

# How School Buses Provide a Social-Emotional Learning Opportunity

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## Purpose

For some students, riding the school bus is a terrible – even traumatic – experience. While many programs such as PBIS target experiences that occur during school hours, there are few – if any – comprehensive programs to target social situations that occur on the school bus. Therefore, we knew we needed to start from the beginning, in order to support the social-emotional needs of students during these extended hours.

Why is the school bus experience important anyhow? For bus riders, students' first experience in the morning starts from the moment they set foot on the school bus. Negative social interactions can turn a promising day into a recovery experience. This was the experience for several of our students, and there were two problems to address: the root cause and coping skills. The root cause was the negative social interactions that took place in a space with little adult supervision. The purpose of the project was to **empower students by developing their problem-solving and leadership skills through social-emotional learning**.

## Whole Child Tenets

- Healthy
- Safe
- Engaged
- Supported
- Challenged

## Basic Premise

We decided on a targeted approach with scale-up potential. Most programs that aim to develop student leadership involve students who are already perceived to exhibit positive behavior. At the same time, we know that students exhibiting negative behavior often have a high degree of **influence** over other children. We wanted to harness that influence but repurpose it in a positive way.

We identified students for the Bus Club based using prior bus discipline referrals and/or known ongoing issues on the bus. During once a month meetings we conducted activities with the students aimed at **problem-solving** using scenarios that occur on school buses. We created a **safe space** to talk about their feelings related to what goes on during their bus ride. Students participated in activities specifically designed to promote **self-regulation, empathy and leadership**.

## Operational Details

**Group size** – The group size was flexible. As students demonstrated a need, they were added. After consistently good progress, students graduated from the program.

**Selection** - Students demonstrating a need for intervention were chosen based on bus discipline data, input from bus drivers, teachers, the counselor and administration.

**Frequency** – The students met once every few weeks for approximately 7 months during the school year.

**Adult leaders** – The school counselor and the principal led the ‘club’ and the comprehensive effort, but periodically brought in the principal, social worker, a teacher, and the curriculum facilitator (lead teacher) when appropriate.

### **Activities:**

- Students participated in teambuilding activities, such as ‘how to be a team player’ and ‘how to be a good listener’.
- Students discussed problems that exist on the bus, based upon their observations.
- Students participated in activities based on scenarios that were made-up based upon common situations or unique situations from years past (without names).
- Students participated in role-play activities and collectively discussed solutions to problems.
- Students made videos for younger students about bus expectations, as a service project.
- Students were given leadership roles in the school, private privileges/celebrations at each meeting if they had no bus referrals the month before.
- Other teachers in the school were tasked with acknowledging and praising the efforts of their work and their improvement in a confidential way.
- Parent meetings were organized by specific bus, with a representative from the transportation department, our partnered DARE officer and the principal. Parents were given specific expectations, their child’s data and strategies they could employ to assist.
- Community organizations partnered with us to support these efforts in character education, throughout the entire school.
- Students, parents and teachers were surveyed regarding school buses, and that data was used to inform team decisions (PBIS).
- Students who ‘graduated’ due to consistently improved bus behavior, were groomed to help serve as leaders for a younger grade level.
- Bus drivers were given specific training at the beginning of every year to give them information about how to greet students when they walk on the bus, use encouraging words, listen to children and collect details when incidents happened. They were given tickets from our school-wide incentive system in order to integrate buses into our school-wide practices for positive behavior and the Whole Child.