



# Virginia Department of Education

## School Bus Safe Driving

### Awards Program

Virginia Department of Education  
Offices of Support Services  
Richmond, VA 23219  
1/1/2020 (revised)

# **VDOE School Bus Safe Driving Awards Program**

## **Introduction**

The VDOE School Bus Safe Driving Awards Program provides a means for local school divisions to recognize outstanding accomplishment and better-than-average school bus driving performance. The purpose of the program is to stimulate school bus drivers to be more safety conscious behind the wheel. Qualifications for awards are based upon criteria applied uniformly by the public school divisions participating in the program.

## **Availability**

This program is available to all public school divisions that agree to follow the established criteria.

## **Requirements for Participation**

Each public school division shall:

1. Maintain a record of all accidents involving school buses, the number of years of safe driving for each driver, and awards received by each driver.
2. Investigate each accident thoroughly, and record facts for later use.
3. Establish an accident review committee, appointed by the school board or superintendent.
4. Plan an appropriate awards presentation program.
5. Operate the awards program on a 12 months basis, beginning and ending of the period to be determined by the school division. The initial 12 months award year selected by a school division shall end no earlier than March 31 of the year.
6. Submit a copy of the individual driver awards record, upon request.

## **Composition of the Accident Review Committee**

The committee shall be composed of at least one school bus driver and one person from at least two of the following categories:

1. Director/Supervisor or Assistant Director/Supervisor of transportation
2. Law enforcement deputy/officer
3. School, county or city safety officer/administrator
4. Other school administrators
5. Representative from risk management or insurance company.

## **Role of the Review Committee**

1. The Accident Review Committee (ARC) determines whether accidents are classified as ‘preventable’ or ‘non-preventable’; it does not function in a disciplinary capacity. The ARC’s duty is to determine if a driver took appropriate action to prevent the accident from occurring based on the information in the documentation related to the accident.
2. Notify bus driver involved in the accident of the committee’s decision.
3. The classification of the accident should be used solely for the purpose of determining eligibility for a safe driving award.

## **Eligibility Requirements – School Bus Driver**

1. Must meet all requirements of 8VAC20-70-280.
2. Operate a school bus for 80 percent of the regular school session or 144 instructional school days in regular and summer sessions.
3. Operate without a preventable school bus accident or proven violation of safe driving practices.

## **Classification – Preventable or Non-preventable**

“Was the accident preventable?” The answer to this question should be determined by whether or not the driver took all reasonable defensive measures to prevent the accident. (Note: There is a tendency to try to place the blame for an accident on the other driver rather than to accept that certain defensive actions could have been taken to prevent it.) If the committee considers all possible defensive actions, drivers will soon find that most accidents are preventable. Failure to abide by the law and to follow recommended practices is a major cause of preventable accidents. Sources that might be used to determine whether or not proper driving practices were followed are state laws and regulations, local policies and regulations, and procedures and practices contained in the Bus Driver Training Curriculum.

## **Definitions**

The following definitions are based on decisions of accident review committees. These definitions should assist the accident review committee in classifying the accidents as preventable or non-preventable.

**Defensive Driving**: Driving to prevent accidents, regardless of the actions of other drivers and adverse weather, road or traffic conditions.

**Defensive Driver**: A defensive driver adjusts his or her driving to compensate for weather, road and traffic conditions.

By being alert to situations that cause accidents, the driver takes necessary preventive actions. A defensive driver knows when it is necessary to slow down, stop, or yield right-of-way to avoid involvement.

School Bus Accident: Any incident involving a school bus that results in death, injury, or property damage. Who was injured, what property was damaged or to what extent, is not a factor.

Preventable School Bus Accident: Any incident involving a school bus which results in death, injury, or property damage in which the school bus driver failed to take all reasonable measures to prevent its occurrence.

Unsafe Practice: An incident caused by a driver's error that does not result in death, injury, or property damage, is not a school bus accident. Such an incident, however, may violate safe driving practices and may prevent the bus driver from receiving an award. Failure to stop at railroad grade crossings or stop signs, and excessive speed are examples of unsafe driving practices.

