

August 5, 2009

Greetings Parents/Guardians and Students:

Can you feel the excitement in the environment? The first day of school is fast approaching. Where did the summer go?

The beginning of school is always filled with excitement and anticipation. Unfortunately, it is also a time when students are at increased risk of transportation-related injuries from pedestrian, bicycle, school bus and motor vehicle crashes. This occurs due to more students on the road each morning and afternoon and many drivers' patterns change. So as schools open their doors, and more than 22,000 New Hanover County Schools' students return to school, it's time for everyone, motorists, parents, educators and students, to improve their traffic safety practices.

Generally, when parents talk about school safety, they are usually referring to the surge in violence that occurs at schools. However, research illustrates that school-age children are actually nine times more likely to sustain unintentional injuries, whether on the playground or in school, than to become the victim of violence while at school. An estimated 2.2 million children ages 14 and under are injured in school-related incidents annually, according to the National Safe Schools Campaign. Therefore, the NHCS Safety Office has been proactive in addressing these legitimate concerns by providing trainings, drills and security modifications to maintain safe, orderly school environments.

Many accidents can be avoided through prevention measures. Thus, NHCS Safety Office would like to highlight Back-to-School Safety Tips, for parents and students, to help keep your children from harm.

Should:

- Choose the safest route between home and school and practice walking it with your children until they can demonstrate traffic safety awareness.
- Walk to school with other students. Strength in numbers.
- Teach children to recognize and obey traffic signals and pavement markings.
- Cross at designated crosswalks, street corners and traffic-controlled intersections.
- Always look both ways before crossing the street and never enter streets from between parked cars or from behind shrubbery.

- Walk, don't run, across intersections. A flashing "walk" signal or the crossing guard in the street does not mean it's safe to cross.
- Avoid talking to strangers and get distance between you and anyone who tries to approach you or make contact with you.
- Never get into a vehicle with a person even if you know them without parent permission. If a stranger approaches, tell a trusted adult such as a parent or teacher.

Shouldn't:

- Allow your child to be at school any earlier than 15 minutes prior to the start of school as crossing guards, teachers or aids may not be out at the school to monitor your child.
- Go to a friend's house without getting permission.
- Walk to school using canals, alleys and cutting through yards or open fields.
- Walk alone as children are an easier target for harassment, bullying or stranger approach.
- Run to cross the street or intersection or cross in the middle of the block especially in heavy traffic areas. Never let children under age 10 cross the street alone.
- Talk to a stranger or get within reach of that person. That includes taking a ride from a stranger or someone you know without parent permission.

Riding Bicycles:

Bicycles are associated with more childhood injuries than any other consumer product except the car. To make sure children are safe when riding bicycles to school:

- Check with your school principal to make sure bicycles are allowed. Some schools do not allow students to ride bicycles until a specific grade.
- Make sure your child is wearing a helmet. Helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by as much as 85 percent.
- Obey rules of the road; the rules are the same for all vehicles, including bicycles.
- Stay on the right-hand side of the road and ride in the same direction as traffic.
- Know and use appropriate hand signals.
- Supervise young children biking to school.
- Choose the safest route between home and school and practice it with your children until they can demonstrate traffic safety awareness.

Walking:

- Supervise young children walking to school.
- Ensure your child leaves early enough to get to school 10 minutes prior to the start of school.
- Use the same route every day and avoid shortcuts.
- Go straight home after school.
- Students should use public sidewalks and streets when walking to school.

Riding the Bus:

Although bus travel is one of the safest ways to get to and from school, injuries can still occur, and most of them take place when children are getting on or off the bus. Some safety tips for riding the bus are:

- Students shall not attempt to ride in a school bus unless assigned to it by the principal.
- Arrive at the bus stop at least five minutes before the scheduled arrival of the bus.
- Stay out of the street and don't horseplay while waiting.
- Wait quietly and orderly.
- Stand on the sidewalk or the edge of the street by the curb.
- Do not stand on the traveled part of the road.
- Be respectful and watchful of traffic.
- Stay off private property and cross in front of the bus.
- Wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before getting on or off.
- Board the bus in a quiet and orderly manner.
- Remain seated and keep head and arms inside the bus at all times.
- Do not shout or distract the driver.
- Do not walk in the driver's "blind spot" – the area from the front of the bus to about 10 feet in front of the bus.
- Adults are encouraged to take turns monitoring the bus stop and wait with the children until the bus arrives both before and after school.

The school bus, including the bus stop area, is an extension of the school and all school rules and regulations that pertain to student conduct in the school are applicable to student conduct on the bus and at the bus stop. Therefore, the Student Discipline Policy (Policy #8410) is applicable.

Discipline on the school bus is the responsibility of the principal of the school where the student is assigned. The principal has authority over students on the bus and at designated bus stops and that authority is delegated to the bus driver. The driver is responsible for the safe operation of the bus and will refer all students who violate regulations to the principal.

Driving:

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths among children age 14 and under. To reduce the risk of injury:

- Always use child safety seats and safety belts correctly when driving or riding in a car.
- Arrive early, especially the first few weeks of school, and use the school's designated student drop-off and pick-up zone.
- Follow the designated procedures for student drop-off and pickup. This will assist in maintaining a timely flow of traffic.
- Remember that Student Drop-Off and Pick-Up Procedures are designed and executed for the safety of all children, staff and parents.
- Maintain calmness and patience during the dismissal and drop-off process. The normal procedures can be completed in a 30-minute window if there is patience and cooperation exhibited by all. Be a positive role model during this short period.

- Do not double park or make u-turns in front of the school. Don't park in places that can obstruct the traffic flow and create hazardous conditions for pedestrians on campus.
- Students should enter and leave the car on its curbside at designated areas for student drop-off and pickup.
- Pick your child up on time so they are not left waiting near or in front of the school unattended.

In School/Campus:

Make sure students are aware of all school rules governing their behavior while in school.

- Children may be embarrassed about being targeted by bullies. Let them know it is okay to report a bully to a teacher, principal or resource officer
- Never be afraid to tell a teacher or administrator if you see something happening that you know is wrong.
- Stay friendly with others and if anyone begins to give you problems or if you see someone else being picked on or bullied, tell someone that you trust (a teacher, principal, etc.) so it can be stopped.
- Teach children proper playground behavior: no pushing, shoving or crowding.
- Don't share locker combinations with other students.
- Clean out backpacks and large personal bags before you go back to school. Students who have taken their backpack camping or on other trips and have carried allowable/necessary items such as matches, lighters or pocket knives should not bring these items to school. These items are prohibited.
- Encourage students to leave iPods, cell phones and other electronic devices at home. Most schools ban them during school hours. This will also eliminate the possibility of these items being lost or stolen.
- Think about actions before you react.
- Student drivers should check their automobiles daily for contraband before entering the campus.
- Go to orientation and meet your teachers. It is good for teachers to know you before you arrive on the first day and it is just as important for parents to meet them.
- Make goals.
- Stay around positive people.
- Don't try to fit in....stay you!

If you have any questions or concerns about school safety, contact Harris M. McIntyre, Director of Safety, at 910-254-4275.

Sincerely,

Harris M. McIntyre
Director of Safety