

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
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The old saying about time flying by certainly seems to be accurate as we get older. Although it seems as though Memorial Day was only a few weeks ago, we have already reached the Labor Day Weekend; the unofficial end of summer. We'll likely still have many days with good weather but fall is not far away. With the arrival of Labor Day, also comes my annual "Back to School" column. As a student, I actually dreaded this time of year, with the "Back to School" sales and television commercials, so I can sympathize with children and parents who aren't quite ready to close the book on the summer of 2012. Honestly, I have heard from more than a few parents, however, who are eager to see their children board the school bus.

Going back to school is something that affects the entire community. The increased morning traffic, the addition of many pedestrians and the presence of more bicycles means every motorist needs to stay alert. Children can be easily distracted, so use caution when approaching them; never assume they know you are there. Pedestrians are encouraged to use the sidewalk when available or to walk against traffic when not. It's always a challenge during poor weather, so everyone should be more cautious in the rain.

The School Bus is the safest method of travel to and from school. Parents should monitor children as they board the bus and encourage them to remain seated when the bus is moving. The Salter Bus Drivers do an excellent job of letting kids know when it's clear to cross, so never rush children, there may be a hazard. As a motorist, you are required to stop upon approaching a vehicle that has a posted "School Bus" sign and red flashing lights. Buses may be big and yellow or smaller vans. If you see the driver has turned on the yellow caution lights, be prepared to stop or check for a potential hazard. The Amesbury buses typically operate on a tight schedule, with pick-ups within a few moments of the same time daily. If you find you're behind a bus each morning, adjust your schedule by a few minutes to avoid the delay.

Parents should spend a few moments with their child, regardless of the age, to talk about personal safety and stranger danger. Parents and children often feel that older children don't need to be as concerned about strangers as younger ones. Truthfully, as children get older and are able to enjoy more freedom, the chances of encountering a stranger increase. The basic rules never change, regardless of your age; never accept something from a stranger, never get into their car or house and be alert for potential tricks. Police will be monitoring school routes each day but the entire community plays a role in getting the school year off to a safe start. Report suspicious activity to the school and police, you could help prevent a crime later on.

Finally, many students get a ride in the morning from a parent or neighbor. Carpooling is a great idea, saving gas money too. Regardless of how short the commute is or how late you are running, make sure everyone in the car is properly restrained. A crash can happen anywhere and at any time, so be prepared before one happens to you. It only takes a moment; it's not only the law but common sense. Before we know it, we'll be making graduation plans, so enjoy the school year, take it slow and make sure everyone gets there safely.