

When to Stop for a School Bus

What Drivers Need to Know to Keep Kids Safe



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336-724-1234
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DISCLAIMER: This publication provides general information regarding school bus passing laws and is not intended to be, nor is it, legal advice. If legal advice or other professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.

As this publication is not intended as legal advice, any use of this information will not create an attorney-client relationship. After an initial consultation, and before representing you on any claim, a written attorney-client agreement must be signed in order to create such a relationship.

Introduction

School buses are frequently on streets, roads, and highways around the country – from small towns to bustling cities. And while they are a helpful mode of transportation that many families utilize every day to get kids to and from school, they can also lead to dangerous circumstances if other drivers do not respect the laws in place regarding bus safety.

Over the past 10 years in the United States, there have been about 1300 deaths of young people or students from accidents directly resulting from violations of school bus laws (namely, when a vehicle driver doesn't stop in response to the bus's flashers or stop sign). Likewise, in North Carolina alone over the past 12 months, there have been 12 deaths and 47 serious injuries from drivers violating school bus passing laws.

Clearly, school bus safety is a serious topic and one that not enough people on the road are aware of. The specific rules surrounding bus-passing laws

can also be a little confusing, especially in complex road situations. That's why we're here to help break them down and to specifically address when it is and isn't safe and lawful to pass a school bus while driving.



Why Illegal Passing of School Buses Happens

Often, school buses are illegally passed due to the harried time of day that the buses operate. Because school buses are picking up and dropping off children in the early morning and afternoons, often during peak rush hour times, other drivers may be in a hurry to get to their destinations causing them to drive recklessly. They may also be distracted and not paying attention to the traffic around them.

Additionally, many drivers may simply be unaware of the laws surrounding school bus passing. All of these factors can lead to tragic consequences for everyone involved. As a firm of personal injury attorneys, we've seen the lives of families absolutely shattered as a result of drivers violating school bus safety laws, which is precisely why we think it's so important to review them. With that in mind, let's take an in-depth look at the nuances of school bus passing laws.



A Deep Dive Into School Bus Passing Laws

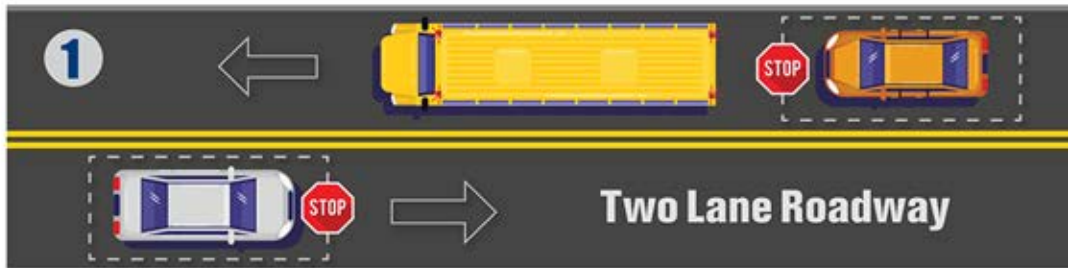
Before we dive in, it's important to clarify that these laws are specific to North Carolina. Though there may be minor variations depending on the state, they're largely the same in other states across the US as well.

Generally, anytime you're driving behind a school bus and its flashers turn on and the stop sign comes out, drivers are required to stop. This applies regardless of how many lanes of traffic there are. If you're traveling in the same direction as a school bus, you have to stop. In fact, in most

situations, traffic traveling in both directions must stop.

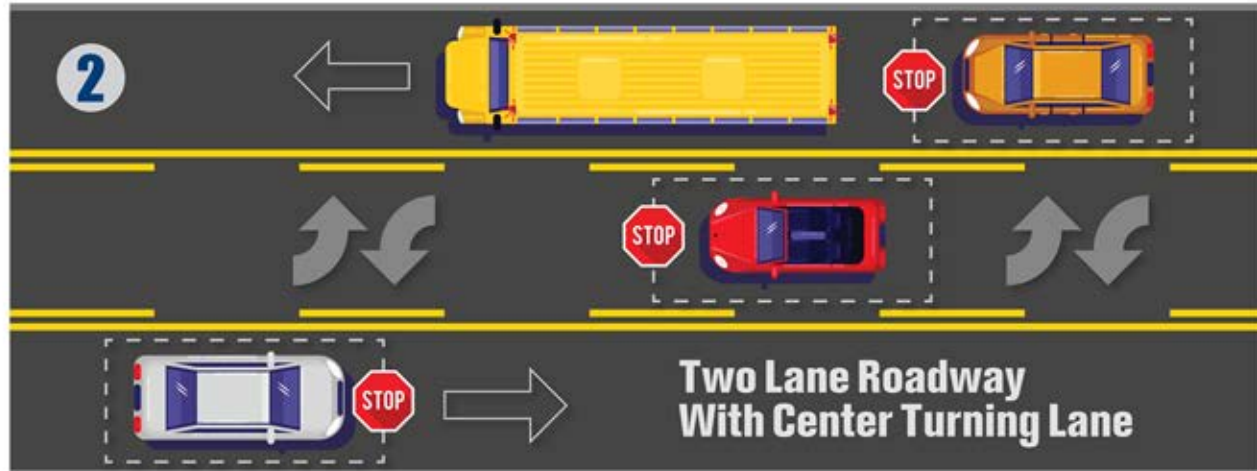
The only situations in which both directions of traffic do not have to stop is if there are more than four lanes or it is a road divided by a median – in that case, the traffic traveling in the opposing direction does not have to stop.

