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COEFO: 08-02

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 13, 2007

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Linda Champion

SUBJECT: Transportation Safety Instructions for Parents and Students

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) and Florida's school districts and charter schools are committed to the safety of Florida's students and schools. Ensuring access to learning requires that students get to and from school safely, regardless of their mode of travel. Students often walk, bike, or ride to and from school or the bus stop on their own or with parents, guardians, or others.

[Rule 6A-3.0121](#), Florida Administrative Code, requires districts and charter schools to inform parents, guardians, and students at least annually in writing of their own responsibilities for safe travel to and from school or the bus stop and their homes. To assist schools in fulfilling this responsibility, the FDOE offices of School Transportation and Safe Schools have developed the enclosed brochure, "Are We There Yet?: Staying Safe Between Home and School." This brochure offers tips to parents, guardians, and students on how to stay safe, especially when the students are not with school officials who can help protect them.

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The brochure offers safety information in the following important areas:

- Tips for School Bus Riders
- Tips for Riders in Cars, Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs), and Trucks
- Tips for Walking and Bicycling Safely
- Student Conduct and Bullying Prevention
- Protecting Children from Sexual Offenders and Predators
- Resources and Information

The print specifications for this brochure that are needed for local printing are enclosed. This specific brochure is only one tool available to parents and students.

In order to ensure safety of students, regardless of their mode of travel, districts and charter schools are encouraged to convey local safety information and policies to parents and students. Thank you for your efforts to ensure the safety of students throughout the coming school year and beyond.

LC/ch

Attachment: Are We There Yet? (brochure)
Print Specifications

Cc: Safe Schools Directors
Safe and Drug-Free Coordinators
Transportation Directors
Charter Schools

Student Conduct:

School staff, parents, and students are all responsible for creating a culture of positive behavior. Discuss with your child the student conduct information below:

Parents and students must follow the school district's Student Code of Conduct. A frequent form of misconduct is bullying.

What is bullying?

Unwanted and repeated written, verbal, or physical behavior, including any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing gesture by an adult or student that is severe or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment, cause discomfort or humiliation, or unreasonably interfere with the individual's school performance or participation.

Where Does Most Bullying Occur?

As with most harmful behavior among children, in general bullying occurs wherever there is the least structure and adult supervision. Most incidents tend to occur on the playground, in bathrooms, in locker rooms, in cafeterias, in cyberspace, at bus stops, and in the school bus.

What Parents and Students Can Do?

Tips for Parents:

- ✓ Encourage your child to talk to you. Praise your child for positive communication and behavior.
- ✓ Provide/ensure adequate supervision.
- ✓ Teach your child to be assertive rather than aggressive or violent when confronted by a bully.
- ✓ Verify that consistent messages about rules and safety are practiced in your child's school and staff is trained in bullying prevention.
- ✓ Build a relationship with your child's teachers and administrators.

Tips for Students:

- Stay away from bullies.
- Tell an adult.
- Avoid bad situations.
- Make friends.
- If bullied, tell the bully to stop; then walk away.

Did you know that research shows that at least half of all bullying can be prevented?



Did you know that according to the National Mental Health and Education Center, direct, physical bullying increases in elementary school, peaks in middle school, and declines in high school?

Protecting Children from Sexual Offenders and Predators – Tips for Parents and Students:

Florida has the strongest laws in the country to protect its youthful citizens from being abducted. However, parents and children themselves are the first line of defense. Talk to your children about following these rules:

- Stay away from any unfamiliar person who is trying to trick you or force you to go with him or her.
- Let your parents and other trusted adults know about any suspicious persons or situations.
- Learn to describe people and vehicles.
- Know where to run and how to forcibly resist capture.
- Scream to be seen and to scare a stranger away.
- Stay with a buddy, a group, or parents at the bus stop.
- Report anyone hanging around or passing by regularly.
- Accept a ride only from someone approved by the school.
- Walk or bike only along a route that your parents or the school has determined is safe.
- Lock the door and never tell callers you are home alone.



For More Information:

If you want more information on staying safe between home and school, check out these websites:

Offices of School Transportation Management
<http://www.fldoe.org/transportation> & Safe Schools
(<http://www.firn.edu/doe/besss/sdfs.html>)

Safe Kids USA
<http://www.usa.safekids.org/>

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
www.missingkids.com
1-800-LOST (843-5678)

Missing Children Information Clearinghouse
www.fdle.state.fl.us
1-888-FL-MISSING (356-4774)

Florida Department of Transportation Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Program
http://www.dot.state.fl.us/Safety/ped_bike/ped_bike.htm

Safe Routes to School Florida
www.srtsfl.org

Community Traffic Safety Teams (CTSTs)
<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/safety/CTST/CTST.htm>

Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (FDHSMV; licensing and teen drivers)
www.hsmv.state.fl.us