Injury: A physical injury which requires treatment by a licensed physician or nurse.

### **Situations Frequently Requiring Classification**

The performance of the school bus driver in the following traffic and operational situations is discussed below. This may be useful as a guideline for determining whether the accident was preventable.

Intersections: The school bus driver is responsible for approaching, entering, and crossing intersections in such a manner as to avoid accidents that might be caused by other drivers. Complex traffic movement, blind intersections, or failure of the other driver to conform to law or traffic control devices will not automatically classify an accident as "non-preventable". Intersection accidents can occur even though the school bus driver has not violated traffic regulations. The driver's failure to take precautionary measures before entering an intersection is a factor to be considered by the Accident Review Committee.

When a school bus driver crosses an intersection and the actions of the driver of another vehicle indicate possible involvement due to excess speed, crossing into another driver's lane when turning, or coming from behind a blind spot, the decision should be preventable.

Vehicle Ahead: Regardless of an abrupt stop by the vehicle ahead, the school bus driver can prevent a collision by maintaining a safe following distance at all times.

Vehicle Behind: Rear-end collisions caused by a “roll-back”, an abrupt stop at a grade crossing or a traffic signal, or the driver’s failure to signal a turn at an intersection should be identified as “preventable”. A bus may be struck from behind if the driver fails to maintain a safe distance between his or her vehicle and the one in front.

Passing: Failure to pass a vehicle safely may indicate faulty judgement and the driver’s failure to consider safety factors before attempting the maneuver. The entire passing maneuver is voluntary and is the driver’s responsibility.

Being Passed: Accidents such as “side-swipes” and “cutoffs”, that occur while a bus is being passed by another vehicle, are “preventable”, if the driver fails to yield to the passing vehicle, or fails to slow down.

Oncoming: It is extremely important to investigate the actions of a school bus driver who is involved in a head-on collision or whose vehicle is side-swiped by an approaching vehicle. The location of the vehicles, prior to and at the point of impact, must be carefully verified. Even though an approaching vehicle entered the bus driver’s traffic lane, it may be possible that the accident could have been prevented by the school bus driver. For example, if the approaching vehicle was passing another vehicle and the bus driver failed to slow down, stop, or allow the vehicle to re-enter its own lane, action was not taken to prevent the accident. Failure to signal the approaching driver by flashing the headlights or sounding the horn also should be taken into account.

Fixed Objects: Collisions with fixed objects are preventable and usually involve failure to properly judge clearance distance for the vehicle. Drivers must be alert to such conditions and make the necessary allowances.

Pedestrians: Traffic regulations and court decisions generally favor a pedestrian who is struck by a moving vehicle. A pedestrian who crosses a street in the middle of a block or from behind a parked vehicle does not necessarily relieve a driver of the responsibility for precautions to prevent such accidents. School buses traveling in school zones, shopping areas, residential streets, and other areas with special pedestrian traffic problems must be operated at reduced speed.

Bicycles, motor scooters, and similar equipment frequently are operated by inexperienced drivers. A school bus driver, who fails to reduce speed when that kind of equipment is operated within his/her sight distance, has failed to take the necessary precautions to prevent an accident. Keeping within posted speed limits is not sufficient when unusual conditions call for reduced speed.

Private Property: When a school bus driver is requested to unload passengers at unfamiliar locations (usually on field and/or athletic trips), the driver is responsible for discussing the trip with the proper authorities and for making sure permission has been obtained to enter the area.

On-board Accidents: These accidents include students injured by falls, striking stanchions, etc., when the school bus is in motion and not involved in a collision. Accidents must be traced to a sudden movement of the bus; therefore, the need for, and the appropriateness of the maneuver, must be evaluated.

Non-Collision: Many accidents (turning over, skidding or running off the road) may result from emergency action by a school bus driver to avoid a collision. In such instances, the driver's actions should be examined for possible errors of judgment or failure to drive defensively.

