

# Transportation Facts

Written by Mike Riggan, Director of Transportation

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. Many of you will already know me. My name is Mike Riggan and I have worked for the district since 2002. I was the bus mechanic for six years and served as Transportation Director for the next seven years. At the end of the 2014/2015 school year, I began serving as a mechanic again, this time on the white fleet, which consists of our vans, sedans and trucks. If it is not a bus, it is white fleet. Now, I find myself back in the director's position.

Much has been written lately on our new buses, so I won't be dwelling too much on that subject other than to say that they have begun arriving. They are very nice and all district staff and students appreciate them very much. I would like to send a big thank you to our voting public for approving our bond measure, thus enabling us to purchase this new equipment.

I will be addressing a controversial subject today: seatbelts and school bus safety. Our buses are not equipped with seat belts. School buses are the safest vehicles on the road today. They are over 40 times safer than riding in a car. School buses rely on a concept called compartmentalization. This means that the seats are placed very close together and have very high, well-padded backs. In the event of an accident, the passengers are propelled forward into the seat back in front of them, which acts much like an airbag. Passengers also sit high off of the ground, which is far above the impact zone. Currently, only six states require seat belts on school buses.

Nationwide, there are fewer than 10 school bus passenger fatalities per year. Over 800 school aged children are killed in private vehicle crashes during normal school hours. There is no doubt that some of them are on their way to or from school or a school related activity. So, as you can see, it is much safer for our children to ride to school in a bus than to walk or ride in a car.

Unfortunately, occasionally major accidents occur and sometimes they are catastrophic. One of the main things we do to prevent this type of tragedy is to make sure our drivers are as safe as possible. Arizona has some of the most stringent training requirements of any state. Drivers must have a current Commercial Driver's License with P (passenger) and S (school bus) endorsements. They must pass a Department of Transportation (DOT) physical every two years, submit to a criminal background check and must have First Aid training, CPR training, both five and nine panel drug testing and a physical performance test. Drivers must complete 14 hours of classroom training and 20 hours of behind the wheel training. The entire certification process usually takes three to four weeks. When a driver is finally certified, another driver will ride with him/her for several days to make sure they are doing things safely. All drivers are drug tested annually and may have to submit to a random drug test at any time. They must attend refresher training every two years. First aid and CPR certifications must be renewed every two years. By following these procedures, we hope to continue to keep your children safe for many years to come.