



School Bus Driver

**PRE-  
SERVICE  
COURSE**

Trainee Manual

**CORE &  
OPTIONAL Units**

Watch Your Step

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome, new New York State school bus driver!

The *School Bus Driver Pre-Service Course* has one goal: to prepare you to safely transport children on a school bus.

You are entering a proud profession. New York State's school bus drivers have established an admirable safety record over the past generation. Statistically, New York's school buses represent the safest form of ground transportation ever devised. Children riding in school buses are approximately 24 times safer than when they're riding in the family car!

However, student safety is never assured. Your responsibility for safety will be serious from the first day you drive a bus with children on board. What you learn in this course can save a child's life.

This *Trainee Manual* will prepare you for the course. Read it carefully before the course begins. Complete the review questions at the end of each Unit before you come to class. Write down any questions you have for your instructor. If you don't understand something, say so. Asking questions is one sign of a professional.

Again, welcome to our New York State school bus safety community!

Mary Faherty Sansaricq  
New York State Education Department  
State Director of Pupil Transportation

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# CORE UNIT 1: YOUR KEY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A SCHOOL BUS DRIVER

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## Unit 1 Topics

- 1.1 Your Responsibility for Safety
- 1.2 Professional Conduct
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- 1.4 Role Model
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## Introduction

Unit 1 of the *Pre-Service Course* will introduce you to the most important responsibilities of a school bus driver. Driving a school bus is a job like no other. Because you are responsible for children's safety, your community expects the highest standards of conduct and professionalism in everything you do. Because New York's school bus drivers take this responsibility so seriously, our state's school bus safety record is the best in the nation. By becoming a New York State school bus driver, you are joining a demanding but proud profession.

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## 1.1 Your Responsibility for Safety

**1.1.1 Student safety is the priority at all times.** Safety is important in many jobs, but for a school bus driver, student safety is always the priority. No matter what happens, your main responsibility is protecting the students on your bus, or in the process of getting on or off your bus.

*Your main responsibility is protecting the students on your bus.*

**1.1.2 Safety judgment.** "Safety first" is not just a slogan for a school bus driver. Once you have begun driving school bus with students on board, you *will* be confronted with situations that require quick and decisive action on your part. Sometimes you will be faced with a clear choice between student safety and other priorities. For instance, one day soon you may be substituting for another driver who is sick, and find yourself running late on the run for reasons beyond your control. There are many reasons school buses sometimes run late; it is a common occurrence in any school district. When running late, a school bus driver faces a clear choice: drive faster to try to get back on schedule, or inform base by radio that you will arrive at school a little late that morning. Getting students to school on time is important, but "safety first, schedule second" is always the right decision if you're running late for any reason.

Occasionally you will encounter a student who, in spite of your requests, simply refuses

to follow a key safety rule, such as waiting for your signal before crossing the road at the bus stop. Convincing students to be safe is not always easy. Again, the bus driver is faced with a clear choice in such a situation: “keep the peace” with students by allowing them to ignore safety rules, or report the students to a supervisor or principal so the problem can be corrected, even if it takes a suspension from school to do it. It is good to be friendly with students, but safety must come first. Students who refuse to follow safety rules must be reported.

This course cannot cover every scenario you may face as a school bus driver. When transporting dozens of children in a large vehicle over a wide variety of roadway and weather conditions, unexpected events will occur. As a professional school bus driver, one of your most important responsibilities is to exercise good “safety judgment” when confronted with an unusual situation. Placing student safety first is always the right course.

### *It is your responsibility to drive defensively at all times.*

**1.1.3 Defensive driving.** It is your responsibility to drive defensively at all times. This means doing everything you can to avoid accidents and crashes in spite of the unsafe actions of other motorists. Traffic congestion and the hectic pace of modern life combine to create a very challenging roadway environment in most areas of our state. While driving your bus you will encounter an astounding variety of risk-taking, distracted, and impaired motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The outstanding safety record of school bus drivers is only because they remain

constantly alert for potentially dangerous motorists and hazardous traffic situations.

Defensive driving means reducing the risk of collision by anticipating dangerous situations, despite adverse conditions or the mistakes of others and includes adjusting your speed based on weather and road conditions. Severe winter weather is a fact of life in many parts of our state. Fog is common in many areas. When roads are slippery or visibility is limited, you need to slow down. Rushing is always dangerous in a school bus, but in bad weather it’s a recipe for disaster.

**1.1.4 Distractions.** School bus drivers must be able to stay focused on safe driving in spite of distractions. With children on board, school bus drivers face more distractions than other commercial drivers. You must learn to temporarily tune out onboard behavior problems during safety-critical driving tasks, such as approaching an intersection or while picking up or dropping off students.

**1.1.5 Care and custody of children.** As a school bus driver you are legally responsible for the safety of the students assigned to your bus. In some ways a school bus driver’s responsibility is similar to a parent’s towards his or her own child. This means you are expected to do what you can to protect a child just as a responsible parent would in similar circumstances.

Our society gives parents wide latitude in how they raise their own children, but draws the line at abuse. Knowingly allowing a child to be abused or hurt is unacceptable for bus drivers as it is for parents. Ignoring a situation that clearly places a child at risk – a threat of violence against a child, for instance – is not only unethical but could expose a school bus driver to legal sanctions.

## *Rushing is always dangerous in a school bus.*

Because school bus drivers are responsible for the “care and custody” of children, it is important that every child assigned to your bus can be accounted for. For instance, changing the location of a child’s bus stop without authorization, dropping off a child at a friend’s house without a school-approved note, or leaving a sleeping child on board your bus at the end of a route, are all violations of your “custodial responsibility” toward students. Each of these examples could result not only in a child being hurt, or worse, but potentially in personal liability for the bus driver.

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## **1.2 Professional Conduct**

**1.2.1 Language and appearance.** As a school bus driver, you are a representative of your school district. This is true whether you work directly for the school system, or for a private bus company contracting with it. You will be interacting regularly not only with children but with parents, teachers, school administrators, and the public. It is essential that you conduct yourself in a mature and professional manner at all times. This includes language. Cursing – even “mild” cursing such as “damn” or “hell” – and off-color jokes are unacceptable in any school setting.

## *Whether you work directly for the school system, or for a private bus company contracting with it, you are a representative of the school district.*

As a school bus driver, your personal appearance matters. Clean, neat clothes and excellent hygiene are job requirements. Taking pride in how you dress for the job can have a positive impact on how children perceive you. To be treated as a professional, you must act like a professional.

“Sexy” apparel – revealing tops or “short-shorts,” for instance – are inappropriate around children. Clothing with potentially offensive, adult-oriented slogans or graphics must be avoided.

Keeping your bus clean is very important. School buses stand out. A dirty bus will be interpreted by the public as a lack of professionalism in general. An unswept floor, an overflowing trash container, or a cluttered driver area all tell students that you don’t really take pride in the job. A dirty bus is a shaky foundation for student management.

**1.2.2 Reliability.** As a school bus driver, showing up late for work creates serious safety problems.

- Rushing through a pre-trip inspection means you might miss a serious mechanical problem.

*A dirty bus will be interpreted by the public as a lack of professionalism and tells students you don't take pride in your job.*

- Inconsistent route times confuse children waiting at bus stops. They may go back home or try to walk to school if they think they've missed the bus. A child who finally spots your approaching bus might rush across the street without thinking and be struck by a car – it has happened.
- Trying to make up time on a route is always a bad idea. Safety at the bus stop, when children are most exposed to danger, requires a focused, unhurried alertness on the part of the bus driver. Being in a hurry when picking up or dropping off children is extremely dangerous.

A professional school bus driver always arrives for work early enough to go over any changes for the morning route. Arriving early gives you time to check out a spare if your regular bus needs to be repaired. In wintry conditions, professional drivers leave home earlier so they can make it to work on time over slippery roads and give themselves enough time to clear snow from the bus.

Excellent attendance is important for school bus drivers. If you are not there, someone who is less familiar with your route and your students will have to drive for you. Even the best substitute cannot provide the same level of safety as the regular driver.

If you are too ill to concentrate on driving, you should not work that day. If you are genuinely sick, you need to stay home to avoid spreading your illness to co-workers and children. But abusing sick days by missing work for frivolous reasons, or by scheduling medical and dental appointments during driving hours when they could easily have been scheduled between runs, is not the way of a professional school bus driver.

**1.2.3 Honesty.** Sooner or later, even the most safety-conscious school bus driver is likely to make a mistake. For instance, you may hit a curb while making a tight turn. You might drive past a child's house on the morning route, or back into a sign at a turnaround.

As a school bus driver, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to prevent an accident. But transportation supervisors realize that no driver is perfect. As long as the incident was not caused by *deliberate and willful* indifference to a child's safety or adds to a pattern of unsafe incidents, most supervisors ask only that you learn from your mistake so that it doesn't happen again.

Failing to immediately report even a minor incident is a major mistake when transporting children. Understandably, parents expect complete honesty about any unusual situation involving their children.

Any incident in which there is even a slight possibility that a child might have been hurt must be reported at once – from where it happened, if possible. For instance, a child may have slid off the bus seat and bumped his head when your bus went over a pothole. The injury might be very minor – “just a bump” – but it might also turn out to be very serious. Remember, not all children can communicate and not all injuries are apparent. Report

possible injuries immediately – don't wait until you've completed your run.

The same guideline applies if your bus makes contact with another vehicle or a fixed object such as a mailbox or a sign. No matter how minor the accident, and regardless of whether you were at fault, immediate reporting from the scene and complete honesty about what happened is always the best way to protect your students and yourself. And remember, thanks to cell phones parents will now be at any incident or accident scene in a few minutes anyway.

***Failure to immediately report even a minor incident is a major mistake.***

It is only human nature to feel upset if you've been involved in an accident, even a minor one. You may feel embarrassed to inform base over the radio. But trying to cover up even a minor incident usually backfires, sometimes with tragic results. For instance, if you mistakenly drive past a child's stop one morning, you may be reluctant to report it over the radio. Why not just back up your bus to the stop you missed?

But backing up to return to a stop is extremely dangerous. You could easily back into a car that's pulled up behind you. Or, far worse, you could back over a child chasing after your bus. It has happened.

The safest thing to do if you go past a stop is to call base immediately by radio. With a dispatcher's help, there are many ways to handle such a minor mistake without making it worse. You may be directed to return to the stop by going around the block; another bus

may be able to pick up the child that morning; or the parent may volunteer to take the child to school that day.

As a school bus driver, failure to promptly and honestly report a problem or incident can quickly turn a minor mistake into a major disaster.

**1.2.4 Flexibility.** The typical school bus garage is a whirlwind of constant change. Student address changes, babysitter changes, newly entering students, students going home with friends, temporary or permanent additions or deletions to routes, bus switches due to repairs or service – daily, even hourly, changes like these are standard operating procedure in any school bus operation today. Even small school districts process dozens of such changes every day.

***Flexibility is a job requirement for school bus drivers – cooperation and problem-solving are the heart and soul of any well-run bus garage.***

No one enjoys frequent disruptions in their work routine, but flexibility is an essential job requirement for a school bus driver. Cooperation and problem-solving are the heart and soul of any well-run bus garage. Each bus driver is only one part of a complex and interconnected system overseen by a dispatcher or supervisor. The overall mission of getting all children to and from school safely is what really matters in a bus garage. To that end, there will be times you are asked

to drive a spare bus at a moment's notice. If another driver is running late, you may be asked to pick up part of that route. Your own route may change at any point in the school year because of students moving in or out of the district or for a variety of other reasons.

Driving a school bus is not like sitting on an assembly line doing the same task day after day. The ability to handle change calmly and professionally is one secret of being a successful school bus driver.

The happiest school bus drivers also know the importance of keeping a sense of humor in the face of all these changes!

**1.2.5 Confidentiality.** As a school bus driver you will have access to personal information about students and their families. Student names, ages, and addresses, home and emergency phone numbers, and even information about a student's special needs or medical condition may be provided to you. All information about students and their families should be considered strictly confidential and should not be discussed with others except in case of an emergency. (Information that could protect a child in an emergency *can* be shared with those with a legitimate need to know.)

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## 1.3 Physical and Mental Readiness for the Job

**1.3.1 Physical readiness.** You must pass the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles or federal Department of Transportation medical exam for bus drivers *before* transporting students. The first section of the medical exam form requires you to describe your medical history as well as any current health conditions and any medications you are taking. You must complete the

medical form accurately and honestly. Failure to reveal a current or previous health problem on the medical form is falsifying a government document – a potential felony. Worse, withholding information about your medical problems could place children at risk. No matter how badly you want to drive a school bus, lying about your medical history is not worth it.

*No matter how much you want to drive a school bus, withholding information about your medical history to pass the physical exam is not worth it.*

School bus drivers are not allowed to select which physician conducts their medical exam. The exam must be conducted by or under the direction of a physician or advanced practice nurse authorized by the school district.

The New York State Education Department requires school bus drivers to pass a medical exam at least once every thirteen months.

You may be asked to undergo follow-up exams to monitor your blood pressure, diabetic condition, or other health concern. Follow-up exams are typically scheduled every three months or six months. Unlike the complete medical exam required every thirteen months, follow-up exams may be conducted by your personal physician instead of the school doctor. It is both your responsibility and your supervisor's responsibility to make sure you have all required follow-ups within the specified time

frame. You are breaking the law if you continue driving school bus without taking a scheduled follow-up medical exam.

The examining physician may require you to wear corrective lenses (glasses or contacts) while driving school bus, even if you aren't required to wear them while driving your personal vehicle. If corrective lenses are indicated as required on your medical exam form, you *must* wear them whenever you drive a school bus.

You must also pass the New York State



Education Department “Physical Performance Test” (PPT) before transporting students, and every 24 months afterwards. The PPT consists of a set of simple physical tasks designed to demonstrate that you can operate a bus under normal conditions, and that you are also capable of responding quickly in an emergency.

Use caution to avoid an injury during your PPT. You will be directed to drag a heavy object the length of a bus, and to exit through the rear emergency door of a bus. These tasks test your ability to quickly evacuate students in an emergency. If you have back problems or other physical concerns that could result in an injury, inform the person conducting the PPT before you start the test.

The person conducting your test can suggest ways to reduce the chance of an injury. For instance, it is best to use the muscles in your legs, not your back, when dragging a heavy object. Use both hands to pull, and once you get the object moving, keep going. Starting and stopping and starting again is much harder than one steady pull.

To avoid an injury when going out the rear emergency door, be aware that it's a long way down – more than three feet on most buses. If you jump you could twist your ankle. It is much safer to “sit and slide” from the floor at the exit. Use your hands and arms to support you as you slide to the ground.

Be aware of the low headroom at the emergency doors – don't bump your head as you go out. Make sure the door handle and latch don't snag your clothes as you exit.

You must re-take a PPT after any absence from duty of 60 or more calendar days (other than the typical summer layoff). The absence could be because of a medical leave or other personal matter. The “return-to-duty” PPT is identical to the regular test.

**1.3.2 Proper Dress.** The way that you dress for work not only can reflect your professionalism, it can also protect you from injury on the job. Sturdy footwear is key to protecting yourself from trips and falls. Shoes with soles that provide good traction and grip are essential. Shoes with open toes or high

heels are not acceptable. Avoid hanging jewelry and long loose hair that that could be grabbed by children.

Dress neatly. Dressing the part of a professional school bus driver will affect the way the children respect and interact with you. Avoid provocative clothing that reveals too much cleavage, mid-section of legs. Do not wear any items of clothing with colors, messages, or logos that could be considered gang-related or represent alcohol, drug or cigarette manufacturers or themes.

**1.3.3 Use of alcohol or drugs.** It is against the law to drive a school bus under the influence of alcohol. The responsibility is too serious and the job is too challenging to attempt it while impaired in any way. You must be free of alcohol for at least six hours before going on duty. This means you cannot legally drive a school bus if you have an alcoholic drink at midnight and are scheduled to start work at 6:00 a.m. that morning.

If you do use alcohol in your personal life, the safest philosophy is to limit your drinking to Friday night or Saturday. Even then, be responsible. Don't drink and drive. What you do in your personal life can affect your ability to continue driving school bus. A single "Driving While Intoxicated" (DWI) conviction in your personal vehicle could mean losing your job as a school bus driver. Many school districts and bus companies have established a "zero tolerance" policy regarding DWI's.

## *What you do in your personal life can affect your ability to continue driving school bus.*

All school bus drivers are subject to alcohol testing. You may be tested whenever you are on duty. A positive test could mean the end of your career as a school bus driver.

The use of illegal drugs is prohibited. All school bus drivers are subject to drug testing.

School bus drivers cannot refuse to be tested for drugs or alcohol. A refusal is considered a positive test and will result in the loss of your CDL.

**1.3.4 Personal medications.** Some personal medications can impair your ability to drive and should not be used while driving a school bus.

It is your responsibility to check the warnings on any medications you are currently using. This includes both prescription medications and common over-the-counter products such as cold and flu medications. If the warning label states: "Do not operate machinery while taking this medication," or "Do not drive while taking this medication," you cannot drive school bus while using it.

Ask your personal doctor or the pharmacist where you purchased the medication if it is safe to drive school bus while using it.

**1.3.5 Adequate rest.** Driving a school bus is a demanding job. Trying to do it when you are tired or sleepy is a recipe for disaster. This is only common sense.

The New York State Department of Transportation requires at least eight hours of rest between your previous day's tour of duty

and returning to duty the next day. This means you cannot drive school bus at 6:00 a.m. if you returned from a sports trip at 11:00 p.m. the night before.

It is not safe to return to drive if you did not get enough sleep. If you were up all night with a family emergency, are you really able to concentrate on driving a school bus the next morning? The stakes are too high to risk driving if you're not rested and alert.

It is also against the law to drive a school bus more than ten hours in one day. It is both your responsibility and your supervisor's responsibility to make sure you are not assigned a long trip that exceeds this limit. A second driver may need to accompany you on a long trip.

Even if you are not driving the whole time, it is also against the law to be "on duty" for more than fifteen hours in a single day. "On duty" means being responsible for your bus – whether you are driving it or it is parked. For instance, if you drop students off at a destination and then stay with the bus to make sure it isn't vandalized or tampered with, you are still on duty. To be considered "off duty", you need to have access to a location where you can actually rest, or a written waiver from your supervisor specifically relieving you from all responsibilities for a designated period while parked at the destination site.

Take the driving hours laws seriously. They protect students and they protect you. If you have an accident and it's determined that you exceeded the "driving hours" or "on duty hours" limits, you could be subject to legal sanctions or even personal liability.

