



## TRANSPORTATION FAQ'S

**As part of our aim to provide ample opportunity for an education, the Texas State Board of Education and the district fund transportation for all students who live two miles or more from the school that they are assigned to attend. To accomplish this, we require the cooperation of all students and parents.**

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### SCHOOL BUS DRIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

*Universal Academy school bus drivers are highly trained professionals who have obtained a Federal Commercial Driver's License with air brake, passenger, and school bus endorsements. They are required to attend a 20-hr school bus driver safety-training course approved by the Texas Department of Public Safety as well as pass a physical examination, which is required by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Additional Universal Academy training is required in Safety/Student Management/ procedures.*

***"We strive to be the best because our children deserve to be safe."***

*Universal Academy's bus drivers work directly for the school district. They must be trained in Universal Academy policy/procedures and come directly under district control and supervision while transporting Universal Academy students. They are responsible for safely driving the school bus, transporting the students, and staying on time. To aid the drivers with that responsibility, they are given control over daily operations. This may include the following: assigning seats, requiring silence on the bus, conferences with students, instruction in emergency procedures, etc.*

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### PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

*Register your child for Transportation. Your student must be registered to be eligible for Bus Service. Students that are not registered may be denied transportation services. If you move, you must provide the campus with a new proof of residency as Transportation is based upon whatever address the campus has entered and until it is updated, bussing will continue to be provided to the original address.*

*To maintain the routing/bus schedule, drivers cannot wait (unless they are early) at bus stops and may not have sufficient time to return if your child missed the bus. Children must be at their stops five (5) minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. Instruct your children on procedures to follow if they miss the bus.*

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*Take the time to go over all the bus safety rules and consequences listed below with your child. Make sure they understand the need for following the safety rules on the bus and the necessity for respecting others as well as themselves.*

*If your student should lose their bus privileges, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to transport to and from school.*

*At no time is a parent authorized to board a Universal Academy school bus.*

*To ensure the safety and security of all students on Universal Academy buses, parents may not board the bus at any time. Should you need to discuss an issue with the bus driver, please contact our office at 972-393-5834. The driver has been instructed not to engage in discussions with parents on route to avoid route delays.*

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## **STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Take the time to go over all the bus safety rules and consequences and make sure you understand the need for following the safety rules on the bus and the necessity for respecting other students as well as yourself. Remember that the driver is the authority on your bus.

### **MORNINGS**

- Be at your bus stop five minutes before the scheduled pick-up time.
- Wait next to, but not in the street, driveway, or parking lot.
- When the bus approaches, form a line and be prepared to load immediately.
- Stand clear of the bus until it comes to a complete stop.
- Use the handrail and steps.
- Go directly to your seat and sit down.
- The bus will not move until you are properly seated.
- If you miss the bus, go home immediately.

### **AFTERNOONS**

- Go directly to your bus at the campus-the bus will wait 5 minutes after arrival.
- Use the handrail and steps.
- Go directly to your seat and sit down.
- The bus will not move until you are properly seated.
- At your stop, stay seated until you hear the brake is set.
- Wait for your turn to leave the bus. Pushing and crowding will only slow exiting and may cause an accident

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- All students living on the left side of the roadway shall exit the bus and move to a point 10-12 feet in front of the right corner of the bus and wait for the driver to signal you that it is safe to cross the street.
- Check-in both directions and walk directly across the street.
- NEVER cross the street behind the bus.
- Be alert for cars that do not stop when the bus is loading or unloading students.

**IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT OR EMERGENCY**

- FOLLOW THE DRIVER'S DIRECTIONS COMPLETELY AND WITHOUT HESITATION

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**UNIVERSAL ACADEMY SCHOOL BUS SAFETY RULES**

**THE SCHOOL BUS IS AN EXTENSION OF THE SCHOOL DAY. ALL RULES AND GUIDELINES IN THE STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT APPLY ON THE SCHOOL BUS. UNIVERSAL ACADEMY TRANSPORTATION OPERATES UNDER A PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE POLICY WHEN PROMOTING AND ENFORCING STUDENT SAFETY ON THE BUS. THIS MEANS THAT ANY SAFETY VIOLATIONS WILL BUILD ON PAST VIOLATIONS IN THE SAME SCHOOL YEAR, RESULTING IN LONGER SUSPENSION PERIODS.**

