## EASTON BUS MANUAL



# Samuel Staples Elementary School 515 Morehouse Road 

## Helen Keller Middle School 360 Sport Hill Road

## IMPORTANT BUS CONTACTS

## Bus Company

For questions regarding bus timeliness, bus driver issues, etc., contact First Student, Inc. directly either by phone or email:

First Student, Inc.
11 Durant Avenue \#1
Bethel, CT 06801
475-470-0373
Location Manager: Elaine Reynolds, Elaine.Reynolds@FirstGroup.com
or the Easton/Redding/Region 9 Business Operations Manager, Oliver Crouch, at 203-261-2513 or ocrouch@er9.org.

## Easton/Redding/Regional School District No. 9

For questions regarding bus routes, bus stops, etc., contact the ER9 Central Office by filling out the online form at www.er9.org , click on Parent Information, Bus Forms - ER9 Transportation Change Request Form.

If you wish to opt out of school-provided transportation, please complete the Opt-Out form found at www.er9.org, Parent Information, Bus Forms.

If you need your child/children dropped off or picked up at an alternate location other than your home address because of joint custody or day-care purposes, please complete the Dual Stop Request Form found at www.er9.org, Parent Information, Bus Forms.

## Contact for Reporting Inappropriate Behavior

To report inappropriate student behavior on the bus to or from school, call the school office directly. The office staff at each school will direct your call.

| Samuel Staples Elementary School: | $203-261-3607$ |
| :--- | :--- |
| Helen Keller Middle School: | $203-268-8651$ |

## Bus Route Postings

Current bus route information will only be available via the Parent Portal in PowerSchool.

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## Dear Parents:

Almost all children today ride a school bus at one time or another. Many ride back and forth to school each day. Some ride only occasionally on field trips. It is important, therefore, that all children learn about safe school bus behaviors.

In order for the bus driver to keep students safe, the driver must concentrate on the road. Students need to be mindful of their behavior at all times. Riding an Easton school bus is a privilege. Like all privileges, riding the bus can be taken away if ongoing poor behavior is noted. As set forth in Easton Board of Education Policy No. 5131.1:

Students are advised that they may be suspended from school and/or transportation services for unsatisfactory conduct while awaiting or receiving transportation to and from school which endangers persons or property or violates a board policy or administrative regulation.

The purpose of this manual is to provide you with information about school bus riding in Easton and enhance your understanding of school bus safety. By parents and students reading this manual, we will increase awareness of the rules and procedures endorsed by local and national bus experts.

According to the National Association for Pupil Transportation Foundation, statistics continue to confirm the fact that school buses are the safest mode of transportation for students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. By making parents and students aware of the rights and responsibilities of being a school bus passenger, we hope to increase our school bus ridership, improve school bus safety, and provide direction for those with questions or concerns related to the school bus.

It is our vision to have students display an understanding of the respect and responsibility commensurate with riding in their family car.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Fox Santora
Principal
Samuel Staples Elementary School
Susan Kaplan
Principal
Helen Keller Middle School

## EASTON BUS MANUAL

Student behavior while waiting for the school bus in the morning, riding on the bus, and exiting the bus at the end of the day is of continuing concern because of the potential for injury to children caused by inappropriate behavior. School administrators, teachers, the bus company, and bus drivers will periodically review bus behavior with children in classrooms, at assemblies, and on buses. Parents are also asked to discuss proper bus behavior with their children.

## WAITING FOR THE BUS

- Walk to the bus stop and arrive at the bus stop five (5) minutes before the scheduled pick-up time and stand in a safe place. Stay 5 giant steps ( 10 feet) back from the road. Wait quietly and be alert to danger. DO NOT WAIT INDOORS AS THE BUS SCHEDULE DOES NOT PERMIT WAIT TIME.
- Behave at the bus stop.

1. Stay on sidewalk or driveway at all times.
2. Keep hands, feet, and objects to self.
3. Speak kindly to others.
4. Be respectful of the citizens living near the bus stop and their property.

