



Berkeley Heights School District PARENTS' GUIDE TO TRANSPORTATION

The purpose of this handbook is to familiarize parents with the Berkeley Heights School District transportation system. We will attempt to answer many of the questions that parents have regarding their child's transportation to school.

While this handbook was specifically created for the parents of kindergarten students and new students, more experienced parents may also find it useful.

If reading this handbook helps ease your child's entrance into our school system, then we have met our goal.

Debra Wilson
Transportation Supervisor

Berkeley Heights provides transportation for over 1300 in-district students, using First Student (formerly Laidlaw), Morris Union Jointure Commission, and our own district buses.

The vehicles used by the district are owned by the district, and the drivers that operate these vehicles are employed by the Berkeley Heights Board of Education.

Berkeley Heights uses a tiered busing system. The students attending Governor Livingston High School, grades 9-12, represent the first tier. The second tier consists of Pre-K thru 8th Grade students, attending Hamilton Terrace Early Learning Center, Mountain Park Elementary, Thomas P. Hughes Elementary, William Woodruff Elementary, and Columbia Middle Schools.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- All students must be at the bus stop ten (10) minutes before the assigned pick up time. This rule is in effect all year. Please remember, running down the driveway is **not** “at the bus stop”. Please have your child stand where the bus driver can see him/her. Bus drivers are not allowed to wait for students who are late since this presents a significant traffic safety hazard.
- Bus pass times are target times. Permanent pick up times will be established through consistent driver practice. Pick up times may also vary during the school year due to constant fluctuations in traffic patterns.
- Students shall only ride the bus to which they are assigned. Students are not permitted to ride another bus for any after school activities, which include but are not limited to scouts, work, visiting a friend, birthday parties, school projects, etc. For safety reasons, students may only board and exit the bus at their assigned Stop.
- All buses have seat belts, which students are required to wear. Drivers are required to report those who refuse to wear seat belts as directed.
- Your child should wait off the roadway and approach the actual boarding location only after the bus has stopped and the red school lights are flashing.
- If it is necessary to cross the road to get to the bus stop, students should wait until the driver has stopped the bus and activated the red lights. Students should cross at least 15 feet in front of the bus, looking both ways to be sure it is safe before crossing.
- When Hamilton Terrace students are dropped off at their bus stop, the driver must see a parent. If the bus stop is at your home and you are waiting inside, please open the door and wave at the driver so he/she knows you are there.

- All carry-on materials must be small enough to be held on the child's lap. Backpacks must not be worn while students are seated. All large materials, including large band instruments, must be transported by car.
- All bus stop change requests must be made in writing to the Transportation Department. Please, no phone requests. If a change is made, please allow 3 days for the change to take effect.
- Please make sure that your house number is clearly visible from the road. If the bus driver is unable to clearly identify the address on your house or mailbox, your child may not receive transportation the first day.

VEHICLE SAFETY/ MAINTENANCE

Each school vehicle is subjected to a thorough New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles inspection twice a year. These inspections are conducted on-site and are school vehicle specific.

Drivers must conduct a complete pre-trip inspection daily before taking their vehicle out on the road. If they take a different vehicle out on the road that same day, they must conduct a complete pre-trip inspection of that vehicle as well. Any vehicle that is found to be deficient during these pre-trip inspections is taken out of service until the deficiency is corrected.

All vehicles are routinely maintained during the school year according to a regular schedule that conforms to state guidelines.

All vehicles are swept regularly, as well as thoroughly cleaned inside and out several times during the school year.

All drivers, at the completion of each route, are required to walk to the rear of the vehicle to check for pupils who may have remained on board.

If a vehicle breaks down, another vehicle is supplied within a short period of time.

CONDUCT ON THE BUS

- Show respect for the driver at all times and follow his/her direction.
- Remain seated until the bus comes to a complete stop.

- Loud talking, laughing, or other unnecessary behavior diverts the driver's attention and may result in a serious accident. Students should talk quietly to their neighbors while riding the bus.
- Do not litter or throw anything in the bus or out the window.
- Students shall not use profanity.
- Students shall not tamper with the bus or any of its equipment.
- Students shall keep their heads and arms inside the bus when the windows are open and keep the aisles clear of feet, books, packages, coats, and all other objects.
- Smoking is prohibited at all times.
- Eating and drinking is not permitted on the bus at any time.
- The driver shall be responsible for the orderly conduct of the students. While on the bus, the students are under the authority of, and directly responsible to, the driver. In the event of misconduct by the student, the driver will complete a Bus Conduct Report that will be submitted to the school principal.

Upon violation of any rules, the following procedure will be followed:

- First Offense: Discussion with the Principal or Assistant Principal
- Second Offense: Contact with the student's parents.
- Third Offense: Exclusion from the bus for one school day.
- Fourth Offense: Exclusion from the bus for five school days.
- Fifth Offense: Exclusion from the bus for thirty school days and/or other consequences determined by the administrator on an individual basis.

Serious violations may require imposing immediate extended exclusion from the bus.