Bullying Prevention
www.stopbullyingnow.org

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/>

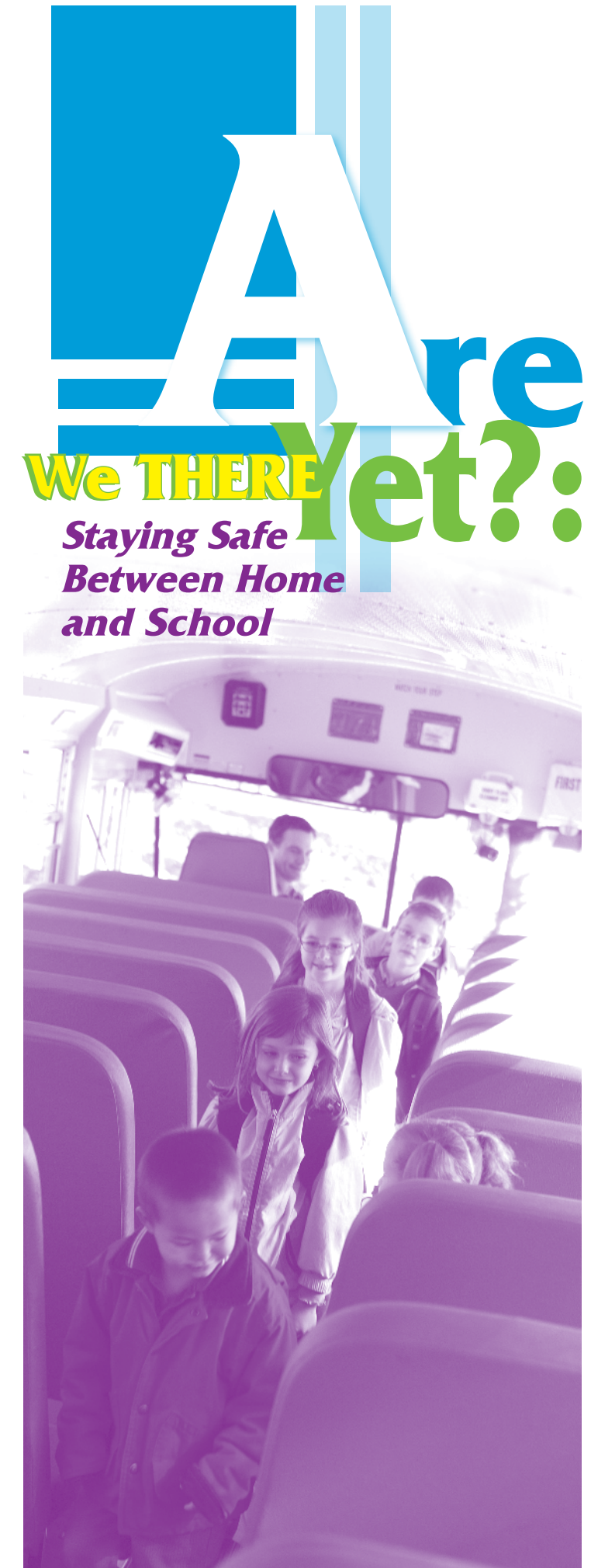
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>

The Florida Department of Education and Florida's school districts are committed to the safety of Florida's students and schools. Students often walk, bike, or ride to and from school or the bus stop on their own or with parents, guardians, or others. This brochure offers important tips to parents, guardians, and students on how to stay safe, especially when the students are not with school officials who can help protect them. Please discuss these important tips with your children.



Florida Department of Education
Office of School Transportation Management
Office of Safe Schools

¹This information is designed to assist school districts in complying with requirements to provide safety information to parents, guardians, and students (Rule 6A-3.0121, Florida Administrative Code).



Tips for School Bus Riders:

School officials, bus operators, parents, and students themselves are all responsible for ensuring that school bus riders follow these safety tips:

At the bus stop:

- Students and parents are responsible for safety and proper student behavior going to and from the stop and while waiting for the bus.
- Students must stand off the roadway while waiting.
- Students must respect other people's property.
- Students must not push, shove, or engage in horseplay.
- Parents should supervise children at the stop if possible.
- Students must arrive at the bus stop at least five minutes prior to the scheduled pickup time.
- Students must wait for and get off the bus only at approved stop locations.

During loading and unloading:

- Always stay away from the 12 foot "danger zone" around the bus, except when you are directed by the driver to get on or off the bus.
- NEVER pick up an object that you drop under or near the bus. Ask the driver for help.
- Always be sure the driver can see you.
- Make sure clothing and backpacks have no loose drawstrings or long straps that could catch in the handrail or bus door.
- When you see the bus coming, stand at the stop and wait for the bus to come to a complete stop.
- Always wait for the driver to signal that it is safe to cross the road and/or load into the bus.
- When crossing a traffic lane, always look left, right, then left again; cross only if approaching traffic has stopped.
- Never walk behind the bus.
- Only board your assigned bus, unless other arrangements are approved by your school.