- NEVER SPEAK TO STRANGERS. Immediately tell the bus driver, a teacher, and/or a parent if someone you do not know approaches you.

Keep in mind that behavior at the bus stop is a parental responsibility. The school assumes responsibility from the time children board the bus until they exit from the bus in the afternoon. All school rules that are in effect apply to a child's behavior during this time.

## GETTING ON THE BUS

- Before you move, wait until the bus is stopped, the door opens, and the driver says it is okay to get on. If you must cross the street, make eye contact with the bus driver before crossing to board the bus.
- Ask the driver for help if you drop something while boarding the bus.
- Use the handrails when walking up the stairs.
- Take your seat right away before the bus starts to move.
- Sit facing forward in your seat, with your feet in front of you and your backpack on your lap.
- Samuel Staples' students will sit in the designated area by grade level. Brothers and sisters may sit up front with their kindergarten siblings.


## BEHAVIOR ON THE BUS

Students are expected to be kind, respectful, and courteous to one another and to the bus driver, and:

- Make everyone feel welcome and included.
- Treat others the way all students wish to be treated.
- Be willing or invite someone to share a seat.
- Be nice.
- Understand that no eating or drinking on the bus at any time is an important safety issue.

The bus driver is fully occupied driving the bus safely and being alert to traffic, pedestrians, and other hazards. Therefore, it is particularly important that children abide by common sense rules of safety and
courtesy. Students are expected to follow bus rules. Students who are unable to abide by the following rules may lose their ridership privilege:

## 1. EATING, DRINKING, OR SMOKING IS NOT ALLOWED ON THE BUS AT ANY TIME.

2. Be respectful of the school bus driver and follow the directions of the bus driver at all times.
3. When you get on the bus, go directly to your seat. Once you find your seat, put your backpack on your lap.
4. Remain seated at all times facing forward, "Back to Back" and "Bottom to Bottom" while the bus is in motion. Do not kneel or stand on seats. Do not stand up or change seats while the bus is moving.
5. Keep hands, feet and objects to self.
6. Keep the aisle clear at all times. Feet should be directly in front of you on the floor.
7. Use indoor voices at all times.
8. Be respectful of bus property.
9. Do not litter.
10. Animals are not permitted.
11. Use appropriate language on the bus.
12. Body parts, hands, arms, and heads shall remain inside the bus.
13. Respect others and their property.
14. Do not block or manipulate the emergency door.
15. There shall be no disorderly actions, such as fighting, shouting, and/or throwing or swinging objects (including backpacks) inside or outside the bus.
16. Be kind to other students.
17. Stay seated until the bus stops before getting up to get off at your stop.

## LEAVING THE BUS

- Stay seated until the bus stops.
- Use the handrail when walking down the stairs.
- Make sure drawstrings and other loose objects are secure before getting off the bus so they do not get caught on the handrail or door.
- Look for cars passing on the side of the road before stepping off the bus.
- Step off the bus and onto the sidewalk or 5 giant steps away from the street.
- If you have to cross the street, first walk 5 giant steps ahead of the bus along the edge of the street. Then, look at the driver. When he signals, cross only to the edge of the bus. Then, look left, right and left again before crossing to the other side of the street. NEVER go behind the bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, NEVER try to pick it up. TELL THE DRIVER. The driver will help you get it.
- If you leave something on the bus, never return to the bus to get it. The driver may not see you come back and he/she may begin moving the bus.
- Students are only allowed to get off the bus at their assigned bus stop. The driver isn't allowed to let a child off at another stop without written permission.
- Once children leave the bus, they should go directly home and be alert for traffic hazards while walking on the road.


## Kindergarten and First Grade Disembarkation

For safety reasons, bus drivers will not release kindergarten and/or first grade students (even with older siblings on the same bus) unless a parent or guardian (or designated adult) is present at the bus stop to greet the child. If there is no one outside waiting for the child(ren), the bus driver will bring the student(s) back to school after completion of the route, and the parents will be called to pick up their child at school. We urge families to develop a plan for elementary age students to follow if a parent or designated adult is not present at home to greet the student.

