

Driver Safety

Backing Up

Backing up any vehicle is a hazardous maneuver that should be avoided as much as possible. Backing up a school bus or student vehicle is made more hazardous by the driver's inability to see what is behind the vehicle. The best method for preventing accidents from backing up is to park or position vehicles so that backing up will not be necessary. When it is required, there are several things you can do to minimize the hazards associated with backing up.

Know what is in your path of travel. This requires **GETTING OUT AND LOOKING** at what is behind your vehicle. Check your clearance to the sides and overhead both in and near the path your vehicle will take. Don't forget the front clearances. Swing of the front end will put it in a position different than it is in before backing up.

When backing up, try and turn toward the driver's side (left side) of the vehicle if possible. This will allow you to see much more than if you are backing up toward the other (right) side. This will also allow you to watch the rear of your vehicle by looking out the side window. If you have to drive around the block to position for this back-up maneuver, it will be worth the effort by increasing your visibility.

Use a helper or guide, if available; however, make sure of a few things before you get this guide's assistance. Agree on hand signals and make sure to look for the signals and guide in your mirror at all times. If you can't see the guide, STOP immediately. Discuss with the guide the need for him or her to remain visible. If a guide is not available, you may be able to block off an area at the rear of the bus with cones/reflectors to warn traffic and act as your guide.

If you do need to back up, activate your four-way hazard warning lights and open your window to be able to hear clearly. Minimize as many distractions as possible (e.g., the radio). Use your horn to signal your back-up maneuver unless you have a back-up warning device. Use your mirrors to check your path



of travel to the rear and sides (don't forget that you can't see everything in your mirrors). Turn the top of the steering wheel toward the direction you want to go. Proceed in reverse SLOWLY. Backing up slowly will allow you to make corrections before you get too far off course and allow you to stop suddenly if needed.

While you may have checked your path, unless you have a helper, it is possible that your path clearance can change while you are backing up. Pedestrians, other motorists, or other objects can materialize in your path while you are backing up. Be aware of noises and vibrations in and around the bus as you proceed slowly. Because of buses' sturdy construction, it will be difficult to detect if you may have hit something or are sideswiping something, so extra caution and patience are necessary. If you suspect a change in conditions or detect that something doesn't seem right, you should get out and look again before proceeding slowly.

If there are students on the bus, keep all students on the bus. Some state laws require that if backing up is required at or near a loading or unloading zone, all students must be seated on the bus during the back-up maneuver.

Because backing up is done infrequently, many drivers are uncomfortable with the maneuver, so remember the steps outlined above for backing up safely.