

## **School Bus Routes Operations, Guidelines and Administrative Procedures**

The following information has been developed by the Colby School District in order to address the operation of school bus routes. These guidelines and best practices should be consulted when addressing any school bus related topics.

1. **Compliance** – All school bus routes will operate within full compliance of Wisconsin laws. The bus routes must meet all policies set forth by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Any county or local ordinances must also be adhered to. The school bus routes must also comply with all policies of the Colby School District.
2. **School Bus Routes and Efficiencies** – School bus routes should be developed and updated as necessary to ensure that each route is operated as efficiently and safely as possible and that the total number of buses operated within the school district does not exceed what is necessary. Each school bus route should make efficient use of the capacity of the bus that is assigned to that route.
3. **School Bus Capacity** - Each bus has a listed legal capacity. That number represents the legal capacity of the bus based on three students in each seat. The legal capacity of the bus does not represent what the comfortable capacity is of that bus. The comfortable capacity of the bus should be arrived at by subtracting 10 from the legal capacity.
4. **Load Factors** - The load factor for each individual route should be carefully monitored throughout the year. By doing routine student counts each bus route should be categorized as either efficient or inefficient. What makes a route efficient is the ACTUAL load factor of the route (how many students actually ride the bus) versus the comfortable capacity of the bus.
5. **Student Counts** – In order for the load factors to be determined, student counts must be performed at various times of the year to determine the actual load factor of each school bus route. Student counts should be performed for no less than six different weeks. The students are counted each morning and each afternoon of those weeks. Students should also be counted for any stops that are made in town. By doing so each city/village stop can be identified as either used or unused. The weeks that are chosen should be carefully considered. The weeks should represent different times of the year and different weeks of each month. Avoid weeks for student counts when ridership would be unusually low.
6. **The Number of Students Assigned to Each Route** - Each school bus route should have more students assigned to the route than the capacity of the bus. While on the surface this does not sound right this will indeed offer the greatest efficiency for the route. Every student that is available to ride a bus must be assigned to a bus. However that doesn't mean those students will actually ride the bus it just means they are assigned to the bus. Many students drive their own vehicles to school. It is a fact that only a few upper classmen will regularly ride a school bus. Likewise, many younger students will not routinely ride the school bus. It is the responsibility of the school bus driver and the school bus contractor to accurately track the students who do ride the bus and who do not ride the bus. By doing so it can be predicted who will routinely ride the bus and efficient routes can be created. Once that has been established then the number of students assigned to a bus route can exceed – and should exceed – the comfortable capacity of the bus because it is known that not all of those students will ride the bus.

7. **Licensed Daycares and Babysitters** – The need for childcare is a constant concern for parents of young children. The Colby School District recognizes this need and makes every effort to address these concerns. Parents are allowed to have two locations which their children can be dropped off at or picked up at. One of these locations must be their home. If the children go to two different homes (the parents are split or divorced) that will count as the two separate locations. These locations will be considered part of the school bus route. If a parent wishes to send their child to a babysitter, that location must be on an established school bus route. In other words, the bus will not go out of the way to babysitters on the rural routes. For daycare centers in town, routes will be established with the daycare center taken into consideration. That means that students who go to a daycare center will not have to walk any further than students who walk to other designated school bus stops in town. Daycare centers will not be guaranteed door to door service if they are located within a community that is serviced as part of the Colby School District.
8. **Maximum Passengers Allowed for Daycare Centers** – A daycare center will only be allowed to consume 25% of the capacity of the school bus that services their daycare center. The school district must consider that should a daycare wish to transport an extremely large number of children, this will negatively impact the school bus route because the ability to use the bus efficiently for other students will be limited.
9. **Walking Distances** – Students who live in the city/villages that lie within the Colby School District will be expected to congregate at designated stops. The distance that students walk to the designated stop will not exceed 1320 feet (1/4 mile) for pre-k through fifth grade. For grades six through twelve the distance will not exceed 2640 feet (1/2 mile).
10. **Selection of City/Village Stops** – The Colby School District has several communities that are within the school district. Those areas include Dorchester, Unity and Riplinger. Designated stops are needed in each community in order to accommodate passengers that live within the community. When establishing the stops, the criteria must include:
  1. The distance the student must walk to reach the stop (pre-k through grade five cannot walk more than 1320 feet to reach their stop, grade six through twelve cannot walk more than 2640 feet)
  2. The amount of traffic present at the time that students will be boarding or exiting the bus at the stop (the stops must be at locations that do not have significant amounts of traffic present when the bus will be there picking up or dropping off students. State and County Highways are usually considered areas with high traffic counts.)
  3. Consideration should be given to streets that have sidewalks. Since many of the areas in the communities serviced do NOT have sidewalks present, then consideration must be made for stops using the items listed above
  4. The number of students listed to be at that stop – bus stops with larger numbers of students are more efficient than stops with lower numbers
11. **Equitable School Bus Routes – “First On – First Off”** - It is important that the school bus routes established by the school district are equitable for all of the passengers. This means that whenever possible, the routes should incorporate the “First On – First Off” procedure. For those students who board the bus first in the morning, those same students should be the first off the bus for the afternoon route whenever practical.
12. **Length of School Bus Routes** – Based on the size of the school district, the start time of school and the distance some students must travel to reach the school, it is highly recommended that the bus ride for any student not exceed one hour 15 minutes (1.25 hrs.). While exceptions to this guideline may be made