## BUS DANGER ZONE

The DANGER ZONE is the area immediately surrounding the school bus. It extends 10 feet in front and behind the bus, and 10 feet from the sides. The area of greatest danger is immediately in front of the front bumper and right wheel. If the student can touch the bus, he/she is TOO CLOSE; and if the student can't see the driver as he/she crosses the street in front of the bus, he/she is TOO CLOSE.


Children leaving the bus should walk straight ahead away from the bus for at least 10 feet before turning in either direction. At the front of the bus there are a number of "blind spots" in which the driver cannot see a small child or one who is stooping to pick up a dropped article. Students who are walking through or standing in the DANGER ZONE are very likely to be outside the bus driver's field of vision. It is important to stay out of the DANGER ZONE in order to be seen by the driver. Never walk behind the bus. If you can see the driver's eyes, the driver can see you. Remember that vehicles do not always stop for a school bus with red lights flashing.

## BUS SAFETY

Bus safety is reviewed with students each year and safety evacuation drills are routinely practiced. Parents should reinforce these important rules. Further, children should know to keep shoes tied and avoid carrying bulky objects or packs with long ties or strings. Sports equipment being carried to school for use at recess or during after-school sports activities must be carried in a sports/duffel bag when transported on a school bus. Large sports items, such as skis, lacrosse or hockey sticks, etc., are not allowed on the bus. Musical instruments must be in an appropriate case.


Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

## Evacuation Drills

The bus company shall organize and conduct two (2) emergency exit (evacuation) drills each year for all students. The initial drill shall occur during the first six (6) weeks of the school year.

Emergency evacuation drills from the side emergency exit shall be arranged and scheduled by the bus company in cooperation with the school administration. The drills shall be held under the direct supervision of the school administration. School bus drivers and bus company personnel shall conduct the emergency evacuation drill sessions.

Drills shall be held on school property and not on a bus route. The bus driver shall stay on the bus during the evacuation drill. The parking brake must be set, ignition turned off, and transmission in neutral.

Students shall not take backpacks, lunch boxes, books, etc., when they evacuate the bus during a drill. Students will be directed to assemble at a safe distance from the bus in an evacuation drill and shall remain there until given further instructions.

## Actual Emergencies

In case of an actual emergency:

- Listen for instructions from the driver.
- Do not touch emergency equipment unless told to do so.
- Do not exit the emergency door unless told to do so.
- If it is necessary to exit through the emergency door, students should:
- Leave all personal items on the bus.
- Be careful (sit and slide).
- Move away from the bus quietly and quickly - others are following.
- Stay together as a group at a safe distance from the bus, until assistance arrives.
- Driver will check to ensure no students remain on board.
- Driver will retrieve the emergency equipment, protect the scene, set out reflective triangles, and join the waiting students.
- Driver will account for all students, ensuring their safety.


## ADDITIONAL BUS INFORMATION

## Video Cameras on Buses

Video Cameras are installed on school buses. Video recordings of student may be used by school administrators to verify complaints about student behavior on the bus. Only school administrators, Central Office personnel and First Student management will have access to view the video.

## Alternate Destinations

Students at Samuel Staples Elementary School are not permitted to ride on alternate buses. However, under certain circumstances, such as to accommodate certain after-school care or shared custody orders, changes may need to be made to a student's assigned bus. Parents must request and receive permission for such a change from Central Office. Permission for such alternate arrangements can be sought by calling the Business Manager at 203-261-2513. If permission is granted, Central Office will officially notify the school and bus company of the approved arrangements. These arrangements remain in effect as long as circumstances warrant, but need to be requested each school year. THIS PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED TO ACCOMMODATE PLAYDATES.

Students at Helen Keller Middle School may ride buses other than their regularly assigned bus on a limited basis only at the discretion of the school district in accordance with bus safety regulations. A written parent request must be submitted to the HKMS Main Office during home room. The student will receive an office-issued bus pass.

