

Bus safety at rural schools

Dairy Flat School



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Awhina Hunga Whara



“Taking an action learning approach to this unit will give senior students ownership of the teaching process and its content and in turn this process hopefully will embed the learning into the culture of the school in a more sustainable way than in the past.”

Gary Cain, previous Principal

Introduction

Dairy Flat School is a decile 10 school with a roll of 217, located in a semi-rural area north of Auckland. Most of the students travel on buses at some time or another. This ThinkSafe Education project involved the senior class, teachers, parents and ultimately the whole community in planning and actioning changes to prevent injury while travelling on the school bus.

What was the issue?

The school already had bus rules, and several senior students were trained as bus monitors each year. But while the bus rules were generally obeyed, there were some grey areas that the bus monitors were unsure about, such as aisle clutter, children moving between seats, controlling bus windows and acceptable activities while travelling. Also, some of the rules had not been sufficiently stressed.

The project was undertaken by senior pupils and bus monitors, mostly from the digital e-class. This project was timely in that it took place when bus monitors were being trained. It also formed part of the school’s bi-annual health consultation with their community.

What did the school do?

Investigation:

Students began by gathering evidence anecdotally from bus monitors, senior students and teachers. Guided by the information they had collected, the students

designed a multi-choice questionnaire for pupils, bus drivers, teachers and parents.

The results showed a disparity of views on what was acceptable behaviour on the bus. For instance, while students thought it okay to stand up in the aisle if they were getting off at the next stop, adults thought they should remain seated at all times. Some children and adults incorrectly stated that it was safer to cross in front of the bus, and others were confused about the contradiction of not being allowed to talk to the driver, but having to ask them for help if required.

The students used the internet to research international information on bus safety. This led to an unplanned healthy and robust debate about differences in school bus design and safety rules, particularly in America, which led them to better understand the reasoning behind New Zealand's safe practice in this area.

Interventions (action plan):

Groups of students developed PowerPoint presentations to share their findings with the whole school at assembly. The newsletter was also used to convey the message home to parents.

A fortnight later, the students gave the questionnaire to a different group of students, parents and bus drivers. They analysed the differences in the results from the questionnaires that were completed before and after the presentations. The responses to the post-presentation questionnaires showed a shift of attitude. For instance, respondents now stated that school bags should be kept under seats, students should face the front, and only the bus driver or monitor should open or shut the bus windows.

What happened as a result?

The investigation showed that there were a number of grey areas in which pupils, monitors and drivers were unclear about expectations. The school could now define those areas by deciding on preferred solutions and developing a new set of bus rules based on the results of the questionnaires.

In the end, the new rules were not too different from the previous set, but the big change was pupil and community ownership of them. Because of the consultation that the school had engaged in, the rules now reflected the view of the school community.

How well did it work?

The research and presentation components of this project were well suited to the digital environment. It was progressed through an integrated period of study time, involving written and oral language, and bringing together and processing information – the heart of inquiry learning. Underpinning the whole project was the health objective of nurturing and caring for the younger members of the community.

What will they do in the future?

The PowerPoint presentations created by the students have been combined into a single teaching resource for the whole school, which will ensure that the behaviour changes are sustained. An interchangeable bank of 135 slides allows teachers to adapt the presentation to the level of their class.

As many of the children live on lifestyle blocks where their families own quad bikes and other light agricultural equipment, the school is now considering using the same action learning approach to address the issue of tractor safety.

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