

# TAKE 5

# Back-to-School Traffic Safety

HS18-002B (09-20)

The end of summer signals a change of season and the start of a new school year. It also brings more students and school buses to area roads, and the need for drivers to use extra caution in school zones.

More than a million Texas children and teens depend on school buses to get to and from school each day.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, 811 vehicle crashes occurred in school zones statewide, resulting in two deaths and 30 serious injuries.<sup>2</sup> Accidents like these can be prevented when motorists drive safely and follow Texas school bus and school zone laws.



## Texas School Bus Laws

In Texas, drivers must stop for flashing red lights on a school bus, regardless of which direction the vehicle is traveling, unless a physical barrier divides the road lanes. Violators can receive up to a \$1,000 fine, driver's license suspension, and even jail time, depending on the number of convictions and the seriousness of the incident. Knowing the flashing-light system that school bus drivers use to signal their intentions to motorists can save lives.

- **Yellow flashing lights.** Yellow flashing lights mean the bus is getting ready to stop to load or unload students. Drivers should slow down and prepare to stop.
- **Red flashing lights.** Red flashing lights with an extended stop sign mean the bus is stopped and students are getting on or off. Drivers approaching the school bus from either direction must stop, even if the road is divided by a turning lane, unless a median or other physical barrier such as a wall or fence, separates the road lanes. Vehicles may not pass the school bus until the red lights stop flashing, the extended stop sign is pulled back into place, the school bus has started to move, and the bus driver signals for vehicles to proceed.

(Continued.)

## Watch for Students

Each year, about 13% of the students returning to the 9,000-plus schools across Texas<sup>3</sup> walk or ride bikes to class.<sup>4</sup> The following recommendations can help motorists remain alert and keep students safe before and after school hours.

- **Reverse responsibly.** When backing a vehicle, go slowly and watch for students walking or riding their bikes to school. Every vehicle has blind spots. Check for walking and biking students on the sidewalk, in the driveway, and around vehicles. Look around and use all mirrors and a backup camera when the vehicle is equipped with one.
- **Slow down and stay alert.** Look for students walking in the street, especially in neighborhoods without sidewalks. Speed limits in school zones are slower for a reason. A pedestrian struck by a vehicle traveling at 25 mph is nearly two-thirds less likely to be killed compared to a pedestrian struck by a vehicle traveling 10 mph faster.<sup>5</sup>
- **Come to a complete stop.** According to the [American Automobile Association](#), more than one-third of drivers roll through stop signs in school zones or neighborhoods. Always come to a complete stop, check for students in crosswalks, and watch for students who may dart into the street or between vehicles when trying to catch their bus.
- **Watch for bicycles.** Students on bikes are often inexperienced, unsteady, and unpredictable. Slow down and give bicyclists three feet of passing distance.

## Texas School Zone Laws

Knowing Texas school zone laws can help motorists keep students safe and avoid traffic fines.

- **Follow the speed limit.** Obey the posted speed limit in active school zones. School zone speed limits are usually set at 25 mph; however, local municipalities have the option to change the speed limit to meet local needs. In fact, a school zone speed limit can be as low as 15 mph to help protect students. Fines usually double in school zones.
- **Eliminate distractions.** Do not use a cell phone while driving. In Texas, handheld cell phone use is banned in all active school zones. Violators face fines up to \$200. [Research](#) shows that when drivers take their eyes off the road for just two seconds, it doubles their chances of crashing. Reduce risk by not using electronic devices or eating while driving.

## Texas School Zone Laws

- **Remain alert at intersections and crosswalks.** School campuses are active at all hours with before- and after-school activities. Always watch for students rushing to and from pick-up and drop-off locations, who might not use the school's designated area. Slow down. In addition to Texas doubling fines in school zones, it imposes an extra \$25 court cost onto the cost of the ticket. These extra funds go back to the school system's crossing guard program and other student safety plans.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the fine, the life of a child is priceless. Stay alert, obey the speed limit, and avoid distractions. The few seconds it takes to slow down in a school zone can save the life of child.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of Transportation. School Bus Safety. Website. <https://www.txdot.gov/driver/kids-teens/school-bus-safety.html>. Accessed September 15, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Texas Department of Transportation. Back to School Driving Tips. Website. <https://www.txdot.gov/driver/kids-teens/school.html>. Accessed September 15, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Texas Department of Transportation. School Bus Safety. Website. <https://www.txdot.gov/driver/kids-teens/school-bus-safety.html>. Accessed September 15, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> AAA Exchange. School's Open – Drive Carefully. Website. <https://exchange.aaa.com/safety/child-safety/schools-open-drive-carefully/#.X2IPgmhKiUk>. Accessed September 16, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> AAA Exchange. School's Open – Drive Carefully. Website. <https://exchange.aaa.com/safety/child-safety/schools-open-drive-carefully/#.X2IPgmhKiUk>. Accessed September 16, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Virtual Drive. Texas School Zones. Website. <https://www.virtualdriveoftexas.com/texas-school-zones/>. Accessed September 16, 2020.



*Safety Violations Hotline*

**1-800-452-9595**

[safetyhotline@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:safetyhotline@tdi.texas.gov)

The Texas Department of Insurance,  
Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC)  
E-mail [resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov)  
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

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