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Where Education Begins: Honoring the Roots of the Idaho School Day

From Idaho Department of Education Director of Student Transportation Ali Hicks

(BOISE) – It feels fitting—almost poetic—that School Bus Driver Appreciation Day lands on Superhero Day. As the State Director of Student Transportation, I don’t see that as a coincidence; I see it as long overdue recognition for the people who quietly serve as the foundation of our education system.

My own journey began behind the wheel of a yellow bus. And if I’m honest, I can see it ending there too. There’s something about that role that stays with you. When you’re responsible for the safety and well-being of Idaho’s students, it changes you. That sense of responsibility and pride still drives my work every day at the Idaho Department of Education. Because no matter how much policy we write or refine, none of it matters without the drivers who start the day before the sun comes up.

School bus drivers are, in many ways, the roots of public education in Idaho. They are the only professionals in a district managing a “classroom” of 50-plus students while traveling down the road—often at highway speeds—with their back turned. Before a teacher ever picks up a marker, a driver has already set the tone. A calm, consistent presence or a well-timed word of encouragement can shape how a student walks into school that day.

It’s one of the most complex roles in any school system. Drivers don’t just navigate roads. They navigate relationships. They know their students: their routines, their needs, their challenges. Over the course of a single route, they shift from authority figure to mentor to trusted adult. They are the first face a child sees in the morning and the last one they see before heading home. That matters more than we often say out loud.

They don't wear capes. They wear high-visibility vests. They don't fly. They handle 13-ton vehicles with skill and precision in every kind of weather. They are steady, watchful, and quietly heroic—protecting what matters most.

To the drivers across Idaho: I'm proud to be part of this work with you. Thank you for the grit, the patience, and the care you bring to the job every single day. Whether you're navigating a mountain pass in a snowstorm or offering reassurance to a nervous kindergartener, you are making a difference, one mile at a time.

On behalf of the Idaho Department of Education, thank you for the essential role you play in our schools and communities. Because of you, students arrive ready to learn and return home safely.

Happy School Bus Driver (Superhero) Appreciation Day.

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