

School Bus Driver License Renewal

By: Jennifer Proto, Principal Analyst
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Issue

Identify the entities regulating the school bus driver license renewal process in Connecticut. Provide information on the license renewal process for school bus drivers in other states, including renewal timeframes. Explain the rationale for requiring drivers to verbalize their actions before taking actions during the DMV renewal test.

Summary

According to the [National Highway Safety Transportation Administration](#), “...school buses are the most regulated vehicles on the road.” The federal government develops regulations and guidelines about various aspects of school bus safety, including requirements for issuing and renewing drivers’ licenses. While most regulatory control over school bus driver licensing occurs at the state level, this federal involvement generally results in industry standardization from state-to-state. 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 in Connecticut, also called school bus certificates in some states).

This report generally focuses on the additional state requirements for school bus drivers above those required to renew a CDL. For more information on the general requirements for renewing a CDL, see the Department of Motor Vehicles’ (DMV) [website](#). This report does not include requirements that may also be imposed by local jurisdictions or a school bus driver’s private employer.

State Regulation

The Connecticut DMV regulates the issuance and renewal of school bus driver licenses. By law, the DMV commissioner adopts regulations establishing the procedure for the safety training of, and minimum proficiency requirements for, school bus drivers. The DMV-administered safety training must (1) conform to the minimum requirements of [Guideline No. 17](#) (Pupil Transportation Safety) of the National Highway Safety Standards and (2) include instruction relative to the location, contents, and use of the vehicle's first aid kit ([CGS § 14-276a\(a\)](#)), as amended by PA 21-106).

Prior to the issuance or renewal of school bus endorsements, drivers of a school bus or student transportation vehicle must successfully pass a proficiency examination, including a road test, given by the DMV. In addition, the law authorizes towns and regional school districts to require their school bus drivers to complete a safety training course in the operation of school buses, consisting of at least 10 hours of behind-the-wheel (BTW) instruction and three hours of classroom instruction ([CGS §§ 14-276a\(b\) and -276a\(c\)](#)), as amended by PA 21-106).

Renewal Timeframe

Federal Requirements

Under federal regulations, states cannot make a CDL valid for more than 8 years from the date of issuance (49 C.F.R. §§ 383.73(b)(9), 383.73(c)(9), 383.73(d)(6), 383.73(e)(7)). This generally applies to initial, transferred, renewed, and upgraded licenses.

DMV Response

In Connecticut, CDLs must be renewed every four years ([CGS § 14-44h](#)). The DMV's CDL/testing unit indicated that this four-year CDL renewal cycle is generally consistent across states, and that Connecticut's proficiency test requirement has been in place for quite some time for safety purposes – the last time statistics were reviewed the failure rate was 25%.

Other States

A review of motor vehicle agency websites for nearby states found 4-year renewal timeframes in New Jersey and Vermont and 5-year renewal timeframes in Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Additionally, at least Maine and Rhode Island offer shorter renewal cycles for older drivers. In some cases, the option to renew early (e.g., Massachusetts drivers can renew their CDL up to one year prior to its expiration date) may effectively shorten renewal periods.

In general, it appears that the majority of states renew a driver’s endorsements simultaneously when renewing their CDL (Massachusetts requires annual renewal of school bus certificates). All of the states reviewed require drivers to have a clean driving history, criminal background check, provide federally required proofs of legal presence and identity, certify that they meet federal medical requirements, and pay a renewal fee. In some states, this must be done in-person at a motor vehicle branch office, while other states offer mail-in or online options. Table 1 below outlines CDL renewal timeframes, and renewal requirements specific to school bus drivers, including whether or not re-testing is necessary.