**RULES DEFINING STUDENT CONDUCT ARE DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE PASSENGERS AND SHALL INCLUDE, BUT NOT BE LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING:**

- The Bus Driver oversees students on the bus. Students shall always follow the driver directions regarding safety rules and bus operations.
- **All** students are required to have a STUDENT ID in their possession and scan on and off the bus, when assigned.
- Only authorized personnel and registered eligible bus students are permitted to ride the bus they are assigned to
- May only load and unload at the stop designated by Transportation. Buses will stop at designated stops only. Those stops are assigned by the Transportation Department based on the number of students in the area. Students are to arrive at their bus stop (5) five minutes before their leave time. Students will wait next to (but not in) the street, driveway, or parking lot. Students must be respectful of the property surrounding the stop. Students must wait for the bus to come to a complete stop before approaching to board or standing to leave the bus.
- Emergency transportation may be granted on a temporary basis by the Assistant Director of Transportation. **Notes from parents/guardians will not be accepted as authorization to ride a bus.**
- Students will remain properly seated (facing forward always keeping feet on the floor in front of them with their backs completely on the vinyl). **ALL Universal Academy students** receive assigned seats.
- **ALL** Universal Academy buses are **NO TOUCH BUSES**. **Zero tolerance will be applied.** Any verbal or physical behavior that constitutes Sexual Harassment



- and/or Bullying is **prohibited on the bus and at designated bus stops.** Students must keep all body parts, bodily fluid and personal objects from contacting another student.
- Students are only allowed to drink **WATER ONLY** if on bus for more than forty (45) min\_There will be no consumption of food or gum.
  - Littering or throwing items inside or from the bus is **prohibited**. Students must keep their hands, head, feet, and personal objects inside the bus always. **Zero tolerance will be applied.**
  - Students may not engage in yelling, abusive or inappropriate language, display obscene gestures. The bus driver may require any or all students to be silent on the bus.
  - Students shall not vandalize the bus. Students who violate this rule will be required to pay for damages and lose their bus privileges for a period to be determined.
  - Students are not allowed to bring animals, insects, inflated balloons, or harmful objects on the bus (i.e., weapons, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, fireworks, laser lights, etc.). on the bus.
  - Students may use cell phones for any operation **EXCEPT Camera or Video Use (No picture taking, video recording, face time, or Skype of themselves, others, or surroundings for any reason).**
  - Band instruments or class projects are allowed on Universal Academy buses provided they can be held by the student (not taller than shoulder or seat back), fit in the seat with the student, do not interfere with the availability of seating for other students, and do not interfere with the safety of students or bus operation. If any of these conditions exist, parents will be notified by Transportation that they must provide an alternate means of transporting their child's instrument and/or project to and from school.
  - Students are not to engage in any other conduct that disrupts the safe operation of the bus. **All Universal Academy campus and Transportation policies and rules are enforceable within any Universal Academy bus stop or campus.**

## CONSEQUENCES

The bus driver will report misconduct to the Assistant Director of Transportation or designee using a Bus Safety Report. Copies of the report will be sent to the parent, school principal and placed on file in the Transportation Department.

**Video and audio surveillance may be in operation on your child's bus to help in maintaining a safe and orderly bus. Federal law prohibits the school district from releasing the video to any member of the public except law enforcement officials (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act).**

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If necessary, inappropriate behavior will be investigated using student interviews and video review - parents will be notified of the results. Suspensions can only be served during active school days. Students who violate bus safety rules could receive the following consequences:

- Written warning
- One-Day bus suspension
- Three-day bus suspension
- Five-day bus suspension
- 10-day bus suspension
- 30-day bus suspension
- Severe bus suspension
- Indefinite suspension for the rest of the school year

**CERTAIN BEHAVIORS CONSTITUTE A MORE SEVERE SUSPENSION SUCH AS BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE FOLLOWING: Racist Language, Threatening Language, Throwing Objects inside or outside of the bus, Behavior that could cause harm to oneself or others, Disruption of Transportation, and other behavior determined by the Assistant Director or Director of Transportation. SEVERE SUSPENSION CAN BE UP TO AN INDEFINITE SUSPENSION.**

Education Code 37.126. Disruption of Transportation: Except as provided by Section 37.125, a person commits an offense if the person intentionally disrupts, prevents, or interferes with the lawful transportation of children to or from school or an activity sponsored by a school on a vehicle owned or operated by a county or independent school district. An offense under this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS ELIGIBLE FOR TRANSPORTATION?

