

**RULES
OF
THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY
HIGHWAY PATROL DIVISION**

**CHAPTER 1340-03-09
TENNESSEE SCHOOL BUS SPECIFICATIONS**

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1340-03-09-.01 MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL BUSES.

- (1) All school buses purchased by a county, local school system, charter school, or private contractor shall meet the National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures (NSTSP), as well as the Tennessee Minimum School Bus Standards Addendum approved by the Tennessee Commissioner of Safety and all applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards.
- (2) Use of a fifteen (15) passenger van, defined as a vehicle that seats ten to fourteen (10–14) passengers not including the driver, to transport students is prohibited.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 4-3-2009 and 49-6-2109. **Administrative History:** New rules filed February 24, 2026; effective May 25, 2026.

1340-03-09-.02 OPERATION OF SCHOOL BUSES IN TENNESSEE.

- (1) Records and Reports. Each director of schools shall keep records of transportation costs and the number of pupils transported on a monthly basis and shall make such reports as required by the Commissioner of Education.
- (2) Insurance.
 - (a) Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6-2111, no school bus shall be operated to transport pupils to and from school unless the school bus is insured for liability and property damage. Minimum liability and property damage coverage shall be no less than the amount specified in the table below:

Coverage Type	Coverage Amount
Limit for bodily injuries to, or death of, one (1) person	\$100,000
Limit of bodily injuries to, or death of, all persons injured or killed in one (1) accident (subject to a maximum of \$100,000 for bodily injuries to, or death of, one (1) person)	\$300,000
Limit for loss or damage in any accident to property of others (including occupants)	\$50,000

- (b) In the event that the local board of education (or the governmental entity with liability under the Governmental Tort Liability Act of 1973, as amended, T.C.A. §§ 29-20-101 et seq.) is unable to purchase insurance to cover its obligations hereunder, except through an assigned risk pool, then the limits of liability in the three (3) preceding categories shall be \$20,000/\$40,000/\$10,000 respectively. If insurance is not purchased through an

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assigned risk pool or if the board of education or governmental entity elects to self-insure, then the greater limits of \$100,000/\$300,000/\$50,000 shall apply.

- (3) School bus crashes shall be reported to the Department of Education, in the following manner:
 - (a) Pupil injury and/or fatal crashes: By telephone within twenty-four (24) hours of the accident and by written report within ten (10) days on the Department of Education-provided School Bus Accident Report Form.
 - (b) Property damage crashes: At the end of the school year on the Annual Pupil Transportation Report.
- (4) The Commissioner of Safety, or designee, shall annually inspect each school bus that transports school children and has been in use for fifteen (15) years or less from the in-service date. The in-service date is the date of the first Department of Safety inspection. Years of service are calculated from the in-service date. For a school bus that is purchased used, the school district must provide the original title or the body build date which will be used as the in-service date due to the lack of a prior Department of Safety inspection. The annual bus inspection calendar, for purposes designated by the Tennessee Department of Safety, is defined as beginning August 1st of each year and ending on the following July 31st.
- (5) Approved buses are identified as:
 - (a) Type C conventional buses with eighteen (18) years or less of service. After fifteen (15) years of service, twice annual inspections are required from the Commissioner of Safety or designee;
 - (b) Type D transit buses with eighteen (18) or less years of service. After fifteen (15) years of service, twice annual inspections are required from the Commissioner of Safety or designee;
 - (c) Type C conventional and Type D transit buses with less than two hundred thousand (200,000) miles of recorded travel and more than eighteen (18) years of service, provided that the Commissioner of Safety has approved the additional years of service beyond the eighteenth year. The Commissioner of Safety, through the inspection process, may approve additional years of service beyond the eighteenth year from the in-service date for Type C conventional and Type D transit buses on a year-to-year basis. The owner of a bus may receive approval for additional years of service beyond the eighteenth year only if any Type C conventional or Type D school bus being operated in the eighteenth year or beyond has less than two hundred thousand (200,000) miles of recorded travel; provided, however, that after the bus reaches two hundred thousand (200,000) miles of recorded travel, the owner of the bus shall be allowed to operate the bus throughout the remainder of the school year, and, at the conclusion of the school year, the owner shall replace the bus. The bus shall meet all requirements for continued safe use and operation during the remainder of the school year, and the owner of the bus shall notify the Department of Safety in writing, via certified mail, that the bus has reached two hundred thousand (200,000) miles of recorded travel. The owner shall immediately notify the Department of Safety when the bus reaches the mileage limit, requiring discontinuance; and
 - (d) Type A buses with fifteen (15) years or less of service. The Department of Safety shall permit the use of Type A school buses for a period of fifteen (15) years of service. If a Type A school bus reaches the fifteenth year of service, requiring discontinuance of its use, during the school year, the owner of the bus shall be allowed to operate the bus throughout the remainder of the school year. The bus shall meet all requirements for continued safe use and operation during the remainder of the school year, and the owner

