

## STOP ARM CAMERAS NOW BEING USED ON MORRIS AREA SCHOOL BUSES



Morris Area Schools is proud to be awarded the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) Stop Arm Grant. Stop arm cameras have been installed on 18 of Morris Area School buses and will be operational when the school year starts in September.

The OTS announced nearly \$14 million in state-funded grant awards in phases one through six during 2022 and 2023 to help keep Minnesota students safe as they get on and off school buses. The grants will reimburse schools and transportation companies for purchasing and installing stop arm camera systems and supporting software programs. Morris Area Schools and 25 MN school districts & transportation companies received grants in Phase 6. In total, through all six phases of the grant program, the state's public safety office will install stop-arm cameras on more than 7,000 buses in Minnesota, which represents about 59 percent of all school buses in the state.

The program is a partnership with law enforcement agencies including the Minnesota State Patrol, police departments and sheriff's offices statewide. The grant process included getting support letters from local Sheriff and City Police departments which included Stevens, Grant, Pope & Swift counties. Another part of the grant process was sharing the number of violations in our school district with the state including the number of citations written. In the past 4 years Morris Area Schools have had 43 violations and unfortunately only 8 of these resulted in citations. The reason behind the low number of citations is because the school bus drivers first priority is the safety of the students. The driver usually only gets partial or no plate number at all. It will be a tremendous help for the buses to be equipped with cameras to help capture the violator's license plate, make of car, driver, etc. The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services conducts an annual illegal passing survey in Minnesota. School bus drivers observed 747 stop arm violations in a single day during the 2023 survey.

This project also funds education and awareness efforts to encourage drivers to obey the law. All motorists need to pay attention, be patient, and need to stop for our flashing lights and extended stop arms on our school buses as this is when students are getting on and off the school bus and most likely they will have to cross the road. We have had some near misses with motorists and it would be very unfortunate to have a tragedy because of one reckless motorist. As a bus driver it is a terrifying moment when you see a motorist that is not paying attention and drives through the stop arm and near students. As drivers we do everything possible to keep our students safe but we also need the public's help to keep our children safe. Many motorists that go through our stop arms are not even paying attention to where they are and they are often distracted by cell phones or other passengers. Many motorists are not even looking at the bus. The best way to be aware of your surroundings at all times is to put the distractions away. With the cameras law enforcement will be able to catch more motorists and hold them accountable. The goal is to have motorists learn to pay attention and make the right choices around school buses. The important thing to remember here is not the fine. The **IMPORTANT** thing here is the **CHILD'S LIFE!**

## REMINDERS FOR MOTORISTS - Follow the Law, Keep Children Safe

Standard school bus stop laws: Learn and follow the school bus laws for motorists. Laws exist to protect children getting on and off the bus AND to protect you from a tragedy. Here are the standard rules:

1. Motorists coming to a school bus must watch for yellow flashing lights meaning the bus will be stopping to pick up students. Prepare to stop when you see these lights. Motorists from all directions must STOP 20 feet from the bus when the bus displays flashing red warning lights and extends the stop signal arm. These signals show that children are getting on or off the school bus and may be crossing the road.
2. Vehicles may not move or pass the bus until the flashing red lights and signals are turned off.
3. Drivers traveling in the same direction as the bus are always required to stop. Never pass on the right side of the bus, where children enter or exit. This is illegal and can have tragic results.
4. Violation of these laws can result in a citation and fine not less than \$500. A person may be guilty of a gross misdemeanor and face criminal charges if a motorist passes or attempts to pass the school bus in a motor vehicle on the right-hand, passenger-door side of the bus; or passes or attempts to pass the school bus in a motor vehicle when a school child is outside of and on the street or highway used by the school bus or on the adjacent sidewalk.

School bus drivers must report passing vehicles!

## REMINDERS FOR STUDENTS - Be aware of your surroundings.

1. When loading a bus, always look for cars and wait for the driver to signal that it is safe to cross. Stay out of the danger zone which is 10 feet around the entire school bus. Never chase after the bus if you miss it.
2. When getting off a bus, look to be sure no cars are passing on the shoulder. Stay out of the danger zone which is 10 feet around the entire school bus. Wait for the bus driver to signal that it's safe to cross. Stop and look both directions for vehicles. Never run across the street and never cross behind the school bus because it is very dangerous.
3. When crossing the street to get on the bus or to go home, make eye contact with motorists before proceeding.