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For *Immediate Release*

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Help Your Child Stay Safe on the Way to School

Every school day in Rio Rancho, more than 10,000 students walk to bus stops and board buses to get to school. Many others walk, bike, or drive themselves to school or are driven there by parents, other family members, and caregivers.

What all these ways of getting to school have in common is the need for safety. Parents may share these tips with their students (and observe them themselves) as school begins:

Walking or riding a bike to school or to a school bus stop:

-  Parents should show their children the safe walk path to use and encourage them to follow that path.
-  Obey all traffic signals, signs, and/or crossing guards. Use crosswalks where available.
-  Walk bikes through intersections.
-  Walk with a buddy, if possible, and be aware of the surroundings.
-  Never talk to or respond to strangers. If a stranger approaches or tries to get a child to come to him/her, the child should run home, to a neighbor's house, or another safe place such as a business and ask an adult for help.
-  Reflective material makes walkers and bicyclists more visible to street traffic.
-  Always wear a helmet when riding a bike (grownups too!).

At the bus stop:

-  Know your school bus number.
-  Get to the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive. Running to catch the bus is dangerous and can lead to injuries.
-  While waiting for the bus, stand at least five giant steps (10 feet) away from the curb and line up away from the street.
-  Wait until the bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says it is OK to board before getting onto the bus.
-  Students crossing the street in front of the bus should walk on the sidewalk or along the road to a point at least ten giant steps ahead of the bus before crossing. (Better yet, cross at an intersection and use the crosswalk if one is available.) Be sure that the bus driver can see you and that you can see the driver when crossing the street and watch for traffic coming both ways.
-  When you are dropped off at school or at the bus stop, walk 10 giant steps away from the bus. If you need to cross the street, wait until the driver tells you it is okay and cross in front of the bus. NEVER walk behind a bus.
-  Use the handrail to enter and exit the bus.

-  If you drop something near or under the bus, tell the bus driver. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO PICK IT UP because the driver may not be able to see you.
-  School buses are loaded or unloaded at established school bus stops only, unless an emergency dictates otherwise.
-  Parents are encouraged to supervise their children at all school bus stops before and after school. At some stops, parents take turns watching the children while they are waiting for or getting off the bus.

While on the bus:

-  Be respectful of your driver and others around you. Do not talk to the driver unless it is necessary.
-  Stay in your assigned seat and face forward. Stand up only after the bus has stopped at the bus stop or at the school.
-  No eating or drinking on the bus.
-  No yelling or shouting -- it distracts the driver. Speak in a low voice.
-  Do not throw things while on the bus.
-  Never stick anything out of the window (arms, legs, head, books, etc.).
-  Keep aisles and exits clear and personal belongings under control (backpacks, musical instruments, etc.).

Students qualify for bus transportation if they live more than one mile away from an elementary school, 1½ miles from a middle school, or two miles from a high school. Students living within these “walk limits” may qualify to ride the bus if the route a student would take to walk to school is hazardous.

Under New Mexico law, student bus transportation is a privilege offered to those who qualify. Students and parents are expected to become familiar with and abide by the rules described in the *RRPS Student/Parent Transportation Handbook*. Students who misbehave on the bus may not be allowed to ride.

Safety is everybody’s business (other drivers, too!):

-  Set a good example by always wearing your seat belt and making sure everyone else in the vehicle buckles up.
-  Children below the age of 13 are prohibited from riding in the front seat of a vehicle unless all other seats in the vehicle are occupied, by Rio Rancho ordinance.
-  Watch for children when backing out of driveways, in residential areas, walking in the street, around bus stops, and especially in school zones.
-  SLOW DOWN!
-  Always follow the posted speed, especially in residential areas and school zones.
-  **No passing** is permitted in school zones.
-  Yellow flashing lights indicate a school bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children, so drivers should prepare to stop also.
-  The **Red Stop Arm** on the side of the school bus, when extended out, means traffic in BOTH directions is required to **STOP** and wait until the flashing lights are turned off and the bus begins moving before proceeding. It's not only a good safety practice: IT'S THE LAW!

All Rio Rancho schools have parent pick-up/drop-off lanes for parents who prefer to drive their children to school. Each school has specific procedures for parent drop-off and pick-up that have been carefully studied and found to be

safe. Parents should familiarize themselves and their children with those procedures. Parents driving children to school must not drive through or park in the school bus lanes. This could be dangerous to students getting off of or onto buses.

During inclement weather, it is sometimes necessary to delay the start of the school day. These delays allow time for snowy or icy roads to thaw, improving safety for buses and for parents and students driving to school. An abbreviated day begins two hours later than the regular schedule. **Bus schedules are also delayed two hours.** Listen to radio stations KOB AM, KOB FM, KRST or watch TV Channels 4, 7, or 13 for the most up-to-date information. Information on school delays or cancellations is also posted to our website, www.rrps.net , and provided through the district's emergency notification system.

Parents with questions or concerns should contact RRPS' Department of Student Transportation at 338-0078. The Transportation Department Web site, <http://www.rrps.net/Administration/Transportation/transport.html>, also includes information on the district's student transportation services.