Students must live more than 2 miles from the school they are zoned to attend to be eligible for transportation. There are many ways to measure distance. For the purpose of determining eligibility, the distance measurement will be made along the shortest route using public roads from the property line of the prospective rider to the property line of the school. Please note that commercial mapping systems such as Google Maps, MapQuest, and Waze may not be able

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to accurately measure distances less than 2 miles. The transportation department uses a routing system to measure these distances. Also worth noting, the measurement is not the same as the safest walking distance to the school, which may be greater than or less than the route used to determine rider eligibility.

#### **HOW IS THE 2-MILE DISTANCE MEASURED?**

The 2-mile measurement is made from the property line of the residence to the property line of the campus along the shortest path using public roads. We follow strict guidelines from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), which governs the operation of the district's transportation program and transportation funding from the state. TEA directs the district to measure distances in a reasonably accurate and consistent manner using the shortest route that can be traveled on publicly maintained roads between:

- An established prominent landmark at the student's campus (such as the campus entrance or the student drop-off or pick-up point); and
- An established landmark at the student's legal residence (such as the nearest property line, the driveway, or the front door entrance). (TEA school transportation allotment handbook, p. 29, 6-1)

[https://tea.texas.gov/Finance\\_and\\_Grants/State\\_Funding/State\\_Funding\\_Reports\\_and\\_Data/School\\_Transportation\\_Funding/](https://tea.texas.gov/Finance_and_Grants/State_Funding/State_Funding_Reports_and_Data/School_Transportation_Funding/)

#### **MY CHILD'S BUS IS OVERCROWDED. CAN SOME CHILDREN BE PLACED ON ANOTHER BUS?**

School bus sizes are stated in terms of passenger capacity. It is assumed that elementary school-aged children will ride three (3) per seat. Every attempt will be made to limit middle and high school students to ride two (2) per seat. Even if the bus has three (3) elementary students or two (2) middle or high school students in each seat, it will seem crowded, but it will not be over capacity. It is our goal to fully utilize all the space on all of the buses in our fleet.

#### **WHY DON'T SCHOOL BUSES HAVE SEAT BELTS?**

Seat belts are not required in school buses because research by the Department of Transportation and others determined compartmentalization was a better solution. The student is "compartmentalized" between the high, wide, and thick foam padding of the seats. The metal surface of the seat frame is covered with this padding and is constructed to spring and bend forward to absorb energy if a child is thrown against it. The steel frame must 'give' just enough to absorb a child. The seat is also anchored to the floor so strongly it will not pull loose during this bending action. And the floor must be so strong that it will not be bent or torn by the pulling action of the seat anchors. This concept of compartmentalization is more manageable than seat belts. The protection exists without depending on any action by the children or extra supervision by the drivers. Seat belts require discipline and supervision to keep them clean, unraveled, and in use.

Compartmentalization works equally well for 1, 2, or 3 students per seat. Today's seats may contain three small children or two large ones, or any combination in between. Arranging seat belts to properly handle any combination is difficult, if not impossible; the best know solution

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with seat belts is to restrict each seat to two students and two belts, which has the disadvantage of sharply reducing the carrying capacity of bus fleets.

Compartmentalization works whether students have fully developed abdominal areas or not. Conventional seat belts, which are lap restraints only, are not suitable for small children whose abdominal area and bone structure are not adequately developed to take the force of a lap belt alone. They need the help of chest harnesses also, which adds to the complexity of a proper seat belt solution.

Compartmentalization, once it has done its energy-absorbing job, leaves the student free to escape the bus. Seat belts could leave students strapped in, upside down, or unconscious in burning or flooding buses.

