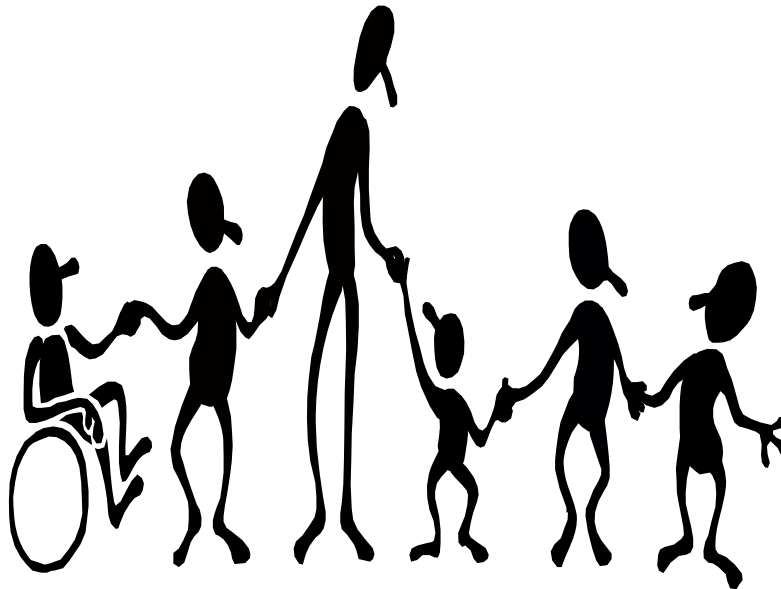


BEGINNING SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CURRICULUM



UNIT VIII SPECIAL EDUCATION

REVISED 10-2007

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UNIT VIII
SPECIAL EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

- The driver will explain how to communicate important information to students with disabilities.
- The driver will explain how to handle behavior problems with students with disabilities.
- The driver will explain how to handle health problems with students with disabilities.
- The driver will explain when and how students with disabilities should be evacuated from a school bus.
- The driver will explain the use and importance of the medical information card.
- The driver will understand the basic Michigan and federal disability laws and the rules and regulations pertinent to transportation.
- The driver will understand the basic concepts of securing a wheelchair to the school bus.
- The driver will understand the basic concepts and importance of Child Safety Restraint Systems.

Introduction to Transporting Students with Disabilities

Public Act 198 of 1971 which took effect during the 1972-74 school year is commonly known as the Michigan's Mandatory Special Education Act. The Act guaranteed special education programs and services for all students with disabilities from birth through 25 years of age. On November 29, 1975, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act. Before 1971, some children with disabilities in Michigan did not attend schools. Services varied greatly and quality of service was not a major concern. As a result of these laws, access to public education became a right. Educational programming now must be in response to the needs of the student as determined and monitored by a team. Placement in the least restrictive environment is a legal mandate. Related (transportation) Services may be a necessary part of the pupil's educational plan.

State and federal civil rights require reasonable accommodation for pupils who are disabled. Both Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Public Act 121 of 1990, the Michigan Handicappers Civil Rights Bill, require school districts to transport pupils in wheelchairs where necessary for them to benefit from public education. The Individuals with Disabilities Act PL 108-446 (2004), enumerates services that must be provided by states as a condition for receiving federal education funds.

All students identified as a student with a disability are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. An Individualized Educational Program Team (IEP Team) determines eligibility based on recommendations from the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET).

School Bus Transportation and Disabled Students

Every student with a disability may be considered for transportation services as a related service and will be provided if needed to make certain their educational program requirements are met. If the IEP Team determines that a student is in need of special transportation, transportation personnel must develop methods and procedures for transporting that student safely. School bus transportation for students with disabilities mandates that the driver and assistant be knowledgeable about the specific needs of each student. Many students will require special physical or behavioral management interventions.

School bus drivers have a unique opportunity to provide a positive influence on the lives of pupils with disabilities as they are being transported. By providing an atmosphere of friendly assistance and by responding to their individual and group needs, drivers can play an important role in the daily lives of these pupils.

Inclusion and the School Bus

Full Inclusion indicates that appropriate practices and technologies exist to accommodate disabled students within the ordinary classroom setting. Inclusion requires the educational commitment to the needs of each disabled child permitting an atmosphere to allow successful learning within the general education setting.

What does inclusion look like on the school bus? It is nearly the same as in the classroom. Most students with disabilities are regularly transported with their non-disabled peers.

Inclusion may present some challenges for school bus drivers. The inclusion student may have a disability similar to those described in this section. Special care may be needed for the student. You should be trained to use necessary interventions for physical, health, and/or behavior problems.

Remember to document all concerns in great detail and provide that information to your supervisor on a continual basis.

