

School Bus Driver Licensing and Training Requirements

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March 19, 2018 | 2018-R-0089

Issue

What are the current licensing and training requirements for school bus drivers? What training do school bus companies typically provide? Has there been any recent legislation related to school bus safety?

Summary

To drive a school bus, a person must obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) and the required license endorsements (i.e., "P" and "S" endorsements). This report generally focuses on the additional license and training requirements for bus drivers above those required to obtain a CDL. For more information on the requirements for obtaining a CDL, see the Department of Motor Vehicles' (DMV) [website](#).

To be eligible for the required endorsements to drive a school bus, applicants must, among other things, have an acceptable driving record, possess good moral character, pass a medical exam and criminal background check, and not be listed on the sex offender or child abuse registries. Applicants may be disqualified if they exceed the number of allowable motor vehicle violations or have certain criminal convictions.

Before receiving the initial endorsements to drive a school bus, applicants must complete the required preservice training and pass a proficiency exam and road test. Preservice training, in general, must be at least 10 hours long and must cover a number of specified topics, such as bus inspections and emergency procedures, among other things. Holders applying to renew their

endorsement must also submit to DMV proof that they have completed the required in-service training. The training required for licensure and endorsement, in practice, is typically provided by approved instructors at school bus companies. These companies also generally require or encourage additional training for new and experienced bus drivers beyond that which is required to obtain and maintain endorsements.

Regarding recent legislative initiatives, we identified two acts passed in the last three years related to school bus safety: (1) a requirement that DMV monitor school bus companies for compliance with the law requiring the companies to check DMV's report of drivers with suspended licenses and (2) an increase in the criminal penalties for driving under the influence (DUI) in a school bus, among other vehicles.

Licensing

In order to drive a school bus, a person must obtain (1) a CDL, (2) a CDL public passenger ("P") endorsement, which allows a person to transport passengers in a commercial vehicle, and (3) an "S" endorsement, which allows a person to drive a school bus. According to the [DMV website](#), in order to be eligible to receive the endorsements, applicants must:

1. be at least 21 years old,
2. have at least three years of consecutive driving experience,
3. have an acceptable driving record,
4. possess good moral character,
5. submit fingerprints for and pass a state and national criminal background check,
6. not be listed on the national sex offender registry or the state child abuse and neglect registry,
7. pass a medical exam completed by an authorized medical examiner,
8. complete required training (see below), and
9. pass the required proficiency exams and road tests (for information on these tests, see the [Connecticut CDL Manual](#)).

Disqualification

By law, an applicant for, or holder of, a public passenger endorsement would be disqualified for any of the following:

1. four or more moving violations within a two-year period (violations include speeding and failing to yield the right of way, see the full list [here](#));
2. any conviction or administrative license suspension, within the previous five years, for specified violations (e.g., driving under the influence and manslaughter with a motor vehicle, see the full list [here](#));
3. any conviction within the previous three years for reckless driving, driving with a suspended license, or negligent homicide with a motor vehicle;
4. a conviction of a serious criminal offense which adversely reflects on his or her moral character; or
5. having engaged in any conduct which adversely reflects on his or her moral character.

DMV regulations specify that an arrest of a driver for fourth degree sexual assault, first degree reckless endangerment, or any felony is sufficient evidence of conduct that adversely reflects on an applicant's moral character, unless the charges were dismissed in the driver's favor ([Conn. Agencies Regs. §14-44-4\(a\)](#)).

Additionally, an applicant for, or holder of, an "S" endorsement would be disqualified if he or she has a conviction for a serious criminal offense and has finished serving the sentence within five years prior to the application date or the date the conviction became known to DMV (see [Conn. Agencies Regs. 14-44-4 \(b\) to \(d\)](#) for a list of these offenses). If an applicant or endorsement holder completed a sentence more than five years prior, the DMV commissioner must make an individual determination of the individual fitness to transport school children, based on an assessment of the offense and the entire criminal history of the individual. The DMV commissioner must also determine if a violation of federal law or those of another state are substantially similar to conduct deemed serious criminal offenses. "S" endorsement applicants or holders who have an arrest for any felony or are convicted of an offense other than a serious criminal offense may have their application denied or endorsement withdrawn.