## $\underline{\text { Seatbelts }}$

Any vehicle over 10 tons, including a full-size school bus (which is 15 tons), is exempt from the seat belt law. Students under age 8 and less than 60 pounds who ride a minibus or van must wear seat belts. The school buses are equipped with 3-point seat belts, students are encouraged, but not required, to wear them.

## Students With Temporary Special Needs

A student with temporary special needs (e.g., crutches, a cast) is permitted to ride the bus providing he or she can board and evacuate the bus using the handrail and without assistance from the driver. If the student cannot board the bus independently, alternate transportation will be provided. Parents must contact the Business Manager at Central Office (203-261-2513) to arrange for appropriate transportation.

## NO EATING POLICY / Students with Food Allergies

Eating is prohibited on the bus, and drivers must enforce that rule. Food allergies are real, dangerous, and life-threatening. As no medical personnel rides on the bus, the no-eating rule is critical to the safety and well-being of all students, but particularly those with food allergies. Among the best ways for a parent to keep a child with food allergies safe while riding the school bus is to establish a relationship with the school nurse who will work with parents to ensure that:

- The bus company and driver are aware of the child's specific food allergies.
- The bus company stresses to its personnel the importance of enforcing a no-eating policy on the bus.
- The bus driver is trained in allergy awareness, including recognition of an allergic reaction, and in bus emergency procedures.
- The bus company and drivers keep each bus as clean as possible.
- The food allergic child may sit in the front of the bus so that there is a direct sight line to the driver (and vice versa). If necessary, other appropriate seating arrangements may be made.
- The food allergic child limits touching possibly contaminated parts of the bus (e.g., the handrail, etc.).
- Each bus is equipped with a fully functioning communication device in case of an emergency.


## Electronics Devices on School Buses

Helen Keller Middle School students assume the risk if they choose to bring electronic devices on the bus. Students are expected to supervise their belongings at all times. It is the responsibility of students to adhere to the ER9 Acceptable Use Policy No. 5131.81 when using electronic devices on the bus.

Samuel Staples Elementary School does not allow students to use electronic devices on the bus.

## Establishing a Positive Relationship with the Bus Driver

Driving a school bus is a very difficult job. School bus drivers are not educators who have received training in managing large groups of children, and yet, many drivers transport anywhere between 60 and 135 passengers each day.

Everyone appreciates recognition for a job well done. It is important to make an effort to recognize the driver's efforts whenever there is an opportunity.

- Introduce yourself and your child(ren) to the driver.
- Greet the driver by name whenever you see him or her.
- Express your gratitude to the driver, with words, a note, or a smile.
- Tell the bus company how much you appreciate the driver.


## Lost and Found

Articles left on the school bus will be kept for one (1) week. Students may retrieve lost items from the bus driver. Items not claimed within the week will be given to the school. The school and bus company are not responsible for items left on a bus.

## Inclement Weather

Information regarding school cancellations, delayed openings, and/or emergency early dismissals, may be found at www.er9.org . Parents will also be notified via Listserv.

## Unexpected Bus Delays

In case of bus delays because of unanticipated occurrences, such as mechanical problems, accidents, etc., parents will be notified via Listserv.

## AGGRESSIVE OR MEAN BEHAVIOR

The Easton School District is committed to promoting and ensuring that the climates in our schools remain conducive to teaching and learning that is free from threat, harassment and any type of aggressive or mean behavior. All school rules must be followed from the moment a student boards a bus in the morning to go to school until he or she disembarks from the bus in the afternoon after the school day. Parents are urged to review the Easton Board of Education policy on bullying and other violent and aggressive behavior with their child. Easton Board of Education Policy No. 5131.21 may be found on the www.er9.org website, where parents and students can see details of specific behaviors classified as bullying. All district policies and regulations may be found under the link to the Easton Board of Education.