Disability Categories of Michigan

The State of Michigan has defined 13 disability areas that entitle a student to special education programs and services. These 13 disabling conditions are:

- ECDD Early Childhood Developmental Delay
- LD Specific Learning Disability
- CI Cognitive Impairment
- EI Emotional Impairment
- HI Hearing Impairment
- VI Visual Impairment
- ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder
- PI Physical Impairment
- OHI Other Health Impairment
- SLI Speech and Language Impairment
- SXI Severe Multiple Impairment
- TBI Traumatic Brain Injury
- DB Deaf Blindness

Students that are diagnosed with **Cognitive Impairments** include those with MiCI (mild cognitive impairments), MoCI (moderate cognitive impairments), and SCI (severe cognitive impairments).

Cognitive impairments vary considerably among people who have them, just as the range of abilities varies considerably among all people. Children may take longer to learn to speak, walk and take care of their personal needs, such as dressing or eating. Students may take longer learning in school. Most adults with

cognitive disabilities will be able to lead independent lives in the community without paid supports. A small percentage will have serious, lifelong limitations in functioning. However, with early intervention, an appropriate education and supports as an adult, all people with cognitive disabilities can lead satisfying lives in the community. (Excerpt from the ARC Fact Sheet)

Possible interventions would be instructions that are simple and very clear, possible physical assistance, and/or demonstrations of what you are want or are asking them to do. The students who are severely cognitively impaired often are not verbal. These students have very low ability to understand what is being said to them. The student's expressive ability, the ability to speak clearly and express one of their needs is impaired. They may not be able to do this.

Students who are diagnosed with mild or moderate cognitive impairments have higher mental abilities. These students can express themselves and are able to make some decisions regarding their health and safety. Possible interventions would be simple clear directions as to what you want them to do.

Emotionally Impaired students who are diagnosed may have difficulty in making good decisions regarding their behavior. These students may be impulsive, may not respond in a predictable way to directions, or may be withdrawn.

Possible interventions would be to closely communicate with the special education provider, regarding any behavior plan that may be in place for the student. It is essential that the **EI** student be dealt with fairly. These students may have no visible impairments but often do not behave in a way that is consistent with their age or grade.

Students who are diagnosed with **Hearing Impairments** have a hearing loss that is so severe that they may need amplification or specialized instruction in lip reading or sign language. As a result of the student's hearing loss, it is essential that the students understand beforehand the rules and expectations of them while riding the bus. If the student is not looking at you when you are speaking to them, they would not be aware there is something being said to them.

Possible interventions would be a "personalized" set of written instructions and expectations while riding the bus. Position the **HI** student so they can see your face in the rear view (interior) mirror. If the **HI** student can see you, he/she will know that something is being said to the group. Hearing impaired students often have poor expressive speech and may be hard to understand. The ability to face the student or the use of sign language during communication will enhance needed communications.

Visually Impaired encompasses students who are blind and those who have low vision. These students may be using a mobility aide of some type; it may be a cane, leader dog, or a person providing the necessary assistance enabling them to access the bus.

Possible interventions may be pairing the student with a sighted student or offering precise verbal directions to the visually impaired student.

Students with **Physical Impairments** (orthopedic or other health) may require equipment adaptations within the school environment.

Possible interventions would be the use of a lift to get on and off the bus, understanding how to react to a student, or having a secure and safe place to stow mobility equipment, e.g., canes, crutches, walkers, etc. Some of these students may have critical health concerns that may require immediate attention. In these cases, a careful emergency plan must be available and the appropriate training must take place for staff that will be working with the student.

Students that have **Speech and Language Impairments** have a disturbance in the speech process or speech production area. Some of these students are unable to produce the proper sounds that make words distinguishable. Some students may be unable to speak and are using some type of communication device. Careful listening and patience are key skills when working with these students.

Early Childhood Developmentally Delayed students are in the age range of birth through age six years. These students are at a developmental rate of less than 50% of what is expected for someone in their particular age bracket. When these students are transported, an approved child restraint system may be recommended.

Possible interventions would be the use of physical assistance to get the child on and off of the bus. Due to the age and developmental level of the child the child may be nonverbal or have difficulty with the concepts of rules and safety on the bus. Consistent repetition and demonstration of rules and procedures will be necessary.

Students who have a **Learning Disability** have a disturbance in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic writing, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation or mathematics reasoning. These students have average to above average intelligence. Some of these students have attention problems; if you are giving directions or giving a correction do not be too wordy. Get to the point and make sure the student has an adequate understanding of the rules and regulations of the bus.