During the bus ride:

- Always follow the driver's directions.
- Never distract the driver from driving unless there is immediate danger to you or others.
- Remain seated and keep the aisles clear.
- Eating, drinking, and chewing gum are prohibited.
- Never bring unsafe or unauthorized items into the bus.
- Always wear your seat belt when one is available.
- Always keep your arms, legs, and head inside the bus.
- Always show respect for your fellow students.
- Keep conversation at a reasonable level and remain quiet at railroad crossings. The Student Code of Conduct applies in the bus as well as in the classroom.

Did you know that the familiar yellow school bus is the safest way to and from school? Each year approximately 800 school-age children are killed in the United States during school transportation hours while walking, bicycling, and riding in smaller passenger vehicles. Only about two percent of the total deaths occur in or around school buses.

Tips for Riders in Cars, SUVs, and Trucks:

- ✓ Drivers and passengers in cars, SUVs, and trucks must always use appropriate safety restraints. Anyone transporting children needs a child safety seat, booster seat, or safety belt, depending on children's sizes and ages.
- ✓ Preschool age children should always be restrained properly in a secured child safety restraint system, such as a rear-facing infant seat, rear-facing convertible seat, forward-facing convertible seat, or forward-facing-only seat appropriate to their age and weight range.
- ✓ All children who have outgrown child safety seats should be properly restrained in booster seats until they are at least 8 years old, unless they are at least 4' 9" tall.
- ✓ The backseat is the safest place in a crash. Children age 12 and under should ride properly restrained in back. Infants riding in rear-facing seats must NEVER be placed in front of an air bag.

Tips for Parent Drivers and Teen Drivers:

To reduce energy usage, pollution, and traffic congestion in neighborhoods, consider walking or bicycling with your children. If you need to drive, follow these safety tips:

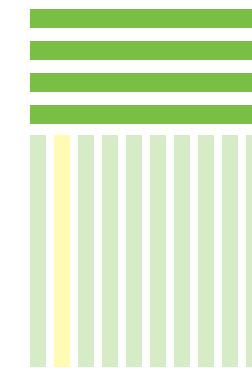
- ✓ When picking up children in the afternoon don't arrive too early and hinder the movement of traffic in the neighborhood around the school.
- ✓ Wait in a single line and leave enough room so an emergency response vehicle would be able to get through.
- ✓ Don't block driveways, mailboxes, disabled parking spaces, or fire hydrants, and don't park on lawns.
- ✓ Don't block access to or the view from side streets.
- ✓ Don't back out onto any street from the school parking lot or from a side street.
- ✓ Try to arrange your drop off/pickup time after the peak rush hour and use designated loading and unloading areas.
- ✓ Always heed signs and the directions of school and law enforcement officials.
- ✓ Always obey posted speed limits and other traffic laws.
- ✓ Act as you would want people to act if it were your neighborhood.
- ✓ Be patient and understand that walkers, bicyclists, and school buses are trying to exit the school, too.
- ✓ Always ensure that you and your passengers buckle up.
- ✓ Never talk on a cell phone or engage in other distractions while driving.

Did you know that motor vehicle crashes are now the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds in the United States? According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 7,460 drivers ages 15 to 20 were involved in fatal crashes in 2005. Most of the fatalities involving young drivers are the young drivers themselves and their passengers.



Tips for Walking and Biking Safely:

Walking and biking to and from school can be a great way to get exercise, interact with your children, and teach them lifelong traffic safety skills. Know your child's abilities and remember your child's limitations. Children under 10 years of age are developmentally limited when it comes to judging speed and distance accurately.



Walking

Teach, practice, and remind children to:

- ✓ Walk with an adult or responsible older child at all times.
- ✓ Children under 10 years old should cross the street only with an adult.
- ✓ Walk on the sidewalk if there is one.
- ✓ Walk facing the traffic, as far from the road/traffic as possible, if no sidewalk is available.
- ✓ Use traffic signals and marked crosswalks if available.
- ✓ Stop at the curb or edge of the road and look left, right and left for traffic before crossing the street.
- ✓ Walk; don't run.
- ✓ Give drivers time to see you before crossing the street.
- ✓ Keep looking for cars while you are crossing.
- ✓ Wear white clothing or reflectors when walking in the dark or in low light.

Biking

Bicycles are vehicles and riders must follow Florida Traffic Laws.

Teach, practice, and remind children to:

- ✓ Always wear a helmet that is properly fitted.
- ✓ Whenever possible, ride with an adult or responsible older student.
- ✓ Always obey all traffic signs and signals.
- ✓ Ride on the right side of the road or trail in a single file (one bicycle behind another).
- ✓ Ride in the same direction as other vehicles.
- ✓ Go straight across railroad tracks.
- ✓ Always use proper hand signals when turning and stopping.
- ✓ Yield to pedestrians and alert them with a bicycle bell or your voice when passing.