Suspension or Revocation

The law requires DMV to suspend any public passenger endorsement held by a person who has been convicted of a serious criminal offense, as determined by the DMV commissioner. Under DMV regulations, a bus driver's endorsements may be suspended, revoked, or withdrawn if the driver

would have his or her renewal of the endorsements suspended, revoked, or withdrawn. Endorsement holders must be allowed a hearing before such action can be taken, unless the DMV commissioner determines that an imminent threat to public safety and welfare exists ([Conn. Agencies Regs. 14-44-6 \(d\)](#)).

Notification and Reporting. By law, if a driver holding a public passenger endorsement is arrested and charged with a felony or fourth-degree sexual assault (which is a felony if the victim is under age 16), the arresting officer or department must report the arrest to DMV ([CGS §14-44\(d\)](#)). The DMV commissioner must provide to boards of education and public or private entities that transport students a report that lists the names and license numbers of drivers whose endorsements have been withdrawn, suspended, or revoked ([CGS §14-44\(h\)](#)).

Driver Training

“S” Endorsement Training

By law, each applicant for an “S” endorsement, or for the renewal of an “S” endorsement, must submit a certificate, signed by an approved instructor, indicating that the applicant has completed the applicable pre-service training or in-service training ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 14-276a-2](#)). Carriers must include training records in the driver qualification files the law requires them to maintain for each driver they employ ([Conn Agencies Regs. § 14-276a-7](#)).

Pre-Service Training. An applicant seeking an initial “S” endorsement must have completed a pre-service safety training program within the six months prior to his or her application. The training must be (1) administered or supervised by an approved instructor and (2) divided between behind-the-wheel driving instruction and classroom instruction, according to the instructor’s determination of the applicant’s needs. In most cases, applicants must complete a minimum of 10 hours of training. However, the minimum is four hours for applicants who (1) hold a valid CDL or (2) were appropriately licensed and employed as a school bus driver for at least two of the previous four years ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 14-276a-3](#)).

Pre-service training must cover, at a minimum:

1. training to obtain a CDL, if one is required;
2. pre-trip safety inspections and completion of a vehicle inspection report;
3. loading and unloading procedures;
4. railroad track crossing procedures;

5. emergency procedures and accident management and evacuation;
6. the location, contents, and use of the school bus first aid kit;
7. motor vehicle laws and regulations; and
8. using passenger restraint systems and special equipment for students with mobility impairments, if the driver will operate a vehicle equipped with them ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 14-276a-4](#)).

In-Service Training. In order to renew an “S” endorsement, an applicant must have completed at least six hours of in-service training annually provided by an approved instructor or in a class approved by the DMV commissioner. The training must include, at a minimum:

1. seasonal safety problems affecting driving, loading, and unloading procedures;
2. student management;
3. substance use and abuse;
4. emergency procedures including first aid and universal precautions;
5. communication skills, activity trip procedures;
6. characteristics of students with disabilities; and
7. updates of laws, regulations, and policies ([Conn. Agencies Regs. 14-276a-6](#)).

Training by Employers

We surveyed four private transportation companies servicing Connecticut students and found that in practice they hire drivers who already meet these requirements, as well as offer company training for brand new drivers to help prepare them for CDL and endorsement testing administered by DMV. Additionally, bus companies typically require or encourage additional training for their applicants and employees, above and beyond that which is required for licensure. Training opportunities vary between employers. Generally, they cover school bus operation and mechanics, driving skills and safe driving techniques, safe transportation of students, and standard company protocol. Table 1 provides detail, taken from the each of the company’s websites, on the training the companies offer.