Autism Spectrum Disorder students have disturbances in the areas of communication, relating to other people and possible disturbances in intelligence. Some of these students have behaviors that interfere with their health and safety. Students with ASD may function in the lower ability range and need constant supervision. These students may be very impulsive and may not make good decisions regarding their health and safety.

Some persons with ASD are nonverbal and may use a picture communication system. Special education personnel should provide transportation personnel with information regarding the student's communication system. Sudden changes in routine may not be tolerated well by many students in this group.

This is a brief overview of some of the characteristics that are found in the identified disabilities mentioned in the text above. If you feel that an intervention needs to be established, consult the program staff and have them work on this procedure with you. Please keep in mind that the students described in the text are entitled to respect and dignity.

Suggested Guidelines for School Bus Staff

General Guidelines for All Drivers and Aides Transporting Students with Disabilities:

The driver/attendant have a unique opportunity to provide a positive influence on the lives of students with disabilities as they are being transported. Providing an atmosphere of friendly assistance and responding to their individual needs, you become an important link in their efforts to reach greater independence.

The success of the special education transportation program depends largely on it being a partnership between you as a driver and the attendant if one is assigned to your run. There is no substitute for the teamwork approach in transporting and caring for students with disabilities. Teamwork and partnership will extend to your supervisor, dispatcher, teachers, and program supervisors at each building.

It is important that you check with the supervisor prior to leaving on a run for any messages regarding your students.

School policy may dictate how long you wait for pupils at their residence. Be sure that you arrive at the proper time, and if early, you may wish to wait longer to be fair to the parent and student.

When transporting disabled students during an extracurricular trip, you may be requested to assist the teacher in caring for the students.

Driver/attendants should make no changes in bus routes without the approval of the district. Arrangements for pick-up and drop-off should not generally be made directly with the parent or guardian. If a transportation change request is given to the driver/attendant, the suggested change must be referred directly to your supervisor.

As taught in the Student Management Unit, parents and/or guardians are not permitted to ride the bus unless authorized by the supervisor or when serving as a chaperone on a special trip.

Give appropriate assistance to each student as required as they board the bus. Students need to be encouraged and expected to help themselves as much as possible.

Driver/attendants are responsible to arrange for the safe transfer of students at staging areas. It is very helpful if driver/attendants *maintain a log of behavior* concerns for the students on their bus.

It is important to feel free to communicate to the supervisor specific incidents, attitudes, etc., which may be significant in managing the behavior of the student.

Driver/attendant responsibility for students ends at school or home when the student is placed in the care of a designated responsible person. In some cases, students may be allowed to enter school or home alone. This authority will be indicated on the Special Education Transportation Request form or on special lists provided by the program supervisor.

The bus driver is responsible for the safe operation of the vehicle and care of the students. The aide, if assigned, is responsible for the care of the students with the assistance of the bus driver.

From time to time, parents and/or guardians request that drivers/attendants transport student medications to school. We expect to cooperate in transportation of medicine as outlined in school policy and procedures. When medicine is delivered to the school or home, it must be signed for by someone at the school or home location. Following is a sample form that could be used.

SAMPLE

DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT MEDICINE				
RX NO. _____	STUDENT _____	_____	_____	_____
		Last	First	MI
RX NO. _____	STUDENT _____	_____	_____	_____
		Last	First	MI
RX NO. _____	STUDENT _____	_____	_____	_____
		Last	First	MI
School _____				
Signature _____	Date _____			

Although rare, a driver or attendant may need special training to administer medicine to a student. Medicine should not be carried by the students. The parent or guardian must give medicine directly to driver/attendant, per school policy and procedures.

Be aware of the student's abilities and what special needs are required during the bus ride. Most medical and physical problems are on file and you should feel free to check with the transportation office and teachers to secure the information you need.

Behavioral Problems and Safety

Disabled students with behavioral problems must be treated on a one-to-one basis pertaining to their specific conditions. You should assume that some of your students might not understand general instructions. Each driver/attendant should maintain a daily log of behavior. If it becomes necessary, this information can then be converted to a regular Bus Conduct Report for a call to parents and school. The following guidelines may be used in emergency cases when it is **impossible** to safely continue to transport students.

1. Driver/attendant may radio dispatcher for instructions.
2. If direction is given to return to school, students are to remain on the bus until a school staff member meets the bus. Bus will remain at the school until released by dispatcher in consultation with principal.
3. Staff will contact parent or an emergency person to assist with bus or alternative transportation home.
4. Staff will contact backup personnel, if necessary (Director of Transportation, Special Education Supervisor) to transport the student home if parents and/or emergency contact are not available.

In no case should students ever be left at any location without proper home or school staff supervision. When in doubt, please use your two-way radio.