Parking: Double parking, failure to display warning devices, etc., generally indicate that an accident was preventable. Accidents caused by unattended school buses rolling away while parked should be classified as preventable,

Backing: Accidents occurring while a school bus is being operated in reverse gear are preventable. Use of a guide does not relieve the driver of the responsibility for backing the vehicle safely. A guide cannot control the movement of the vehicle; therefore, the driver is responsible for checking all clearances.

Mechanical Failure: Any accident caused by mechanical failure that reasonably could have been detected by the school bus driver should be classified as preventable. The driver is responsible for reporting needed repairs and having them made as quickly as possible. When mechanical difficulties occur unexpectedly, and a driver fails to ask the transportation office, school site, or central office administrators for emergency instructions and an accident occurs, it is classified a preventable.

Miscellaneous: Accidents that occur when the school bus driver fails to stop the bus before dealing with disruptive pupil behavior or fails to counsel with pupils who do not follow safe riding practices are examples of other types of incidents requiring evaluation.

## Types of Awards

Basic Programs: School bus drivers shall receive a VDOE School Bus Safe Driver Award Certificate and a wallet size card indicating the number of years that they have qualified for a safe driving award. Drivers qualifying for the second year of the program shall also receive a Safe Driving Award Patch with a separate embroidered panel acknowledging two years of safe driving. Each succeeding year, a driver shall receive a panel indicating his/her cumulative years of safe driving.

Optional Programs: Recognition for safe driving should exceed that provided by the Basic Program. The following programs also are useful in conducting an effective safe driving program:

Lapel Pin	Shirt/Blouse
Key Chain	Cap
Plaque	Jacket
Trophy	

These items are described in the Appendix.

Driver of The Year Award: Local school divisions may want to consider the establishment of a “Driver of The Year Award”. Trophies, plaques, or other items used for this award should be appropriately inscribed. The recipient of the award should be selected by a committee composed of school bus drivers and local school administrators. Selection should be based on exceptional performance of duty, including safe driving.

## Example of Local Awards Program

<u>Number of Years</u>	<u>Award</u>	<u>Program</u>	
		<u>Basic</u>	<u>Optional</u>
1	Certificate and Card*	X	
2	Patch and Number Panel**	X	
5	Lapel Pin/Key Chain		X
7	Lapel		X
10	Lapel Pin/Key Chain		X
12	Jacket – Unlined		X
15	Lapel Pin/Key Chain		X
17	Jacket – Lined		X
20	Plaque		X
25	Lapel Pin/Key Chain		X
30	Trophy		X
35	Plaque		X

\*Certificate and card to be presented each qualifying year.

\*\*Patch to be presented after completion of second qualifying year. The number panel is presented with patch and each qualifying year thereafter.

## **Presentation of Awards**

The true significance of an award is realized only when the recipient gains personal satisfaction from receiving it. Careful attention should be given to planning the presentation ceremony and to the place and persons involved. The ceremony should be planned to create an environment which would enhance the significance of the awards.

## **Sources and Procedures for Ordering Award Items**

Certificates and wallet size cards may be ordered annually from the VDOE. Written requests for certificates and cards should be submitted by the division superintendent or his/her designee. Information concerning sources from which patches, number panels, and optional items may be obtained will be furnished periodically.

## **Accident Review Committee**

The purpose of an accident review committee is to determine the responsibility for an accident involving a vehicle. The committee determines if a school bus driver took an appropriate action to prevent the accident from occurring based on the information (i.e. police accident report) in the documentation related to the accident.

1. The committee should have at least five (or other odd-number) voting members:
  - a. Transportation Director/Supervisor (Chairperson - acting as a tiebreaker)
  - b. Risk Manager or designee as Risk Manager
  - c. Police Officer or Sheriff Deputy
  - d. Operations Manager/Supervisor
  - e. Full-time Operator/Driver (rotated monthly)
2. Meetings should be held each month and minutes recorded.
3. Each accident must be reviewed on its own merit; previous driving record of an employee should not be considered in making a decision.
4. The Accident Preventability Determination Guidelines must be used for defining the type of accident as 'Preventable' or 'Non-Preventable'. (Decisions on accident situations not covered in the guide will be determined by the accident review committee, voting members.)



