

August 3, 2023

Dear Parents,

As the new school year approaches we would like to be the first to wish you a safe and enjoyable school year. Now more than ever, we understand how crucial it is to have a smooth process in place, with open lines of communication, to operate efficiently and in a safe manner. We are looking forward to working with parents and students alike during the 2023/2024 school year. We will do our best to keep your students safe and secure as we transport them to and from school. To help us all prepare for the new school year, I want to provide you with some important information. Please take a few minutes to carefully review the information below.

**Bus Driver Shortage**

School districts across the nation are struggling to fill bus driver vacancies. Rockbridge County Public Schools is also facing a driver shortage. RCPS has both full-time and part-time routes available, as well as the need for substitute bus drivers. In recent years, the ability to cover every route each day has become increasingly difficult. All three members of the transportation office staff often drive a morning and afternoon route on a daily basis. We ask that you are patient when calling the transportation office and your call in answered by the answering machine. In most cases this means we are all driving routes. Please leave a message and a member of our staff with return the call or you may try calling your child’s school.

It is always good practice to have a backup plan for transportation to and from school. In some cases a bus may experience a breakdown and/or the driver may be running behind schedule. It is best to call the school for information when the bus does not show up at the scheduled time. In the event a route cannot be covered a message will be posted on social media outlets and a call will go out to families indicating which route (s) will be affected.

We continue to seek individuals interested in driving a bus for RCPS. If you would like more information about joining our transportation team, please call 540-463-5437.

**BUS ROUTING SOFTWARE**

The school division is currently using a routing software package called Versatrans. This software allows us to determine the most efficient routes so we can minimize the time students spend on the buses and best utilize our fleet. Versatrans maintains a connection with Infinite Campus, the new Student Information System that RCPS uses to maintain student records. When an address, phone number, emergency contact, or medical information is entered into Infinite Campus at your child's school, the information is imported to the Versatrans system within 24 hours. The next morning, the Transportation Department will get an automatic download of this new or changed information into Versatrans. This will help us to efficiently monitor our student ridership and help get students onto the right buses every day. **It is very important that you, as a parent or guardian, keep your student’s school informed of current information for your home address, phone numbers (including home, work, and cell numbers), emergency contact information, and medical information so that we can best provide for the safety and wellbeing of your child.**

**ELINK**

ELINK is a tool to help parents obtain accurate bus and bus stop information. The link below, called ELINK, will provide parents with their child’s assigned bus number, as well as the expected time for pick up and drop off each day. Please know the times are only estimates and often change during the course of the school year based on the number of students riding each day. It is important for students to be at the bus stop a minimum of 10 minutes before their assigned time.

versatransweb05.tylertech.com/rockbridge/elinkrp/login.aspx

A link to ELink will be located on the RCPS Website. The Username will be the student’s ID number and the Password will be the student's date of birth (ex. 01012021). Parents may access ELink by clicking on Transportation on the RCPS home page or by accessing the transportation page under Departments on the RCPS home page.

**STUDENT CONDUCT**

In order to transport your student safely each day, we require good behavior from all students while on the bus. While we have student ridership rules in place, the Transportation Department will be reviewing and revisiting current rules to make them more effective. The rules for riding the bus are posted on each bus in the county.

Driving a school bus is not an easy job and carries a tremendous amount of responsibility. It is very important that students understand and obey the ridership rules. Students who misbehave while on the bus cause distractions for the driver. This can compromise the safety for all riders, as well as the driver. These types of misbehaviors can be dangerous and will not be tolerated. I do hope that as a parent you will do all you can to help us provide safe transportation for our students to and from school by encouraging your child to obey all transportation policies and rules.

**CHANGES IN AFTERNOON BUS DROPS**

The transportation department understands situations arise periodically where there is a need to change afternoon transportation plans. We will do our best to honor changes to afternoon bus transportation. However, we may not always be able to honor requests for students to ride to alternate locations. If the transportation department cannot honor a bus change, you will be notified by the school office to make alternate plans.

If your student needs to ride a bus in the afternoon to a different location, other than his/her normal stop, he or she will need to have a written note from a parent or guardian. This note must include the name of the student, the address of the location at which the student is to be dropped, and the day(s)/date(s) for this change in location drop. This note must be signed by a parent or guardian and also approved at your student’s school by a school office secretary, school guidance counselor, or school principal (with a signature from one of these persons). We WILL NOT drop a student off at a different location without written permission, or confirmation from the school office or administration. We WILL NOT accept texts or phone calls during the route to your child’s cell phone or to the driver’s cell phone. This will be strictly enforced in order to maintain the safety and well-being of your student.

**CAMERA SYSTEMS**

Buses which are in use on a daily basis for route transportation are equipped with multiple cameras. These are in place to help monitor student behaviors and ensure safety for all students while the bus is transporting students to and from school. Having multiple cameras allows us to capture activities in the bus from different angles. Video records are monitored on a routine basis and will be used as documentation in the event students misbehave while on the buses. Because student faces are visible on camera, making it easy to identify students, parents may not view camera footage. In the event bus tapes would be needed in a court case the Sheriff's Office, court officials, or lawyers will request a copy of the tape using the proper legal avenues.

**TWO WAY RADIOS**

All buses in Rockbridge County are equipped with two-way digital radios in order for the transportation office and school administrators to communicate directly with bus drivers. Rockbridge County is over 600 square miles and having the ability for drivers to communicate with school officials or the transportation office is crucial. No matter where RCPS buses are traveling in the county, drivers have the ability to communicate with an administrator in the event of an emergency. These radios also have an emergency button that contacts the 911 dispatcher when the button is pressed in the event of an emergency. This feature gives our drivers peace of mind knowing help is just a button away if needed.

**SYNOVIA SOLUTIONS GPS SYSTEMS**

Each Rockbridge County Public Schools bus is equipped with a GPS unit that provides a wealth of information to both the driver and transportation department. The GPS units record each action the school bus makes. Actions that are recorded include speed, miles traveled, activation of yellow flashing lights, activation of red flashing lights, opening and closing of the doors, and braking. The GPS units allow the transportation department to know the location of each bus as it travels the route in the event of an emergency or break down. The transportation department can also give accurate information to parents when calls are received concerning late buses.

Thanks in advance for your help and support. Please don’t hesitate to contact the Transportation Department at (540) 463-5437 if you have questions.

Randy Walters, Chief Operating Officer

Kirstie Campbell, Supervisor of Transportation

Tracy Dunlap, Transportation Secretary