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## 1.4 Your Responsibility to Model Mature Behavior with Students

**1.4.1 Self-control.** Driving a large commercial vehicle over congested roadways is challenging – but for a school bus driver, it's often not the hardest part of the job. Working with children can be gratifying, and if you don't enjoy being around children you're probably not cut out for driving a school bus. But anyone who works with children every day will tell you it can also be exasperating at times.

*For a school bus driver, driving the bus is often not the hardest part of the job.*

The ability to maintain emotional self-control when dealing with student behavior problems is a job requirement for school bus drivers. No matter what students say or do, you are the adult in charge. You are responsible for acting like an adult.

Of course, you have the right and responsibility to protect other students or yourself from a violent student. But losing your temper with children is never acceptable.

Unacceptable acts towards students include:

- Slapping or striking a student.
- Cursing at students – even "mild" cursing, such as "hell" or "damn".
- Threatening a student or a student's family in any way.
- Pushing or shoving a student into the seat because he or she won't sit down.

- Screaming at students.
- Belittling or making fun of students or their families.
- Grabbing a student by the arm, shoulder, hair, ear, or clothing.
- Kicking at a student’s feet or legs to move them out of the aisle.
- Hitting the brakes hard (“jacking the brakes”) to make students sit down.
- Forcing a misbehaving student off your bus at a location other than the approved stop as a punishment.
- Holding a student onboard your bus past the regular stop as a punishment.
- Searching students’ bookbags or other personal belongings.

Depending on the circumstances, any of the above acts could mean losing your job. Some could result in criminal charges against you, or even personal liability.

In Unit 2 you will learn specific strategies for managing difficult students. Schools have many resources for helping you with student behavior problems.

Driving a school bus is not just another job. It takes more than the ability to handle a large vehicle. Being responsible for children is a serious matter. Emotional maturity, especially the ability to control your temper when working with challenging students, is essential.

*Driving a school bus is not just another job – being responsible for children is a serious matter.*

**1.4.2 Tolerance.** As a school bus driver, you will serve families from every corner of your community. You will work with children from a wide variety of social, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. You will encounter many types of personalities every day. You will interact with children and adults whose political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or cultural tastes are very different from yours. You will have the opportunity to work with bus drivers and other transportation staff from a wide variety of backgrounds. You’ll get to know children with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities or medical conditions that you may never have heard of.

New York is an incredibly diverse state and this diversity expresses itself in many ways. For instance, religious differences expressed in Hasidic and Amish populations may require boys and girls to be seated apart or those children might need to be seated separately from other children. In some cultures, it is disrespectful for a child to look an adult in the eyes, so don’t tell them to; “Look at me when I’m talking to you.” Be aware that some immigrant children may just be learning English, so communication might be a challenge. When you say; “Do you understand what I’m saying?” they really do not.

Tolerance for people’s differences is a job requirement for a school bus driver in today’s world. If some of the cultural differences you

see expressed on your bus are confusing to you, take the time to talk to someone at their school or do some research and learn more about the children you transport. As a school bus driver, you are a role model 100% of the time. By consistently demonstrating respect, civility, compassion, kindness, and understanding towards everyone you deal with, you can set a powerful example to the students on your bus. It's a chance to show young people what citizenship means in today's complex world.

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## 1.5 Knowledge of Laws and Policies

**1.5.1 State and federal laws.** School bus safety is governed by both federal and state agencies. School bus drivers are subject to many “school bus-specific” laws and regulations that go well beyond what the average motorist must abide by. It is your responsibility to learn and follow all school bus laws and regulations.

Examples of school bus laws and regulations that exceed the requirements for other motorists include:

- Regardless of the posted speed, New York State school buses cannot exceed 55 mph when transporting students.
  - It is against the law to let a school bus idle longer than five minutes (three minutes in New York City) except in cases of severe cold.
  - It is against the law to turn right on red when transporting students.
  - It is against the law to eat or drink while transporting students.
- School buses transporting students must have headlights and taillights on at all times.
  - School buses must stop at all railroad crossings, with or without students on board, unless directed across the tracks by a police officer, or if the crossing is controlled by a traffic light or posted as “Exempt.”

You will learn about other important school bus laws and regulations throughout the *Pre-Service Course*. But this course is only an introduction to laws and regulations. You will be required to take a more in-depth safety course, known as the *Basic Course*. You must complete the *Basic Course* within your first year of employment as a school bus driver. The *Basic Course* will provide you with much more information about laws and regulations.

New school bus laws and regulations are enacted every year. There are many ways to stay up to date. Keep an eye out for news stories about new laws. Updates may be posted on your department bulletin board. School bus magazines and websites can be helpful – ask your supervisor or School Bus Driver Instructor (SBDI) for suggestions about which ones to check out. Annual compilations of school bus laws are also available.

**1.5.2 Local policies.** School districts and bus companies can exceed state or federal safety requirements. Local policies and procedures are often more strict than state or federal laws. For instance, the New York State Education Department requires school bus drivers (as well as attendants and monitors) to attend two refresher safety training sessions every school year. However, many school districts and bus companies require additional annual in-service training.

Other areas where school districts and bus companies often enact policies stricter than state or federal requirements include:

- Student seat belt use. Although all New York State school buses are equipped with lap belts for students, it is up to each school district to decide whether they must be used. (Regardless of local policy, students must always wear seat belts in small school buses and school vehicles.) Ask your supervisor about your school's policy regarding student use of seat belts.
- Hazardous roadways. School districts can prohibit crossovers on dangerous roadways or declare unusually hazardous roads off limits to school buses altogether. Ask your router or supervisor if there are any restricted roads in your district.

- Field trip policy. Some bus companies and school districts require the bus and bus driver to stay at the destination for the duration of a trip. Others give the driver the discretion of traveling a short distance from the site for lunch or a rest break. Find out what your operation’s policy is.

It is very important that you know and abide by your school district’s or bus company’s safety policies and procedures at all times. Read your department’s policies and procedures handbook carefully. Ask your supervisor or SBDI about anything in the handbook that isn’t clear.

*Read your department’s “policies and procedures handbook” carefully.*

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## 1.6 Testing and Monitoring Requirements

**1.6.1 Testing.** To become a school bus driver in New York State, you must first pass a number of pre-employment tests. As you take this course you may have already taken some or all of these tests. If you haven’t yet, you will soon. The purpose of pre-employment tests is to make sure you possess the skills and knowledge necessary to begin transporting children safely. Mandatory pre-employment tests include:

- Pre-employment drug test.
- Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) permit written knowledge tests.
- CDL road test.
- Medical exam.
- Physical Performance Test.

- *Pre-Service Course* Final Exam – a final exam is administered at the completion of this course.

Your school district or bus company may require additional tests before allowing you to transport students. For instance, some school districts and private contractors require new school bus drivers to pass an in-house road test, in addition to passing the NYS DMV’s CDL road test, prior to transporting students.

Once you’ve begun transporting students, you will be subject to a variety of follow-up tests. Some tests are required annually, some every two years, and some on a random basis. Periodic testing ensures all New York State school bus drivers maintain the skills, knowledge, and professional standards required to safely transport children. These tests include:

- Drug and alcohol tests – all school bus drivers are subject to random drug and alcohol tests; you may also be tested if your supervisor suspects you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or if you’ve been involved in an accident.
- Medical exams – at least once every 13 months; the school’s physician may require more frequent exams.
- Physical Performance Test – at least once every 24 months.
- Behind-the-wheel road test – at least once every 24 months.
- Written knowledge test – at least once every 24 months.
- *Basic Course* Final Exam – a final exam is administered at the completion of the *Basic Course*, which you must complete within your first year as a school bus driver.

The above tests are the minimum required by New York State. Schools and bus companies may require additional tests.

**1.6.2 Monitoring.** School bus drivers in New York State are subject to continuous monitoring both on and off the job. What you do in your personal vehicle and personal life impacts your ability to continue driving school bus. No parent wants a bus driver with a pattern of disregard for safety or compromised moral standards to transport his or her child.

Some of the ways school bus drivers are monitored include:

- Criminal history check – all school bus drivers in New York State are fingerprinted and subject to a criminal background check upon hire; once driving school bus, you will be continuously monitored by both the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for any criminal violations that could disqualify you from driving a school bus.
- Driving record review – you cannot drive a school bus in New York State if you have a poor driving record in your personal vehicle. Traffic violations adding up to nine or more points on your license, whether “earned” in your personal vehicle or a bus, result in an automatic disqualification. Many school districts and bus companies are stricter than the state.
- Defensive driving performance review – at least once every 12 months you must be observed by a Certified Examiner while transporting students; the observation must be discussed with you.

*At least once every 12 months you must be observed by a Certified Examiner while transporting*



*students.*

- Annual review – your overall driving record must be reviewed by your employer every 12 months; school bus drivers must promptly report accidents, traffic violations, and license suspensions to their employer.

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## **1.7 Professional Standards of a New York State School Bus Driver**

The professional standards expected of a New York State school bus driver are summarized on the next page. Read them carefully and keep them in mind every day as you embark on your challenging and important new career.

*No parent wants a bus driver with compromised moral standards to transport his or her child.*

# PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF THE NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER

*As a professional school bus driver...*

## **I will:**

- Always place student safety first.
- Do what I can to protect a child just as a responsible parent would in similar circumstances.
- Exercise sound safety judgment when confronted with an unforeseen situation.
- Drive defensively at all times.
- Stay focused on safe driving in spite of distractions.
- Perform a professional pre-trip, carefully inspecting every vehicle I drive every day to make sure it is safe before transporting children.
- Account for every child assigned to my bus, including completing a professional post-trip to check for sleeping or hiding children left on board at the end of my run.
- Conduct myself in a mature and professional manner at all times in matters of language, appearance and hygiene, cleanliness of the bus, and emotional self-control.
- Be reliable and punctual.
- Be honest and promptly report any incident, accident, problem, or mistake.
- Treat information about students and students' families as confidential.
- Arrive for work physically and mentally prepared for my responsibilities.
- Demonstrate flexibility regarding route changes and vehicle assignments.
- Treat children, parents, school personnel, and co-workers with tolerance, compassion, civility, and respect regardless of background.
- Learn and abide by all federal, state, and local school bus laws, regulations, recommendations, and policies.

## **I will not:**

- Knowingly ignore any situation that could place a child at risk.
- Change a route or bus stop without authorization.
- Attempt to transport students when impaired by drugs, alcohol, personal medication, or fatigue.

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## 1.8 Unit 1 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. Complete the following sentence from the list below: *No matter what happens, your main priority as a school bus driver is...***

- a. *...staying on schedule.*
- b. *...keeping parents happy.*
- c. *...protecting the students.*
- d. *...keeping peace with the students.*

**2. Complete the following sentence in the space below: *To be treated as a professional, you must act like a...***

\_\_\_\_\_ .

**3. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Some medications are unsafe to use while driving bus.”*

**4. Which statement about fatigue below is not true?**

- a. *You can legally drive school bus at 6:00 a.m. if you returned from a sports trip at 11:00 p.m. the night before.*
- b. *It is against the law to drive school bus more than ten hours in a single day.*
- c. *It is against the law to be on duty for more than fifteen hours in a single day.*
- d. *Trying to drive a school bus when you're tired is a recipe for disaster.*

**5. Which of the following actions are unacceptable for a school bus driver?**

- a. *Hitting the brakes hard to make the students sit down.*
- b. *Telling a student that the reason he keeps littering your bus is probably because his family lives in a filthy trailer.*
- c. *“Helping” a misbehaving student into his seat by pushing him down by his shoulders.*
- d. *All of the above actions are unacceptable.*

**6. TRUE or FALSE?** *“New York is a diverse state – tolerance for people’s differences is a job requirement for a school bus driver in today’s world.”*

**7. Which statement about school bus laws and regulations below is not true?**

- a. *It is your responsibility to learn and abide by school bus laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.*
- b. *Local policies and procedures can be stricter than state or federal laws.*
- c. *School bus laws and regulations seldom change.*
- d. *School bus safety is governed by both federal and state laws.*

**8. TRUE or FALSE?** *“School bus drivers in New York State are subject to continuous monitoring of their ethics and driving record both on and off the job.”*

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## UNIT 1 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# CORE UNIT 2: STUDENT MANAGEMENT

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## Unit 2 Topics

- 2.1 Getting the Best Out of Children
- 2.2 Handling Persistent Behavior Problems
- 2.3 Bullying, Threats, and Fights
- 2.4 Relating to Students as a Substitute Driver
- 2.5 Unit 2 Review

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## Introduction

Working with children can be very gratifying, but anyone who does it every day knows children can test your patience. As a school bus driver, you will face the unique challenge of managing the behavior of dozens of children at once – while you are driving.

Unit 2 will introduce you to simple and effective techniques for managing student behavior. Learning from the experiences of other school bus drivers can be very helpful. Many school bus drivers are skilled at getting the best out of children.

This unit will also prepare you to handle severe behavior problems, such as fights and bullying.

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## 2.1 Getting the Best Out of Children

**2.1.1 A positive approach usually works best.** Successful school bus drivers look for ways to encourage safe and responsible student behavior. A positive approach is usually the most effective way to bring out a cooperative spirit in children, just as it is with adults.

A positive approach starts the first day you drive a route. Make a point of greeting every child who boards your bus. A smile and a simple “good morning” can make a big difference to a child. Even teenagers presenting as cool and aloof notice when adults greet them in a friendly manner and treat them with respect. (Don’t take it personally if you don’t get a “good morning” back at first – patience is a job requirement when working with teens.)

*Make your safety expectations clear from the first day you drive a route, and follow up with daily reminders.*

It is important to get to know your students. Children are more likely to misbehave when they feel they are anonymous. Learn their names as soon as you can. Show an interest in what they’re interested in. A simple question about school, sports, or a family pet can help you get to know a child. Make a habit of chatting with children whenever you have a few minutes of “sit time,” such as waiting to release them into school in the morning.

In the afternoon, greet students as they are boarding your bus at school for the ride home. Try to make eye contact with every child as they come up the bus steps. Make it a point to interact with students – don't just sit in your seat.

Once they're all seated, stand up for a moment and face your students before leaving school grounds. Put a positive spin on the ride ahead with a friendly, but emphatic, reminder about the importance of safe behavior. Make your safety expectations clear from the first day you drive a route, and follow up with daily reminders. Even bus rules can be taught in a positive manner. Show students you care about safety, and show them you are in charge.



Of course, kids are kids. Many will forget the rules from time to time, and some will deliberately test them. It was probably no different “back in the day” when you were in school; perhaps you weren't a perfect bus rider either. Every bus driver has to contend with potentially disruptive behavior from time to time. But most children don't like a loud or out-of-control bus any more than adults do. Children who feel threatened or insecure on their morning ride to school are seldom in the right frame of mind for learning once they get

to school. All children deserve a safe and pleasant bus ride. Build trust by letting children know you take their safety seriously. Establishing positive relationships with your students is the key to manageable behavior.

As with adults, constant negativity seldom improves children's behavior. Instead of nagging, look for and recognize safe behavior. Whenever possible, “catch them being good”. If students are staying seated properly, or keeping their voices low, point it out and thank them. Praise can be remarkably effective with children – especially with children who have previously misbehaved.

When your efforts pay off and the behavior of your riders begins to improve, let them know how proud you are of them. Successful school bus drivers are always looking for little ways to reinforce positive behavior – stickers, notes, positive calls to parents (if permitted by local policy), etc., can all be effective. Be creative – show students how much you appreciate it when they follow the rules. (However, don't give students food treats as good behavior rewards without school approval. Many children have serious food allergies.)

Some school districts have established more formal programs for reinforcing safe behavior, such as “mature bus behavior” certificates, ice cream coupons, “Bus of the Month” awards, and the like. Find out if your school district or bus company has such a program.

### **2.1.2 Actions speak louder than words.**

Children watch adults closely. School bus drivers often make a lasting impression on the children they transport.

As any parent knows, being a role model to children isn't always easy. It requires a high degree of maturity and self-control. Even young children don't miss much. For

instance, openly venting your anger when a motorist does something foolish around your bus sets a poor example for your children. (It could also result in a dangerous road rage incident.)

*Children watch adults closely – being a role model requires a high degree of maturity and self-control.*

Create a climate of mutual respect on your bus by modeling a courteous and civil attitude towards others. Little things, such as your consistent use of “please” and “thank you,” can make a big difference in how children think of the bus ride. Build a sense of cooperation and teamwork, and encourage students to take ownership for their behavior, by using phrases like “our bus” instead of just “my bus.” Children with inadequate guidance at home may especially benefit from seeing how a responsible adult interacts with others.

Children don’t expect adults to be perfect, but they do expect honesty. One way to demonstrate personal responsibility to children is to admit when you make a mistake. For instance, if you mistakenly call out the wrong student for violating a bus rule, a simple apology goes a long way to building trust and mutual respect.

### **2.1.3 Teaching and enforcing safety rules.**

Safety rules for students should be posted inside every bus and are usually distributed to all students at the start of the school year. But a poster full of rules means little unless they are explained to students, and consistently and fairly enforced.

Bus rules vary from school district to school district. Learn your district’s well enough that you can readily explain them in your own words. Like adults, children remember rules best when they understand the safety reasons behind them. Be able to discuss, at the child’s level, “why” each rule is important for safety. Briefly go over the most important rules with all your students the first day you drive a run.

School bus drivers have many opportunities to teach students safety rules. State Education Law requires all students to receive at least three bus drills each year; Drills have two goals: to reinforce safe ridership behaviors, and to prepare students for a sudden emergency. A discussion of how to conduct bus safety drills is in Unit 5.

*Like adults, children remember rules best when they understand the “why’s” behind them.*

Bus drills are important, but daily reminders are the most effective way to teach children safety rules. Be a safety advocate – show them you enjoy talking about it. Gradually, your enthusiasm will sink in. For instance, use “sit time” before releasing students into school in the morning to quiz them about safety procedures. Young children love the chance to show adults what they know. Be creative – make a game of it. Children learn best when it’s fun.

Daily reminders are not optional. State law requires school bus drivers to provide daily safety instruction to children who must cross the road. This means you must remind every child every day. You will learn much more

about protecting students at bus stops in Unit 3.

**2.1.4 Assigned seats.** One way to reduce behavior problems is to assign seats. Squabbles between children about where to sit and who to sit with are one of the most common causes of behavior problems on school buses.

*There are many advantages to assigned seats. Most children feel more secure knowing where they will sit every day.*

There are many advantages to assigned seats. Most importantly, it establishes a more controlled, orderly environment on your bus. Assigning seats is a tangible illustration to children that the adult is in charge. It also helps drivers learn their students' names more quickly.