on rare occasions, this best practice ensures that school bus routes are constructed so that students are not required to spend too much time on a school bus.

13. **Prioritizing Town Stops and Rural Stops** – Students who live in the towns that lie within the Colby School District should board the bus as late as possible on the morning route and those same students should disembark the bus as soon as possible on the afternoon route. The reason is the safety of the students and to make sure that the largest numbers of students ride the bus for the shortest amount of time.
14. **Keeping the School Bus Routes on Time** – Parents expect that school buses will arrive at approximately the same time every day. It is important for parents, the school district and the school bus company to realize that the school bus routes must also arrive at school at a designated time. The school district has established a five minute window of time that the school buses can arrive at school. This allows buses to accommodate changing family schedules. Regardless of those daily changes the school buses are still expected to arrive at school within that five minute window of time.
15. **Buses Cannot Wait for Late Students or For Late Parents/Guardians** - If a student is not present at a designated stop when the bus arrives, the bus will not wait for the student. If a parent/legal guardian is not at a designated drop-off site at the scheduled time, the student will remain on the bus and will be dropped off at a pre-arranged daycare facility. The fee charged by the daycare facility will be incurred by the parent/legal guardian.
16. **Tracking School Bus Routes** – The school district and school bus contractor will have necessary documents available in order to track how the school bus routes are operated and evaluated. Those documents will include computerized routes that list the students assigned to each route as well as times that are tracked daily for each bus route.
17. **School Bus Route Consolidation** – The school district and school bus contractor should continually be reviewing school bus routes in order to ensure that the bus routes are operating in the most efficient manner. Should the load factors on bus routes decline those routes should be considered for consolidation. The factors that must be present for the route consolidation to be successful:
  1. The student ride time must not exceed 1.25 hours
  2. The load factor of the bus should not exceed the comfortable capacity
  3. The route should be equitable for all of the passengers – in other words the “First On – First Off” method should be incorporated if possible
  4. If the route makes city/village stops, the distance that students must walk to meet the bus must not exceed the maximum distance of 1320 feet for pre-k through fifth grade and 2640 feet for grades six through twelve
18. **New Routes – Schedules and Timing** - In the event that the school bus routes are changed, parents must receive ample notification. The changes must be announced and letters sent to every family affected by the route change. The letters must be sent no less than 14 days prior to when the changes on the routes will go into effect. The letters received by parents must include information about when the bus will arrive both in the a.m. and p.m. if both routes are affected by the change. The letter must also include a reminder that it may take about 10 school days (two weeks) for the route times to be stabilized.
19. **Safe Walking Zones** – The Colby School District chooses to offer school bus transportation to students who live outside the safe walking zone. This area is south of County Highway N (also Spence Street) and east of Highway 13.