Be sure that each child is properly seated and any child safety restraint systems (CSRS) and wheelchairs are properly secured. Wheelchairs always are to be secured to the floor of the bus, and the students secured in the chair prior to placing the bus in motion.

District transportation supervisors or designees will provide training on necessary equipment that a pupil(s) must use. If you have any questions about the handling or securing of a student, check with your supervisor immediately. It is your right to have as much information as possible to safely transport the student.

Communication

Communicating with some special education pupils can be challenging. There are a number of actions drivers can take, however, that will ease this difficulty. Also, special techniques can be used for the hearing impaired, visually impaired and mentally impaired.

Driver Actions:

- Be patient
- Do not raise voice
- Do not look angry
- Have another pupil help you interpret what is needed
- Use simple words
- Use slow and deliberate speech
- Use appropriate gestures
- Observe closely

Hearing Impaired:

- Write down what you wish to say and have pupil write response
- Learn sign language

Visually Impaired:

- Call pupil by name
- Tell them exactly what you want them to do

Cognitively Impaired:

- Be short and precise
- Repeat often
- Questions should require short answers

Cooperative Discipline

Helping Students Feel *Capable*

Make mistakes “okay”

- Talk about mistakes
- Equate mistakes with effort
- Minimize the effect of making mistakes

Build confidence

- Focus on improvement
- Notice contributions
- Build on strengths
- Show faith in students
- Acknowledge the difficulty of a task
- Set time limits

Make learning tangible

- I can
- Accomplishments
- Checklist of skills

Recognize achievement

- Applause
- Stars and stickers
- Awards
- Self-Approval
- Letters home and to the teacher

Acceptance

- Accept sincerely and unconditionally
- Accept students' personal style

Attention

- Greet students
- Listen to students
- Teach students to ask for attention
- Spend time chatting
- Attend school events
- Visit the classroom
- Recognize birthdays
- Send cards, messages home

Appreciation

- Describe the behavior accurately
- Use three-part appreciation statements
- Give written word of appreciation
- Teach students to ask for appreciation

Affirmation

- Be specific – be enthusiastic
- Acknowledge positive traits verbally or in writing

Compassion

- Show compassion when things go badly
- Be kind
- Be friendly

Helping Students Contribute

Encourage students contributions to the bus

- Invite students to help with daily tasks
- Request students' choices
- Ask students input for rules

Encourage students to help other students

- Cooperative learning
- Peer helping
- Peer recognition

Another Viewpoint of Student Misbehavior

We All Have to Feel Important.

When one talks about misbehavior being a way students choose to satisfy their need to belong, there just doesn't seem to be a logical connection between belonging and misbehaving. We need to look at this from the student's perspective. We need to eavesdrop on the message inside the child's head.

We all know students who meet their need to feel important by constantly disrupting the class.

Students might have a message in their head that says,
"I'm only important when ... everyone is noticing me.

...everyone is all wrapped up with me. Everyone is serving me."

A student operating from this perspective has an Attention Goal.

We all know students who meet their need to feel important by refusing to follow directions.

Students might have a message in their head that says,
"I'm only important when ... I'm in charge.

...I prove you can't make me.
...I'm the boss."

A student operating from this perspective has a Power Goal.

We all know students who meet their need to feel important by being the best fighter in school.

Students might have a message in their head that says,
"I'm only important when ... I'm getting even.

...I'm hurting others as I feel hurt.
...I'm fixing my hurt by getting you."

A student operating from this perspective has a Revenge Goal.

We all know students who meet their need to feel important by never getting their work done.

Students might have a message in their head that says,
"I'm only important when ... I'm being the best failure.

...I'm proving I can't do it."

A student operating from this perspective has an Avoidance-of Failure Goal

The New Student Rider and His/Her Disability

Your Transportation Department will receive a request for transportation services for a new rider with a disability from time to time. After the Transportation Supervisor has received essential information, it will be shared appropriately with the School Bus Driver and Aide. As soon as possible, the student will begin riding your school bus.

Sample Transportation Riding Forms (that may be used):

SAMPLE

SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION REQUEST FORM			
<i>Please print or type</i>			
Name:	_____	Student #:	_____
	Last First MI		
Home Address:	_____		
	Street		

	City	State	Zip
Home Phone:	_____	D.O.B.	_____
Height:	_____	Weight:	_____
<hr/>			
PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION			
Parent/Guardian Name:	_____		
Address:	_____		
	Street		

	City	State	Zip
Home Phone:	_____	Work Phone:	_____
<hr/>			
EMERGENCY CONTACT			
Parent/Guardian Name:	_____		
Relationship:	_____		
Address:	_____		
	Street		

