The danger zones are the areas within **twelve feet** of the bus around all sides. This is the area most difficult or impossible for the driver to see from the driver's seat.

The **most** dangerous areas are

- across the front of the bus,
- along the right side of the bus toward the back, and
- any area in the back of the bus.



These areas are so dangerous that they are called the **death zones**.

PROCEDURE FOR LOADING PASSENGERS

1. Check **all** your mirrors and the traffic.
2. Slow down gradually and tap the brakes.
3. Turn on the amber traffic warning lights 100 to 300 feet before the bus stop.
4. Stop in the right lane. Do not stop on the shoulder.
5. Stop **12 to 15 feet** before you reach the waiting students.
6. Apply parking brake and shift the gear selector to *neutral*, keeping your foot on the service brake.
7. Hold students at the stop by holding up your hand.
8. Check mirrors for ongoing traffic.
9. Open the door if the traffic is clear.
10. Check your mirrors for the stop arm and the traffic.
11. Count the students at the bus stop.
12. If you have students who must cross the road to board the bus
 - A. Load any noncrossing students first. Once they are safely on the bus, give your full attention to the students who are crossing the road.
 - B. Check your mirrors and the traffic.
 - C. When it is safe, give the students the **signal to cross**. This signal must be clear and used consistently so as not to confuse students and motorists. **Never stick your arm out the window to signal students.**
 - (1) If it is dark outside, turn on your dome light so that students can see your signal.
 - (2) While looking at students, make the palm-up "stop" hand-signal with your right hand, extending your right arm fully.

(3) Next, make eye contact with the students, point to them with your right hand, and direct them across the road with a slow sweeping motion of your right arm across the windshield.

D. Students should cross at least 12 feet in front of the bus. If you recognize a dangerous situation and want students to stop and return to the side of the road, tap on your horn.

13. Recount the students as they load the bus.

14. Check to see that all students are seated and accounted for.

15. Check all your mirrors and the blind spots around the front and side of the bus.

16. Close the door.

17. After closing the door of a **transit bus**

A. Activate the hazard lights and, while you are waiting for the child-safety alarm signal to end, check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors.

B. Place the gear selector in *drive* and release the parking brake, keeping your foot on the service brake.

C. Check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors again.

D. Accelerate carefully and continue your route.

E. Deactivate the hazard lights after you are under way.

After closing the door of a **conventional bus**

A. Check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors while you are waiting for the stop arm and the crossing gate to return to their original positions.

B. Place the gear selector in *drive* and release the parking brake, keeping your foot on the service brake.

C. Check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors again.

D. Accelerate carefully and continue your route.

PROCEDURE FOR UNLOADING PASSENGERS

1. Check your mirrors and the traffic.

2. Slow down gradually and tap the brakes.

3. Turn on the amber traffic warning lights from 100 to 300 feet in advance of the bus stop.

4. Stop in the right lane.

5. Apply the parking brake and shift the gear selector to *neutral*, keeping your foot on the service brake.

6. Hold the students on the bus.

7. Check your mirrors and the traffic again.

8. Open the door to activate the stop arm, the crossing gate, and the red flashing lights.

9. Check the mirrors to see the stop arm and to be sure that the traffic has stopped.

10. Count the students as they unload, and count them again as they move away from the bus.
11. Direct students needing to cross in front of the bus to position themselves. They should remain on the side of the road positioned 12 feet from front of the bus. **They are to wait for your signal before crossing.**
 - A. Check your mirrors and the traffic.
 - B. Signal students to move across the road if it is safe. Teach students to **look to the left, then right, and then left again** as they get to the edge of the bus, where they can see in both directions. **NEVER LET STUDENTS RUN ACROSS THE ROAD.**
 - C. If it is not safe, signal the students to return to the right side of the road and repeat steps A and B.
12. Determine that all students are accounted for and safely away from the bus.
13. Check all your mirrors and then close the door.
14. After closing the door of a **transit bus**
 - A. Activate the hazard lights and, while you are waiting for the child-safety alarm signal to end, check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors.
 - B. Place the gear selector in *drive* and release the parking brake, keeping your foot on the service brake.
 - C. Check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors again.
 - D. Accelerate carefully and continue your route.
 - E. Deactivate the hazard lights after you are under way.