Although some children may complain at first, many actually prefer knowing where they will sit every day. Trying to find a seat, especially when the bus is nearly full, can be very unnerving to young or insecure children.

Assigning seats also emphasizes student accountability. It is easier to determine who wrote on a seat when you know which students are assigned to sit there every day. In an emergency, quickly accounting for all children is critical. Knowing where children were seated helps confirm who was on board when the incident occurred.

There are many ways to assign seats. Placing younger and more vulnerable students in the front rows lets you keep an eye on them.



Letting students be involved in picking their assigned seats can keep it from seeming like a punishment. You may need to reassign seats occasionally during the year as new children come onto your route, or because those “inseparable best friends” on the first day of school suddenly can’t stand each other.

**2.1.5 Realistic expectations.** Children are children and it’s important to have realistic expectations about behavior. As a school bus driver, you will be dealing with children of a wide variety of ages. Adjusting expectations according to children’s developmental level is the best way to guide behavior.

Many young children, for instance, have a lot of pent-up energy, especially on the ride home in the afternoon. Asking young children to completely refrain from talking is unrealistic and unfair. Instead of demanding absolute silence, concentrate on teaching young children to use their quieter “bus voices.” Find ways to redirect their energies into safer behaviors, such as looking for animals in the surrounding countryside, or counting red cars. Age-appropriate books or coloring books can help keep young children occupied during the bus ride.

Teenagers are usually more cooperative when they are addressed as adults. The best way to get respect from older students is to give it.

Overreacting to minor rule infractions usually backfires. If older students really want to make an adult's life miserable, they'll find a way to do so. For a pleasant and safe bus ride, you need your students' cooperation. Older students want a safe ride too.

Knowing when to draw the line about rule violations is essential. Pick your battles. Serious safety infractions, such as refusing to stay seated, threatening another student or the driver, damaging seats, or refusing to cross the road safely, must be dealt with at once. Intervene quickly, calmly, and seriously. Safety cannot be compromised. But less severe infractions, such as talking too loud or feet in the aisle, are often best handled by a gentle reminder or subtle redirection. Once you've established a strong, positive relationship with students, an occasional dose of "bus driver eye" – a brief, focused, silent glance – is often all that's needed to subdue a child who is tempted to misbehave.

Sometimes the best way to eliminate a minor behavior problem is by ignoring it. Some children seek the attention of their peers by drawing adults into arguments. Don't let yourself be lured into a conflict spiral with a child who loves drama and knows how to push your buttons. Knowing when to say nothing is one key to student management.

Like adults, children are not perfect. Most will misbehave from time to time, and a few will do so frequently. But all children deserve understanding and patience. Don't hold a grudge. If a child was a problem yesterday on your bus, let today be a new day. Greet the child as you do every other child.

Children face enough negativity in today's world – don't add to it. Never forget that your smile at the bus stop in the morning will be the first smile some children see that day.

Bus drivers can have a powerful positive impact on children's lives. Many New York State school bus drivers have learned how to communicate with troubled students and never stop encouraging them to get on track. The heart of being a school bus driver is finding ways to get the best out of all children.

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## 2.2 Handling Persistent Behavior Problems

**2.2.1 Effective warnings.** Student management on a school bus is not easy. Even the most successful bus drivers have moments when they feel like they're losing control. Or, you may be newly assigned to a run that came with a well-deserved reputation for persistent behavior problems.

*Handling a generally out-of-control or too loud bus load of students:* The noise level of an out-of-control bus can be extremely distracting. In severe cases it can be so distracting it's difficult to drive safely.

Responding effectively to an out-of-control bus is challenging. It's hard to know where to start when it seems like every student on the bus is misbehaving at once. As children try to out-shout each other, the energy level ratchets up. Even children who usually ride peacefully may jump on the bandwagon. More severe behavior problems, such as jumping from seat to seat, teasing, throwing pencils or other items, etc., can quickly take root in the chaos.

## *You need to be able to regain control of your bus without losing control of your temper.*

Trying to calm down dozens of loud and excited children can be intimidating. You need to be able to regain control of your bus without losing control of your temper.

If you're on your route when behavior problems escalate to the point that you cannot concentrate on driving, look for a safe place to pull off the road. Make sure you get well off the road. **Never** stop your bus in or near the roadway, where it could be struck by another vehicle. Be alert for soft shoulders (gravel, mud, or snow) that could give way under the weight of your bus. Activate your four-way flashers (not your student flashers). Once you're stopped, secure the bus with the parking brake. It's a good idea to notify base by radio at this point (or cell phone, if school policy allows its use when you're stopped) that you've pulled over temporarily to handle a discipline problem. Sometimes the mere act of contacting base will begin to calm children down.

In the afternoon, if students already seem unusually wound up as they board your bus (perhaps from something that happened in school that day, or because the weather's turned beautiful and the energy level is high), don't start on your route. They may calm down on their own – but they may not. Instead, stay put on school grounds. If necessary, pull your bus over so other buses in the lineup can get past you.

A loud bus can make anyone's blood pressure rise, but staying calm is essential if you want to regain control. Trying to out-shout raucous

children usually makes things worse. If you lose your temper, you will also lose the respect of your students. An angry bus driver can easily terrify younger passengers, who may already feel vulnerable because of the noise level and behavior of the older students.

Instead of immediately standing up and confronting an unruly group of students, just stay in your seat for a short period. Maintain your composure. If you can manage a quiet smile, so much the better. It won't take long for students to realize the bus isn't going anywhere; but don't expect the bus to go silent instantly. Students who were enjoying the action may try to keep things stirred up a bit longer. You may hear shouts of "let's get going," "just drive the bus," or something worse.

Most children hate a loud bus as much as you do, and most really want to get going. Usually, most of your students will begin to quiet down after a minute or so. Once it's calm enough that they can actually hear what you're saying, speak to them in a normal, friendly tone.

Don't be sarcastic about how they were behaving – it's like pouring gas on a smoldering fire. Don't tell students you're not moving the bus until it's "absolutely quiet" – it puts too much power in students' hands. A few defiant students can call your bluff and keep the bus stopped (and the attention of their peers on them) for as long as they want. Don't make ominous threats – for example, "we'll just sit here until it's dark." You can seriously frighten younger students, who may take the threat literally. Scare tactics also undermine your credibility with older students. They are smart enough to know when you've made a threat you can't follow through on.

***Don't tell students you're not moving the bus until it's "absolutely quiet" – it puts too much power in students' hands. A single defiant student can call your bluff.***

Instead of trying to intimidate your passengers, calmly explain that you simply cannot drive safely when they're too loud or when they're out of their seats. Don't show students you're rattled, even if you are. Rather than venting your emotions, be reassuring – it's the best way to bring excited children back to earth. Stay as professional and as positive as you can.

When students have quieted down for the most part, and are staying in their seats, you may be able to continue on your run. Don't expect perfection at this point.

Make sure *you* are calm enough to drive safely. Take a deep breath before resuming your run. Double-check the status of lights and gauges before starting out. Notify base by radio that you're back on the road. Check your mirrors carefully before moving the bus.

Once you're moving, it's wise to thank students for calming down – even if their behavior is still far from perfect. Reestablishing rapport is the best insurance against losing control again. Use your "bus driver eye" and emphatic verbal warnings as necessary to keep a lid on behavior for the rest of the ride.

When you've completed the run, go over what happened with your supervisor. If your bus is

equipped with a video system, review the footage together. If it's possible to identify the individual student(s) who were most responsible for stirring up the others, write them up. (See Section 2.2.2, "Using referrals effectively," below.)

*Handling defiant individuals or small groups of defiant students:* If, in spite of verbal warnings, a few children won't calm down, or two "frenemies" won't stop arguing with each other, separate them. You have the right to assign seats. Try to move the students several rows apart.

If a student refuses to move to another seat, stay calm. Don't argue with defiant students. (**Never** attempt to drag or push a student into a seat.) Calmly tell them they have a choice – comply with your request, or be written up after the run. Don't paint yourself into a corner by demanding they move "this instant." Instead, back off and give them time to respond. It's far more effective to let them save face in front of their peers at this point than to ratchet up the confrontation.

***Whenever possible, avoid dramatic confrontations and demands that wind up giving the misbehaving student control of what happens.***

If a student still won't move, but does tone down the inappropriate behavior enough that you can drive safely, leave the situation as is for the moment and continue on the run.

Whenever possible, avoid dramatic confrontations and demands that wind up giving the misbehaving student control of what happens. Your job is not to punish children but to maintain reasonable behavior on the bus. Rely on logic instead of force. Try to stay one step ahead of children who are showing off for their peers. You are the adult.

When you've finished the route, report any students who openly defied your authority. If a defiant student does not have consequences, others may follow their example.

If a student or students simply won't calm down enough to let you drive safely, you may need assistance. Inform base of the situation. Do not give the names of students over the radio except in case of emergency. Your dispatcher may tell you to take down the names of the problem students. This alone may get their attention and convince them to settle down. In extreme cases, a defiant student may need to be removed from your bus during the route.

Do not call for outside intervention lightly. Repeatedly taking your bus back to school so the principal can talk to students, for instance, can have the unintended consequence of undermining your own authority with them. There's no shame in asking for help when you really need it, but whenever possible, it's best to show students you can handle behavior problems on your own.

**2.2.2 Using referrals effectively.** Most schools use a written referral system for handling serious or repeated violations of bus rules.

Referrals must be used correctly. Accuracy is absolutely essential. Don't write up a child based on a guess about what happened. Don't hint that you saw or heard something if you didn't. Bus referrals become part of a child's

educational record. Understandably, parents don't appreciate having their child accused of something he or she didn't do.

*In most cases, a referral should be filed only as a last resort, after other behavior management efforts have failed.*

Legibility is essential. If the principal cannot decipher your handwriting, the referral probably won't be acted on.

Be selective. Use referrals sparingly, for violations of important safety rules, not to report merely irritating behavior or minor problems that you could have solved on your own by talking to the child.

In most cases, a student should be written up only as a last resort after verbal warnings and other behavior management efforts, such as moving the child to another seat, have failed. However, with serious safety violations, such as outright defiance, violence or threats of violence, bullying or sexual harassment, drug or alcohol use, or refusal to board or exit the bus safely, a student should be reported after even a single incident. Written documentation is essential in cases of severe discipline problems.

When writing a bus referral, be as detailed as possible when describing what happened. Don't simply say a child "refused to follow the rules" – specifically identify which rule(s). Don't use a referral to write up "the whole bus" all at once out of frustration. This will only undermine your credibility with administrators. A referral must be directed at

the specific behavior problem of a specific student. Don't say a child "always" breaks a rule – specify when it happened. If obscenities or vulgar language were used, indicate exactly what was said on the referral.

Most importantly, explain how the child's behavior jeopardized safety. For instance, "Mary wouldn't stay in her seat – she could have been hurt if I had to stop fast," or "Jeff kept screaming – it distracted me as I was driving and could have led to an accident." If the child ignored previous warnings, say so. Give the principal who will contact the child's parents based on your referral the specific information needed to convince them of the accuracy and seriousness of the offense.

Idle or exaggerated threats undermine your credibility with students. Don't tell a child you're going to write them up and then not do so. Don't try to scare children by inflating the consequences of a referral – for instance, "if I write you up, you'll be off this bus the rest of the year!"

Students are entitled to "due process." This legal term means discipline must be administered fairly. Consequences for rule infractions should follow a series of progressively severe steps (exceptions may be made for severe violations).

Bus drivers cannot suspend students on their own. Suspensions, and any other type of student discipline, *must* be authorized by a school administrator. Never refuse to transport a child without the school's prior approval, or put a misbehaving child off your bus in the middle of a route. Either act represents a violation of your custodial responsibility for children assigned to your route. In the worst case scenario, you could lose your job, or be charged with negligence.

***Bus drivers cannot suspend students on their own.***

***Suspensions, and any other type of student discipline, must be authorized by a school administrator.***

Student disciplinary policies vary from school district to school district. A typical policy is a warning from the principal for a first offense, followed by a one day suspension for a second, followed by a three day suspension for a third. Ask your supervisor about your school's policy.

**2.2.3 Video.** Many school buses are equipped with video systems. Video cameras are very beneficial to student management. Their presence can be a deterrent. If an incident does take place on your bus, a video helps your supervisor or a principal sort out what happened.

There are many types of video systems. Some consist of a single camera mounted on the bulkhead above the driver. Other systems employ several camera heads throughout the bus to provide a better view of students. "Clever" students may try to hide from view behind seat backs. Some systems let you mark or "red flag" the video while driving (usually with a small button on your control panel) so it's easier to find an incident later.

Many video systems document the bus driver's actions as well as the students'. What you say to your students, or to a parent at a bus stop, may be captured on video. Although being "on camera" at all times can be

unsettling at first, video documentation protects bus drivers from allegations of improper conduct.

Many video systems also log bus speed, braking, warning light use, location, and other vehicle actions. Drivers who take safety seriously have nothing to fear from such documentation.

**2.2.4 Five behavior management mistakes to avoid.** Student management can be challenging – even for experienced school bus drivers. Out of frustration, bus drivers sometimes make the wrong decision about how to handle behavior problems. Learning from other drivers can help you avoid making the same mistakes. Behavior management mistakes to avoid include:

1. *Inconsistency.* The best way to win the cooperation of children on your bus is by setting clear, realistic behavior expectations and consistently following through on them. Fairness is very important to children. If you apply the rules differently depending on how much you like a particular child, or on your mood that day, children will notice.
2. *Too timid.* Until you really get to know them, interacting with dozens of children at once can be intimidating. The collective energy level of younger children on a bus can be overwhelming at first, and many teenagers have mastered the art of appearing sullen to any adult with authority. However, you are legally responsible for maintaining reasonable order on your bus. Don't let students run the show. Don't be anonymous – get to know your students as quickly as possible, and let them get to know you. Even if you're "the quiet type," find a way to let students know you are in charge. Win their trust by showing them you take their safety seriously. Demonstrate safety leadership. Intervene

quickly to protect vulnerable children from being picked on and to prevent isolated behavior problems from spreading throughout the bus.

3. *Intimidation.* Attempting to frighten students into behaving – shouting or gesturing at them, etc. – is unacceptable. No parent wants his or her child to be verbally threatened by another adult. Deliberately embarrassing children – for instance, making fun of a child in front of the whole bus – does not improve behavior. Demeaning language is bullying and is unacceptable whether it's from children or adults.

4. *"Jacking the brakes."* Jeopardizing children's safety to "get their attention" is absolutely unacceptable regardless of how much they're misbehaving. Unnecessarily and unexpectedly braking hard to "remind" children to sit down is extremely dangerous. A sudden stop could throw a child out of the seat. A child could easily be hurt. You could be subject to discipline or even be sued.

5. *Distraction.* A school bus driver needs the presence of mind to maintain focus on the roadway environment outside the bus in spite of onboard distractions. School bus drivers must contend with many potential distractions. If you're not careful, even simple tasks such as talking on the two-way radio or adjusting a knob on the control panel can be distracting. Reading the route sheet while the bus is in motion is very dangerous. Students are the most common distraction for school bus drivers. Addressing behavior problems while the bus is moving, or at a bus stop, is extremely dangerous – don't try it. The internal overhead mirror (mounted just above the driver on the bulkhead) has been called "the most dangerous piece of equipment on a bus." Many accidents have been caused by a bus driver's misuse of this mirror. While

the bus is moving, it should be used only for very brief glances at your passengers.

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## **2.3 Bullying, Threats, and Fights**

### **2.3.1 Bullying is devastating to children.**

Bullying can have a serious, long-lasting, even tragic effect on children. Young children, children who are naturally timid, children with disabilities, and any child who is “different” in some way, are especially at risk. Bullying has a huge impact on school performance. A child who is afraid of a bully on the morning bus ride doesn’t arrive at school in a learning frame of mind.

Many incidents of school violence are the result of bullying. Frustration over being continually picked on can push children toward violent revenge or suicide.

Unfortunately, the school bus can be an ideal medium for bullying.

Bullying is not just “kids being kids.” According to the National Association of School Psychologists, “A bully is someone who directs physical, verbal, or psychological aggression or harassment toward others, with the goal of gaining power over or dominating another individual.”

Most bullying is verbal. Mild teasing is standard operating procedure among children. Even good friends “bust” each other. But when the teasing is all one way, relentlessly targeting a vulnerable child, it is not innocent. Sarcastic put-downs and demeaning rumors can be very hurtful. Verbal bullying takes place at all grade levels, but it can be especially intense at middle school.

Bullying can also take more tangible forms, such as “shaking down” children for money, food, or other favors, or threats of violence

against a child or the child’s family. Bullies often hint at retribution to discourage victims from reporting them.

Sexual harassment is a type of bullying. It is widespread in schools today, as it is in our society at large. Sexual harassment can take many forms, ranging from gossip, graffiti, and “sexting,” to fondling or grabbing, to forced sexual activity. Even the “milder” forms of sexual harassment can destroy a child’s self-esteem for a long time.

### ***Being a school bus driver means sticking up for vulnerable children.***

### **2.3.2 Take a personal stand against**

**bullying on your bus.** Being a school bus driver means sticking up for vulnerable children. All children deserve to be protected from intimidation and fear.

If you see signs of bullying – for instance, an older or stronger child pushing around a vulnerable child, or a group of students repeatedly making fun of one child – intervene immediately and decisively. A stern warning to an aspiring bully might put an end to it.

However, bullies can be clever at hiding what they do. Prevention is more effective than trying to catch bullies in the act. From the first day you take a run, let your students know you simply won’t tolerate name-calling or put-downs. Sticking to this rule every day will create a respectful environment on your bus. It will make for a more pleasant bus ride for your students and for you.

Bullying thrives on intolerance and hate. Children don’t grow up in a vacuum. Many

adults in today’s world use hate, scorn, and anger to get their way. Do what you can to make your bus a haven of compassion and tolerance. Whenever the chance presents itself, show children how to accept and respect those who are “different.”

Regularly tell your students to let you know if they ever feel threatened by another student (or adult). Victims of bullying are often embarrassed or afraid to say anything.

Reassure them that you will treat any report confidentially so that other students will not know about it. Always let your supervisor or a school administrator know if a child feels threatened in any way.

**2.3.3 Threats and violence.** School bus drivers must be alert to signs of potential violence. Fortunately, violence on school buses doesn’t happen every day, but it does occur. You need to know what to do if a fight breaks out.

Fights are the most common form of violence on a bus. Fighting ranges from shoving matches between young students to serious fist fights between older students.