	City	State	Zip
Home Phone:	_____	Work Phone:	_____
<hr/>			
SCHOOL INFORMATION			
Home School:	_____	S/E School:	_____
Program Code:	_____	Grade:	_____
Teacher:	_____	Teacher Phone:	_____

SAMPLE

MEDICAL INFORMATION

Please check any of the following that apply:

- Seizures Diabetic Hearing Impaired Visually Impaired
- Respiratory Problem Non-Verbal Non-Ambulatory
- Other – Please Describe: _____

Medication Taken:

Name _____ Dosage _____ Times Taken _____

Name _____ Dosage _____ Times Taken _____

Name _____ Dosage _____ Times Taken _____

Allergies: _____

Wheelchair? Yes No Type/Brand: _____

Physician: _____ Phone: _____

Hospital: _____

Special Instructions for attending physician:

Please review and check any of the following medical/health concerns that may apply:

- Leg Elevations Brace Nothing by mouth Colostomy
- Crutches Drools May require snack Vesicotomy or
- Sling Airway difficulty Elimination needs Ureterostomy
- Helmet Oxygen Gastrostomy Diaper
- Cane Breathing assistance Harness
- Glasses Bleeder Other
- Hearing aid

Please furnish any special information regarding any of the boxes checked:

SAMPLE

AUTHORIZATION FOR TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Each of the following persons participated in the development of these transportation service requirements and by signing below approves them for implementation.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Principal/Program Supervisor

Date

Signature of Transportation Dept. Representative

Date

AUTHORIZATION FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

If I, as parent/guardian of the above named student, cannot be contacted in the event of a medical emergency or traumatic injury demanding immediate medical attention, I hereby authorize district staff person or related service provider contracted for by the district to obtain such medical treatment for the above named student.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

If there are any changes in the student's health, medical or behavior status which the parent(s), physical, transportation or other school staff believe may merit changes in staffing, precautions to be taken, interventions, restraints, or any other procedure noted above, the concerned party shall immediately contact the Transportation Department who will in turn initiate the process to evaluate and recommend necessary change with the involvement of parent(s), physician, school, and transportation staff.

This form must be completed before transportation can begin. Parent or guardian is required to notify the transportation department immediately regarding any changes.

Please allow up to five (5) days after receipt of this form by the bus garage for service to start.



Student Photo

Evacuating the Special Education Bus

Evacuating a bus containing students with disabilities may require specific training. Each driver must know the capability of every student. The driver must formulate an evacuation plan and practice necessary techniques needed if evacuation becomes necessary. It also is essential that a student seating chart and student list are made and kept updated at all times.

Consideration must be given to the following items when formulating evacuation skills:

- Understand when evacuation is appropriate.
 - District policies and procedures must be followed.
 - District transportation supervisor will make certain appropriate training is scheduled as needed.
 - Safety of students during planning and executing an evacuation is essential.
- Know where the vehicle's emergency equipment is located and learn how to use it.
 - Fire extinguisher
 - Fusees
 - Triangles
 - First aid box
 - Belt cutter
 - Where is the belt cutter located?
 - Know how to use a belt cutter. Practice on scrap belt material to learn the appropriate cutting technique. Cuts should be made at a 45° angle!
 - Clean up kit
- The driver must stay calm and remain in control.
- Know your passengers
- If you must evacuate:
 - Follow evacuation procedures for front, rear, or split door evacuation.
 - Evacuate no less than 100' away from the bus and to a safe spot.
 - Visually impaired children need clear verbal instructions and a helping hand.
 - Hearing impaired children should be taught the basic signs for emergency information.
 - Orthopedically impaired children may need to be carried.
 - Students with other disabilities may require additional planning with the assistance from other supportive staff.

Example Emergency Evacuation Procedures

1. Preparation
 - a. Mental
 - b. Verbal
 - c. Written

2. Access student information
 - a. Emergency information form
 - Disabling conditions
 - Medical conditions
 - Verbal or non-verbal
 - b. Seek additional details from parent/guardian/teacher/support team

3. Familiarize self with assistive devices for each student
 - a. Lap belts
 - b. Type of safety vest (harness)
 - c. Child care seats
 - d. Leg braces/crutches
 - e. Other medical devices

4. Evaluate student and equipment individually in terms of quick removal from vehicle
 - a. Size (weight/height/type of equipment)
 - b. Student needs (ambulatory but needs assistance, can assist in emergency situation, needs monitoring, etc.)
 - c. Physical impairments/weaknesses

5. Evaluate seating positions of students
 - a. Proximity to emergency exits
 - b. Location of car seats and students using safety vests, lap belts, etc.