Since 2017, TEXAS requires that three-point seat belts be in school buses that are the model year 2018 or later, including buses chartered by school districts and used for events and other functions. The measure does not require that older buses be retrofitted with the restraints.

#### **CAN THE DRIVER STOP AT MY HOUSE TO PICK UP OR DROP OFF MY CHILD?**

Only certain students, whose needs are addressed through an IEP plan, are eligible for "curbside service." "Curbside service is normally restricted to situations where a less restrictive environment is not possible or where medical issues require this type of service. For other students, service is provided in accordance with district guidelines.

#### **HOW SHOULD I REPORT MY ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER CHANGES?**

The school registrar should be contacted as soon as possible with all address and telephone number information changes. The registrar will put the information into the system allowing it to be downloaded into the transportation's routing software.

#### **WHERE CAN BUS SCHEDULES BE FOUND?**

All Universal Academy students must register for transportation services prior to riding the bus. This registration process will allow Universal Academy to verify each student's address and eligibility. Eligibility will be determined at the time of registration. You may request services through School Mint (the online process to register for school). If your student is already registered for school, you may contact the campus or Transportation and ask them to edit your information. Once a student is registered for the bus, the Transportation Department will email bus information. Information is also available from Transportation Services by calling 972-393-5834. Additionally, you may log in to the website and school application once bus information has been assigned. For log-in information, please contact the student's home campus. If at any time of the year, your student changes addresses, you must contact the campus with the new address before bus information can be changed.



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### **WHY DOES MY STUDENT NEED TO HAVE A STUDENT ID TO RIDE THE BUS?**

ALL Universal Academy students are required to have a student ID. These cards are printed and given to the students on their campus.

### **HOW MANY PASSENGERS DOES A BUS HOLD?**

A conventional bus holds 71 passengers. Universal Academy levels of service allow 71 students on primary routes. The maximum recommended capacity for secondary students is 55 passengers because of their larger size. Standees are not allowed on any Universal Academy school buses.

### **CAN MY CHILD RIDE HOME WITH A FRIEND?**

Only authorized personnel and eligible bus students assigned to a specific bus are permitted to ride that bus. Students **WILL NOT** be allowed to ride any bus other than the assigned bus. Students will be transported to/from a designated stop and to/from a designated school only. The Transportation Department assigns designated stops based on the student's recorded home address. Emergency transportation may be granted on a temporary basis in some cases. A supervisor at the Transportation Department must approve emergency transportation for students riding other buses. Notes from parents/guardians will not be accepted as authorization to ride a bus.

### **CAN A BUS STOP BE ADDED OR A STOP LOCATION CHANGED?**

There are many factors to take into consideration when adding or moving bus stops." The Universal Academy Transportation Department provides safe and efficient transportation operations.

We have worked to establish stops located to best serve all students in your area. Therefore, we consider it a parent or guardian's responsibility to see that children get safely to and from authorized bus stops. All requests to add or change a bus stop will be reviewed, keeping in mind the following criteria: Safety, Spacing, Accessibility, Visibility, and Fiscal Responsibility.

### **HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN A CHANGE HAS BEEN MADE TO A BUS ROUTE?**

Written notices are sent home by students riding the bus in advance of any major change and/or emailed to the parent's email on record.



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### **WHAT IS MY CHILD'S WALK-TO-STOP DISTANCE?**

The distance listed below is the maximum walk-to-stop distance for each age group. Distances are measured along public roads. Distances within apartment complexes or on private roads are not included in this calculation.

Elementary: .25 miles

Middle: .50 miles

High: 1 mile

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF A BUS IS LATE FOR SCHOOL?**

Drivers are instructed to make the first bus stop at the scheduled time. Additional stops can be delayed due to traffic, weather, road conditions, or sick students. A phone call is made to the campus if the bus arrives within 5 minutes of the final bell, and students are instructed to stop at the office if a pass is required. Late arrivals are tracked by the transportation staff in order to improve service.