But because there are so many different types of road configurations, the nuances here can still be a little unclear, so let's break it down further with a few visuals.



In the graphic above, we can see a two-lane road with cars traveling in both directions. Here, when a school bus stops to let a child on or off, all traffic traveling on the road must stop. No exceptions.

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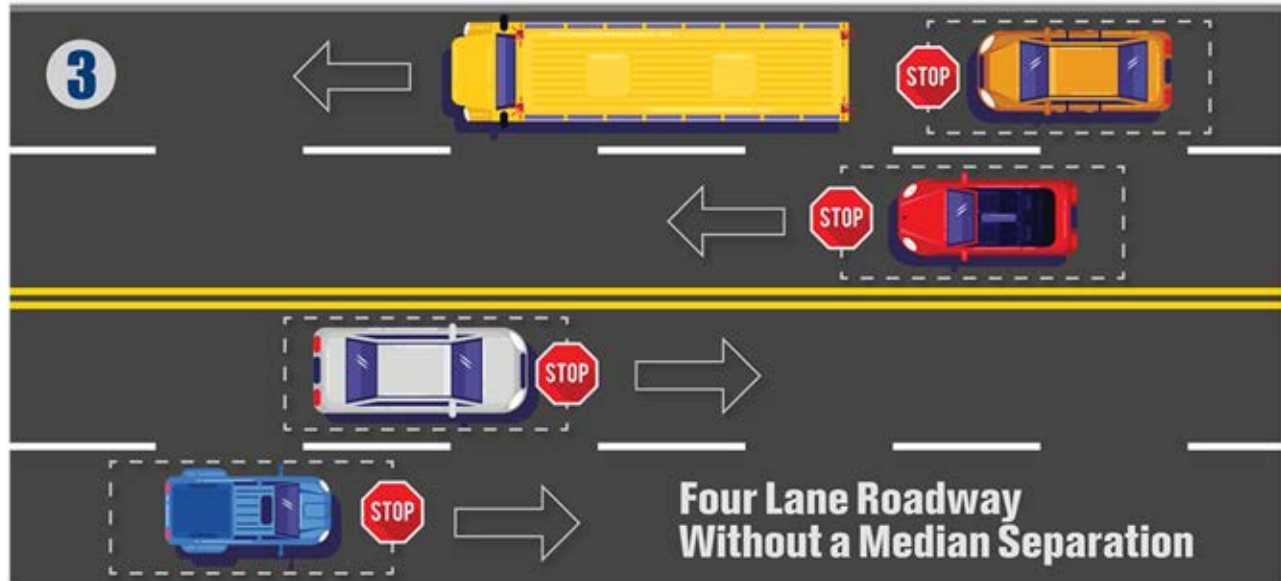


In this graphic, we see a situation that's much less straightforward. These types of road set-ups – a two-lane road with a center turn lane - are becoming more and more frequent, particularly in and around metropolitan areas. And while it may look different from a simple two way street, the law is the same. Both sides of traffic, including the turn lane, must stop for a stopped school bus.

Turn lanes present a dangerous problem because that center lane becomes a multipurpose one for drivers – some use it as an entrance lane or an entrance ramp, others use it as a passing lane or drivers merge into it much earlier than necessary to make a turn. Overall, these lanes can result in a lot of aggressive misuse, and when you add a school bus into the mix, it can become a recipe for disaster.

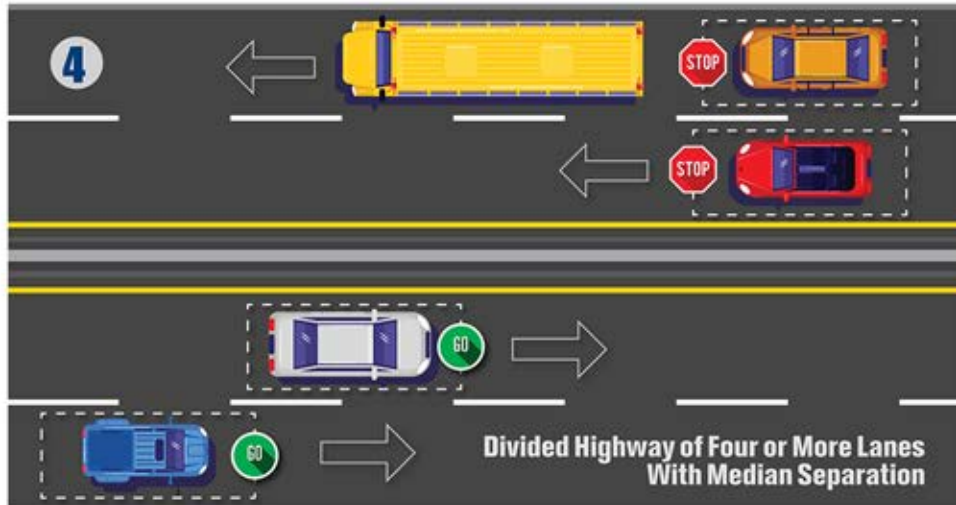
Therefore, any time you see a school bus and there's a turn lane present, exercise extreme caution and awareness.

