

It happens every year about this time. The season's change brings cooler temperatures, changing colors, and shorter days. For me, it also brings back memories of the start of another school year and what that meant for the daily routine in each stage of life. As an elementary and middle school student, this time of year brought so many new things, uncertainty, and changes. No matter how much you prepared for the start of school, switching from the carefree days of summer to the structured march through the school day was always difficult. High school brought all the uncertainty faced by younger students and added on top of that the unfamiliar aspects of driving a car, working a job, or increased family responsibilities. As parent, the start of school could be both a relief and a struggle. Relief in knowing that structure was returning to the day, but struggles to now meet new schedules, timelines, and extracurricular activities. So many emotions and responsibilities are tied into this annual milestone.

For all drivers, an important responsibility accompanies this change too. Safety on the roads as students travel to and from school needs to be a priority. Scientific studies have concluded that it takes people anywhere from 21 to 66 days to learn a new habit. This means by the end of summer, most drivers have become accustomed to and formed driving habits based upon the absence of busses and other school traffic. That all changes abruptly overnight as children and families hit the streets every morning and afternoon going to and from school.

Extra caution is warranted as we all adjust to the new normal. During this adjustment period, keep in mind there will be more drivers on the road, some of whom may be inexperienced. Please plan your commutes with some extra time and bring some extra patience. For our new drivers out there and frazzled parents trying to cope with busy schedules, please remember the safety of everyone in your vehicle is your top priority. Be alert driving on residential streets as they will be full of children waiting for busses or walking to school, some of whom might dart out into the street or make other sudden choices that create a safety issue. Finally, school bus stop arms are mandatory, not mere suggestions. Unless you are separated from the bus by a median, all traffic must stop for a school bus stop arm. When you see flashing lights, slow down and be ready to stop. A stop arm violation is a serious safety risk and comes with a substantial fine.

Back to school season brings many changes. Safe driving needs to remain a constant. Be alert for the changes back to school time brings to the road. Our children are counting on you to be part of the reason they arrive safely at school each morning and home each afternoon. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.