6. Once an evacuation plan is determined, commit to paper. Always update this plan whenever pupil changes occur.

7. It is important that each Transportation Department have clear and concise direction regarding evacuation practices. Some considerations include:
 - a. Emergency evacuation techniques with hands on practice three (3) times per year as recommended by the Michigan Department of Education.
 - b. Many districts publish driver's handbooks that contain specific information regarding special/regular education evacuation policies and procedures.
 - Make certain to review and understand departmental policies.
 - If the District does not practice special education evacuation drills, plan for emergency evacuations through discussions, mock practices with other drivers, and record evacuation plans in written form.

- Share planned evacuation scenarios with substitute drivers.
 - Remember to update student passenger list.
8. Training sessions are valuable. Any time a District or county-wide training session is arranged, drivers/paraprofessionals should be encouraged to attend. These may include wheelchair lift operations, wheelchair tiedowns, evacuation scenarios, moving and lifting students, proper radio use, medical emergencies, accident reporting, and many, many more subjects.
9. Drivers/paraprofessionals may want to plan for and simulate various emergency evacuation scenarios to assist them in their ability to determine:
- a. When evacuation is the best, most appropriate decision, or
 - b. When the decision to remain on the bus is the right assessment for the safety of the students.

Student Disabilities and Safe Transportation

Appropriate training may be necessary for some special education students to be transported safely. Although there are dedicated special education buses, many students with disabilities are integrated into general education routes. Again, always attend classes and meetings when invited to better understand the special needs of a student(s) that may be assigned to a particular route.

Transporting Wheelchairs and Equipment

Suggested Guidelines for Handling Wheelchairs

The following guidelines have been compiled to assist parents, bus drivers, and professional staff when faced with questions about transporting disabled pupils in wheelchairs. School districts are required, under state and federal law, to transport pupils who are disabled where needed to benefit from a free appropriate public education.

- **The Disabled Student**
 - What disability or disabilities does your student possess?
 - A student diagnosis is important to the transportation staff to assist the driver and team in the student's proper care. For instance, if a student suffers from paraplegia (paralyzed from the waist down), this may present a student who is mentally capable of understanding and communicating.
 - It is important to know what medications a student must take. This information is necessary if an emergency occurs requiring medical personnel contacts.



- **The Wheelchair**

- **Wheelchair Safety Requirements:**

- There are a variety of styles and makes of wheelchairs. Recently wheelchair manufacturers have come together to manufacture safer, more transportable wheelchairs. Wheelchairs provide:

- Safer transportation
 - Easier and faster securement
 - Labeling stating the transportable capabilities of the chair including:
 1. crash-worthiness
 2. clearly marked tiedown sites marked by the manufacturer

- **Non Transportable Chairs:**

- Some wheelchair scooters, racing or recreational chairs, stroller type chairs and other similar devices may not be transported on the school bus.

- Chairs that are made of weak or questionable materials should not be transported. A wheelchair should be capable of sustaining a minimum crash at 30-mph and 20-Gs test. Wheelchairs for school transportation shall be limited in maximum size to 30" wide and 53" long and weigh no more than 200 pounds.
 - It should be understood that there may be some chairs that cannot be transported safely due to the construction of the chair. The wheel components of most chairs are their weakest part.

- **Safe Transportation Team:**

- A Team representing the safe transportation of each pupil being transported in a wheelchair should be consulted to make certain the child's wheelchair is in good working condition, is transportable, and has clearly marked anchor sites. A problem-solving team should consist of those who are knowledgeable in transportation safety and wheelchair configurations. The team may include:

- Transportation supervisor
 - Mechanic
 - Physical and/or Occupational Therapist

- Bus driver/paraprofessional
 - Parent(s)
 - Teachers
 - Nurse
 - Specialist in Transportation Research and Safety
- **Safe Wheelchair Transportation Recommendations:**
 - Transfer student to vehicle or child safety seat if feasible.
 - Orient wheelchairs facing forward.
 - Remove and properly secure add-on equipment such as trays.
 - Consult the wheelchair manufacturer regarding structural alterations.
 - Provide clear space around secured wheelchair and use padding when appropriate for the safety of the passenger.
 - **Securement of Wheelchairs on the School Bus**

All drivers/aides need appropriate training in the securement of wheelchairs which includes matching tiedowns, occupant restraints, with step-by-step instruction.

 - Appropriate wheelchair securement sites, four-point tiedowns, and a three-point occupant restraint system are essential in transporting wheelchair students safely.
 - The wheelchair must be effectively secured so that it does not move significantly during an impact.
 - Wheelchairs should be secured with a properly applied, dynamically-tested four-point system.
 - The wheelchair must be secured independently from the occupant in order to avoid loading the weight of the wheelchair onto the occupant.

In other words, a belt that is designed to simultaneously secure both the occupant and wheelchair should *never* be used.