The Helen Keller Middle School Bullying/Harassment Report Form is available in the Guidance Office or may be filled out online. The form may be found on the main page of the HKMS website at www.helenkellerps.org/.

## Some Warning Signs of Bullying and Ways for Adults to Help Prevent Bullying

Parents and guardians, staff members, bus drivers, and students are encouraged to be aware of some of the warning signs of being bullied, as well as what they can do to prevent bullying.

Warning signs of bullying are:

- Student shows an abrupt lack of interest in school or refuses to go to school or travel on the school bus.
- Student has torn or missing clothing.
- Student has physical injuries not consistent with explanation.
- Student has stomachaches, headaches, panic attacks, and/or is unable to sleep.
- Student suffers a drop in grades.

Ways for adults to help prevent bullying are:

- Be a good listener. Discuss bullying behavior with your child(ren), including the different types: physical, verbal, and social, and their effects.
- Work collaboratively with school personnel to address a problem.
- Be as vigilant about bullying prevention as you are about other safety concerns, such as smoking and drug and alcohol use.
- Become active in your child(ren)'s school.


## If Your Child Witnesses Aggressive or Mean Behavior on the Bus

Please encourage them to:

- Refuse to watch, laugh, or join in when someone is being picked on or treated poorly.
- Help others who are being picked on or treated poorly.
- Tell the bus driver about any mean or aggressive behavior.


## Steps to Follow if You Are Concerned about Your Child's Experience on the Bus

- Speak to the bus driver. See if he/she is aware of the problem.
- Contact the school administration directly and report the following information:
- The date and time of the incident.
- The student(s) or driver you are concerned about.
- A description of the problem.
- The bus number.
- Names of potential witnesses to the incident.

Contacting the other child's parent independently is strongly discouraged. A parent may not get on the bus to confront another child.

## Strategies to Discuss With Your Child

The following are some strategies to discuss with your child:

## Practice self-affirmation.

Teach your child to give himself or herself a silent pep talk whenever he or she is teased on the bus. For example, your child might say to himself or herself, "Even though they are saying hurtful things about me, I know that they are not true." The better a child feels about himself or herself, the less likely he or she is to be picked on.

## Teach your child to be assertive, but not aggressive.

Teach your child to verbally stand up for himself or herself and help him or her practice these skills. Your child can let the other student know that his or her actions will not be tolerated. Your child can achieve this by telling the student, "You can't talk to me like that. Leave me alone."

Caution! Some students actually feed on getting any kind of reaction, so your child should try being assertive once. If it does not work, he or she should move on to another strategy; otherwise, the mean behavior may escalate.

## Do not encourage your child to fight the other student.

Some students may tend to tease children who are smaller and weaker to ensure a victory for themselves. If a student physically fights back, school administrators will issue consequences to all parties involved.

## Encourage your child to ask an adult for help.

If the above solutions do not work, let your child know that it is okay to report the behavior to a teacher or other responsible adult. Often aggressive or mean behavior is a problem that needs adult or parental involvement and intervention.
If a child is being treated poorly repeatedly, the most important thing for him/her to do is talk to an adult! Let your child know that it is not "tattling" to tell you or another adult about an incident. Discuss the situation with your child's teacher or a school administrator, not with the parents of the other student.

## Tactics to Use to Support Students on the Bus

Here are some helpful suggestions for children to use if they are experiencing mean or aggressive behavior towards them:

