



School Transportation Safety

2017-2018

**Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report 1718-06**

Published on: May 9, 2018

2017-2018

**Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report 1718-06
School Transportation Safety**

Summary:

Public school children in Madera County arrive and depart school by a variety of methods. Traffic congestion at public schools is wide-ranging and common during drop-off and pick-up times. School districts, city and county jurisdictions need more collaboration to reduce traffic congestion. The type and purpose of school vehicles used is a point of interest. Communication with parents regarding school transportation safety is lacking. The Madera County Grand Jury (MCGJ) makes recommendations to address these issues.

Background:

MCGJ reviewed the safety of public school children, focusing on home-to-school travel and activity transportation, including walking, bicycling, private vehicles and buses. MCGJ investigated Madera Unified School District (MUSD) with an enrollment of 20,956 and Golden Valley Unified School District (GVUSD) with an enrollment of 1,940.

MCGJ interviewed district and school administrators, school transportation personnel, a California Highway Patrol (CHP) Officer, and a CHP Motor Carrier Specialist. MCGJ reviewed the MUSD transportation manual and other internal documents and California Education Code sections related to school transportation. MCGJ conducted on-site visits to Webster, Alpha and Madison elementary schools, and the MUSD transportation facility.

Discussion:

Some students are brought to school and picked up by private vehicle. Frequently, the excess number of cars causes significant congestion on the street and in the parking lots. This is not only inconvenient, but it can be dangerous. There is need for a crossing guard on Ruth Street because of the congestion at Webster Elementary at GVUSD. In late 2014 and early 2015 a Madera County Public Works study was done addressing the possibility for a parent drop off and pick up point on Ardath Avenue on the north side of Webster Elementary. The findings of this study have not been acted upon.

It should also be noted that at Alpha Elementary School at MUSD, left turns from the school parking lots slow traffic on Stadium Road and delay the traffic leaving the parking lots. In addition, the "No Left Turn" sign in the parking lot is severely faded and ignored.

Students who do not ride the bus or come by private vehicles walk or ride bicycles to and from school. Approximately one-third of GVUSD's students are walkers. Data about the number of walkers at MUSD is not available.

State law does not mandate school districts to provide transportation to students. However, tradition for this service is a common practice in all 58 counties in California. MUSD transports approximately 5,000 students per day. GVUSD transports approximately 900 students.

Transportation to and from school is provided by the traditional yellow school bus. There are also white vans, which are used to transport students to extra-curricular activities. MCGJ discovered there are distinct differences in the use and rules between these two types of vehicles.

The definition of a yellow school bus is found in the Vehicle Code Section 545. An essential part of the definition is that in order to carry the "School Bus Yellow" distinction, the bus must have designated seating for eleven or more, including the driver. If a bus has ten or fewer designated seats, including the driver, it does not qualify as a yellow school bus.

Both school districts have a small fleet of white vans with ten or fewer designated seats per van. This fleet is known as the "white fleet." The white fleet falls under Vehicle Code §233. Because white vans are not classified as yellow school buses, the Motor Carrier Specialist does not inspect them nor are the drivers required to follow the same regulations as the yellow school bus drivers.

White vans are often used to transport students to extra-curricular activities. There is no specialized training for a white van driver and it is often a coach, teacher, or volunteer who drives. In order to drive a white van for MUSD, the driver's Motor Vehicle Record is required. The individual is then issued a "White Van Authorization Card."

GVUSD will often use multiple white vans to transport students to an event instead of the yellow school bus. In 2017, GVUSD had two white van accidents involving the transportation of students. GVUSD's white vans are sometimes used to transport students when a yellow bus breaks down with students on board.

Each of the two school districts has its own maintenance department for its yellow school bus and white van fleets. The maintenance departments follow the rules and regulations of the state and the school district. The state's primary rules are found in the California Vehicle and Educational Codes. The CHP and the Motor Carrier Specialist monitor the vehicle code laws. There is a specific timetable for these monitoring procedures. The bus maintenance records are kept in the transportation department. Shop personnel are responsible for keeping maintenance documents up-to-date. It is the Motor Carrier Specialist's responsibility to check these records and sign off on a "292" card. Each bus in operation must have a current and signed 292 card posted near the front door.

Annually, students are given school bus emergency evacuation training. A document is then filled out and signed by the bus driver, a school site representative and the transportation supervisor. This document is kept for at least one year in the transportation office. At MUSD

transportation department, a spot check of these forms was done by MCGJ and there were no school site signatures on several forms from Nishimoto and Chavez Elementary Schools (see Appendix 1 for examples). This is a violation of Education Code §39831.5 (a) (4) (b).

The bus drivers fill out a Daily Vehicle Condition Report (DVCR) as an additional safety requirement. The report is kept in the bus until the next DVCR is created. The Motor Carrier Specialist reviews the DVCR's, which are kept in files for three months. Drivers cannot be forced to drive a bus they believe to be unsafe.

It is the responsibility of CHP to report any bus driver violations to CHP Sacramento Headquarters, who then contacts the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and the Department of Education for evaluation and action.

MCGJ discovered duplicate guidelines in MUSD's "The Care and Maintenance of Buses" section of the transportation manual.

MUSD has 89 yellow school buses. Approximately 50 of the buses have seatbelts. California mandates seatbelts on all buses manufactured after 2005. The white fleet consists of 12 vans and they all have seatbelts.

GVUSD has 13 yellow school buses and none have seat belts. These buses are larger and older, manufactured from 1978 to 2002, and have high mileage. The fleet has approximately three breakdowns per month. MCGJ was informed by GVUSD that they have not been able to qualify for new bus purchase grants.

