



**Key points:**

- **Have students describe day through gestures**
- **Notice, appreciate students doing right**
- **Enlist students to help**

**Social-emotional learning practices to use with students on the bus**

Giving bus drivers the tools to help regulate students on the bus and build relationships can make a world of difference, said Lori **Desautels**, an assistant professor at [Butler University](http://www.butler.edu) in Indianapolis.

A student might have had a bad morning or afternoon, but if the bus ride was refreshing and rejuvenating, the student will get to school or arrive back home with his brain in a state of regulation, she said.

Another benefit when bus drivers help students regulate is the effect on negative behaviors, **Desautels** said.

"When you have a regulated stress response system, those negative behaviors are diminished," she said. "Instead of being reactive, we're helping bus drivers be proactive. It's a discipline strategy, but we're doing it preventatively."

Here are a few SEL practices that your drivers can use with students on the bus.

✓ **Ask, "How are you doing today?"** When students board the bus, the driver can ask them to give a thumbs up or thumbs down to describe their day, **Desautels** said. Or the driver can have a special, individualized handshake for each student. "It's all about emotional attachment with that child," she said. "I see you, I hear you, I notice you. It helps students feel felt and connected."

✓ **Offer a bucket of worries and a bucket of celebrations.** The bus driver can have two buckets next to his seat. When students board the bus they can drop off a worry or concern into the worry bucket to help get it out of their system or put a celebration they will later be shared with their classmates on the bus into the celebration bucket. "It's another way to make a touchpoint," **Desautels** said.

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✓ **Consider tone of voice.** One of the most important times of connection, besides when students are coming on and off the bus, is when a bus driver responds to a student with kindness and compassion, said Roma Khetarpal, founder and CEO of [Tools of Growth](#).

"Tone of voice is very, very important," she said. Because the driver is looking forward and has to project his voice backwards, he is habituated to speak loudly and in a firm tone of voice. But the driver's tone of voice can have an affect on a student, Khetarpal said. "Have a kind voice on," she said. "Be firm yet kind."

✓ **Acknowledge good behavior.** When a student listens and complies to something that the bus driver has requested, Khetarpal said, the driver can take a moment when the student is exiting to say, "That was a great response, thank you for listening."

Notice students when they are doing well and right, **Desautels** said. "Acknowledgement is a connection point," Khetarpal said. "For those students who have complied, take that moment to acknowledge and appreciate them when they get off the bus, because they will be more likely to comply next time."

✓ **Assign helpers.** The bus driver can reach out to students who she feels have good leadership skills, Khetarpal suggested. These students can help by setting a good example by following instructions the bus driver shares with the students and encouraging their peers to do so as well. "Tell the student, 'If I call out to you, make sure you help me out,'" she said.

✓ **Develop bus affirmations.** Encourage each bus driver to create a special, individual affirmation for her bus. This can either be kept private or be hung up in the bus for all the students to see. Or she can put it in a space where it's not publicly displayed but still able to be seen. Then if someone asks her about it, she can explain that it helps her stay calm and collected. "It's completely up to them," Khetarpal said.

The affirmations can be anything from, "I have a calm and cool bus," to describing the kind of energy the driver wants on the bus, to "You are all my favorite children," to remind all the students on a daily basis that they are important to her.

[Florence Simmons](#) covers *Section 504, paraprofessionals, and transportation for LRP Publications*.

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