



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Kids are Back to School - Drive Safely

PATTY RITCHIE September 15, 2017



The bell has rung and students all over Central and Northern New York are getting back into the swing of things at school. As a mother and grandmother, I know that “back-to-school” isn’t just exciting, it is also a time when we need to take extra steps to make sure children stay safe in the coming months—especially when they are traveling to and from school.

Earlier this year, I teamed with school bus drivers from across our region on a survey on school bus safety. In just one school week, drivers in 31 local districts reported being passed a shocking 577 times—that’s over 100 times a day. Of those 577 instances, 317 happened in

Oswego County, 176 in Jefferson County, and 84 in St. Lawrence County.

As the new school year continues, this survey serves as a reminder that we can—and must—do better. During the most recent legislative session, I was proud to support a number of measures, which passed the Senate and aim to improve student safety by increasing the penalties against drivers who break laws involving school buses and put our children at risk.

Taking legislative action is just part of the effort to keep students safe while traveling to and from school. Each of us can play a role in achieving that goal by following the below tips:

***Be mindful of school bus lights:*** The lights and signs on a school bus serve different purposes, but they all lead to the same action a driver must take. When the yellow lights start to flash, drivers need to slow down and prepare to stop. When the yellow turns to red and stop sign on the bus swings out, we must stop.

***Know your bus stops:*** It is also a good idea to learn where your local school bus stops are. When in these areas, be sure to exercise extra caution and keep an eye out for children who might be getting on or off the bus.

***Slow down in speed zones:*** It is also important to note that school speed zones are back in effect. Most schools have signs and warning lights on those signs. Slowing down and stopping at crosswalks will help create that safe environment for students on buses and those who walk.

***Don't be a distracted driver:*** We also need to stay off our cell phones. According to survey participants, distracted driving—and specifically cell phone usage—is one of the biggest problems when it comes to threats to school bus safety. Navigating through a school zone can be difficult enough when our focus is on the road. Phone calls and text messages only

make it that much more challenging.

As the school year continues, I hope you'll join me in taking steps to protect student safety. Drivers should be fully aware of their surroundings and the consequences of their actions while driving near school buses and school zones. To keep our children safe, give them a "brake!"