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of the bus shall immediately notify the Department of Safety in writing, via certified mail, when the bus reaches the fifteenth year, requiring discontinuance.

- (6) No bus purchased from an out-of-state entity that has been in use for more than fifteen (15) years from its in-service date may be in use unless it has been in service in this state for a minimum period of two (2) consecutive years.
- (a) The two (2) year period of service shall start on the date of the first Department of Safety inspection.
 - (b) The two (2) year period of service shall equal twenty-four (24) months.
- (7) Commercial advertising may be displayed on the exterior or interior of school buses as follows:
- (a) Commercial advertising on the exterior of a school bus shall be permitted only on the rear quarter panels of the school bus; no more than two (2) advertisements per rear quarter panel shall be permitted.
 - (b) The size of commercial advertising per quarter panel shall not exceed thirty-six inches (36") in height and ninety inches (90") in length, including any border or framing.
 - (c) Commercial advertising shall not include:
 - 1. Tobacco or alcohol products;
 - 2. Political campaign advertising; or
 - 3. Individual food items that cannot be sold to students through vending machines pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-6-2306.
 - (d) Commercial advertising shall not cover any structural or sheet metal damage or any alterations made to the school bus that could impede the inspection process.
 - (e) The local board of education shall adopt a policy to regulate commercial advertising on school buses. Such policy shall address the following minimum standards:
 - 1. Cost of the commercial advertising;
 - 2. Designation of the individual(s) with the authority to sell and approve commercial advertising;
 - 3. Definition of appropriate commercial advertising;
 - 4. Specification of how the advertising will be attached, if not painted, on the school bus; and
 - 5. Issues relating to contracts with independent contractors.
 - (i) All contracts for commercial advertising must comply with local board of education policy.
 - (ii) Contracts with independent bus owners must indicate how the revenue from the commercial advertising will be allocated.

(Rule 1340-03-09-.02, continued)

- (8) In compliance with Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-201, the Department of Education shall report annually on school bus accidents to the State Board of Education and to the State Department of Safety, Pupil Transportation Division.
- (9) A school bus shall not transport more students than the manufacturer's rated capacity.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 4-3-2009 and 49-6-2109. **Administrative History:** New rules filed February 24, 2026; effective May 25, 2026.

1340-03-09-.03 TENNESSEE MINIMUM SCHOOL BUS SPECIFICATION ADDENDUM.

- (1) School buses shall be equipped with a crossing control arm mounted on the right side of the front bumper. When opened, this arm shall extend in a line parallel to the body side and aligned with the right front wheel.
- (2) The district, company name, or owner of the bus must be displayed at the beltline. Lettering should be no less than five and one-half inches (5.5") and no more than six inches (6.0") in height and shall consist of capital block lettering in the color black.
- (3) The bus identification number displayed on the sides, rear, and front of the vehicle shall be in capital block lettering in the color black. Buses shall end the number sequence, on all four sides of the bus, with the following lettering to coincide with the fuel source as following:
 - (a) C = Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)
 - (b) D = Diesel
 - (c) E = Electric
 - (d) G = Gasoline
 - (e) P = Propane

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 4-3-2009 and 49-6-2109. **Administrative History:** New rules filed February 24, 2026; effective May 25, 2026.