- Reporting is telling on someone to help that person or someone else; tattling or ratting is telling on someone to get him or her into trouble
- Try to ignore the other student, pretending not to hear him or her. Do not even look at him/her. Walk right past him/her, if possible. Students often stop if they do not have an audience.
- Try to sit with students who are your friends, or at least students with whom you feel safe.
- Do not provoke the other student by staring. Staring is seen as confrontational.
- Practice sitting up straight. Walk tall and walk with confidence. Some students may target others who slouch in their seats or slouch when they walk.
- If the mean behavior continues, tell the other student to stop. Be polite, but firm. Look him or her straight in the eye and, without name-calling, say, "I want you to stop it."
- Do not cry, get angry, or show that you are upset. That is the other student's goal. Do not give him/her the satisfaction. Even if you are feeling really hurt, do not let it show. Turn away if you cannot hide your feelings.
- Brainstorm responses ahead of time, and practice them in the mirror. In that way, you will have them ready when you need them.
- If the problem continues, tell the bus driver. Tell your parents or an adult you can trust (this may include: a teacher, the principal, an adult youth leader, or someone at your church or synagogue.)
- If you feel you cannot talk to anyone, try writing a letter about what is happening. Keep a copy for yourself and give the letter to an adult you trust.
- If you do not want to seek out help from someone alone, bring a friend, sibling, or parent. It especially helps to bring someone who has seen the behavior.
- Remember that you are not the one with the problem. It is the other student who has the problem.


## BEHAVIORAL COMPLAINT PROCEDURES - DISPOSITION OF COMPLAINTS

The process by which a bullying complaint may be made and how a complaint may be handled by the school administrators is explained in the school handbook. [www.samuelstaplesps.org; www.helenkellerps.org]

## BUS DRIVER OBLIGATIONS

The bus driver shall:

- Transport children to and from school safely.
- Not smoke on the bus, on school grounds, or in front of students at any time.
- Introduce himself or herself to students riding the bus, especially younger students and their parents, in an effort to provide a sense of security and comfort.
- Not exchange personal information with students (e.g., phone numbers, email addresses).
- Engage in appropriate conduct and conversation while in the presence of students.
- Be in the driver's seat and remain there while students are on the bus, while students are loading or unloading, and while the motor is running.
- Check student passes regularly, if required, and make sure that students board or leave a bus only when it is stopped.
- Strictly enforce a NO EATING POLICY on the bus because of the dangers (e.g., choking, allergic reaction, etc.) of such behavior.
- Promptly report serious behavior or safety incidents to the bus company and to school administrators, and if requested by the school administration, file a written report. (See use of Bus Conduct Report Form below.)
- Follow bus company policy for checking the bus for sleeping children.
- Check the bus for vandalism after every run and report all damage immediately.
- Not operate a vehicle carrying school children in excess of its rated capacity.
- Follow accident reporting procedures as outlined in BOE Policy No. 3541.9.

Note that the bus driver has other duties and responsibilities under the terms of his/her employment with the bus company. They have not all been enumerated here.

When a bus driver identifies that there is a disciplinary problem on a bus, he or she fills out a Bus Conduct Report. (See Bus Conduct Report Form on the last page of this manual.) The bus driver then submits the Bus Conduct Report to a school administrator. An administrator reviews the conduct report, investigates the report to the extent necessary, and meets with the student(s) to determine an appropriate consequence. A copy of the conduct report is sent home for a parent's signature or mailed directly to the parent. Copies are given to the driver and the bus company, and one copy is maintained on file in the school office for at least one (1) year.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## How many children are allowed to share a bus seat?

Three (3) students are allowed to share a bus seat; however, the bus company prefers, when possible, to only allow two (2) students per seat.

## Are there chains on the bus for use in inclement weather?

Yes. In inclement weather, drop chains that provide traction control are installed on buses and can be automatically dropped over the tires.

Why are the brakes of the school bus so noisy?
Because of oil and grease lubrication being used, it takes a great deal to stop a fifteen (15) ton school bus. Noisy brakes do not mean the brakes are impaired.

What should I do in case of an unexpected or unusual delay of my child's bus?
The safest and wisest course of action is to stay home by the phone and trust that the bus company is doing everything it can to get your child home as quickly and safely as possible.

## EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICIES

The complete Easton Board of Education policies are available online at www.er9.org. The policies referenced herein are numbered as follows:

BOE Policy Nos. 3541 through 3541.9 (Transportation; Student Behavior).
BOE Policy Nos. 5131 through 5131.91 (Conduct).
BOE Policy No. 5114 (Student Discipline and Due Process).