After closing the door of a **conventional bus**

- A. Check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors while you are waiting for the stop arm and the crossing gate to return to their original positions.
- B. Place the gear selector in drive and release the parking brake, keeping your foot on the service brake.
- C. Check your side mirrors and crossover mirrors again.
- D. Accelerate carefully and continue your route.

SAFE PRACTICES, LOADING AND UNLOADING

- **Be on time.** Your being late or early at a stop can create safety hazards.
- When you are on time at a stop and a student is not in sight, take a good look around to be sure that the student is not approaching the stop. If the student is not in sight, continue on your route.
- **Carefully monitor students as they walk down the bus steps and exit the vehicle.** Make certain that such things as their backpacks, drawstrings, and loose clothing do not become hooked on the handrail or stuck in the door. **Each year students are killed or severely injured because drivers have not noticed that children's clothing is attached to the bus.**

- During the loading and unloading procedures, use your turn signals only to indicate a lane change, not to indicate that you are making a stop.
- Use the eight-light warning system for loading and unloading on the road ONLY. These lights are not used while loading and unloading on school grounds or in parking lots during field trips.
- When checking your mirrors for traffic during the loading and unloading procedures, be aware that motorists may not stop. Tap your horn if necessary. Be sure to check vehicles behind the first stopped vehicle, and look out for any hint of movement toward your stopped bus. Pay special attention to your right rearview mirrors, to be sure that no vehicle is trying to pass your stopped bus on the *right* side.
- Be especially careful to monitor the loading and unloading of preschoolers and other young children. Their small size makes them harder to see, and their young age means they tend to be inexperienced and impulsive. They are, therefore, especially vulnerable to danger around the bus and/or in the roadway. Follow your district policy regarding regulations for authorized persons bringing young children to the bus stop in the morning and meeting the bus in the afternoon.
- Do not allow students or any other passengers to stand in the stairwell or beside the driver's seat.
- Do not allow students to stand up before the bus has been secured and you have signaled them to do so.
- Do not allow students *or a bystander* to approach the side of the bus within the 12 feet area during loading and unloading.
- **Avoid backing at a bus stop.** If you pass a student at a stop, let the student come to you. If the route requires you to turn around at a bus stop, the students who get on or off at that stop should be on the bus while you back it. **Load students before backing. Back before unloading.**
- Drop students off only at designated stops, unless a school official or your supervisor informs you of a change. Parents must submit such requests for changes in writing to school officials. You may *not* make a change based upon the oral request of a parent.
- Keep in mind that the after-school run is the most dangerous because students who have probably been sitting quietly for much of their day are now ready to move and are less likely to pay attention.
- **Do not try to take care of discipline or other problems during loading and unloading.** Loading or unloading requires all of your concentration. Do not take your eyes off of what is happening as students get on and off the bus.
- If you are unable to account for a student outside the bus
 1. Secure the bus.
 2. Activate the hazard lights.
 3. Turn engine off, and take the key with you.
 4. Check around and underneath the bus.

EMERGENCY VEHICLES

When an emergency vehicle approaches during loading or unloading, the situation requires special caution. There are two possible scenarios:

- A. The bus has students on board and is approaching a bus stop with warning lights flashing or has just stopped in preparation to unload students. No students are outside the bus. An emergency vehicle is approaching from either direction. Use the following procedure:
 1. Come to a complete stop.
 2. Keep students inside the bus.
 3. Deactivate the warning light system.
 4. Activate the four-way hazard lights. This indicates to the emergency vehicle driver that there are no students on the ground and that you have yielded the right-of-way.
 5. Once the emergency vehicle passes by, resume the unloading process.
- B. The bus is stopped for loading or unloading, with amber or red lights activated, **and there are students outside the bus, either on the ground or in the roadway.** An emergency vehicle, approaching from either direction, is required to stop. Use the following procedure:
 1. Remain stopped with the eight-light warning system in operation and complete the loading or unloading process.
 2. As soon as all loading students are on the bus or all unloading students are clear of the bus and the roadway, deactivate the eight-light warning system.
 3. Activate the four-way hazard lights.
 4. Remain stopped until the emergency vehicle has proceeded by.

SAFETY RULES FOR STUDENTS

Students must follow safe practices and procedures when loading and unloading the bus. At the start of the school year, you must teach students what you expect of them and remind them of the safety rules as necessary.

