

Local partnership promoting school bus safety to motorists

Independent and county school districts, county government take part in campaign

“It’s not JUST a stop sign, it’s a child’s life.”

That is the message a joint partnership between the Harlan County School District, the Harlan Independent School District and Harlan County Judge Executive Dan Mosley and the Harlan Fiscal Court is spreading across the county to promote the importance of school bus safety to motorists.

Utilizing a statewide campaign theme by the Kentucky Department of Education, a large banner has been placed over U.S. 421 in Harlan and yard signs are being strategically placed along busy roads to promote safety and help protect students as they load and unload each day.

Forty-five billboards were placed across the state. While there isn’t one in Harlan County, the local partnership formed after Harlan County Schools Transportation Director Mike Cox and Driver Trainer Debbie Dozier approached Superintendent Mike Howard requesting to expand the campaign locally.

An invitation was extended to Mosley for the fiscal court and to Morton for the independent district to be involved. Both agreed to participate.

“Student safety is something that is near and dear to all of our hearts,” said Mosley. “As motorists, in our busy everyday lives, sometimes we tend to get complacent behind the wheel. This time of year should serve as a reminder to all of us that school is back in session and when those buses stop, and the lights are flashing the very next thing we see could be one of our own children or grandchildren trying to navigate traffic to begin their educational day or get home to one of us.”

Morton agreed, noting “School Bus safety is a personal choice, it really boils down to respecting all the efforts that have been put in place to protect students and school buses. Being aware of the bus, the flashing lights, the stop arms, the drivers and the school children is critical in school bus safety. By respecting the entire school bus area drivers can help ensure student safety.”

Morton said it is imperative that drivers be aware of the laws governing travel when school buses are stopped.

“Driver awareness is a fundamental element for School Bus Safety,” said Morton. “Every driver on the road must be aware of the rules regarding how to drive when school buses are on the road. Every effort to raise awareness and promote school bus safety is important to the overall safety of our students.”

Howard said the current campaign specifically focuses on loading and unloading students.

“The most critical time for the safety of our students while transporting them to and from school is the loading and unloading along our streets and roads,” said Howard.



During the 2014-15 school year, 75 percent of the school bus-related fatalities across the nation occurred when a student was hit by a passing vehicle, according to the annual National School Bus Loading and Unloading Survey.

“Some motorists are not aware of when they must stop for a school bus,” said Howard. “It is important to remember that if the road is a divided highway and there is a median between the lanes, traffic going in the opposite direction does not have to stop. Traffic going in the same direction as the bus must stop. If there are two or more lanes not divided by a median, all traffic must stop.”

School bus drivers use a "flashing signal light system" to alert motorists of pending actions:

- Yellow flashing lights indicate that the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.
- Red flashing lights and extended stop arms indicate that the bus has stopped, and that children are getting on or off the bus. Motorists must stop their cars and wait until the red lights stop flashing, the extended stop sign is withdrawn, and the bus begins moving before they can start moving again.

While Kentucky has not recorded any such fatalities, bus drivers often see drivers illegally passing their buses as children attempt to get on and off the bus. According to a survey by the National Association of the State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services of more than 96,000 school bus drivers in 33 states, drivers recorded 74,421 vehicles illegally passing a stopped school bus.

Drivers must record the license numbers for motorists breaking the law and then warrants are obtained for drivers of the vehicles.

“We hope to raise awareness by placing these signs and the banner to remind motorists to be aware that school is in session and that they should be alert for school buses that are hauling our **most precious cargo**,” said Howard.

Mosley said he is pleased to be a part of the partnership with the two school districts.

“My hope is the partnership to place banners and signs on the busiest stretches of highway will help remind our citizens to be on alert for all of the school buses out and about.”

For more information, visit the Kentucky Department of Education website at <http://www.education.ky.gov> , or follow the agency on Twitter at www.twitter.com/kydeptofed and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kydeptofed.