Preventing fights is important. Separate students at once if an argument is brewing. If you know your students well, you may be able to detect early warning signs of an escalating dispute. Other children will often try to let you know that something’s about to happen.

Seat children who are arguing as far apart as possible. Each will usually blame the other for provoking the argument. Let them know that they will both be in trouble if a fight breaks out, regardless of who started it. Quick adult intervention can often, but not always, convince arguing students to “cool it.” Even if they stop, report the dispute to your supervisor after the run – the argument could re-ignite later.

If a fight breaks out, stay calm. Using your strongest, clearest command voice, tell both fighters to “stop right now.”

Do not ignore a fight in the hope it will resolve itself. If the fighting students will not stop, call for assistance by radio. Stop in a safe location and secure your bus. Shut the engine off and take the key with you if you get out of your seat.

*Use your strongest, clearest command voice to insist both students “stop right now.”*

Quickly move other students away from the fight. Do not let anyone cheer on the fighters. You have the legal right to restrain a violent student if it’s absolutely necessary to protect other students or yourself, but do so only as a last resort and with extreme caution. You could unintentionally injure a child. (If you do have to restrain a violent child, inform your supervisor as soon as you can.)

Stepping between younger children may keep them apart long enough to cool down, but do not try this with older students taking full swings at each other – you could be seriously hurt. Instead, focus your attention on the student who seems to be getting the worst of it – there’s a greater incentive to stop fighting. Use your command voice to direct that student to move away from the other fighter.

While you’re waiting for law enforcement, evacuation of the rest of your students may have to be considered in a severe fight. Evacuation is potentially dangerous and

should be a last resort. Children can wander into harm's way once they are off the bus.

The possibility of a weapon must be taken seriously. Weapons are a fact of life in all types and sizes of school districts. Be alert for signs that a student is trying to hide a weapon – bulging pocket or coat, overly protective of a backpack, secretive or suspicious behavior, etc.

If a student tips you off that someone has a weapon, take it seriously. Don't confront the suspected student or try to search the student, or his or her belongings, on your own. Instead, quietly contact base by radio (or cell phone, if you can stop your bus momentarily in a safe location). Let them know what you suspect. Don't wait until the student has gone into school to report your suspicions – it could be too late.

Some school districts use a prearranged code to let a bus driver inform base, without alerting the suspected student, that there could be a weapon on board. Ask your supervisor if your district has a code.

If a weapon is openly displayed, your primary goal is to convince that student to let other children off the bus. Don't attempt to take a knife, gun, or bomb from a student. Trying to be a hero could make the situation worse. Even if you've had weapons or police training in a previous career, your priority as a school bus driver in such a dangerous scenario is to protect the rest of your students. A weapon on a school bus is a matter for law enforcement. Let responding police, who are trained and equipped to do so, handle such a severe situation.

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## 2.4 Relating to Students as a Substitute Driver

**2.4.1 Don't be anonymous.** In many school districts and bus companies, new drivers start out as substitutes. It's a good way to learn all the routes in your district, and will give you experience for eventually driving a regular run. Some drivers, even veterans, love being a substitute. But being a sub can be challenging.

*Being a sub can be challenging. Just as for a substitute teacher, there's an art to managing students as a substitute driver.*

Just as for a substitute teacher, there's an art to managing students as a substitute driver. One tip is to make a point of actively engaging children as they board your bus, whether in the morning on the way to school or the afternoon before heading for home. Children are less likely to misbehave when they see you seeing them. Make a concerted effort to connect with every child, even if it's just for a second as they come up the stairs. Don't just sit silently in the bus seat. Smile at them. Let them see you as a real person, not an appendage of the bus.

It's normal to feel nervous about driving a run you've never done before, but try not to show it – you could alarm younger children, and invite mischief from older ones. Making life difficult for subs – substitute teachers or substitute drivers – is a time-honored tradition for older students in some schools. Don't let them sense your anxiety – put on your game face!

On a take-home run, get out of your seat for a moment once all students are on board. Stand up and introduce yourself. Even if you're nervous – facing dozens of students you don't know can be intimidating to anyone – smile. A touch of friendliness and personal interaction before you start out can make a big difference during the run.

**2.4.2 Driving an unfamiliar route.** Always take at least a few minutes to look over the route sheet before setting out on an unfamiliar run. Never try to read a route sheet while you're driving, or at a bus stop. If you need to look at it again during the route, do it when you're stopped in a safe location.

Before leaving, ask someone in the transportation office, or a driver who knows the run, to go over the route with you. Veteran drivers are an invaluable source of information. Find out which students must cross and any unusual hazards along the route. On a morning run, especially before full light, suggestions for locating the first bus stop will be very useful.

An important responsibility of regularly assigned drivers is to make sure their route sheets are up-to-date. But as a sub, you may still encounter route sheets that are not completely accurate. Address changes, new students, or the exact location of a bus stop may not be reflected on the route sheet. Be prepared for the unexpected at all times. This is one reason substitutes should be the slowest, most cautious drivers in the fleet.

If you can't find a child's stop or get confused while driving an unfamiliar route, stay calm. There's no need to feel embarrassed – it's happened to most substitute drivers at least once in their careers. If you mistakenly drive past a child's stop, never back up! You could back into a vehicle pulled up behind you, or

back over a child. Radio base to ask for guidance.

### **2.4.3 Finding the right student to help you.**

Students can be a big help when driving an unfamiliar run. You need a child who knows the run well, rides most of the way, and speaks clearly. An older child is usually best, but even young children can be good helpers – you just have to find the right one. As a help to subs, some schools identify “student helpers” on their route sheets.

Pick a single child to help you. Having more than one child calling out directions is confusing. Have your helper sit in the front passenger-side seat. Remind the child to let you know well before you reach a stop. Children are children – you may need to remind your helper to stay focused throughout the run.

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**Remember to thank your student helper at the end of the run!**

## 2.5 Unit 2 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. Which of the following statements are true?**

- a. *Most children don't like an out-of-control bus any more than adults do.*
- b. *All children deserve a safe and enjoyable bus ride.*
- c. *Positive relationships with students are the key to safe bus behaviors.*
- d. *All of the above.*

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** *"Squabbles over where to sit and who to sit with are one of the most common causes of behavior problems on school buses."*

**3. TRUE or FALSE?** *"Unlike adults, children do not need to understand the 'why's' behind rules."*

**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *"Use referrals sparingly, for violations of key safety rules, not to report merely irritating behaviors or minor problems that you could have solved on your own by talking to the child."*

**5. TRUE or FALSE?** *"If a child continues to misbehave, put the child off the bus during the route."*

**6. What is referred to as "the most dangerous piece of equipment on your bus?"**

- a. *Bus tires.*
- b. *Internal mirror above the driver.*
- c. *Exhaust system.*
- d. *Fuel tank.*

**7. TRUE or FALSE?** *"Purposefully embarrassing children - for instance, making fun of a misbehaving child in front of others - usually improves behavior."*

**8. Which statement about bullying is true?**

- a. *Most bullying is verbal.*
- b. *Bullying is devastating to children - it's not "just kids being kids."*
- c. *Sexual harassment is a form of bullying.*
- d. *All of the above.*

**9. Which statement about violence on a bus is true?**

- a. *Separate students at once if an argument is brewing.*
- b. *If older students are swinging at each other, step between them.*
- c. *If you suspect a student has a weapon, search the student's belongings.*
- d. *All of the above.*

**10. TRUE or FALSE?** *"Because they don't have to interact with the students, substitute drivers can usually drive a run more quickly than the regular driver."*

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## UNIT 2 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# CORE UNIT 3: BUS STOP SAFETY

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## Unit 3 Topics

- 3.1 The Moment of Truth
- 3.2 Bus Stop Safety Procedures
- 3.4 Crossover Mirrors
- 3.4 Route Safety
- 3.5 Unit 3 Review

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## Introduction

Statistically, children who ride school buses are most at risk when they are getting on or off the bus. This is the single most important fact to keep in mind as you become a school bus driver. For children’s and your own sake, you must have a thorough mastery of bus stop safety procedures before transporting students.

Unit 3 of the *Pre-Service Course* will explain how and why children are potentially so vulnerable at bus stops. Most importantly, you will learn exactly what you need to do to make sure children are safe as they get on or off your bus every day.

Unit 3 is a very important part of this course.

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## 3.1 The Moment of Truth

**3.1.1 Lessons from tragedy.** Thinking about incidents in which children are injured or killed is very sad, but careful accident analysis

may reveal patterns from which lessons can be drawn that help prevent future tragedies.

A review of school bus accident statistics over many decades reveals three important patterns that every school bus driver needs to know.

The first pattern is startling: most children who’ve been killed in school bus accidents died not in crashes or fires, but while getting on or off of the bus, often directly in front of their homes. Historically, approximately three out of every four school bus fatalities occur at a bus stop, when children are outside the bus. This is why the student loading and unloading process is the “moment of truth” for a school bus driver.

*Three out of every four school bus fatalities occur at a bus stop, when children are outside the bus.*

Several factors account for the stunning fact that most children are killed outside their bus:

- Most importantly, children are naturally energetic, impulsive, and fearless. Their unpredictability makes it a challenge to control children’s behavior when they are outside your bus. In this unit you will learn ways to remind children how to be safe when loading or unloading.
- School buses are large vehicles with many blind spots. There are many different types of school buses. Some offer better visibility than others, but all have blind spots. Children – especially younger, shorter children – can easily be hidden from your direct view when you are in the driver’s seat. Unless you are highly alert,

you could run over a child. This nearly unthinkable tragedy is called a “by-own-bus” incident. It is how most student fatalities take place. This unit will explain how to use your bus mirror system and other techniques to check for children in the blind spots.

- Even though it’s against the law for motorists to pass a stopped school bus with its red lights flashing, it happens all the time. In fact, State Police estimate 50,000 motorists pass stopped school buses illegally in our state every single day. The modern roadway environment is a dangerous place. It is congested and filled with risk-takers who are late for work and trying to make up time, as well as many other types of equally dangerous motorists: the inexperienced, the elderly, the distracted, and the impaired. Any of them could drive past your bus when a child is in the roadway. This is referred to as a “passing motorist” incident. It is the second most common type of school bus fatality.

*Younger children are most at risk when getting on or off your bus.*

Two more important lessons for bus drivers can be drawn from a close study of bus stop tragedies:

- Because of their immaturity and smaller physical stature, younger children are far more at risk than older children when getting on or off your bus. The younger the child, the greater the chance he or she will be hurt or killed at a bus stop.

- Bus stop accidents are twice as likely to occur on the afternoon take-home run than on the morning ride to school. This is largely because children tend to be much more energetic on the way home. They can be pent up from a long day in school. They may also be carrying home school materials and papers that can easily be dropped near the bus. Afternoon hours can also be challenging for adults, especially those who have been up since dawn, like most school bus drivers. Mental fatigue is dangerous when dropping off children at a bus stop. Finding ways to stay alert through this critical part of the workday cycle is critically important for school bus drivers.

*Bus stop accidents are much more likely to occur on the afternoon take-home run.*

Throughout your career as a school bus driver, never forget the three critical lessons discussed above:

1. Most student fatalities occur outside the bus.
2. Younger children are most at risk.
3. A take-home run is twice as dangerous as a morning run.

**3.1.2 Information saves lives.** The importance of the lessons discussed above – most children are killed outside the bus; younger children are most vulnerable; and most fatalities occur on the trip home – cannot be overstated. As a school bus driver, you need to know what situations place children most at risk.

Before New York State’s modern training programs were begun in the late 1970’s, few school bus drivers had access to critical safety information. You may have senior co-workers in your operation today who started their careers before systematic safety instruction, such as this Pre-Service Course, was provided to bus drivers. A few decades back, new bus drivers were often hired and literally “handed the keys” to begin transporting children that same day.

Through their skills and dedication, even without ready access to critical safety information, many veterans enjoyed long, safe careers as school bus drivers. Our state owes them a debt of gratitude. However, there is a profound difference between the statewide safety record before systematic training was provided to bus drivers and the safety record today.

*Our state’s 50,000 school bus drivers today have established a safety record almost unimaginable a generation ago.*

In the years before our state’s training programs were implemented on a widespread basis, many loading and unloading tragedies occurred each year. If children had continued to die in school bus accidents at the rate they did during the mid-1970s, it is reasonable to believe hundreds more children would have perished over the intervening years. Instead, our state’s 50,000 school bus drivers today

have established a safety record unimaginable a generation ago.

As a new school bus driver, you are joining a select and proud profession. Our state has the best safety record in the nation and now goes years at a time with no bus stop fatalities whatsoever – an almost unthinkable achievement in the 1970s. While several factors have contributed to this historic safety milestone, the main reason is that school bus drivers are now provided with the critical safety information and training they need to protect children.

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## **3.2 Bus Stop Safety Procedures**

**3.2.1 Picking up students.** When approaching a bus stop to pick up students, follow these safety procedures.

*Approaching a stop in the morning:*

- Well before you get to the stop, check the status of your master flasher switch. Learn how to do this by feel alone, without taking your eyes off the road. As you approach the stop, double-check the switch to make sure it’s “armed,” so you can activate the amber pre-warning flashers without any delays.
- Well before you get to the stop, check your driving mirrors for vehicles behind your bus. Be especially alert on high speed roads (more than 35 mph). Assess the following distance and closing speed of vehicles behind your bus to decide how early you should activate your amber pre-warning flashers to alert them of your upcoming stop.
- Activate amber pre-warning flashers early enough that other motorists have enough time to see you, slow down, and stop. A

general rule of thumb is about 300' before the stop – the length of a football field – however, there is no “one size fits all” rule about exactly when to turn them on. For instance, for stops with limited visibility due to a curve, knoll, or other obstruction, stops located on high speed roads, when weather or light conditions reduce visibility, or when you suspect an approaching motorist is paying less than full attention to driving, turn them on earlier to make sure motorists see you in time. On the other hand, activating pre-warning flashers *too* early can be confusing to motorists – they’re not sure when or even if you’re going to stop, and may be tempted to pass your bus. Every bus stop is different. Use your “safety judgment” to decide what’s the best pre-warning distance at each stop. If you have questions about how early to activate pre-warning flashers at a particular stop, ask your supervisor for advice.

- As the stop first comes into view, start scanning the surrounding area. Are the children who should be waiting for your bus in sight? They should be trained to line up in single file well back from the roadway – at least 15' is safest. But near a bus stop, anything can happen. Scan for children playing at or near the stop, or hurrying towards it out of a house. Be alert for parked and idling vehicles in the vicinity that may suddenly begin to move. Check for any unusual potential hazards near the stop such as snow banks, construction equipment, delivery trucks, or emergency vehicles.
- Slow down well before you get to the stop. Going slow gives you time to respond to an unexpected hazard. You should be down to “dead idle speed,” with your foot

“covering” the service brake, at least two bus lengths before the stop. Last-second braking with children nearby could result in a tragedy.

- As you bring your bus to a stop, check again for other vehicles. Are all stopped, or slowing to a stop?

***Slow down well before you get to the stop. Going slow gives you time to respond to an unexpected hazard.***

- Do not pull your bus next to waiting students. Stop far enough back so they have to walk to the bus. Stop so they can still see your face and you can see them clearly. Pulling up next to waiting students is dangerous. A child could suddenly move or be pushed toward your bus. In slippery conditions, your bus could slide into the children at the stop.

#### ***At the stop in the morning:***

- As soon as your bus comes to a full stop, secure it with the parking or emergency brake. (On buses equipped with interlock systems, opening the door engages the brake.) Securing your bus every time children are getting on or off prevents it from lunging forward suddenly if your foot slips off the service brake pedal, or you’re suddenly distracted or become ill, or if your bus is struck from behind by another vehicle.
- Promptly open the passenger door to activate your red student flashers and stop arms and let motorists know they have to stop. Never open the door even part way

until your bus has come to a complete stop and is fully secured. On all buses with manually-operated passenger doors, and some buses with power doors, you can open the door just enough to activate the flashers. This helps keep your bus warm in cold weather.

- Just to be safe, quickly check to be absolutely certain your red flashers are on. Some buses have an indicator light on or near the control panel to let you know if they're working. You should also be able to see one or both stop arms in your driver's side mirror.
- As an additional warning to motorists coming up behind your bus while you're at the stop, keep the service brake pedal lightly depressed so your brake lights stay on.
- Raise one hand in the "universal wait signal." Hold it almost against the windshield and angle it towards the students outside so it's easier to see. If students are across the street, use your left hand. If students are waiting on the passenger door side of the street, use your right hand.
- Be prepared to use the "universal danger signal" by placing your other hand on the horn. Honk only if you spot a vehicle about to pass your bus and want to alert children to go back to the side of the road they started from. The danger signal has saved children's lives, but it only works if students know ahead of time what it means.
- If all vehicles in the vicinity are stopped and everything seems safe, give the waiting students the "universal safe to board signal." Use your left hand if students are across the street and right

hand if students are on your passenger side.

- If the passenger door was only partly opened to this point, open it all the way.
- A group of students should be taught to approach the bus together, as one unit. Letting them straggle across one at a time increases the chance a motorist will grow impatient and drive around your bus. Remind children about this every day.
- As they enter, remind children to use the handrail to avoid slipping on the steps.
- Briefly greet students as they board but keep your primary attention focused outside the bus for as long as you're at the stop.
- Wait until all children are seated before leaving the stop. To protect your stopped bus, leave your red flashers on until you are ready to pull away.

#### ***Leaving a stop in the morning:***

- When you believe all children who were at the stop have boarded your bus, make a very careful scan of the surrounding area. Does everything appear normal? If parents who accompanied their children to the stop are still present, train yourself to look at them before leaving. If there's a waiting vehicle facing your bus, look at the driver. Before you pull away, make sure no one's trying to get your attention to warn you that a child is near your bus. Children's lives have been saved this way.
- Resume full pressure on the service brake pedal, make sure the transmission is in drive, and release the parking brake.
- Close the passenger door. (If your bus is equipped with an interlock system, closing the door releases the brake.)

- Give your passengers time to be seated. Carefully check your driving and pedestrian crossover mirrors before resuming forward motion. Do not check your internal overhead mirror at this point. Always check crossover mirrors last.

***Be especially alert for children running after your bus just as it pulls away.***

- Leave the stop slowly. “Dead idle speed” is fast enough until you’re safely away from the stop – at least two bus lengths. Continue scanning the surrounding area as you slowly pick up speed. Be especially alert for children running after your bus just as it pulls away. A child who’s afraid of getting in trouble for missing the bus may do anything to catch it.
- When you’re well away from the stop and back up to normal road speed for the area, and if the roadway several seconds ahead of your bus appears free of potentially hazardous situations, you can glance into your internal overhead mirror to make sure all passengers are safely seated. Keep it brief. Taking your eyes off the road is always dangerous.