1. Be on time at the bus stop.
2. Never run to catch the bus.
3. Stay 8 to 10 giant steps (12 feet) away from the road while waiting for the bus.
4. Move toward the bus only when the driver signals it is safe to do so.
5. When crossing the road to board the bus, remain on the left side of the road until the driver motions that it is safe to cross. Check traffic. Walk straight across the road at least 12 feet in front of the bus.
6. Go directly to your seat upon boarding.
7. Stay in your seat until the driver signals it is OK to stand.
8. Keep all papers and other belongings inside your book bag or backpack.

9. Watch that backpacks, drawstrings, and loose clothing do not get caught on the handrail or in the door.
10. Look back toward the rear before stepping off the bus to make sure no vehicle is trying to pass the bus on the right.
11. Once you are off the bus, move at least 12 feet from the bus immediately. Students planning to cross the road should walk forward 12 feet to the front side of the bus.
12. Wait for the bus driver's signal to cross the road.
13. When the driver signals, walk forward and stop again in front of the driver but near enough to the road that you can see in both directions.
14. Never walk behind the bus.
15. Never get closer than 12 feet to the side of the bus.
16. Go home immediately, staying clear of traffic.
17. Never try to pick up something you have dropped. Tell the bus driver, and he or she will get it.
18. Help to look after the safety of small children.

B. Railroad Crossings

School buses are built to protect riders from injury in most crashes. However, there is at least one instance in which the school bus is not a safe place at all: when it is in a collision with a train.

A train cannot stop quickly. A train cannot swerve to avoid a school bus. Because of the potential for massive injuries and deaths, **it is up to you** to protect students from train collisions. At all railroad crossings you must assume that "ANYTIME IS TRAIN TIME." You must always follow proper procedures

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW AT ALL RAILROAD CROSSINGS

- A. You must stop at any railroad grade crossing where signs or road markings remain, even if the crossing is no longer in use. *You must stop even if no students are on board.* Use the following procedure:
 1. Move to the right-most lane in multilane highways well before you get to the crossing.
 2. Check your mirrors.
 3. Turn on hazard lights at least 100 to 300 feet before the crossing.
 4. Stop smoothly at least 15 feet, but not more than 50 feet, from the nearest rail.
 5. Turn off all heaters and fans.
 6. Require students to be quiet. Use a signal that you reserve only for railroad crossings to remind them.

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7. While you are stopped, look and listen for any rail traffic. Open the window to your left and open the service door to look and listen.
 8. If you do not hear or see a train, close the service door, and proceed across the track.
 9. Deactivate the hazard lights once the bus has cleared the tracks.
- B. If the warning lights are flashing at a crossing but you see no indications of a train approaching, **DO NOT CROSS. It is illegal to do so.** Call the 800 number posted at the crossing, or call your transportation supervisor. You may be rerouted, or the train engineer may be contacted. You may cross the track with warning lights flashing only under the direction of a railroad engineer or traffic enforcement official.
- C. At **multiple-track crossings**, the number under the cross-buck sign shows how many sets of tracks are at that crossing. **Make only one stop at such crossings.** However, take extra care. Once the train passes, always wait until the tracks become completely clear and visible in both directions before proceeding. A second train could be approaching from the opposite direction.
- D. Never drive onto a railroad track until you are sure there is enough room ahead for your entire bus to clear the tracks completely. You must know the length, width, and overall size of your bus in relation to any railroad crossing you meet.
- E. **If your bus is on the tracks when the gates begin to lower, keep moving. DO NOT STOP.** It is safer to move forward, even if it means breaking the guardrails.

An Approaching Train

Never try to cross a track if you see a train approaching, even if the warning lights and gates have not yet been activated. If there is any indication of an approaching train, use the following procedure:

1. Set the parking brake, move the gear selector to *neutral*, and keep your right foot on the service brake while you wait for the train to pass. You may cross the track only after the train has passed and you have checked to be certain that no other train is coming.
2. When it is safe to proceed, put the gear selector in drive, release the parking brake, close the service door and look and listen; then proceed across the tracks.
3. Deactivate the hazard lights once the bus has cleared the tracks.

Stalling on the Track

If your bus stalls on the track, evacuate all students *whether or not a train is coming*.

- If no train is coming, use the front (service) entrance to evacuate the students. You may try to restart the bus only after all students have been evacuated.
- If a train is coming, use the rear or side and front exits to evacuate the students. Remind the students to leave all belongings on the bus. Direct the students to walk at a 45-degree angle away from the tracks in the direction of the approaching train.

