

# Chalkboard

By

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It is rare that an employee comes to me and says, “Can I be a guest author in your *Chalkboard* this week?” When it happens, I know they are passionate about an issue that they want to make public. Gentry’s Transportation Director, Shiera Wilson, wrote this week’s article. It is entitled “Big Yellow School Bus”.

“Staring at a blank sheet of paper for several minutes left me wondering where to begin. I want to stress the importance of not passing a stopped school bus with its red lights on. I think the best place to start may be by asking the question, “Why is it important to stop for a school bus with its red lights on”. I know it may seem like a silly question, but let me just pose this question for pondering. Stopping for a stopped bus is not only the safe thing to do; it is the law, so why are so many people not stopping?

On November 18, 2004, the state of Arkansas conducted a survey in which every school district in the state was asked to record how many times a bus was passed. The numbers were astonishing, close to a thousand in that one day statewide. In Gentry eleven vehicles passed our school buses with red lights flashing in the month of February 2005. It seems there are people out there that still do not know to stop.

People that pass buses have claimed every excuse imaginable. “I didn’t see a school bus.” “Yes, I saw the bus with the red lights on but it was still moving.” Gentry bus drivers do not activate the red lights until after making a complete stop. Another excuse is, “That wasn’t me, I loaned my car to Aunt Mary it must have been her.” I replied, “Can we talk to Aunt Mary? Their response was, “No, she went back to Alaska yesterday.” I admit I embellished the story. Names were changed to protect the guilty. There is no excuse to violate the law and run the risk of injuring or killing a child.

Gentry School District has done a lot to make our buses more visible. On every bus we have installed LED (Light Emitting Diode) lights. They are brighter, they strobe quickly and are very visible. Believe me you see them when they come on. We have installed them on our reds, brake lights and stop arms. We are going to install them on our amber warning lights, clearance lights and turn signals. We have all the state required lights, overhead strobe, yellow warning, red stoplights and stop arm.

We have installed digital cameras on all of our route buses and are now installing outside cameras. These will pick up images of cars in the act of passing the bus. The police are especially appreciative of the images the cameras provide. If you are caught by one of these cameras doing something to put our passengers in danger, don't be surprised if you get a visit by the local police department. This could result in you standing before a judge.

School buses are a safe mode of transportation. It is the safest way to get children to and from school. More students are injured or killed riding in a private vehicle or walking than on a bus. If you are curious or want more information on this statistic, you can contact the Department of Transportation in Little Rock.

In Gentry we work hard to transport our students safely and efficiently. Every year we teach our students the importance of school bus safety. We teach them about loading and unloading and to wait on the driver's hand signal before crossing the street. We will continue to stress the importance of safety to our students. We really need the support of the driving community to help provide for the safe transportation of our students to and from school.

**DO NOT PASS A STOPPED SCHOOL BUS WITH THE REDS ON!!!"**