**3.2.2 Dropping off students.** Statistically, dropping off children is twice as dangerous as picking them up. You must be extremely cautious on a take-home run. When approaching a bus stop to drop off students, follow these safety procedures.

***Approaching a stop in the afternoon:***

- Well before you get there, remind children who are getting off at the next stop to get

ready. Books and homework or other possessions should be stowed in backpacks; coats and gloves and hats should be on; etc. Get to know your students – some need more time than others to get ready.

- Children must stay in their seats until your bus is fully stopped. Even though it may save a few seconds at the stop, do not let children move to a front row while the bus is moving. It’s dangerous.
- Be aware of vehicles behind your bus as you approach a stop. Are they closing quickly, tailgating, trying to pass, or driving erratically? If you can pull over in a safe location well before the stop to let motorists go around you, do so. Courtesy to other motorists improves bus stop safety. Make sure the shoulder is adequate for your bus. Use your right turn signal to indicate you’re pulling off the road, then activate your 4-way flashers while you’re stopped. (Check to be sure your amber pre-warning flashers are not on.) Pull fully off the road and come to a complete stop - it’s dangerous to “troll” along the shoulder. When vehicles have passed, use your left turn signal before pulling back onto the roadway.
- Before you get to the stop, double-check the master flasher switch to make sure it’s “armed.” (Learn how to find it without looking for it.)

***Courtesy to other motorists improves bus stop safety.***

- Activate amber pre-warning flashers early enough that other motorists have enough

time to slow down and stop. A general rule of thumb is about 300' before the stop. Turn them on earlier for stops with limited visibility, stops on high speed roads, when weather or light conditions reduce visibility, or when you suspect an approaching motorist is not paying attention.

- As the next stop comes into view, start scanning the surrounding area. Be alert for any unusual or potentially hazardous situations near the stop. If you see a fixed potential hazard (snow bank, construction debris, etc.) right where children were going to disembark, you may have to stop a short distance (a bus length or less) before or past the normal drop-off point. If you do have to move a stop even slightly, inform children before they depart so they aren't disoriented once they're off the bus. Be especially careful with younger children who are more easily confused. You should also be on the lookout for non-fixed hazards such as roaming dogs or suspicious individuals loitering near a stop. If you have any doubt about whether it's safe to drop off a child, keep the child on board. An unexpected change like this can make children very anxious – reassure them that everything will be fine. Do not just continue on your run. If possible, pull off the road near the stop. Immediately contact base by radio, briefly explain your concerns, and wait for their guidance. The transportation office may be able to contact parents to meet their children. In some cases you may be directed to keep the children on board until an alternate drop-off point can be worked out.
- Even if everything looks completely normal as you approach the stop, slow

down well before you get there. Approach bus stops at “dead idle speed” with your foot covering the service brake – “just in case.” Anything can happen near a bus stop. A younger sibling excited to meet a big brother or sister could come rushing toward your bus just as you pull up to the stop. A bus stop is no place for being in a hurry or for jackrabbit stops or starts.

***If you have any doubt about whether it's safe to drop off a child, keep the child on board.***

***At a stop in the afternoon:***

- As soon as your bus comes to a full stop, secure it with the parking or emergency brake. (On buses equipped with interlock systems, opening the door engages the brake.) Leaving a bus in gear, held back only by your foot on the service brake pedal, poses an unnecessary risk to children around it. Many motor vehicle accidents occur each year, especially in wet weather, because of the driver's foot slipping off the brake pedal. Securing the bus at every bus stop also protects children if the driver suddenly becomes ill or if another vehicle crashes into the back of the bus. Scary as they are, both scenarios happen every year in New York State.
- As soon as your bus is secured, open the passenger door to activate your red student flashers and stop arms. (Never open the door until your bus is completely stopped and secured.)

- Just to be safe, check quickly to be absolutely certain your red flashers are on. Some buses have an indicator light on the control panel to let you know if they're working. You should also be able to see one or both stop arms in your driver's side mirror.
- As an additional warning to motorists behind you at the stop, keep the service brake pedal lightly depressed so your brake lights stay on.
- Do not let children exit your bus wearing headphones, oversized hats, or while talking or texting on their cell phones – they need to be able to see and hear and pay attention while getting off the bus.
- Be alert for children carrying loose items such as school papers as they disembark. A child dropping something near or under the bus is a common cause of by-own-bus tragedies. Children should stash all belongings in their backpacks before exiting – remind them ahead of time about this, and insist that they actually do it. Some bus drivers carry a few plastic grocery bags on the bus to give to children who have loose items that won't fit in a backpack.
- Be alert for children wearing clothing or backpacks with dangling drawstrings or straps. They could become snagged in the handrail, passenger door, or even the fire extinguisher as the child goes down the steps and exits the bus. Inform your supervisor or SBDI if you see a child with long drawstrings, straps, or other dangerous clothing. A phone call to a parent might prevent a tragedy.
- By state law you **must** instruct every crossing child in safe crossing procedures every day. Ignoring this law places the

children and you at risk. Give some form of bus stop safety reminder to each child before disembarking. Keep it brief, simple, and positive: “Check before you step off the bus”, “Go far enough in front of the bus to see my face”, “Wait for my signal before starting across the road”, and “Stay alert for cars – they don't always stop for our bus” are all acceptable. Don't just mechanically repeat the same phrase every day. Be a real teacher – find your own style for getting through to kids.

*Give some form of bus stop safety reminder to each child each day – keep it brief, simple, and positive.*

- At group stops, it is safer to discharge crossers before non-crossers. It takes work to pull this procedure off – children don't naturally separate themselves into crossers and non-crossers – but it can help you establish greater order outside the bus, making it easier to keep tabs on children who have disembarked. “Crossers first” is especially useful at large group stops, such as trailer parks or apartment complexes, which can be very confusing.
- Remind children to use the handrail as they go down the steps. Many children slip and fall on bus steps.
- Make a mental count of the number of children who get off your bus at each stop. Do this even when you're on the same run day after day and you think you know how many children get off at a stop. Children often bring friends home from school. You will use your count to double-check

that all children are safely away from your bus before moving it.

- Teach children to pause briefly at the bottom step before disembarking and to “check before they step” off your bus. They should look both ways. Children just stepping off a bus have been killed when a vehicle illegally passed on the passenger side. Insist that all students check before they step off the bus – even high school students. They’re at risk too.

***Even high school students are at risk – insist that all children “check before they step” off your bus.***

- If children don’t have to cross, they should walk quickly off the roadway and directly away from the bus. Do not let them check the mailbox or tarry near the edge of the road. By state law, you must leave the red student flashers on and cannot move your bus until all children who have disembarked are off the road and at least 15’ away from the bus.
- Be alert when parents, grandparents, siblings, or friends meet children at the stop. Responsible adults can be a great help at bus stops. In the morning, children waiting for the bus are much less likely to fool around when parents or other adults are present. But in the afternoon, a child excited to see a loved one might be distracted and rush out into the road. Encourage parents to meet young children at the bus door. If they must cross the road, parent and child should practice standard safe crossing procedures together.

## **Car Drives Around Bus and Kills Girl, 7**



STATE POLICE and Madison County sheriff's investigators examine the scene of a fatal crash Friday at Peterboro Road in Sloat. Mallory Eddy, 7, had just stepped off her school bus when a car swerved around it and hit her. Photo by Corbinburg photographer.

Courteously explain to the parent the importance of teaching this procedure to the child. Without an explanation, parents simply might not understand why it’s important to follow safe school bus crossing procedures. Always look for ways to work cooperatively with parents to protect children at bus stops.

- If children have to cross, they should walk far enough in front of the bus to clearly see the bus driver’s face and to wait there (use the upright palm “universal wait signal” to hold them in place) until the driver gives the “universal crossing signal” to proceed across the road. Avoid training children to wait for your signal “ten feet in front of the bus.” Few children know exactly how far that is. Avoid teaching them to wait to cross at a set location (for instance, next to a tree or sign along the road). A substitute driver may not stop the bus in exactly the same location as you, and children could be confused. “I see the driver, the driver sees me” is the simplest and most effective way to teach children how far in front of the bus they should wait.
- At group stops, children should be taught to wait for your signal as a unit and to

cross together. Straggling across the road one at a time increases the risk that a waiting motorist will lose patience and drive past the bus, striking a child. Crossing as a single unit also makes it a little easier to keep tabs on children.

***While children are crossing, honk the horn only if you want them to immediately head back to the side of the road they started from.***

While children are waiting to cross the road, or in the act of crossing, keep your hand over the horn in case you need to quickly alert children that a vehicle is approaching. New York State's "universal danger signal" has saved children's lives. Our signal means one thing and one thing only: while children are crossing, honk the horn only if you want them to immediately head back to the side of the road they started from. In a real incident, there's no time to remind children of what it means. Every situation is different. Depending on where the approaching vehicle is when you first spot it, it may be safer to let children continue across. The best way to be prepared for such a quick and profound judgment call is to remain highly aware of the surrounding roadway environment every time you are stopped to pick up or drop off children. If your mind wanders away from your crossing children, you may not be ready to make the best decision quickly when you realize a vehicle is speeding toward the children.

If you drive a school bus for twenty years, you may never have to make such an instantaneous life-and-death decision. Or it could happen the first day you drive bus.

- Buses equipped with public address systems and external speakers give the driver another tool for influencing children's behavior outside the bus. Most PA systems are too cumbersome to rely on to communicate with children in a sudden emergency, such as a vehicle about to pass your bus. The horn is the quickest, surest way to instantly communicate with children in an emergency. But external PAs can be helpful in teaching children how to cross properly. They are especially useful in helping children gather into one crossing unit at group stops.
- Keep your attention focused on the danger zones around your bus the entire time you're at the stop. Stay off the two-way radio while children are in the process of getting off your bus. Do your best to tune out children's behaviors inside, too. Keep your eyes off the internal overhead mirror at this point. At a bus stop, the internal overhead mirror is the most dangerous piece of equipment on your bus.

***Leaving a stop in the afternoon:***

- Before leaving the stop, locate and methodically re-count students who have just disembarked now that they're outside your bus. If you counted four children going down the steps, make sure you can account for all four before moving your bus.
- If you've lost track of a child who just disembarked, don't move the bus until you can figure out where he or she is. There are several ways to accomplish this. A parent at the bus stop or a reliable student

may be able to tell you where the child went. If you're lucky enough to have a bus attendant with you, he or she can check around and under the bus. There are even occasions when your office can make a quick phone call to make sure the missing child is inside the house. But in a worst case scenario, when all else fails, you have no choice but to shut off and secure your bus, take the key with you, and peek under the bus. State law allows you to get off the bus with children on board in an emergency, and this is an emergency. Explain what you're doing to children still on board and ask them to help out by behaving.

- When you are confident all children who have just disembarked are safely out of the road and away from your bus, make a final visual scan of the surrounding area. Does everything appear normal? If parents who met their children to the stop are still present, train yourself to look at them before pulling away. If there's a waiting vehicle facing your bus, look at its driver. Listen for warnings, too – shouts from bystanders or honking from nearby vehicles. (“Crack” your driver window so it's partially open, and keep the radio volume low at stops, to help you hear last-second warnings.) Before resuming forward motion, make sure no one's trying to get your attention to warn you that a child is near your bus. Children's lives have been saved by last-second warnings from people near the bus.
- Resume full pressure on the service brake pedal, make sure the transmission is in drive, and release the parking brake.
- Close the passenger door. (If your bus is equipped with an interlock system, closing the door releases the brake.)

- Carefully check your driving and pedestrian crossover mirrors before resuming forward motion. Do *not* check your internal overhead mirror at this point. Always check crossover mirrors last.

*Always leave bus stops slowly – be prepared for the unexpected.*

- As in the morning, this is the moment of truth. Leave the stop slowly – do not let yourself be in a hurry. “Dead idle speed” is fast enough until you're at least two bus lengths away from the stop. Continue scanning the surrounding area as you slowly pick up speed.
- When you're well away from the stop and back up to normal road speed for the area, and if the roadway several seconds ahead of your bus appears free of potentially hazardous situations, you can glance into your internal overhead mirror to make sure your remaining passengers are still in their seats and behaving appropriately. Keep it very brief. Taking your eyes off the road is always dangerous.

**3.2.3 School loading areas.** The physical layout of school loading areas and bus loops varies greatly. Many are less than ideal in terms of traffic flow. Few school campuses were designed with school bus safety in mind. Many lack the space to keep buses entirely separate from other vehicles (teachers, parents, student drivers, delivery vehicles, etc.) or from students who walk to school. In communities where space is at a premium, buses may be forced to park right on the street when dropping off or picking up students at school.

Regardless of the physical layout of the bus loading area, caution is always required. On school grounds, children may be present anywhere at any time. Typical dangers in school loading areas include:

- Children walking between buses lined up in the loop.
- Children running or playing near buses.
- Children standing too close to buses as they pull into or out of school.
- Other motorists (parents, student drivers, teachers, etc.) illegally passing buses as students board or exit.
- Poles and signs may be located too close to the road. A child sticking his or her hand out the window as your bus pulls out of school could be seriously injured. It's happened in our state.

To avoid an accident on school grounds, follow these safety procedures:

- Always secure your bus with the spring brake or parking brake when dropping off or picking up students on school grounds.
- Do not leave your bus when children are inside.
- Check your bus for sleeping or hiding children before leaving the school after dropping off in the morning.
- If, after all children have disembarked, you park your bus on school grounds, always take the key with you and secure it fully by pumping the air brakes down.
- Avoid unnecessary idling on school grounds – it's harmful to everyone's health and wastes money. Shut your bus off while waiting for students to be released from school.

- Avoid backing up on school grounds. A child could be behind your bus. If you must back up on school grounds in an emergency, use an adult spotter (another bus driver, a teacher, the principal, etc.) to assist you.
- Drive slowly on school grounds at all times.
- Always activate red student flashers when loading or unloading passengers on school grounds or when behind another bus that has its flashers on.
- Do not pass another bus with its red student flashers on.

Because school loading areas vary so much, you need to learn the specific features of the schools you will be driving for. With a trainer or experienced driver, take a tour of your local school bus loading areas. Go over the traffic pattern at each school and discuss any unusual hazards.

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### **3.3 Crossover Mirrors**

**3.3.1 Proper adjustment of crossover mirrors.** School buses are equipped with three different types of mirror systems:

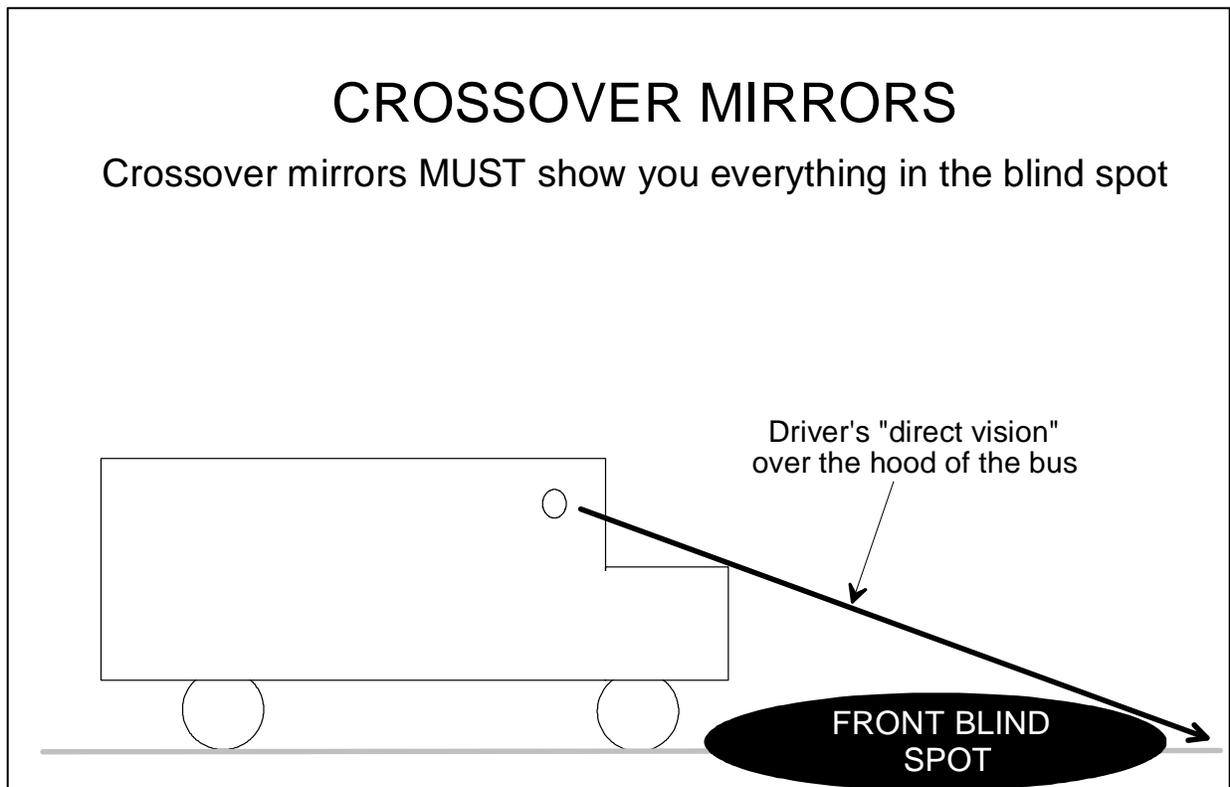
1. Driving mirrors – usually mounted just ahead of the driver's seating position on both sides of the bus. They may consist of a single flat mirror or a flat mirror/convex mirror combination. Some are power adjustable. Their primary purpose is to show you the vehicles behind and around your bus as you move down the road. They are also essential when backing.
2. Internal overhead mirror – mounted on the bulkhead above the driver. Its purpose is to let the driver check on passengers when it's safe to do so.

3. Pedestrian crossover mirrors – usually mounted on both front corners of the bus. There are many styles of crossover mirrors. To provide a wider angle of vision all are convex to some degree.

Proper adjustment of crossover mirrors is extremely important. If a mirror is out of adjustment, you could run over a child. It is against the law to drive a school bus with the

*If a crossover mirror is out of adjustment, you could run over a child.*

All school buses have blind spots. They vary in size depending on the type of bus you're driving, your height, and how your seat is adjusted. "Conventional" style school buses (engine in front) usually have bigger blind



crossover mirrors out of adjustment.