C. Backing

When you think of backing, you should automatically think of DANGER. Many accidents happen while the driver is backing the bus.

As a bus driver, you must avoid backing if at all possible.

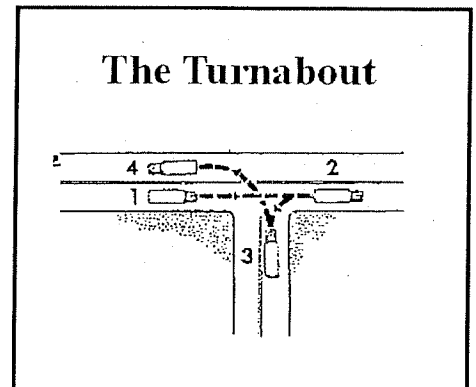
As a trainee, you must demonstrate that you can back the bus in a straight line. You also must back the bus into a given space without allowing any part of the bus, including the mirrors, to scrape or hit stationary objects. Fortunately, during your training, you can be assured that no small child or other large stationary object will be near enough for you to damage. In real life you have no such assurances.

In most cases, your bus route will be designed so you do not have to back to turn around. You will turn around in an area where you can pull in and turn around without backing.

If you must back, use the procedure outlined below. Be aware that many backing accidents occur when the driver wanted to back *only a few feet*

Making a Turnabout

1. Check your mirrors.
2. Check traffic front and rear.
3. Turn on your hazard lights (four-way flashers) at least 100 to 300 feet before stopping for backing.
4. Tap the brakes.
5. Pull beyond the road into which you will back. Check the road as you go by.
6. Apply the parking brake.
7. Put the gear selector in *neutral*.
8. Ask a trusted student to walk to the inside rear of the bus to assist you. Talk to the student to be sure both of you understand the signs you will use.
9. Before and during backing, check all mirrors to see if the way is clear.
10. Ask the student helper, "Is it clear?"
11. If so, holding your right foot on service brake, put the gear selector in *reverse* and then release the parking brake.
12. Ask your helper again, "Is it clear?"
13. Back very slowly *without using the accelerator unless it is necessary*.
14. After backing, set the parking brake. (The bus should be in the right lane of the road and behind crosswalk area.)
15. Put the gear selector in *neutral*.
16. Check your mirrors again and allow the student helper to return to his or her seat.
17. Turn off your hazard lights.



18. Turn on your left-turn signal.
19. Holding your right foot on the brake, move the gear selector to *drive*.
20. Release the parking brake when clear.
21. Check the mirrors and the traffic.
22. Pull forward, make a complete stop, and check the traffic in both directions.
23. When the traffic is clear, continue making the turn.

Remember: Before backing at a bus stop, always have the students on board.

Load before backing. Back before unloading.

PARKING

Emergency Parking Procedure

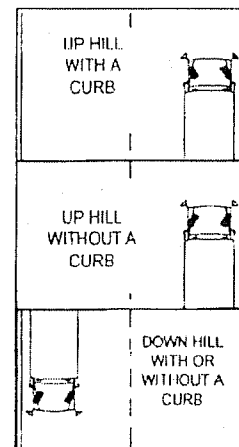
1. Check the mirrors.
2. Give the appropriate turn signal.
3. If you are parking by the side of the road, select a safe spot.
4. Set the parking brake.
5. Put the gear selector in *neutral*.
6. Cancel the turn signal.
7. Turn the ignition off, and take key with you.
8. Activate the four-way hazard lights.
9. If you have had to make an emergency stop en route, you will be running behind schedule. Be sure to report the incident to your supervisor.

Parking on a Grade

Turn the wheels at the proper angle while the bus is still slowly moving:

- A. Turn the wheels **to the left** when you are facing **uphill where there is a curb**.
- B. Turn the wheels **to the right** at all other times when parking on a grade.
- C. When the parking area is level, point the wheels straight ahead.

Wheel Angles
When Parking
on a Grade



CONTROLLING THE SPEED OF THE BUS

- You must drive within the posted speed limit and within a safe speed, depending upon the conditions.