## **Accident Preventability Determination Guidelines**

### **Intersections**

The school bus driver is responsible for approaching intersections prepared to take such actions as necessary to avoid accidents, regardless of the actions of the other drivers. Failure to obey the law or to heed traffic control devices on the part of the other driver does not automatically make the accident non-preventable.

The school bus driver's failure to take every precautionary measure prior to entering the intersection must be considered in making a decision. If a school bus driver fails to check cross traffic to be sure that it is going to stop, or if he/she forces the right-of-way instead of yielding, then any resulting accident should be ruled preventable.

Accidents involving special intersections such as alleys, driveways, plant entrances, etc., must be carefully reviewed to determine what action could have been taken to avoid the accident. Many of these intersections are blind and the other driver's vision is blocked, a failure to slow down, sound a warning or yield right of way can be considered sufficient cause to rule the accident preventable.

### **Changing Traffic Lanes**

Passing is a voluntary action and failure to pass safely indicates possible faulty judgement or lack of consideration of all the factors affecting the maneuver. Actions of oncoming traffic or of the traffic being passed do not excuse the school bus driver. These actions should be anticipated and considered before starting the maneuver.

Being passed requires that the school bus driver yield to the passing vehicle by slowing down or moving to the right if the passing driver is trapped. A sideswipe or cut-off accident is imminent.

Lane encroachment accidents on the highway or in merging traffic indicate an unwillingness to yield to vehicles or to wait for a safe break in traffic. Blind spots are not a valid excuse; the school bus driver must use extra caution to allow for the areas of limited vision.

Squeeze plays involving fixed objects or other vehicles can be avoided by dropping back when it is apparent the other driver is forcing the issue or contesting a common portion of the road.

Failure to observe any of the above defensive driving techniques should result in the accident being ruled preventable.

### **Front-End and Rear-End Collisions**

The school bus driver can prevent front-end collisions by maintaining a safe following distance at all times. Tailgating is one of the most frequent causes of accidents and cannot be excused.

Regardless of abrupt or unexpected stops or actions of the driver ahead, the driver must be able to stop safely. Paying more attention to the road ahead of the driver you are following will help to anticipate his/her actions. Night speed should be adjusted so that the stopping distance is not greater than the forward distance illuminated by the headlights.

School bus drivers risk being struck from behind by failing to maintain a safe following distance. Failure to signal intentions or failure to slow down gradually for traffic signals or grade crossings may cause the following driver to be trapped. This should be cause for ruling the accident preventable.

### **Backing**

It is extremely rare that a backing accident is ruled non-preventable. Even when being guided, the driver is not relieved of his/her responsibility to back safely. The guide is just an aid and cannot control the movement of the vehicle. The driver must check clearances for him/her self.

### **Turns**

Any time a school bus driver leaves a traffic lane, the complete responsibility for the maneuver is his/hers. Signaling is not enough; traffic on both sides and to the rear must be checked carefully before making a change.

Squeeze plays caused by left and right hand turns are the responsibility of the driver making the turn. Failure to signal, signaling too late, failure to properly position for the turn to check mirrors before and during the turn or to take any other necessary defensive action, must be considered by the accident review committee.

Accidents involving turns by other drivers should be investigated and examined in detail. The non-turning driver may have failed to recognize a turn was pending from the actions of the other vehicle, and thus failed to take proper defensive action. He/She may have tried to force the right-of-way. Any such lack of defensive driving should deem the accident preventable.

### **Vehicles Going in Opposite Directions**

The head-on or sideswipe accident involving vehicles going in opposite directions is one of the most difficult to classify. The exact actions of each vehicle prior to the accident must be determined in order to ascertain whether the driver should have been warned about possible involvement by the actions of the opposing vehicle. If the opposing vehicle was passing and thus intruding into the driver's lane and he/she failed to slow down, stop or pull to the right, then the driver failed to take proper defensive measures and the resulting accident should be judged as preventable.