The primary purpose of crossover mirrors is to help you check for children at bus stops. It's easy to lose track of a child hidden from direct view in the blind spots – often called “danger zones” – around your bus. Most school bus fatalities are the result of “by-own-bus” incidents in which the driver failed to see a child. Crossover mirrors can help prevent such tragedies.

spots than “transit” style buses (rear engine or engine next to the driver). Depending on the height of the driver and how the driver's seat is adjusted, a conventional bus may have to contend with a front blind spot of up to twenty-five feet. The same driver in a transit style bus may have a blind spot of only ten feet. However, children have been run over and killed by transit style buses just as they have by conventional style buses. Proper mirror adjustment is critical to bus stop safety

no matter what type of school bus you're driving.

By state law, mirrors must show the seated driver any areas in front of the bus, or to the sides of the bus, hidden from direct view. Crossover mirrors must show you the entire area in front of your bus from the bumper to where you can see the pavement directly over the hood.

A "one size fits all" mirror adjustment will not be right for all drivers. Crossover mirrors may need to be individually adjusted depending on the seat adjustment and the height of the driver. Proper adjustment is especially important for shorter drivers, who sit lower in the seat and usually have more of their direct vision blocked by the bus hood.

Some crossover mirrors cannot be adjusted without a mechanic's help. Ask your supervisor or SBDI for assistance if you're not sure if your mirrors are adjusted correctly for you.

### **3.3.2 Correct use of crossover mirrors.**

Even properly adjusted crossover mirrors mean little if they are not used carefully at every bus stop.

Check your crossover mirrors last, immediately before resuming forward motion, at every bus stop – morning or afternoon – along the route or on school grounds. Do not check on passengers with the internal overhead mirror just before moving away from a stop. Do *not* check your driving mirrors just before re-entering the traffic flow. As you prepare to leave a stop, nothing is more important than making sure no children are near your bus.

Some bus drivers mistakenly think crossover mirrors exist only to look for a child they know they've lost track of. But the most



important purpose of crossover mirrors is to help you spot a child you didn't know you'd lost track of. Children are so inherently unpredictable that the only real protection against a by-own-bus incident is to train yourself to systematically check your crossover mirrors just before moving the bus – at every single bus stop, even when you're "100% certain" all children are safely away from your bus. Nothing you will do as a school bus driver requires greater vigilance. It is impossible to be too careful at this moment of truth.

*The most important purpose of crossover mirrors is to help you spot a child you didn't know you'd lost track of.*

By itself, neither crossover mirror can show all areas to the front and sides of your bus hidden from your direct vision. Crossover mirrors are designed to be used in tandem. Check your mirrors carefully and methodically, one at a time. A quick glance may not reveal a child. Search each mirror for at least two to three seconds – longer in low-light conditions.

Move actively in the driver's seat, and move your head, to change your angle of vision and maximize what you can see in each mirror. Train yourself to follow this procedure meticulously at every single bus stop. It is one of the surest signs of a truly professional school bus driver.

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## 3.4 Route Safety

**3.4.1 Placement of bus stops.** School districts are responsible for establishing reasonably safe bus stops. Safety and efficiency must both be considered.

Determining the exact location of bus stops is one of your supervisor's most important responsibilities. Every stretch of road, every neighborhood, and every driving environment presents its own set of hazards to account for when deciding where to place a bus stop.

Deciding where to locate a child's stop is not a bus driver's job, but drivers should be aware of the general guidelines school districts utilize for establishing stops. You are the eyes and ears of the school district while driving your bus. If you feel a particular bus stop is unusually hazardous, or have an idea for improving safety on your route, let your supervisor know. Suggestions from bus drivers can help supervisors create safer bus stops.

Factors typically considered by supervisors when deciding where to place a bus stop include:

- *Visibility.* The greater the visibility, the greater the chance other motorists will see your stopped bus. Stops with limited visibility, such as those located near a sharp curve or the crest of a hill are more hazardous.

- *Intersections.* Picking up or dropping off students at an intersection should be avoided whenever possible. Stopping about 100' (three bus lengths) before the corner gives other motorists more time to see your stopped bus.
- *Waiting area.* Children need adequate room well back from the roadway to wait for their bus.
- *Crossovers.* Motorists don't always stop for stopped school buses. Few if any school districts can eliminate crossovers altogether, but finding ways to reduce the number of crossovers is one way to improve bus stop safety. Crossing students on high speed roads, multilane roadways, or in areas of heavy traffic, should be avoided when possible. Crossing young children (Preschool to Grade 2) or children with significant physical, mental, or emotional disabilities should be avoided. Regardless of their age, students should never be asked to cross a divided highway. Do not attempt to cross students if you are driving a small school vehicle without red student flashers.
- *Age and characteristics of the child.* An older student may be capable of safely crossing a particular roadway, while a younger child may not. There is no state requirement mandating school districts to pick up and drop off children at their homes. Most children can safely handle a neighborhood "group" stop. However, a child with special needs may require a house stop.

## *Never change the location of a bus stop on your own.*

### **3.4.2 Unauthorized route and stop changes.**

Never change the location of a bus stop on your own. Don't change your route without official authorization from your office.

If you think a stop or a route should be altered in some way, discuss it with your supervisor.

If a parent comes to your bus to request a change in their child's stop – for instance, a parent asks you to pick up a child in front of the house instead of at a group stop down the street – courteously advise the parent to call the transportation office.

Unauthorized route changes can be dangerous. If a substitute driver takes your run, any changes you've made on your own, which are not on the route sheet, can confuse both the substitute and the children. If you've been picking up a child at home instead of at the neighborhood group stop listed on the route sheet, that child might enter the roadway as the bus passes the house.

If a child is hurt in a scenario such as the one discussed above, you could be held personally liable. A school bus driver's responsibility for the care and custody of children includes picking them up and dropping them off at school district-approved locations and following school district-approved routes.

If you must re-route your bus because of a temporary condition, such as road repairs, severe weather, a motor vehicle accident or house fire in the area, notify base of the situation by radio. Letting your office know protects everyone.



**3.4.3 Turnarounds.** Many school districts utilize bus turnarounds, especially in rural areas where “going around the block” could add many miles to a route. Most turnarounds require backing. All turnarounds should be approved by your router or supervisor.

Scan the area carefully before beginning to turn around. Before backing, position your bus to give you the best view of the area you'll be backing into. Although school buses are equipped with back-up beepers, always “honk three times and pause” before starting to back. Back-up beepers can be hard to hear in some situations. Honking gets the attention of anyone nearby, and pausing before starting to back gives them time to get out of your way.

If you're fortunate enough to have an attendant on board, ask your attendant to observe (from inside the bus) you as you back up. If you don't have an attendant, consider using a reliable older student as a spotter (again, from inside the bus only). Even with a spotter, the responsibility for preventing an accident is still yours – you're the driver. But a second set of eyes while backing is always safer. Before you begin backing, decide on a signal for the spotter to alert you of a hazard – a simple “Stop!” works best.

Always back slowly. Dead idle may be too fast – keep your foot on the brake. Overconfidence about backing can result in a tragedy. Backing a school bus is always risky. Winter conditions make turnarounds even more challenging. Snow can make it hard to know exactly where the edge of the turnaround is. Back up only as far as necessary to get your bus turned around. If a turnaround looks too snow-filled or slippery to negotiate safely, contact base. Area highway departments respond quickly to any call to assist a school bus. If you do get stuck in a turnaround, contact base. Trying to get out on your own by repeatedly “rocking” your bus back and forth can make things worse, and with children on board, it can be dangerous. Do not be embarrassed about asking for help – the safety of the children is all that matters.

*In the morning, pick up waiting children before backing up; in the afternoon, back up before dropping off children.*

Turnarounds at or near bus stops are especially hazardous. When children are nearby, anything can happen. If your route requires you to back up at or near a bus stop, always follow this procedure: in the morning, pick up waiting children before backing up; in the afternoon, back up before dropping off children. Children are safest when they’re on board your bus.

**3.4.4 Safety cushion.** Whenever possible, keep students out of the rear seats of your bus.

Use the last row only when other seats are filled.

Passengers in the last row are more exposed to injury if your bus is struck from behind. Because school buses routinely stop in the roadway to receive or discharge students, a rear end collision is one of the most common types of school bus accidents. School buses have also been struck in the rear while stopped at railroad crossings.

School buses are designed to protect children in collisions. However, if the vehicle striking your bus from the rear is a large commercial vehicle such as a truck or another bus, the collision can be so severe that children in the rear seats can be seriously injured or killed. Keeping children out of the rear seats is a simple and no-cost way to provide even a higher level of safety.

Older students almost always prefer to sit way in the back – being as far away from adults as possible is part of being a teenager. Teaching them to stay out of the back seats takes persistence. Take the time to really explain the safety reason behind the rule. Many school bus drivers have been very successful at convincing children of all ages to stay out the rear seats.

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**The “safety cushion” rule is as important on sports and field trips as it is on regular routes. It is especially important on any route utilizing a high speed roadway with heavy truck traffic.**

### 3.5 Unit 3 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. Why is the student loading/unloading process considered “the moment of truth” for a school bus driver?**

- a. *Three of every four student fatalities occur at the bus stop.*
- b. *Children are naturally impulsive and unpredictable.*
- c. *All school buses have blind spots where a child could be hidden from direct view.*
- d. *All of the above.*

**2. Statistically, when are children most at risk?**

- a. *Getting on a bus in the morning.*
- b. *Getting off a bus in the afternoon.*
- c. *Riding on the bus in a residential neighborhood.*
- d. *Riding on the bus on the highway.*

**3. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Slow down well before you get to a bus stop. Last-second braking with children nearby is a recipe for disaster.”*

**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Secure your bus at every bus stop.”*

**5. What is the “universal danger signal” and what does it mean?**

- a. *Flash headlights – child should freeze in the roadway.*
- b. *Honk horn – child should freeze in the roadway.*
- c. *Wave your hands and yell – child should run.*

- d. *Honk horn – child should immediately return to the side of the road he/she started from.*

**6. TRUE or FALSE?** *“To save time at the bus stop, children should get out of their seats and move to the front of the bus as you approach their stop.”*

**7. TRUE or FALSE?** *“It is against the law to drive a school bus with the crossover mirrors out of adjustment.”*

**8. What’s the most important purpose of crossover mirrors?**

- a. *To help you locate a child you know you’ve lost track of.*
- b. *To check for children you didn’t know you’d lost track of.*
- c. *To check for cars pulling next to you while driving.*
- d. *To check your flashers during the pre-trip.*

**9. What should you do if you feel a bus stop is unusually hazardous, or you have an idea for improving safety on your route?**

- a. *Make the change on your own – it is the bus driver’s responsibility to establish the location of bus stops.*
- b. *Discuss it with your supervisor.*
- c. *Continue doing the route as written – routes cannot be changed during the school year.*
- d. *None of the above.*

**10. What's the most important reason students should stay out of the rear seats whenever possible?**

- a. *You can't hear what they're saying.*
- b. *Takes them longer to get off the bus at their stops.*
- c. *They are more exposed to injury if a vehicle strikes the back of your bus.*
- d. *There is no reason to keep students out of the rear seats.*

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## UNIT 3 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# CORE UNIT 4: TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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## Unit 4 Topics

- 4.1 Most School Buses Transport Children with Special Needs
- 4.2 Children with Special Needs Are Diverse
- 4.3 Special Education Terms and Concepts
- 4.4 Sensitivity
- 4.5 Emergency Concerns
- 4.6 Unit 4 Review

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## Introduction

Serving children with disabilities is a big part of the modern educational system. Disabled children represent 10-20% of the student population in most school districts today. Every New York State school bus driver needs to know how to provide safe, caring transportation for children with special needs.

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### 4.1 Most School Buses Transport Children with Special Needs

**4.1.1 You will be working with children with disabilities.** Most children with disabilities ride regular school buses. Most

New York State school bus drivers transport children with special needs. Successful transportation of children with special needs requires:

- Safe, current, working equipment and vehicles
- Appropriate staffing on vehicle for student needs
- Consistent staffing on the bus
- Staff who understand student-specific needs
- Staff who have received student-specific training
- Written student-specific emergency plans
- Respectful, friendly bus environment

**4.1.2 The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** Our country has come a long way in how we treat people with disabilities. Throughout history, discrimination against the disabled has been as deeply rooted and destructive as racial prejudice. Just a generation ago, children who were considered “handicapped” seldom had a chance to go to school. Most adults with disabilities spent their entire lives completely segregated from society – locked up in dreary institutions or hidden away in a back room of their family’s home.

In the 1970s, America experienced a virtual revolution in attitudes and laws concerning disabled children. Building on our nation’s core belief in equal opportunity for all, and inspired by the struggles for equality of other neglected and misunderstood groups, parents of disabled children banded together and demanded a decent education for their children.

The watershed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1975, was the culmination of countless local battles for equal rights for disabled children. The law of the land now required school districts to provide a “free and appropriate public education” for all children, disabled or not.

**4.1.3 Key role of the school bus in educating children with special needs.** One of the key barriers to meeting the new mandate to provide an education to children with disabilities was getting them to and from school. Transporting children with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities created many new challenges for school districts. From the early years of IDEA, educating children with special needs has depended in a deep way on the skills, resourcefulness, and caring of school bus drivers and attendants.

Transporting children with special needs will never be simple or easy. The *Pre-Service Course* is only a starting point of what you will need to continue learning throughout your career to transport children with disabilities as safely and humanely as possible.

**4.1.4 Working with parents.** Parents of children with disabilities face many challenges. Their challenges come both from living with and loving their children day to day and from trying to work with service providers whose rules and restrictions sometimes can make them feel frustrated and powerless. Our goal in student transportation is not to be one of those service providers who make their life more difficult. Let parents know that you want to do what is best for their children. Keep lines of communication open. Parents know their children better than anyone and may be able to help you understand their child’s needs and behaviors.

*Transporting children with special needs will never be simple or easy – it has always depended on the skills, resourcefulness, and caring of school bus drivers and attendants.*

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## 4.2 Children with Special Needs Are Diverse

**4.2.1 Every child is unique.** A child with a disability is a child, not a disability. Every child, disabled or not, is an individual with a unique personality. All children have their own hopes and fears. When you think of a child’s disability, try to understand it as a “difference” and not a deficit or a deviance which have negative connotations. Difference simply means that something about that child is different from what would be considered typical. Many children with disabilities have unique talents, personalities and perspectives that go far beyond those of children who might be considered “typical.”



Within every disability category discussed below, individual children display a wide spectrum of characteristics and behaviors.

#### **4.2.2 General disability categories.**

Although no two children within a disability category are alike, it's helpful for school bus drivers to be familiar with the typical characteristics of the disabled students they may be working with.

The New York State Education Department defines thirteen types of disabilities eligible for special education services. These specific disabilities can be grouped into three general categories:

1. Physical disabilities
2. Mental disabilities
3. Emotional disabilities

**4.2.3 Types of physical disabilities.** New York State identifies six types of physical disabilities that may qualify a child for special education services:

1) "Orthopedic impairment" refers to a physical problem affecting a child's bones, muscles, joints, or tendons. The category includes birth defects such as clubfoot or absence of a limb, as well as skeletal problems caused by disease (polio, bone tuberculosis, spina bifida, etc.), or impairments from other causes (cerebral palsy, amputation, severe fractures, etc.).

Some children with orthopedic impairments use wheelchairs, walkers, or other types of mobility devices to get around. They may need to be transported on a lift-equipped bus.

Safely transporting children using mobility devices requires the highest degree of caution and attention to detail. A school bus emergency involving children in wheelchairs poses exceptional challenges. (Optional

Unit 11, "Transporting Students Using Wheelchairs," covers safety procedures for loading, securing, and transporting students using wheelchairs and other mobility devices.)

Children with orthopedic disabilities often receive specialized services from a physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT). Your school's PT or OT can be a valuable source of information about how to safely transport a child with orthopedic impairments.

2) "Deafness" refers to a hearing impairment so severe that the child has difficulty processing linguistic information through hearing, even with a hearing aid.

3) "Hearing impairment" indicates a less severe hearing loss, or an intermittent hearing loss, that still adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Most deaf and hearing impaired children ride the regular school bus along with their non-disabled peers and many are fully integrated into the typical educational program at school. Others attend special schools for deaf children. Many deaf children can communicate effectively both with hearing and non-hearing individuals.

*Many deaf children can communicate effectively both with hearing and non-hearing individuals.*

4) "Visual impairment including blindness" indicates a vision problem so severe that, even with correction, a student's educational performance is adversely impacted. The category includes both partially sighted and completely blind children. Blind children

often ride a regular school bus with their sighted peers. Emergency planning should take into account how to guide a blind child safely off the bus in an evacuation.

5) “Deaf-blindness” includes children who have simultaneous hearing and visual impairments, creating substantial communication barriers. Deaf-blind children’s developmental and educational needs often require specialized programs beyond those offered to deaf or blind students. Careful emergency planning is essential when transporting deaf-blind children.

6) “Other health-impairment” is a large disability category, covering a wide variety of chronic and/or acute health conditions that affect a child’s ability to function successfully in a school environment.

Health problems that may qualify a child as disabled include heart conditions, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, and diabetes. Children who are weakened or inattentive due to an illness require special caution during the bus ride.

Tourette syndrome, attention deficit disorder (ADD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are also included in the “other health impaired” disability category. Children with Tourette syndrome may exhibit repetitive, inappropriate behaviors such as uncontrollable cursing.

Children with ADD or ADHD seldom show physical signs of their conditions. They look like any other child but often have difficulty maintaining focus on a particular goal or task. Their impulsive behaviors can be challenging for the bus ride.

***“Autism” is a developmental disability affecting the ability to communicate and interact with others – the term covers a wide spectrum of behaviors.***

**4.2.4 Types of mental disabilities.** New York State identifies five types of mental impairments that may qualify a student for special education services:

1) “Autism” is a developmental disability affecting the ability to communicate and interact with others. The incidence of autism among children has grown exponentially over the past generation. Approximately one out of every 110 children born today have some form of autism.

The term autism covers a wide spectrum of behaviors. “Asperger’s Syndrome” is a milder form of autism. Children with Asperger’s Syndrome are usually of typical or higher intelligence and can often function effectively in the typical school environment. Children with more severe forms of autism may display characteristic repetitive movements such as rocking or waving, or “echolalia,” compulsively repeated phrases or words.

Many children on the autism spectrum have a strong preference for predictable patterns and order. Sudden changes – for instance, an unavoidable detour on your bus route – can be very difficult for children with autism.