Table 1: School Bus Driver Renewal Timeframes & Requirements in Nearby States

State	CDL Renewal Timeframe	Overview of Renewal & Testing Requirements
Connecticut	4 years	CDLs and “P” endorsements must be renewed in-person. "S" endorsement drivers must also successfully pass all sections of the endorsement-specific road test to obtain the proper endorsements on their license. This test must be dated within one year for renewal.
Maine	5 years; 4 years for drivers 65 and older	According to this third-party website , CDL renewals do not require drivers to retake exams but must be completed in-person. Any current endorsements are automatically renewed along with the CDL (except for a hazmat endorsement).
Massachusetts	5 years; school bus certificate must be renewed annually	To annually renew a School Bus Certificate drivers must have completed: the application, including a section by the current or prospective transportation company employer; pre-service training; 40 hours of BTW and classroom training to be determined by the certified instructor; first aid certification; and a recent medical exam. Applications can be completed online.
New Hampshire	5 years	To renew a School Bus Certificate , drivers must (1) be currently employed and on the roster of a school bus company and (2) retake the school bus certificate knowledge test every 5 years.
New Jersey	4 years	At the time of renewal, all school bus drivers not under the Department of Education’s jurisdiction must present the following to an MVC agent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letter from their current employer confirming they are still operating a school bus • completed declaration flyer <i>(No mention of testing requirements)</i> Additionally , drivers must submit medical exams more frequently when over age 70 (annually) and 75 (every 6 months).

Table 1 (continued)

State	CDL Renewal Timeframe	Overview of Renewal & Testing Requirements
New York	Not found	DMV encourages CDL drivers eligible to renew by mail to do so, with certain exceptions requiring in-person renewal. Drivers can renew their CDL with the S endorsement without additional tests.
Rhode Island	5 years; 2 years for drivers 70 and older	No testing requirements found for CDL renewal (except for hazardous materials endorsements or adding new endorsements). The Division of Motor Vehicles processes CDL renewals by mail, drop box, or in-person with a reservation. School bus drivers must provide a completed renewal form , supporting documentation, and fee payment.
Vermont	4 years for CDL and endorsement	CDL is issued to expire on the fourth birthday anniversary from the date of issue (2-year option is not available for valid school bus endorsements). Drivers holding a license with a school bus endorsement must retake an examination every 4 years consisting of a: (1) vision test; (2) knowledge test and earn a passing score of 80% or better; and (3) road test if the applicant has any physical disabilities, or at the discretion of the examiner.

Examination

Drivers seeking to maintain their “S” endorsement when renewing their CDL must retake the DMV’s knowledge and road skills tests. The minimum BTW requirements are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Behind the Wheel Covered Skills for School Bus Driver Endorsement

Behind the Wheel	Driver-Trainees Must Demonstrate the Following:
Unit D2.1 Danger Zones and Use of Mirrors	Techniques necessary to ensure the safety of persons in the danger zone around the bus. Practice mirror adjustment and usage. The types of mirrors and their use are shown, and cones used to demonstrate the requirements of 49 C.F.R. 571.111 .
Unit D2.2 Loading and Unloading	Required procedures for loading and unloading students, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students crossing the roadway at a bus stop; • ensuring the danger zone is clear and that no student has been caught in the doorway prior to moving the vehicle; • proper use of lights, stop arms, crossing gates, and safe operation of the door; • risks involved with leaving students unattended on the bus; and • checking the vehicle for sleeping children and lost items at the end of the route.

Table 2 (continued)

Behind the Wheel	Driver-Trainees Must Demonstrate the Following:
Unit D2.3 Emergency Exit and Evacuation	Safely evacuating the bus in an emergency.
Unit D2.4 Special Safety Considerations	Safe backing techniques and demonstrate their ability to avoid tail swing crashes by using reference points when making turns.
Unit D2.5 Pre- and Post-Trip Inspections	Conducting pre-and post-trip inspections, as stated in §§ 392.7 and 396.11 , and of school bus-specific equipment, such as mirrors, stop arms, crossing arms, emergency exits, fire extinguishers, passenger seats, first aid kits, interior lights, and temperature control.
Unit D2.6 Railroad-Highway Grade Crossings	Proper procedures for safely navigating railroad-highway grade crossings in a school bus.

Source: [Appendix D to Part 380 - School Bus Endorsement Training Curriculum](#)

DMV Response

DMV confirmed that school bus drivers are required to verbalize certain actions before taking them when taking the DMV’s roads skills test. According to DMV’s legislative liaison:

“...one of the crucial parts of driving a school bus is picking up and discharging students. During the proficiency test the driver is required to count the passengers getting off the bus, count them before they cross the street, and one final time upon reaching the other side. This is done to ensure all passengers are accounted for and crossed the road safely. If this wasn’t spoken, how would it be known that it was being done? The same is true for other driver tasks that must be spoken to the agent during testing.”

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