

# The Need To Align A School's Behavior Management Plan and Bus Behavior Plans

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**Research Question:** How can we better support behavior management systems on our school buses by aligning them to the school's behavior management plan?

## Rationale

A School's behavior management plan and administration do not always provide the necessary support for bus behavior plans. This is a problem commonly seen in the profession. Bus drivers are encouraged to take control but must have the support of the school principal to be able to effectively manage the behaviors that occur on their bus. Different schools tend to use different methods for resolving conflicts that occur. While some administrative faculty members prefer to get involved personally, others take a less interactive approach to solving the situations. This tends to cause problems for the bus drivers.

The lack of support leads to less effective disciplinary strategies used. A few bus drivers that were surveyed had similar opinions on the roles of a school's behavior management plan and the support they received from the administration. So, what exactly does a bus behavior plan include?

## Literature Review

The basic bus behavior plan includes but is not limited to the following: All behavior expectations, including acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, must be clear to the students. They must understand the consequences for unacceptable behaviors. There are different ways to manage behaviors to help prevent serious or multiple infractions (*APS Student Transportation Handbook*).

The different methods for managing behaviors include setting rules, being clear in communication with students, extinction of behaviors, punishment and positive reinforcement for acceptable behaviors. Setting rules establishes expectations and safety for the bus ride. Having clear communication with the students allows for clear and understandable correction of behaviors. Extinction is simply ignoring behaviors that are annoying or attention-seeking, but not dangerous (American Federation of Teachers).

In our district, punishment is handled using the guide located within the *APS Handbook for Student Success*. This handbook includes information about how a driver, bus assistant or administration may choose different consequences when handling a situation. These consequences depend on the seriousness of the infraction. A first offence is handled with a

warning to the student with a report to the guardians or parents. Second offenses disciplinary action will be taken at the discretion of the school administration with the recommendation that the student be placed on probation and receive a written document stating the offense for the parents or guardian to review. With a third offense a suspension of riding privileges can result, depending on the seriousness of the infraction. When a serious disruption occurs immediate suspension of transportation privileges will take effect. Positive reinforcement for acceptable behaviors is the most powerful way of increasing the likelihood of a positive behavior to be repeated. The school's support regarding disciplinary actions can affect the bus driver's ability to manage the behavior that occurs.

Having a school's support regarding a bus behavioral plan is necessary. Their support ensures that an unacceptable behavior that has occurred during the care of a driver is addressed and punishment is enforced. The enforcement of punishment helps the students understand their wrongdoings, which decreases the probability that a similar situation will happen again. Many teachers use similar methods regarding negative behaviors in the classroom. These are recommended to be used on buses (Mulvahill, 2019).

Having these similar methods in the classroom and on the bus can be helpful, although classroom behaviors and bus behaviors can differ. Some behaviors that occur both in school and on the bus are foul language, bullying, aggressive behavior, fighting, threats, weapons, and sometimes drugs and alcohol (Mulvahill, 2019). Though these behaviors occur in both situations the dynamic between the two are often different. Because of limited time with students, bus drivers can only do so much to prevent and discipline students unlike teachers and other administrative members. Most importantly, many drivers feel they are not receiving support from a school's administrative faculty when disciplinary actions are needed.

## **Study Design**

I interviewed 15 bus drivers and used their responses to guide my research. In the end, I relied heavily on in-depth interviews of 4 bus drivers with whom I worked. I asked them a series of questions about how their behavior management was reinforced, or not reinforced, by teachers and administration at the various schools they served.

## **Study Results**

According to an AFCP union member who has been working about 5 years in transportation, there is a need for all school staff to be supportive. Another AFCP union member with a total of six years' experience in transportation said they do not feel very supported as part of the school's behavior management system or they are not included in these systems. Being an AFCP member with 36 years of transportation experience, I am inclined to agree with others' statements regarding the lack of involvement and support given by the school. Having school support, as well as the union management's support, is something that bus drivers said repeatedly might help bus management to be taken seriously.

According to the people who participated in the survey, they feel they are not included in professional development regarding the behavior management systems at schools they provide

service to. There seems to be a belief that being included in fair decisions based on a student's actions will set expectations for what is expected from the students on the bus. Due to the lack of input asked from bus drivers, there is not any concern for what goes on during a child's time on the bus.

### **Recommendations/Next Steps**

The support for the bus behavior management plans is not always provided from the school's administration or the school's behavior management plan. The bus's management plan includes effective management and prevention as well as consequences for negative behavior that occurs on the bus, but is not always directly tied to a school's behavior management plan. This causes confusion for students about their expected behavior in the two settings, and a lack of support for the bus drivers. Although the dynamic between the two settings are different, schools can provide more support for drivers. People who were surveyed had similar opinions about the lack of support from the school's administrative faculty and their behavior management plans.

Going forward, there needs to be ongoing joint professional development on behavior management that includes all stakeholders in the school community: licensed educators, administration, transportation, custodial staff, cafeteria staff, and instructional assistants. In this way, we can align our behavior expectations and better serve our students' needs. School staff will see themselves as partners with bus drivers and the drivers will be able to support the school's goals. This could be accomplished through negotiations with our school district and our union winning language to support this type of cross-professional development.

### **References**

APS Student Transportation Handbook. [www.aps.edu/student-transportation-services/studenttransportation-handbook](http://www.aps.edu/student-transportation-services/studenttransportation-handbook).

"Managing Student Behavior on the School Bus." PDF. American Federation of Teachers.

Elizabeth Mulvahill (2019) .contest-social .share-links svg. "The Pain and Agony of the School Bus." Retrieved from [www.weareteachers.com/dealingwith-bus-problems/](http://www.weareteachers.com/dealingwith-bus-problems/).

### Appendix

#### **Aligning Behavior Expectations Between the School and the Bus (Survey)**

1. Are you a member of your union, AFCP?
2. How long have you worked in transportation for APS or another district?
3. How supported do you feel as part of your school(s) behavior management system?
4. What support do you need?
5. Are you included in professional development regarding behavior management systems at the school(s) you serve? \*If you answered no above, do you believe it would be helpful? Explain.
6. Are you given paid time to address behavior issues of a student with the administration, teacher(s), student and their parents?
7. If you answered "No" above, do you believe it would be helpful? Explain.

8. How do you feel you can best be supported to align your behavior expectations on the bus with the school's behavior expectations?