Some children with autism can communicate effectively with pictures (story boards) or keyboards.

2) “Learning disability” is a disorder involving the processing of spoken or written language. Children with learning disabilities may have difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing math. Dyslexia is one form of learning disability. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

3) “Speech or language impairment” is a communication disorder, such as stuttering or other language or voice impairment. To be considered a disability, the disorder must be severe enough to adversely affect a child’s performance in school. Children with speech delays or impairment are frequent targets of teasing and bullying.

4) “Intellectual Disability” (previously identified as “Mental Retardation”) indicates generally below average intellectual functioning, existing simultaneously with other developmental delays and behaviors. Children with an intellectual disability are often affectionate, and may readily develop strong emotional attachments. Adults in charge must be cautious to deter inappropriate interactions.

5) “Traumatic brain injury” is the result of a blow to the head or because of certain medical conditions such as stroke, encephalitis, aneurysm, or a brain tumor, causing impaired thinking, language, memory, or judgment. Perceptual and motor skills and psychosocial behavior can also be affected. Children who have suffered a traumatic brain injury can be highly unpredictable.

**4.2.5 Emotional disability.** Children are considered “emotionally disturbed” when they exhibit a prolonged and pronounced inability

to learn that cannot be explained by a lack of intelligence, sensory disabilities, or illness.

Children who are emotionally disturbed often exhibit inappropriate behaviors or feelings under otherwise normal circumstances. They frequently have trouble establishing friendships with peers or positive interpersonal relationships with teachers.

*Transporting children with emotional disturbance can be very challenging, requiring consistent self-control and psychological savvy.*

Pervasive unhappiness or depression is characteristic of children with emotional disturbance. Physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems are common. Schizophrenia is a form of emotional disturbance.

Transporting children with emotional disturbance can be very challenging. Their frequent volatility and inappropriate behavior require consistent self-control and psychological savvy from the adults in charge.

**4.2.6 Multiple disabilities.** A child with “multiple disabilities” has two or more simultaneous impairments, such as intellectual disability and visual impairment, intellectual disability and orthopedic impairment, etc., resulting in such severe educational needs that they cannot be met in a special education program designed solely for one of the impairments.

Some of these students with multiple disabilities are “medically fragile”. Many school districts now transport medically fragile children to and from school every day. Medically fragile children have potentially life-threatening health problems. They may need medical equipment such as oxygen during the bus ride. Their condition may be serious enough that an attendant or even a nurse must accompany them on the bus ride. In rare cases, severely ill children may have a “Do Not Resuscitate” order (DNR) in place. A DNR raises legal and emotional issues that go well beyond the scope of this course. If you are asked to transport a child with a DNR, your supervisor will provide you with the information and support needed to carry out such a sensitive mission.

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### 4.3 Special Education Terms and Concepts

As a school bus driver, you need to understand the meaning of key terms used in special education.

**4.3.1 Committee on Special Education (CSE).** By law, each New York State school district has a “CSE.” A CSE is made up of special education teachers and staff, administrators, and parents. Its purpose is to identify and assess children who may need special education services, including specialized transportation arrangements such as a lift-equipped bus, bus attendant, house stop, etc. Transportation representatives are sometimes asked to participate in CSE meetings.

**4.3.2 Individualized Education Program (IEP).** An “IEP” must be created for each student who the CSE identifies with a need for special education or related services, which

can include special transportation arrangements. IEPs define specific educational, social, and behavioral goals for each child. The IEP provides information about the child that can assist the transportation staff in providing safe and effective transportation.

Transportation personnel should be informed of:

- the reasons a student requires special transportation;
- health needs that might necessitate ongoing or emergency intervention;
- student behavioral issues or fears that might raise health or safety concerns; and
- specialized training required for bus drivers and/or attendants.

While New York State Law requires the notification and training listed above, at times this information and specific training needs are not shared with transportation. If you find out that a child you are transporting has special medical equipment/devices such as: oxygen tanks, lap trays, tracheotomy tubes, medical magnets, epi pens, etc. or has behavioral issues you have not been trained to address, notify your office immediately so that you can be prepared to safely transport that child and respond to emergency situations that might arise because of a medical or behavioral need.

Schools must provide any services specified on a child’s IEP. For instance, if the IEP indicates a child needs a bus attendant, the district cannot legally ignore the requirement, even for one day. If the IEP specifies that the attendant must be CPR-certified, the district must comply.

**4.3.3 Confidentiality.** Unnecessarily revealing personal information about students or their families is a violation of state and

federal law. The only exception to this rule is if the information is necessary in an emergency to protect a child.

Parents have successfully sued school districts and bus drivers for violating confidentiality laws. A student's disability, behavior, or family situation should never be discussed in the local diner or in front of other students on your bus.

*Unnecessarily revealing personal information about students or their families is a violation of state and federal law.*

If you have questions about the students you transport or feel you need more information to ensure their safety during the bus ride, ask your supervisor or SBDI for help. It is fully appropriate and professional for school bus drivers to ask questions about a child's health, behavior, or physical needs if the information could help ensure that child's safety on the bus.

Any student information carried on your bus – route information such as names, ages, addresses, and phone numbers – should be securely maintained. It should be accessible only to those who are directly responsible for protecting the student, such as a substitute driver or emergency responders.

Avoid using actual student names over the radio whenever possible. Who knows who's listening? When using the radio, try to find a

way to say what you need to say without saying it.

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## 4.4 Sensitivity

**4.4.1 Isolation.** The experience of children with disabilities is often one of isolation. They are isolated on “special ed” buses and special education classrooms. Their parents are often isolated from other families because their child's differences make their friends uncomfortable.

Think about a time when you were at an event where you felt out of place – maybe a party where you didn't know anyone or didn't have the right clothes to wear; maybe most of the people there were speaking another language; maybe you were in a courtroom or an IEP meeting and the professionals were talking a whole different vocabulary; maybe you didn't make a cheer or sports team; or maybe you had trouble learning what seemed to come easily to everyone else. Think how much you would have appreciated a friend at that moment and try to be that welcoming and understanding friend for the children you transport and their parents.

**4.4.2 Words are important.** Outmoded words keep negative stereotypes and demeaning attitudes alive. A thoughtless comment about a child can leave a lasting scar. Sensitivity towards children with disabilities begins with a self-examination of how we speak – about them and to them.

Our society has a long history of savage verbal abuse aimed at the “handicapped.” Making fun of disabled people was routinely accepted long after racist and sexist “jokes” were considered strictly off-limits. Professional school bus drivers get to know their children

as individuals rather than relying on rude stereotypes.

Unfortunately, many children on school buses have overheard extremely demeaning comments from transportation staff, such as “She’s just a vegetable – why are we even bothering to take her to school?” Always assume children can understand what you’re saying. The child who is the subject of the remark is hurt; the other children are learning negative behavior modeled by you.

When speaking about a child with a disability, try to use “people-first” language. Refer to the child first, then the disability. For instance, instead of saying “blind child,” say “a child who is blind.” Avoid the use of negative terminology that reinforces outmoded stereotypes about people with disabilities. For instance, instead of the phrase “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound,” which implies that the individual is helplessly imprisoned, say “uses a wheelchair” or “wheelchair user.” Language matters! Even the common term “handicap” implies helplessness. The ancient origin of the word “handicap” is “cap in hand,” meaning “beggar.”

Tips for interacting effectively with children with disabilities include:

- Listen to them. If the child has difficulty speaking, listen attentively and patiently. Don’t finish the child’s sentences. If the child has difficulty hearing or comprehending, speak slowly and in short sentences.

## *A thoughtless comment overheard by a child can leave a lasting scar.*

- Be aware of both your verbal and non-verbal communication. Our attitudes are often more clearly communicated with our body language and tone of voice than the words we say.
- Remember that communication can be the spoken word, sign language, gestures or behaviors, and a variety of communication tools such as storyboards, touch screens and typing machines.
- Assume children with disabilities *can* do something. Don’t assume they’re helpless. Ask if they need your help.
- When speaking at length with a child who uses a wheelchair, try to place yourself at their eye level.
- When speaking with a child who has a visual impairment, identify yourself before speaking.
- Treat teenagers with disabilities as teenagers, not as young children.
- Don’t lean against or hang onto a child’s wheelchair. The wheelchair is part of the child’s personal space.
- If a child using a wheelchair can’t fasten the lap or shoulder belts on his/her own, be as sensitive and non-intrusive as possible when doing it for the child. Think how it would feel if someone was doing it for you. Whenever possible, keep the back of your hand instead of your palm against the child’s body as you work on the belts.

Children, too, can be horribly insensitive to each other. For instance, the time-honored tradition of referring to the special education bus as the “retard bus” still lives on today in some school systems. As a school bus driver, you are a role model. Many children will look up to you. Teach them to care for each other and befriend each other despite their differences.

**4.4.3 PJ’s Law.** In 2005, a child with autism was viciously and repeatedly belittled by a bus driver and attendant. Caught on tape, the ugly incident was so disturbing to parents and educators that a new state law, known as “PJ’s Law,” was passed. PJ’s Law requires annual sensitivity training for all transportation staff as well as specific pre-service training on understanding of and sensitivity to children with disabilities. This unit of the New York State Education Department Pre-service Course meets that pre-service requirement.

Being sensitive does not mean treating children with disabilities as though they were helpless. People with disabilities do not need pity. Children with disabilities have the same natural desire for independence as all other children. One of the main goals of special education is to encourage each student with a disability to be as independent as possible.

*Like all children,  
children with  
disabilities have a  
natural desire for  
independence.*

On your bus, encourage children to do as much for themselves as they can. For instance, many children who use a mobility device are fully capable of locking or

unlocking the wheelchair brake, latching or unlatching lap and shoulder belts, etc.

Throughout history, people with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities have accomplished incredible feats in government, business, education, the arts, sports, and in daily life.

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## 4.5 Emergency Concerns

Unit 5, “Emergency Preparedness,” will prepare you for some of the most common emergency situations you may face as a school bus driver. However, you should be aware of specialized emergency concerns when transporting students with special needs.

**4.5.1 Evacuation plan.** When driving a run that includes children with limited mobility or other physical or mental conditions that could impede their rapid evacuation, you need a crystal-clear plan of exactly how you will get them out of the bus if an emergency occurs. Which children will you take out first? In what order? From which exit? If you have a bus attendant, exactly what will he or she be doing? Who will be outside to help students off the bus, and who will stay inside to get them to the exit?

It’s unrealistic and dangerous to assume that you will know what to do in an emergency situation without outlining a plan. Panic and confusion can cost valuable time. In some situations, such as a fire, you may have only two minutes to get all children out of your bus. During an actual emergency there’s no time to figure out how to quickly remove children from your bus. You need to decide ahead of time.

Create a specific plan for two types of emergencies: 1) rear door evacuation (e.g., if

the engine catches on fire); and 2) passenger door evacuation (e.g., if there's a fire at the back of your bus). See Sample Plan on next page.

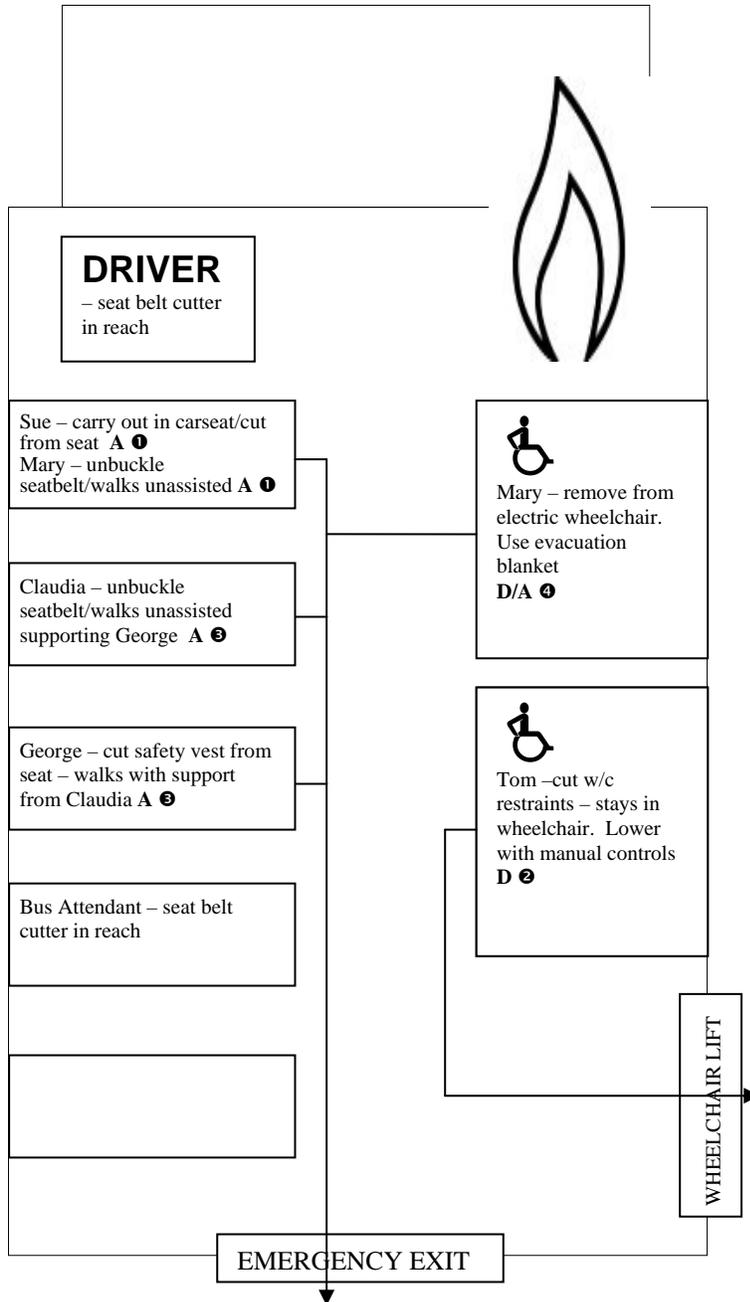
Ask your SBDI or supervisor to help you with your plan. Take enough time to really think it through. Use a blackboard to sketch out where children are seated and where the emergency exits are located on your bus.

# Sample SPECIAL NEEDS RUN REAR EVACUATION PLAN

Bus #: \_\_\_\_\_ Route #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Driver: \_\_\_\_\_

Attendant: \_\_\_\_\_



## Front engine fire or front door is unusable

**Driver Plan:** Driver goes immediately to Tom, cuts wheelchair loose and moves Tom to the lift which he opens, loads Tom on to and lowers using manual controls.

Assists attendant to remove Mary from wheelchair, lower her on to a fire blanket or evacuation aid and take her out back door.

**Attendant Plan:** Cut Sue from car seat, unbuckle Mary. Get out, lift Sue out and then assist Mary to sit and slide.

Release Claudia and cut George free. Exit bus then assist George and then Claudia to sit and slide out back.

Assists driver to remove Mary from wheelchair, lower her on to a fire blanket or evacuation aid and take her out back door.

Carefully consider every child's disability and how it impacts your emergency plans.

You need to practice the plan. Practice might reveal a potential bottleneck you didn't notice when the plan was only on the blackboard. Practice also prepares your students.

Any practice evacuation involving children with special mental, physical, or emotional needs must be conducted with the full approval and active support of the school and your supervisor. Children's teachers and classroom aides may be able to observe and assist as necessary. Preventing an injury to a vulnerable student during the drill must be a priority.

#### **4.5.2 Location of emergency services**

**along the route.** When transporting children with special needs, learn the location of all emergency services along your daily route. This is especially important with medically fragile children. This includes hospitals, clinics, ambulance terminals, fire departments, and police stations. In a serious emergency, it may be faster to drive to a facility than having emergency personnel come to the bus. Discuss this issue with your supervisor.

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## 4.6 Unit 4 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

### 1. Which statement below is not true?

- a. Most children with disabilities ride regular school buses.
- b. Most New York State school bus drivers transport children with special needs.
- c. With what we know today, transporting children with disabilities has become much simpler.
- d. Just a generation ago, children with disabilities seldom had a chance to go to school.

### 2. Which statement(s) below are true?

- a. A child with a disability is a child, not a disability.
- b. Every child, disabled or not, is an individual with a unique personality.
- c. Within every disability category, individual children display a wide spectrum of characteristics and behaviors.
- d. All statements are true.

### 3. A physical problem affecting a child's bones, muscles, joints, or tendons is considered what type of disability?

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### 4. An inability to communicate and interact with others and repetitive movements such as rocking or waving is characteristic of what type of disability?

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5. TRUE or FALSE? "Many deaf children can communicate effectively both with hearing and non-hearing individuals."

6. TRUE or FALSE? "Few school districts transport medically fragile children."

### 7. Which statement below is not typical of children with emotional disturbance?

- a. Behaves normally under normal circumstances.
- b. Trouble maintaining friendships with peers.
- c. Pervasive unhappiness or depression.
- d. Physical symptoms due to personal or school problems.

### 8. What does "CSE" stand for?

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### 9. What does "IEP" stand for?

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10. TRUE or FALSE? "Revealing personal information about students or their families is a violation of state and federal law."

### 11. Which statement(s) below are true?

- a. A thoughtless comment about a child can leave a lasting scar.
- b. Sensitivity towards children with disabilities begins with an examination of how we speak.
- c. Our society has a long history of savage verbal abuse aimed at the disabled.
- d. All the above statements are true



# CORE UNIT 5: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

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## Unit 5 Topics

- 5.1 What to Do If You've Had an Accident
- 5.2 Breakdowns
- 5.3 Radio Use in an Emergency
- 5.4 School Bus Fires and Wires
- 5.5 Evacuations
- 5.6 Bus Safety Drills
- 5.7 Violence in Society
- 5.8 Unit 5 Review

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## Introduction

Core Unit 5 of the *Pre-Service Course* will prepare you to handle emergencies you may encounter as you drive a school bus. From the first day you transport students, you must be mentally prepared for a sudden emergency.

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### 5.1 What to Do If You've Had an Accident

**5.1.1 Report it at once.** School buses are very safe, but the road is a dangerous place. Traffic accidents are a fact of life. School buses survive most crashes remarkably well.

As long as children are properly seated, serious injuries to children are rare. But even after a minor incident, calming children and assessing possible injuries can be a challenge.

No matter how minor, it is extremely important to immediately report an accident, crash, or incident from the scene by radio. What at first seems like a “minor” incident may turn out to be not so minor. Student injuries are not always apparent at first. Immediate reporting of all incidents from the scene protects both you and your students. If the radio isn't working or you're out of range, use a cell phone to contact base or 911. If you can't get through, ask a bystander or Good Samaritan to call for help.