Table 1: School Bus Driver Training Practices at Four Private Transportation Companies

Company	Training Practices (as provided by the companies)
<p>All-Star Transportation, Inc. Waterbury</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides school bus services for 35 Connecticut cities and towns • Reports to transport 47,000 students each day during the school year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to driving a bus, new hires must complete 20 hours of classroom instruction and, after obtaining a CDL permit, 60-80 hours of behind-the-wheel training. • Training includes student management, proper student transportation procedures, state laws, company policy, defensive-driving procedures, legal use of the roadway, speed control, zone control, lane position, proper student pickup and drop off, railroad crossing procedures, and pre-trip checks of a bus's interior and exterior. • All newly licensed drivers must be cleared by an All-Star transportation trainer before driving a bus by themselves. • Employees must attend monthly safety meetings focusing on state-mandated topics, as well as seasonal workshops on subjects such as back-to-school tune-ups, winter driving, "spring into safety," and complacency and danger zones.
<p>DATTCO New Britain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides school bus services to more than 30 Connecticut school districts • Reports to transport over 110,000 students daily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drivers receive rigorous training that exceeds federal standards. • Trainees who pass the CDL exam are exposed to actual situations that may occur on city streets and country roads before they are permitted to access public roads. • New drivers must also pass a seminar in assertive discipline as a step-by-step approach to managing student behavior. • Ongoing driver training includes initial training, licensing, and an annual proficiency test conducted by the CT DMV.
<p>Durham School Services Offices in Madison, Rocky Hill, Milford, Stratford, Wallingford, and Waterbury</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A subsidiary of the global parent company the National Express Group • NELLC operates more than 22,000 school buses, serves over 500 school districts, and transports over 1.2 million students daily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first week is spent in the classroom preparing candidates for the CDL permit test, and once earned, 4-6 weeks are spent on behind-the-wheel training. • Once a driver earns a CDL, he or she is required to complete a Durham safety and training course. • Employees are trained specifically to work with children (and parents). • Employees attend monthly safety meetings. • Drivers are required to thoroughly check a bus at the end of each route and prior to leaving the bus according to their Child Check System.
<p>First Student, Inc. Offices in 20 locations across CT including Bloomfield, Hartford, and New Haven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates 44,000 school buses and serves 1,100 school districts nationally • Moves more passengers per day than all U.S. airlines combined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training goes beyond the state requirements. • Training programs are aligned to each driver's experience, the needs of their passengers, and any location-specific issues or risk factors. • Comprehensive training programs for new and experienced drivers may include sexual harassment and bullying prevention, specific security events and procedures, injury and collision prevention, early childhood and special needs training, and regular updates regarding laws and regulations. • GPS devices on all buses monitor driver performance for speeding or excessive idling, and effectively respond to parent/guardian concerns.

Recent Legislation

State Oversight of School Bus Driver Monitoring

By law, school bus companies must review periodic reports on school bus drivers who have had their licenses withdrawn, suspended, or revoked and immediately prohibit anyone who appears on the list from driving a bus ([CGS § 14-276](#)). A 2017 act required the DMV commissioner to ensure that school bus companies are fulfilling their duty to review these reports. Specifically, the law authorizes the commissioner to conduct random compliance audits of bus companies to determine whether they are performing the required review and are otherwise complying with the law ([PA 17-68, § 15](#)).

Driving Under the Influence

A 2016 act increased the criminal penalties for DUI (1) with a passenger under age 18 or (2) when driving a school bus, student transportation vehicle (STV), or other motor vehicle specially designated for carrying children, regardless of whether a passenger under age 18 is present. The act (1) imposed longer mandatory minimum and maximum prison terms and mandatory probation for first offenses; (2) subjected people charged with these crimes to the administrative per se procedure; and (3) generally applied to people charged with these crimes the same restrictions and requirements that apply to people convicted of DUI ([PA 16-126](#)).

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