Note: When a student is excluded from the bus, parents are responsible for transporting the student to and from school.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q- Where do the bus drivers come from and what requirements do they have to meet?

A- All bus drivers (this includes district drivers as well as any outside contractors) must possess a CDL license with a passenger endorsement and a special school bus driver endorsement. In order to get that license they have to pass two written

tests and a road test. They also have to undergo a physical exam every two years to keep the CDL license.

In order to keep the passenger and school bus driver endorsements and work in a school system, the driver must be fingerprinted and undergo a criminal background check upon initial employment and every four years thereafter. School bus drivers are also required to be enrolled in a random drug-testing program that is administered by their employer. This drug testing program screens for illegal drug and alcohol use. All drivers also have their motor vehicle abstract checked by the Department of Education at least once per year to make sure that any license suspensions or serious motor vehicle violations have been reported.

Q- How will I know what bus my child will ride on to school in September?

A- Before school opens you will receive notification in the mail with bus information on it. This card will contain the names of your child's AM and PM bus routes, the location of the AM and PM bus stops, and the pick up and drop off times. Please hold on to this information. Your child does not need the document to board the bus, however you may need the information for any questions that may arise about your child's bus route.

Q- What happens if I don't get home in time to get my Hamilton Terrace student off the bus?

A- If, when the bus gets to your stop, there is no parent or pre-authorized person at the stop to receive your child, the driver will keep your child on the bus and go on to finish the rest of the route. The driver will return your child to the school at the end of the route, where you will be responsible to go to pick him/her up. If you arrive home and realize that you have missed your child's bus, please call the transportation office (908-464-2533) or the school office (Hamilton Terrace 908-464-5583) to let them know that you are home. We can then confirm whether or not your child is on his/her way back to the school. No Hamilton Terrace student will be dropped off alone at a stop.

If you know in advance that you won't be at the bus stop, please make alternate arrangements to have someone else receive your child off the bus. You must also notify the Transportation Department of the name of that person. Bus drivers will not release Hamilton Terrace students to the care of strangers without advance permission from the parent. If parents desire, they can give a note to the bus driver or the Transportation Department in the beginning of the year with the names of any other adults who have permission to receive the child off the bus.

Q- What should I do if my child is having a problem with another child on the bus?

A- If you simply want to request that the driver move your child's seat, you can

address this request directly to the driver when the bus stops to pick up your child. If it is a more serious problem, please call the Transportation Department. We request that parents not hold up the bus by discussing serious issues at the bus stop. The drivers have a schedule to keep and it is unfair to the other parents and children along the route for one parent to hold up the entire bus.

Q- What should I do if I feel the bus is being operated in a reckless or unsafe manner?

A- If you see something or hear something from your child that you feel needs to be checked out, please contact the Transportation Department with your concern. Your child's safety is our number one priority. All such calls will be thoroughly investigated to make sure that all Berkeley Heights school buses are operated in a safe manner.

Q- When school opens on a delayed schedule due to bad weather, what time should I expect my child's bus to arrive?

A- All delayed openings are a 1 ½ hour delay, so the bus will pick your child up 1 ½ hours later than usual.

Q- My child is the only one getting on at the bus stop, which is all the way at the corner: can the stop be moved to the front of my house?

A- Bus stops are not intended to be door-to-door. They are either centrally located or corner stops, so they do not have to be moved from one year to the next. Please do not ask the driver to stop in front of your house. This would be an illegal stop and the bus driver could lose his/her job if they are found to have created an illegal bus stop. Illegal stops also make it difficult for a sub driver to cover the route when the regular driver is out sick.

Q- We are moving into a different house in Berkeley Heights. My children will need a different bus to and from the new house. How do I arrange this?

A- Approximately one week before your move, or earlier if you prefer, call your child's school to make them aware of the address change. The school office will forward an address change form to the transportation department. Please allow at least 3 days for the change to take effect.

Q- My seventh grade daughter wants to go over to her friend's house after school. How do I arrange for her to take the friend's bus?

A- Unfortunately, students are not permitted to ride another bus for any after school activities, which include but are not limited to scouts, work, visiting a friend, birthday parties, school projects, etc.

Q- What do I do if my child leaves something behind on the bus?

A- Lost and found items will remain on the bus on which they were found for a short time to allow the child to reclaim them. If the items are not reclaimed, they are turned over to the appropriate transportation office.

If your child rides a First Student (Laidlaw) bus, you may call or visit the First Student Transportation Office to retrieve lost and found items at:

First Student
29 River Road
Chatham, NJ 07928
(973) 635-5707

If your child rides a Morris Union Jointure Commission bus, you may call or visit the Morris Union Jointure Commission Transportation Office at:

Morris Union Jointure Commission
310 Snyder Avenue
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922
(908) 790-9270

If your child rides a Berkeley Heights Board of Education bus, you may call or visit the Berkeley Heights Transportation Office at:

Berkeley Heights Transportation
345 Plainfield Avenue
Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922
(908) 464-2533

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Debra Wilson-Transportation Supervisor (908) 464-2533