

For immediate release  
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### **State Board of Education Approves Bus Safety Policy Revisions**

In the 2014-15 academic year alone, five North Carolina students were injured by motorists passing stopped school buses. That is one reason why the N.C. State Board of Education has revised its bus safety policy to require a standard hand signal bus drivers will use to tell students when a street is safe to cross. The Board approved the revision at its meeting held via conference call on July 9.

According to research conducted by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction Transportation Services section, most school bus-related student injuries and fatalities stem from drivers who disregard the school bus sign. “We have over 15 years of data to show that more than 3,000 cars per day are not going to stop. If we’ve got that information, then we know public awareness alone can’t be enough to reverse this behavior, especially with more distractions out there on the road,” said Derek Graham, section chief of NCDPI School Transportation Services. “The revised policy represents a more proactive approach to what bus drivers and students can do to stay safe even when other motorists don’t adhere to the law.”

Drawing from national procedures as well as school bus safety standards and practices from across the country, the revised policy will require drivers to use a standard hand signal that tells students a roadway is safe to cross. The hand signal has three steps. First, the driver holds up his or her palm facing the student until it is safe to cross. Second, the driver gives a “thumbs up” to the students. For the third step, the driver points with his or her index finger the direction in which the child should proceed across the street. This will empower the driver, usually the single school system employee on the scene, and it will compel students to consciously assess the roadway by looking at their bus driver before stepping into an active street. For a graphic presentation of this new signal, visit [www.ncbussafety.org/safetylessons](http://www.ncbussafety.org/safetylessons).

Parts of this revised policy were piloted in Washington County Schools in April by Director of Transportation Wesley Stokes. Each driver in his fleet of about 30 buses was trained in the new procedure during spring break and began using it the following Monday.

“When this new system was announced, I was anxious for Washington County to try it because I believe that it’s a safer system,” said Stokes. “After our training, I followed the buses to see how it went, and it worked immediately. Even though the kids hadn’t been trained yet, when they saw the hand signal, I saw them stop right in their tracks and wait until the student transporter signaled to cross.”

Following the initial training, the school bus drivers of Washington County Schools discussed the new policy after all students boarded each afternoon over the course of a week. All homeroom class teachers reviewed the flyer, explaining the standard hand signals to the students. Follow-up discussions were held as the student transporter deemed necessary. The district will follow the same bus safety education program the first day of school.

While State Board policy currently requires safety training for students twice per year, the revision requires training in each district to be documented and provided to all students, not just those who ride the bus. NCDPI Transportation Services staff will provide basic instruction points for the training as well as guidance on how to properly implement the bus driver's crossing signal requirement. While districts may choose to implement revisions sooner, the revised policy is effective Jan. 1, 2016. For more information on the policy or school bus safety in N.C., visit <http://www.ncbussafety.org/>.

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