- Securing a 40-pound wheelchair with a 100-pound occupant requires 3,000 – 5,000 pounds of restraining force.
- Wall mounts, pins, ropes and bungee cords shall not be used to secure any wheelchair with an occupant in the chair. The wheelchair must be securely mounted so that it is stable during impact.

A one-time training is not always sufficient. Ask for training or retraining whenever feeling unsure about wheelchair securement.

- **Terminology Related to Wheelchairs:**
 - **Securement:** applies only to wheelchair, i.e., securing wheelchair to the bus
 - **Restraint:** applies only to occupants, i.e., restraints that attach occupant to the bus seat or wheelchair
 - **Securement Points:** are places where tiedowns attach to wheelchair; i.e., are only on the wheelchair
 - **Anchor Points:** places where tiedowns and restraints are anchored; can be on the vehicle or on the wheelchair (e.g., tiedowns are anchored to the wheelchair)
 - **WTORS:** wheelchair securement/occupant restraint system

- **Electric Wheelchairs**
 - Gel batteries should be used rather than batteries using liquid acid in all electric wheelchairs that are transported by school buses.
 - Parents are responsible for the purchase and maintenance of their child's wheelchair, including the purchase and replacement of wheelchair batteries.

- **Wheelchair Lifts**
 - Training in the use of wheelchair lifts is very important. There is more than one type of lift manufacturer. Wheelchair lifts also break down and so training is required for manual use. Develop safe habits during lift operations. Distractions, forgetting to set a parking brake, allowing a student near lift mechanisms that might cause harm, and allowing dangling scarves or jewelry to be worn are all unsafe practices. Safe loading and unloading practices following district policies and procedures is a must.
 - It is recommended that drivers and aides do not ride the lift with the wheelchair occupant. The best and safest method requires operation from the lift either from the ground or from the bus while "spotting" the wheelchair occupant during the operation.

Other Supportive Equipment

- There are support devices that may be added to particular students' stability and/or safety reasons. These are appropriately designed and placed in use by physicians, occupational and physical therapists.
- The variety of support devices may include several different types of postural support devices.

- When a **lap belt** is used for postural control, these are not crashworthy. *The lap belt should cross the pelvis and not the abdomen (soft tissue).*
- If a disabled student uses a tray as an attachment to a wheelchair, the **wheelchair tray should be removed during transit due to the risk of soft tissue damage upon impact**. There are other options during the student's transportation ride. The transportation team should be consulted case by case.

Securing Equipment during Transportation:

- Trays and all other accessories must be stored and secured so that they do not become projectiles in the event of an impact.

Responsibility of the School District

From the time the pupil enters the bus in the morning until the pupil is let off the bus in the evening, the school staff are the responsible care givers. Transportation department staff is responsible to ensure that the special bus meets appropriate safety standards and is maintained in good working order.

The school district also is responsible to ensure that personnel working with pupils with physical disabilities have been trained so they can accommodate the health, safety, and welfare of these pupils.

Responsibility of Parent/Guardian

Parents are responsible to ensure that their children have all the personal items needed for school. This includes the safe operation of wheelchairs and other accommodating devices for pupils with physical impairments. Parents are responsible to purchase wheelchairs and other equipment designed to maximize the child's health, safety, and welfare.

Prior to the final purchase of a wheelchair or transportation device, the parents should consult with the transportation department to determine if the equipment can be transported on a school bus. It is recommended that before any wheelchair purchase is made the parent make sure the wheelchair conforms to the WC-19 standards.

Parents are responsible for bringing the wheelchair to the bus and maintaining a safe clear path to the bus. Parents must always arrange for someone to meet the bus and take the wheelchair into the residence. Transportation staff members are not permitted to go into a residence to pick up or return a student.

Non-Wheelchair Assisting Devices

Sometimes technology dependent students have orthopedic abnormalities which require special attention. To assist some students in accessing transportation, many are placed on mobile devices such as cots, gurneys, banana boards, and extended or modified wheelchairs. Use of this type of equipment on a school bus presents enormous safety concerns for transportation staff. In general, this type of equipment will not be transported. Often the equipment will not even fit on the lift. The wheelchair team will make an evaluation and decision as to the safety of transporting this kind of equipment.

Pupils Unable to Use Bus Steps

Pupils using mobile devices that cannot be transported safely may be boarded by using the lift. Great care should be taken by the transportation staff as the student enters and exits via the lift.

The safest, most effective way to load and unload students who are unable to use the bus steps is use of a wheelchair on the bus lift.

Authority to Transport Mobile Devices

Schools should only transport mobile devices that comply with this guideline and are required by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team and approved by the wheelchair committee.