## **Mechanical Failure**

A school bus driver is required to inspect his/her bus and equipment before starting a trip and report any unsafe conditions. Immediate repairs should be made if continued operation could cause an accident. If an accident is caused by a mechanical failure that reasonably could have been detected by the driver, the accident should be judged preventable.

If a mechanical defect occurs or develops during the trip, the driver should notify the appropriate transportation department staff. If the trip is continued without notification and an accident results, the accident should be judged preventable.

School bus driver abusive driving which creates abnormal strain and leads to mechanical failure resulting in an accident is also considered preventable.

## **Weather**

Rain, fog, snow, ice and sleet do not cause accidents. They are the environments to which the school bus driver must adjust. Failure to properly adjust driving to the existing conditions or laying over when conditions are hazardous should be ground for deciding the accident was preventable.

## **Fixed Objects**

Collisions with fixed objects such as low overheads, buildings, poles, mailboxes, parked vehicles, etc., must be considered as preventable accidents. Asking a bystander's opinion on clearance does not relieve the school bus driver of his/her responsibility. Resurfaced pavement causing low overhead clearance and other changed in conditions along a route are not valid excuses.

## **Property Damage and Personal Injury**

Passenger accidents where there is no collision involved must be considered preventable if they are caused by faulty driving maneuvers. Passenger injuries caused by evasive action to avoid a collision must be judged preventable if the driver failed to use defensive driving techniques that could have eliminated the need for sudden or violent action.

Sudden stops and starts, speeding over bumpy roads, fast turns, and abrupt acceleration must be considered as unsafe driving. Therefore, any accident to passengers as a result of such actions should be considered preventable.

Damage to property or persons from parts of the vehicle being loose (doors) are preventable if the school bus driver failed to secure them, or if detected during the pre-trip inspection and the driver failed to have them secured.

### **Violations of Law, Regulations and School Division Policy**

If a violation of the *Code of Virginia*, the Virginia Board of Education Regulations and/or the local school division policy on the part of the school bus driver contributes to or causes an accident, then it must be judged preventable. This refers not only to the moving vehicle violation but also to technical violations such as the use of drugs to stay awake, lack of required hours of sleep or time off between trips.

### **Accident Situations Not Described**

For accidents not described, the accident review committee should use the members' professional expertise and reasoning to determine if the accident situation must be declared preventable.

## Sample Accident Review Committee Form

<b>(School Division Name, County or City)</b>		<b>ARC</b>		<b>Date:</b>		
<b>Committee Members</b>						
Chairperson						
Member		Member				
Member		Member				
Member		Member				
Guest		Guest				
<b>Accidents Reviewed</b>						
Accident Report Number	Employee Name		Accident Classification	Preventable	Non-Preventable	
<b>Grand Total</b>						
<b>Total Preventable</b>						
<b>Total Non-Preventable</b>						
<b>Collisions</b>						
Number with Property Damage	_____	Number with Injuries	_____	Number with Property Damage and Injuries	_____	
<b>Non-Collisions</b>						
Number of Non-Collisions (Loading / Unloading)	_____	Number of Non-Collisions (On-Board)	_____			
<b>Injuries</b>						
<b>Number of Injuries to Employees</b>				_____		
<b>Number of Injuries to Passengers</b>				_____		
<b>Number of Injuries to Pedestrians</b>				_____		
<b>Number of Injuries to Other Drivers</b>				_____		

## Sample Accident Evaluation Form

<b>(School Division Name, County or City) Accident Evaluation Form</b>					<b>Date</b>	<b>:</b>	
Employee Name					Accident Report Number		
<b>Section I: ACCIDENT</b>							
Vehicle Number		Vehicle Type (MFSAB or School Bus)					
Date of Accident		Time	AM:	PM:	Location		
<b>Section II: ACCIDENT DESCRIPTION (Brief)</b>							
<p>The ‘Accident Preventability Determination Guidelines’ will be used in judging the preventability of accidents. An accident must be judged ‘preventable’ on part of the school bus driver involved unless it is shown, without a reasonable doubt, that the bus driver did nothing to contribute to the occurrence of the accident and the bus driver did everything reasonable to avoid the situation from occurring.</p> <p>An</p>							