As an additional safety measure, GVUSD has buses with cameras. These are used to monitor behavior on the bus and actions surrounding the immediate area outside of the bus.

GVUSD has nine vans, all of which have seatbelts. It does not have any smaller special needs yellow buses, and transports special needs preschool students in a yellow school bus with a paraprofessional sitting with the students.

Per Vehicle Code §27316(c) school districts, bus drivers and other personnel are not held responsible if students refuse to wear seat belts. Regulations exist to retrofit school buses to add seat belts. MUSD and GVUSD do not do this because they claim it is not cost efficient.

Because it is difficult to hire and retain bus drivers, GVUSD offers eight-hour days for bus drivers as an incentive to stay with the district. When bus drivers at GVUSD aren't driving the buses, they work as custodians and/or ground keepers. They work about 20-25 hours of overtime per month.

Students are to receive annual training on bus emergency procedures and passenger safety, normally at the start of the school year. During safety training, students are instructed on how to use the emergency exits. All elementary school students receive the same safety training regardless of age. During the safety training, the older children are directed to assist the smaller

and younger children in exiting the bus. While riding the bus, the smaller and younger children sit up front near the driver.

Education Code §39831.5(a)(1)(A, B, C, D, and E)(2) requires that parents be provided with written information regarding bus safety and bus stops at the time of student registration. Senior management in both districts interviewed by MCGJ was unaware of these requirements.

Findings:

F1. Because senior management of MUSD and GVUSD was unaware of the requirement to provide written bus safety information for parents, there is a potential violation of Education Code §39831.5(a)(A, B, C, D, and E)(2).

Findings for GVUSD:

F2. Because the findings of the study done in 2014 and 2015 regarding Webster Elementary School have not been implemented, congestion problems continue and unsafe conditions persist.

F3. There is a need for a crossing guard on Ruth Avenue at Webster Elementary School to enhance student safety.

F4. Because of the large number of breakdowns, the older, high-mileage buses need to be replaced.

F5. Transporting special needs preschool students in a large yellow school bus with no seat belts creates a potential for danger even if a paraprofessional sits with the students.

F6. The use of three or more white vans instead of large buses to transport large groups could negatively impact student safety.

Findings for MUSD:

F7. Drivers turning left out of Alpha Elementary School onto Stadium Road create congestion problems and dangerous conditions for pedestrians.

F8. Drivers turning left into Alpha Elementary School from Stadium Road create congestion problems and dangerous conditions for pedestrians.

F9. The Transportation Department manual contains duplicate information and needs revision.

F10. Several emergency evacuation forms were incomplete because they were not signed by school staff in violation of Education Code §39831.5(a)(4)(b).

Recommendations:

The Madera County Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, MUSD and GVUSD provide parents with written information on bus emergency procedures and passenger safety pursuant to Education Code §39831.5.

R2. GVUSD Superintendent immediately meet with Madera County Public Works regarding two pick-up and drop-off locations at Webster Elementary School, one for parents at Ardath Avenue and one for buses at Ruth Avenue.

R3. GVUSD immediately provide crossing guards for the crosswalk at Webster Elementary School.

R4. GVUSD develop a school bus replacement schedule by the end of 2018-19 school year.

R5. GVUSD immediately utilize a white van, driven by a certified bus driver, to transport the special needs pre-school students until a smaller special needs bus is obtained.

R6. Whenever possible, GVUSD immediately use large buses for extra-curricular trips that require three or more white vans.

R7. MUSD immediately enforce the “No Left Turn” rule at the exit onto Stadium Road at Alpha Elementary School.

R8. MUSD work with the City of Madera to develop a plan to prevent left turns into Alpha Elementary School by August 1, 2018.

R9. MUSD eliminate duplications in the transportation manual by August 1, 2018.

R10. MUSD ensure complete documentation of annual student bus emergency procedures and passenger safety training beginning fall term, 2018.

Required Responses:

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933, the Grand Jury specifically requests responses as follows:

Golden Valley Unified School District Governing Board
Golden Valley School District
37479 Avenue 12
Madera, CA 93638

Madera Unified School District Governing Board
Madera Unified School District
1902 Howard Road
Madera, CA 93637

Superintendent
Golden Valley School District
37479 Avenue 12
Madera, CA 93638

Superintendent
Madera Unified School District
1902 Howard Road
Madera, CA 93637

Invited Responses:

California Highway Patrol
3051 Airport Drive
Madera, CA 93637

Motor Carrier Division
California Highway Patrol
3051 Airport Drive
Madera, CA 93637

APPENDIX 1



Bus Evacuation Form
Please Fill In All Information

Date: 9-14-17

School Site: Chavez

Number of Students: ~~30~~ 32

Information Given:

Emergency Exits: Emergency Equipment: Use of Radio:

How to Evacuate: How to enter and exit the Bus:

Student Crossover: Bus Rules: Seat Belts:

Location of Parking Brake:

Total Time to Cover the Above Information: 0:25

Driver's Signature: 

School Site Representative: _____

Transportation Supervisor: 

Bus Evacuation Form
Please Fill In All Information

Date: 9.28.17

School Site: Nishimoto

Number of Students: 75

Information Given:

Emergency Exits: Emergency Equipment: Use of Radio:

How to Evacuate: How to enter and exit the Bus:

Student Crossover: Bus Rules: Seat Belts:

Location of Parking Brake:

Total Time to Cover the Above Information: 5

Driver's Signature:

School Site Representative: _____

Transportation Supervisor