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This communication contains information on the following topics:

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### **1) Media relations class – are you ready to answer the hard questions?**

We all know that the school bus is the safest mode of transportation – however, that fact notwithstanding we still are involved in 1600-2000 accidents per year. That accident rate is not alarming, considering that our buses travel over 1,000,000 miles per day. However, to the parents of our children any accident is alarming. When it happens in your district, are you prepared to manage the resulting media attention and keep your parents informed? Do you have speaking points ready and know what to NEVER say to a reporter?

What about your good news? When is the last time you contacted the media to share some good news with them? Have you built a positive relationship with the community and media so that you are prepared in the event something bad happens?

Join our MTA program on February 10 to learn how to work through both the bad news and the good news. The class is offered from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and includes a working lunch. Register online at [www.ohioschoolboards.org/workshops](http://www.ohioschoolboards.org/workshops) or contact Diana Paulins at (614) 540-4000.

### **2) Calamity days – keeping the new rules in mind**

From the ODE website: “Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, districts that change to an hour-based schedule will no longer have calamity days. Instead, schools may schedule “excess” hours above the minimum number. Hours missed above the minimum do not have to be made up. However, if a school closes enough that it will fall below the minimum number of hours, the school must extend its scheduled year.”

The important consideration here is that even though the new rules and regulations do not provide for calamity days, there will still be days when it is not safe for you to operate school buses and your schools will close. We still need to make good decisions regarding the safety of students and staff, and make decisions about school closure similar to what has been done in the past.

ODE’s online discussion goes on to state: “One way to make up the hours missed below the minimum required is to use blizzard bags. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, schools will submit plans explaining how they will make up the missed hours, instead of days, up to the equivalent of three scheduled days. There are no other changes to blizzard bags. Blizzard bags may only be used when it is necessary to close the school because of:

- Disease epidemic;
- Hazardous weather conditions;
- Law enforcement emergencies;
- Inoperability of school buses or other equipment necessary to the school's operation;
- Damage to a school building; or

- Other temporary circumstances due to utility failure rendering the school building unfit for school use.”

### 3) Updated data available online: (all data files are available at [www.ohioschoolboards.org/transportation-services](http://www.ohioschoolboards.org/transportation-services))

**Efficiency ratings:** We have calculated the transportation efficiency ratings for the current year (FY15) and posted them on our transportation data page. Look up your district’s efficiency rating, which measures how many students you transport per bus as compared with your peer districts. This will help you to evaluate how well you are utilizing your school buses, and whether you have the opportunity to make some changes that will help you to be more effective. Ultimately your transportation cost is based on the number of buses that you use daily. By transporting more students with each bus you can minimize the number of buses needed.

**Transportation cost analysis:** Your cost analysis for school transportation for last school year has been calculated and is available to you. The file that has been posted allows you to look up the state average cost for last year, your cost for last year, as well as costs for any other district in the state. These calculations are based upon the T2 reports that all districts submit to ODE by August 1.

**Fuel Use:** Have you ever wondered how many cars would be on the roads if you did not have any school buses? National research has determined that it would take 36 cars to transport the same 55 students that ride on a typical school bus. Think about the traffic jam in front of each of your schools if there were no school buses available to transport our children. Not only do our school buses reduce the number of cars on the road, but collectively they use less fuel than all those cars would. Statewide, our parents would have to use more than 94 million gallons of fuel to transport their own students as compared to the 25 million gallons that our buses use. Stated another way, the average cost of fuel per student per year in a school bus is \$88--in a car the cost would be \$235. Look at the file we have created and posted online to see what the numbers are for your school district. This information may be something to share with your community, especially if you are trying to explain the value of the transportation you provide.

### 4) Alternatives to engine idling to keep the buses warm

Now that we are in the midst of winter, and cold weather is a factor, we should think about how we keep the buses warm. Our drivers are not only challenged with starting a cold bus and getting the windows defrosted, but also with keeping the passenger compartment warm for both themselves and the children. All diesel engines are required to have block heaters, but the fact is that these only keep the coolant in the engine warm enough to facilitate starting on a cold morning.

An option to consider is the addition of an auxiliary fuel-fired heater to your bus. These are time-tested and cold weather proven additions to your bus. Many of these bolt to the frame of the vehicle and can be programmed to come on automatically at certain temperatures and times. The larger ones can also provide enough heat to add to the warmth in the passenger compartment. These heaters run from the same fuel tank as your regular engine, so the operation is painless. If you did not order these on your new buses, they can be added aftermarket – contact your bus dealer if you think this might be a good solution for you.

### 5) May 20 – OSBA alternative fuels training

Temporarily the cost of diesel fuel is down, and the pressures that go with fuel costs are somewhat less. However, we still need to keep up with industry advancements and look at alternative fuel sources for our school buses – knowing full well that diesel prices will go up again when we are least expecting!

Save Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> on your calendars to come join us at OSBA’s offices for an opportunity to learn more about alternative fuel for school buses. We are bringing in factory engineers and manufacturer's representatives to help us gain a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of using fuels other than diesel. They will also be bringing alternative fuel vehicles to inspect as well as other exhibits. We also have several school administrators coming to tell us about their experiences using propane and CNG in their school buses. Watch for more information on this training opportunity in the coming months.