### **WE LIVE ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE 2 MILE LINE. WHY CAN'T MY CHILD GET ON THE BUS THAT STOPS NEARBY?**

This policy is based on distance, and the geography of each community is different. There may be homes within a community that are eligible for transportation next to or very near homes that are not. While it may appear to be a simple matter of extending services to non-eligible families that are close to existing stops, we are simply not able to do this without greatly impacting the ridership across the district.

### **DO BUSES HAVE VIDEO CAMERAS?**

All of the buses at Universal Academy operate video surveillance systems. This enhances security and safety on these buses.

**WHO SHOULD I CALL IF THE BUS DOES NOT ARRIVE TO PICK UP MY CHILD ON TIME?** Your child should be at their bus stop five (5) minutes before the scheduled arrive time. Ten (10) minutes after your scheduled route time, you should call the appropriate Transportation Center office if needed. Please have your child's bus number as well as the school, child's name and stop location.

### **WHAT IS A BUS SAFETY REPORT?**

A bus safety report is part of the four-step progressive discipline process used on Universal Academy school buses. Parents are notified in writing and by phone if a child breaks a bus safety rule. Students are expected to know and follow all bus safety rules in order to assure everyone of a safe ride. For more information, consult the Student Code of Conduct.

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### **IF MY CHILD MISSES THE BUS, WILL THE BUS COME BACK TO PICK HIM/HER UP?**

Students are required to be at bus stops 5 to 10 minutes prior to the departure time of the bus. Buses are scheduled to depart from a bus stop or resident and campus at predetermined times. Our buses service multiple routes: therefore, it is important the buses do not deviate from their schedules so we may keep our level of service to all of our students. Parents are required to transport their children should they miss the bus.

### **DOES THE CAMPUS OR TEACHER NOTIFY THE BUS DEPARTMENT IF I SEND A NOTE TO THE TEACHER THAT MY STUDENT IS NOT GOING TO BE ON THE BUS?**

Notifying your child's campus or teacher concerning a transportation request or concern does not assure you that we have received the information.

### **I HAVE TO WORK AND I AM NOT ABLE TO PICK UP MY STUDENT, CAN MY STUDENT BE PICKED UP OR DROPPED OFF AT MY PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT?**

We follow strict guidelines by TEA and the places we can pick up and drop students off are places of residence, grandparents' residence, or licensed daycare.

### **STEPS TO OBTAIN A COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE FAQ**

#### **WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO DRIVE A SCHOOL BUS FOR Universal Academy?**

- Complete a Reference and Background Check
- Pass Personnel Screening and Interview Process
- Criminal History Check (Pre-employment & Annual)
- Federal & State (CDL) Motor Vehicle Record Check
- Pass US DOT Physical
- Pass Drug & Alcohol Screen Test (Pre-employment & Random)
- Pass all Federal and Texas State Drivers Licensing (CDL) Requirements
- Complete Texas Education Agency Bus Driver Certification Course (20hrs)
- (8-hour Re-certification Course is required every 3 years)
- Complete Universal Academy Orientation & Training Course
- Attend required Safety & Training Classes
- Pass two announced & un-announced On-Route Observations by the Training & Safety Officer
- Comply with Federal, State & District Operational Policies and Procedures

#### **DO I NEED A COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE TO OPERATE A SCHOOL BUS?**

Yes. To drive a school bus, you will need a Class B Commercial Driver's License (CDL) with the passenger, air brake, and school bus endorsements.

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### **HOW DO I GET A CDL?**

Our professional driver training staff will provide you with the skills necessary to complete both the written and behind-the-wheel skills required for your CDL.

### **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO OBTAIN A CDL?**

Depending on your personal schedule, training may take a minimum of five days or up to two weeks or more. We attempt to schedule your training around your schedule.

### **WHO PAYS FOR MY CDL LICENSE?**

Drivers and Driver Trainees are responsible for payment of their own license. The initial Learner's Permit costs \$25.00. The Class B CDL costs \$61 and is valid for five years.

### **WHERE ARE APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE TO DRIVE A BUS?**

You can fill out an application for employment on the Universal Academy's website under employment.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION THAT ISN'T ANSWERED HERE?**

Please call us at 972-393-5834 or email your questions or suggestions to us.