Suggested Guidelines for Regular Transportation of Disabled Students

The following guidelines shall apply whenever a student with a disability is transported on a general education bus. They will apply whether the student's disability is short term or long term.

1. The district has an obligation to provide transportation that is appropriate to any student's educational needs.
2. The driver is to give whatever assistance the student needs once the student is at the door of the bus. The driver is not to leave the immediate area of the school bus. Driving the bus and caring for the students are both integral parts of a bus driver's job. Care extends from each individual to and including the collective group of students who ride the bus.
3. A parent is responsible to bring the pupil to the entry door of the bus and to meet the student at the entry door on the return route. The parent is not responsible for helping within the confines of the school bus. They may assist on a voluntary basis.

4. Safe lifting techniques are the responsibility of the school nurse and/or physical therapist. Drivers should be trained by those professional staff members in the proper way to assist the student. In the case of a medical stop for general education student, the school nurse is responsible as designated by Board Policy. In the case of a Special Education student who rides a regular bus, the professional designing the IEP team document are responsible.
5. An aide may be used for a medical stop, if approved. If it is a Special Education stop, the IEP team will dictate the need for an aide.
6. In the event a student develops a documented history of medical or behavior problems the Pupil Transportation Department may request an IEP team meeting. Special education students are transported on regular education buses whenever possible.
7. Training, when needed, may be limited to the staff regularly involved with the student. Special written instructions will be provided for use by substitute drivers.
8. IEP Team decisions cannot break the laws regarding the safe transportation of all students (e.g. safe stops.)

Child Safety Restraint Systems

- Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) must:
 - Meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS, No. 213)
 - Fit properly into the confines of the school bus seat
 - Be properly anchored to the school bus seat by the seat belt
 - Not be placed next to an emergency exit
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends that all pre-school children be transported in an appropriate Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) when on a school bus.
- The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) also recommends that all pre-school children be transported in an appropriate Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) when on a school bus.
 - Most states exempt young children on school buses from the requirement to be secured in child safety seats, however
 - Federal tests show that the *safest* way to transport pre-school children is in Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) devices.

- Most large school buses do not have seat belts. Seat belts cannot be added to accommodate a car seat.
 - An optional securement system that can be used is a safety vest/cam wrap (CSRS) system.
- **Safety Vests**
 - May be used on school buses with the newer FMVSS 210 seat frames or the older bus seats
 - May be used with a lap belt on reinforced seat frames
 - Must *always* be zipped in the back; *always* secured at the hips and shoulders
 - Must fit properly within the confines of the school bus seat
 - Must be properly anchored to the bus seat
- ALL Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) are permitted seat after seat on the bus.
- **Secured and Unsecured Passengers.**

When transporting both secured and unsecured passengers, unsecured passengers cannot sit directly in back of a student who is in a CSRS.

 - Dynamic testing has proven that an unsecured student may cause harm to a student who is secured in a seat directly in front of such a student during an impact.

Maintenance, Disposal, and Storage of Equipment

Child Safety Restraint Systems, Tiedown Systems and any other essential equipment require appropriate maintenance, disposal and storage.

- Equipment such as car seats, safety vests and cam wraps, wheelchair tiedowns have expiration dates.
 - The equipment should have appropriate labeling which should always be visible on the particular item. The labeling will include the date it was manufactured as well as its life span.
- Disposal of items should be handled with care.
 - Strapping should be cut off
 - Car seats should be marked with permanent marker stating that this item is no longer safe and is being disposed
 - Many of these items can be recycled
- Storage of Equipment
 - Storage is important to keep equipment such as safety vests, cam wraps, and car seats clean and in good working order.
 - Keeping the equipment organized will also help to assure that equipment is properly matched. Manufactured items, like tiedown equipment, should never be mixed and matched randomly.

- It is important that drivers and aides check equipment often for:
 - Broken parts
 - Frayed belts
 - Anything that looks suspect
- All of the above items should be on a regular cleaning schedule. Students are placed in safety vests, car seats, etc., several times during the day throughout the year which may cause soiling or damage, therefore, it is important that such items be kept as clean as possible.

SUMMARY

It is important that bus drivers and aides receive appropriate training through their respective districts in all aspects of transporting students with disabilities. This includes handling wheelchairs, safe loading and unloading, proper securement of equipment, and the safe transportation of their passengers. Additionally the bus drivers and aides must receive appropriate training in all other child safety restraint systems.

Bus drivers/aides should never feel insecure about asking questions and reviewing procedures. Always remember it is our job to keep all students safe.

Resources Available for More Information

- Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC), funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.
<http://www.ercwts.pitt.edu>
- Ride Safe Brochure available online at: <http://www.travelsafer.org>
- National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA). <http://NHTSA.org>