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In this example, we see an additional lane has been added on both sides – so four lanes total, two each traveling in opposite directions, with no turning lane or median. Again, in this road set-up, even though it has more lanes than a simple two-lane road, all traffic from both directions must stop when the school bus stops.

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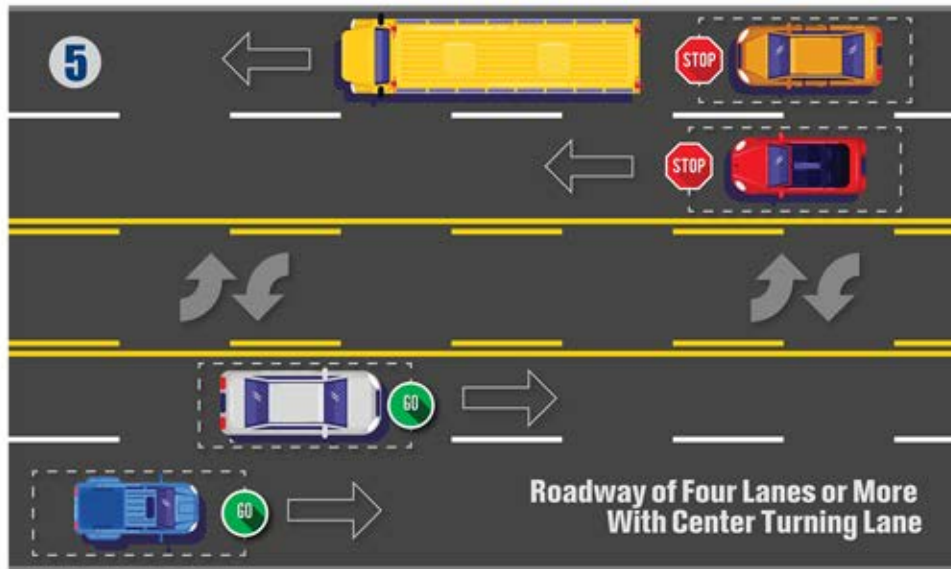
Here, we see a much more complex road set up. This is a four-lane divided road, which can be a road that is either divided by a median or some other kind of barrier. In this scenario, all of the traffic moving in the same direction as the school bus must stop when the bus stops. However, traffic traveling in the opposite direction does not have to stop. That's because there is an extra barrier in place to prevent kids from running across the road into traffic traveling the opposite direction of the bus.

Since this is the first example wherein particular lanes of traffic don't have to stop, it's important to note that this doesn't mean you can stop being

hyper-alert when a school bus is present. Children as young as five and six years old may be riding the school bus, and children that young can be unpredictable. They may get off the bus and see something intriguing, and take off running after it without a second thought.

In fact, this applies to children of all ages, including preteens and adolescents – they can be very excitable and energetic and move in erratic and impulsive ways. For that reason, any time drivers are on a road in the vicinity of a school bus, they should be on high alert at all times, because our primary concern should be keeping our children and students safe above all else.

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Clearly, this is the most complex example we've seen thus far, which makes it a situation with a high potential for danger. This is a four-lane road that, instead of a median, has a middle turn lane, turning it into a five-lane road. Here, like in the example of a divided road with a median or buffer, traffic traveling in the opposite direction of the school bus does not have to stop. Of course, as we've seen in all the other examples, traffic traveling with the school bus is required to stop, regardless of how many lanes there are.

What makes this set-up especially hazardous is the presence of the turn lane and the absence of

a physical barrier dividing traffic and providing a space where there are no vehicles traveling. So, if a car is in the turn lane while a school bus is stopped on one side of the road, and the car in the turn lane is blocking the view of cars traveling in the opposite direction of the stopped bus, they may not be able to see a child who's trying to cross the busy road, which can lead to devastating consequences.

Drivers facing this type of situation should be on high alert in the presence of school buses to be aware of potential blind spots and to take necessary precautions in order to prevent a tragedy.

Have Questions? Get in Touch!

Tragedy can strike in an instant, especially when high-speed vehicles and children are involved. That's why it's so important to understand and follow all rules around school buses, especially laws about when it is and isn't safe to pass them. When you are driving to and from work or appointments or wherever the roads may take you, we want to remind everyone to reorient yourself if there's a school bus around, because safety and awareness should always be top of mind in that situation.

At Daggett Shuler Law, we are happy to answer questions and address any concerns you might have about school bus safety laws and guidelines. We're easily accessible online through email at: www.DaggettShulerLaw.com and through our Facebook page: (<https://www.facebook.com/DaggettShulerLaw/>). You can also give us a call at: 336-724-1234



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