- You must always drive no faster than 45 mph, with the following exceptions:
 - a. you may drive up to 55 mph if the posted maximum speed limit is higher than 55 and
 - b. you may drive up to 55 mph when you have written authorization from the State Department of Education to exceed 45 mph to travel to special events on interstate or state primary highways.
- On school grounds, you must never drive faster than 10 mph.
- **You must never drive over 55 mph under any circumstances.**
- You must adjust your speed for the time of day, weather or road conditions, passenger load, and proximity to children. Remember that your braking distance is affected by the size of your vehicle and load. An empty bus can be more difficult to stop quickly than one fully loaded. Remember also that children are unpredictable. Always drive slower when young **children are near the road.**
- When you are driving in heavy traffic, the safest speed is the speed of the other vehicles. Accidents occur more frequently when one vehicle is moving faster or slower than other vehicles. Vehicles all traveling about the same speed are less likely to run into each other. Go with the flow of traffic while maintaining a safe following distance, not to exceed 55 mph.
- The speed limit signs at exit ramps and around sharp curves are for regular-sized vehicles, not buses. Go slower than the posted speed, or you might lose control of the bus and turn over.
- Whenever you double your speed, it will take you *four times longer to stop* your bus and the bus will have *four times the destructive power.*

PASSING ANOTHER SCHOOL BUS

- The driver of a school bus must never pass another moving school bus.
- The driver of a school bus must never pass another stopped school bus *unless the driver of the stopped bus clearly signals the other bus driver to pass.*

D. Field Trips

Field trips are those off-campus events, including athletic events, for which school bus transportation has been approved by the school district.

Accidents are much more likely to occur on field trips than on routine bus routes. A driver may be less familiar with the bus, the riders, and the route. Adverse weather conditions, a road detour, congested areas, and darkness pose extra risks.

These are some of the situations you will have on a field trip that are different from those you encounter in your regular route driving:

- teachers/chaperones who do not know what their responsibilities are while riding on the bus,
- students who are not familiar with rules and procedures for riding the bus,

- students who are excited (and hyperactive) on the way to the field trip or on the way home after a victory or a defeat,
- extra equipment or materials to transport, and
- the possibility of having an accident or a breakdown far from the home district.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE THE DAY OF THE TRIP

1. As soon as you are notified of the trip, review the route for the trip, even if you will be following another vehicle.
2. If you will be driving a different bus from the one you usually drive, practice behind the wheel prior to the trip.
3. Collect the items you will need to have on board:
 - your valid driver's license with proper endorsement;
 - maps, directions, and schedules;
 - a state field trip permit form;
 - a list of chaperones;
 - reflective triangles; and
 - your emergency information.
4. Review and update your emergency information to make sure you have contact numbers for your bus supervisor, maintenance, and the school principal. Even if the trip is expected to be completed during the regular school day, plan for the unexpected. Make sure you have the after-hours telephone numbers of your contacts. This is especially critical if any part of the trip is scheduled to take place beyond the regular school day or during the weekend.
5. Make sure the bus has been fueled. If it has not, notify your supervisor.

PREPARATIONS ON THE DAY OF THE TRIP

1. If possible, meet with the teachers and chaperones to review their responsibilities in case of an accident or other emergency, if your supervisor has not done so. **Emphasize that teachers are responsible for helping students manage their behavior and that you will not drive while noise and disruptions are endangering others' lives.**
2. Review the bus-riding rules for all passengers and explain the necessity for following the rules to ensure a safe trip.
3. Review evacuation procedures. Point out the emergency evacuation doors and windows and explain that if an emergency evacuation becomes necessary, the riders will be told which door to exit through. Remind the passengers that they would most likely use the front (service) door.
4. Review the procedures for railroad crossings.
5. See that all equipment is secured away from the front and is not blocking any emergency exits or the aisle.

6. Check that all passengers are authorized to ride the bus.

RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE TRIP

- If the students become too loud, get out of their seats, or otherwise make the trip unsafe for you or others, ask the teachers to take charge and bring the students under control. If students continue to misbehave, find a safe place to stop. Inform your passengers that you will not continue to drive until it is safe to do so.
- If possible, park where you will not have to back up.
- Remind students not to leave valuables on the bus.
- Never take the bus to a location other than that listed on the permit.
- Never leave the field trip destination area.
- Make sure *all riders* know where the bus will be parked, how to identify it, and when they are to return to the bus.

PROCEDURE AFTER THE TRIP

1. Complete the necessary forms, and turn them in to your transportation supervisor.
2. Submit a report to maintenance of any problem with the bus.