**5.1.2 Stay calm.** Keeping students calm until help arrives is very important. Children pick up quickly on adult emotions. They can panic if they think someone is hurt. Reassure them that “everything is OK” – even if you aren't entirely sure that's the case.

Accounting for all students after an accident is extremely important. Even in a minor incident, and even if they seem uninjured, children should not be permitted to leave an accident scene without school district authorization. If parents make it to the scene before school officials arrive, ask them to stay at the scene to comfort their children until district and medical personnel arrive.

**5.1.3 Protect the scene.** It is crucial to protect the accident scene as quickly as possible. A disabled bus stopped in or next to the road could easily be struck again by another vehicle. A minor fender bender could quickly turn into a serious incident.

Many motorists are killed every year when their disabled vehicle is struck by another.

Activate your 4-way hazard flashers at once. If your bus is equipped with a roof-mounted strobe light, turn it on. Arrange to have emergency triangle reflectors set up as soon as possible to alert other motorists. Do not leave students unattended on the bus to place the reflectors, even for a few moments, except in exceptional circumstances when the urgent danger of a second crash outweighs other considerations.

*It is crucial to protect the accident scene as quickly as possible.*

It is better to ask a Good Samaritan who has come to the accident scene to set out the reflectors. Tell the Good Samaritan exactly what to do. Setting up triangle reflectors is tricky. It's easy to break them, or place them improperly so they fall over and can't be seen by motorists. Practice how to set them up correctly before you begin transporting students.

After an accident, do not move your bus, unless it is positioned where a second collision is possible. If moving is necessary to prevent another vehicle from crashing into your bus, pull off the roadway to a safer area nearby, even before police arrive if you must. Notify base by radio that you're moving the bus off the roadway to prevent a second collision.

**5.1.4 Cooperate with emergency responders.** Be prepared to provide emergency responders with an accurate

seating chart as they arrive on the scene. They will need to know how many students



(and any other passengers, such as a bus attendant) were on board your bus. If the accident took place at or near a bus stop and one or more students were off the bus when the incident occurred, let emergency personnel know.

Inform emergency personnel as soon as they arrive on the scene of any students with special needs or medical conditions.

Once emergency responders are on the scene, let them do their jobs.

Don't get into an argument with the "other motorist" at the accident scene, and if the media comes to the scene, don't be a spokesperson for your school district or bus company. Ask the reporter to speak to your supervisor.

Be forthright and honest about what happened when interviewed by the police or your supervisor.



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## 5.2 Breakdowns

### 5.2.1 Report possible mechanical problems at once.

When transporting students, a mechanical problem is more than just an inconvenience. A breakdown exposes students to increased risk. A disabled bus in or near the roadway could be struck by another vehicle. Students could be subjected to extreme weather conditions.

A thorough pre-trip inspection reduces the chance of a breakdown, but mechanical problems could still develop on the route. Always be on the lookout for early warning signs of a possible mechanical problem. Scan your gauges regularly for signs that a mechanical component (e.g., alternator, battery, engine, transmission) is beginning to fail. Know what your gauges should read when the component is operating normally. If you're not sure what all gauges should read, ask a school bus technician (mechanic) before leaving the bus yard. There's no embarrassment in asking for help – it's the sign of a professional driver.

Other clues that something is not right include unusual noises (e.g., knocking, banging, grinding, whining, screeching), unusual smells (e.g., fuel, hot radiator, burning or electrical), and a change in how the vehicle handles (e.g., pulling to one side, "loose" steering, soft brakes, bouncing, engine sluggish or skipping). Stay alert and use your senses – sound, sight, smell, touch – to detect a developing problem early.

Early warning of a possible mechanical problem allows you to pull over in a safe location rather than breaking down in the middle of the road where your students would be much more exposed to danger.

Do not continue on your route or trip if you suspect a mechanical problem. Do not wait

until you get back to base to report the problem. Notify base by radio at once. If you can't reach base by radio, pull over in a safe location and use a cell phone.

*Don't continue on your route or trip if you suspect a mechanical problem – don't wait until you get back to base to report it.*

**5.2.2 Stop in a safe location.** As after an accident, a bus with a mechanical problem stopped in the roadway could easily be struck by another vehicle. Pull off the road to a safe location such as a parking lot as soon as a problem is suspected. If you must stop along the road, look for a wide shoulder with good visibility to other motorists. Be careful when pulling off the road – be alert for soft shoulders and ditches. Turn on your 4-way hazard flashers and set out reflectors as soon as possible.

**5.2.3 If your bus is stuck.** Even skilled bus drivers occasionally get stuck in snow, ice, or other slippery conditions. Gently moving your bus forward and back may provide enough traction to get going again. However, repeatedly rocking the bus back and forth, or spinning the drive tires in an effort to get going, can be dangerous, especially with children on board. Tires can catch fire if spun hard, or your bus could break loose unexpectedly and slide sideways into a ditch or other hazard.

Notify base by radio as soon as you realize you're stuck. Most bus drivers have had it happen; it's nothing to be embarrassed about.

If your bus must be towed out, get students out first unless extremely severe weather or other hazards such as exposure to traffic make it safer to keep them on board.

Towing a bus can be dangerous, even for short distances. The tow line could snap or the bus could tip. Escort students to a safe spot well away from the action. Keep them together. Have younger students buddy up.

*Notify base by radio as soon as you realize you're stuck. Most bus drivers have had it happen – it's nothing to be embarrassed about.*

**5.2.4 Transferring students to a replacement bus.** Transferring students from your disabled bus to a replacement bus requires careful attention by both bus drivers. Activate your red student flashers and 4-way hazard flashers before beginning the transfer. Younger students should hold hands and buddy up. If Good Samaritans have come to the scene, they might be able to help out by directing students from one bus to the other. Tell them exactly what you want them to do.

Never leave students unattended on your bus, even for a few moments, or let them enter the replacement bus unless you or the other driver is on board.

Do a student count to make sure everyone is on the replacement bus before you pull away.

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## 5.3 Radio Use in an Emergency

### 5.3.1 Getting help quickly is the priority.

School buses are routinely exposed to a wide variety of dangerous situations on the road: challenging weather and traffic conditions, mechanical problems, and student behavior problems are only the most common. School bus emergencies happen every day.

You must be mentally prepared to decisively respond to a sudden emergency from the first day you transport students. Being ready for an emergency is one of your most important responsibilities as a school bus driver.

*Being prepared for a sudden emergency is one of your most important responsibilities as a school bus driver.*

Every school bus emergency is different, of course, but there is a common theme in how you should respond: Get help to the scene as quickly as possible. Even in a relatively minor incident (e.g., fender-bender with no apparent injuries, breakdown with the bus pulled safely off the road), calming and controlling dozens of children on your bus will not be easy.

In a more severe incident, such as a serious crash or bus fire, getting help to the scene quickly could be the difference between life and death.

During any emergency, contact base by radio or 911 by cell phone as soon as possible. If at all possible, make the initial call before getting out of your seat. Getting help headed your way is the priority.

**5.3.2 Conveying critical information.** Some school districts and bus companies use a system of radio codes to designate various emergencies. “10-50” is a common radio code for accident. If your employer uses radio codes, find out what they are. Memorize them or tape a list of codes to your clipboard.

Many school districts have stopped using radio codes because they are so easily forgotten or confused in the stress of a real emergency. Plain speaking is usually the most effective way to communicate during an actual emergency.

Collect your thoughts *before* speaking over the radio. Convey the most important information clearly. Give your bus number, where you’re located, and a brief description of what happened.

Local policies vary on exactly what you should say first. One example is: “This is bus number X and I have an emergency. I am located at Smith and Jones Street and have had an accident. There may be injuries.”

Using the word “emergency” early in your transmission alerts your dispatcher, other bus drivers, and anyone else listening in that this is not a routine radio call.

Avoid giving too much information – student names should be mentioned over the radio only in exceptional circumstances when base needs to know the identity of a particular student to help direct the appropriate response.

Use a separate emergency channel if one is provided in your radio system. If you have questions about how to switch channels or any other questions about operating your two-way radio, ask your instructor or a technician to show you. Radio controls can be tricky.

Other bus drivers in the fleet should stay off the air when there’s an emergency.

**5.3.3 Cell phone use in an emergency.** Once your bus is stopped, a cell phone can be extremely helpful in an emergency. Using a cell phone instead of the two-way radio lets you give more secure and detailed communication to base about what has happened. The rest of the community won’t hear everything you say.

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## 5.4 School Bus Fires and Wires

**5.4.1 School bus fires do happen.** School bus fires occur more frequently than is commonly thought. Bus fires can be caused by a variety of mechanical or electrical system problems, by collisions, or even by student vandals.

*Students should be evacuated at once if there’s any indication of a possible fire.*

School buses can burn quickly in some situations. Once seat cushions have ignited, it takes less than two minutes for heat and fumes to make the passenger compartment unsurvivable.

Because bus fires can spread fast and are potentially lethal, any sign of a possible fire (e.g., smoke, burning or hot electrical smell, warnings from other motorists) should be taken seriously. Students should be evacuated at once if there’s any indication of a possible fire.

**5.4.2 Typical fire scenarios.** The two most common bus fire scenarios are front engine fires and fires at the rear of your bus due to a crash. You should be prepared to respond to

both scenarios. Your student passengers should be trained to respond to them as well.

You may first become aware of a front engine fire when smoke or flames enter the passenger compartment under the dash near your seat. Electrical power and/or vehicle controls may be lost. After calling base and stopping in a safe area off the road, shut the bus off and immediately begin a rear-door evacuation.

Even after you are certain all students are safely off the bus, don't open the hood to try



to extinguish an engine fire. Opening the hood lets oxygen flood in and may cause the fire to flare up. You could be seriously burned. Let the fire department handle any school bus fire. If you've gotten students to safety, you've done your job.

If another vehicle crashes into the rear of your bus while you're stopped, it could catch fire. It could catch fire even though there's little or no damage to your bus. Spilled gasoline from the other vehicle can increase the danger. Begin a front door evacuation.

If the other vehicle is on fire, it may be quicker and safer to move your bus a safe distance away from the burning vehicle before evacuating the students.

**5.4.3 Fire extinguishers.** Fire extinguishers are too small to put out a serious bus fire. As

a bus driver, your priority is always to get the students to safety.

Let fire crews extinguish the fire when they come on the scene.

In incidents where you are certain all students are safely away from danger, you may choose to use a fire extinguisher to try to put out a small fire on your bus. A fire in the bus wastebasket that hasn't spread to other parts of the bus, for instance, is the size a bus extinguisher might be able to handle.

*Fire extinguishers are too small to put out a serious bus fire – your priority is always to get students safely off the bus.*

Learn how to use a fire extinguisher correctly. Never try to fight a fire unless you have a clear way out – don't put yourself in a position where the fire could corner you if it flares up.

Stand several feet back from the fire and pull the extinguisher pin. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire and squeeze the handle. Make gentle sweeping motions as you aim the spray at the base of the fire, not the flames. Continue until the fire is completely out.

**5.4.4 Wire on bus.** School buses can also come in contact with electrical lines. Because buses are higher than most vehicles using local residential roads where you're picking up or dropping off students, your bus is more likely to snag a low-hanging wire that's been knocked down due to high winds or an ice storm.

You need to know what to do if an electrical wire is touching your bus. Assume that the line is charged and dangerous. Even what appears to be “only a phone line” may be crossing a high voltage line a short distance away. Stay inside and keep all passengers inside. Use a cell phone to contact 911.

Never try to remove a wire on your own. You could be killed. This is a job for a utility crew or the fire department.

Evacuate your students only as a last resort – if your bus is on fire, or in some other severe and imminent danger. If you must evacuate, all passengers must jump from the bus so they are never touching both the bus and the ground at the same time.

Don't let Good Samaritans come close to the bus to ask if they can help. They could be electrocuted. If it's raining or the ground is wet, even the area around the bus could be charged and dangerous.

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## **5.5 Evacuations**

### **5.5.1 Make the “evacuation decision.”**

Evacuation is not always the best response to a school bus emergency.

Evacuating children is dangerous in itself. Children could be injured as they exit the bus, or could wander off during an evacuation and be struck by another motorist or hurt in some other way. Evacuation should never be undertaken lightly.

*In an emergency, you are responsible for assessing the situation and deciding what's best for your students.*

There is no absolute rule about when to evacuate students and when to keep them on the bus. Every emergency is different. In an emergency, you are responsible for assessing the situation and deciding what's best for your students. Factors to be taken into account include the nature of the emergency (e.g., possibility of fire or second collision), the nature of the students (e.g., age, numbers, special needs), and the safety of the area they would be evacuated into (e.g., availability of a safe area off the roadway, weather conditions, presence of other hazards near the bus).

You are in charge of the emergency scene until law enforcement, emergency responders, or your supervisor arrives. After deciding what's safest, give clear and decisive instructions to your students to either stay on board or begin an evacuation.

*If you decide to evacuate, it is your responsibility to direct students to the best exit or exits for the situation.*

**5.5.2 Determine the “best exit.”** If you decide to evacuate, it is your responsibility to select and direct students to the best exit or exits for the situation. You must remain calmly and decisively in control of the

students and the situation. Do everything you can to keep your students calm. If they panic, they could easily be hurt.

There are four main factors to consider in deciding which exit(s) to use in an evacuation:

1. Distance of the exit from the immediate danger on board your bus (where is the fire or other danger located?)
2. Whether the path to the exit is clear
3. Whether the exit will still open (emergency doors can jam in a collision)
4. Potential hazards outside the bus (traffic, spilled fuel, broken glass or other debris, downed wire, elevation of the bus over a ditch or drop-off)

Consider directing students to more than one exit to get them out quicker in a severe emergency, but make sure each exit you choose is safe. Don't forget the passenger door. In many situations it might be the best exit for getting students out quickly and safely.

### **5.5.3 Safest way to go out emergency exits.**

You must know how to open and use all emergency exits. Once you become a regular driver on a daily route, it will also be your responsibility to teach your students how to open and use emergency exits.

Students (and adults) can be hurt if they don't know how to go out exits correctly.

Emergency exits are a long way from the ground. Rear door exits are usually nearly four feet off the ground. Students must be taught to "sit and slide" out emergency doors. Jumping out exit doors is very dangerous.

If a side emergency window must be used in an evacuation, students (and adults) should exit "feet first, face down." To reduce the chance of an injury, pad the window sill with a jacket or fire blanket.

No matter which exit is utilized, select reliable, older students as "spotters" to stand outside the bus to assist students. This reduces the chance of an injury.

### **5.5.4 Accounting for students during an evacuation.**

Before students begin to evacuate, tell them exactly where to gather after they get off the bus. This is very important. Without clear guidance, students could wander off and be hurt, or worse.

Younger students should hold hands and "buddy up" as they exit the bus. Ask two reliable older students to go directly to the designated safe area and to gather younger students as they move away from the bus. Regardless of their age, demand that all students stay together in one safe area.

Immediately after the evacuation, make a student count. Compile an accurate student list. Compare it with your route sheet or trip roster to make sure all students are accounted for.

Contact base again by cell phone as soon as all students are off the bus. Update them about the situation so they can update emergency responders heading to the scene.

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## **5.6 Bus Safety Drills**

### **5.6.1 Preparing your students.**

This unit has described how *you* should respond in emergencies. If you were delivering packages, that would be enough, but your student riders need to know how to respond in an emergency too – whether it is knowing how to follow your directions or knowing what to do if you are incapacitated. A daily emphasis on safety and regular safety tips from the Student Management and Bus Stop Safety Units content need to be backed up with well-planned, effective Bus Safety Drills. In many districts, school bus drivers have the

opportunity to provide the bus safety drills to their student passengers.

**5.6.2 Bus Safety Drill requirements.** State Education Department regulations establish the timing and content of bus safety drills. Drills must be given during the first 7 days of school in the fall, between November 1st and December 31<sup>st</sup>, and between March 1<sup>st</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>. They must be held at a safe location on school grounds and can be taught by transportation or teaching personnel.

The drill content must include:

- Practice and instruction in the location, use and operation of the emergency door, fire extinguishers, first-aid equipment and windows as a means of escape in case of fire or accident.
- Instruction in safe boarding and exiting procedures with specific emphasis on when and how to approach, board, disembark, and move away from the bus after disembarking including specific instructions for pupils who have to cross the road.
- An emphasis on handling specific hazards encountered by children during snow, ice, rain, and other inclement weather.
- Instruction in the importance of orderly conduct by all school bus passengers with specific emphasis given to student discipline rules and regulations promulgated by each board of education.
- Instruction on the use of seat safety belts including; proper fastening and release of seat safety belts, acceptable placement of seat safety belts on pupils, times at which the seat safety belts should be fastened and released, and acceptable placement of the seat safety belts when not in use.

The State Education Department has provided separate guidelines for each of the three bus drills as well as for summer school bus drills and activity trip bus drills. Ask your supervisor for a copy of the drill outlines. Each time you conduct a drill, you must have a witness who signs off on the drill so that accurate records can be kept.

Well prepared student riders who have actually exited through emergency exits are going to get out quickly and safely. Students who have set the parking brake, and used the radio are the key to successful response to an emergency when the driver is incapacitated.

**5.6.3 Conducting the Drill.** Drills are usually scheduled in advance through the transportation office. They must take place on school grounds. There are many ways to go over safety rules with children – find an approach that suits your personality.

Regardless of your communication style, strong student control is imperative during drills. Set the right tone by introducing the drill with a touch of formality. Stand and face your students before starting the drill. Briefly remind them of the seriousness of the exercise they are about to participate in. Point out that bus drills are required by state law and that their purpose is to make sure every child knows what to do in an emergency. Let them know that you expect every child to pay attention throughout the drill. Students learn little if they are allowed to horse around during the drill.

Student safety must be paramount during the drill. Horseplay can result in an injury. Make sure your bus is properly secured before starting the drill. Shut the bus off and take the key with you before getting out of your seat.

Do not let students push and shove during the practice evacuation. Most importantly, never

allow students to *jump* out the emergency door. Emphasize this rule before starting the evacuation. Jumping from an emergency door can result in a sprained or broken ankle. It's a long way down. "Sitting and sliding" from the exit is much safer.

Children learn best when they are actively involved. Instead of just lecturing about safety rules, ask "why" questions:

"Why don't we allow eating on the bus?"

"Why do you need to know where every exit is located?"

"Why is it important to stay seated when the bus is moving?"

Maintain student control, but keep the drill as hands-on as possible. Instead of just talking about emergency exits, have students point them all out. Let older students demonstrate how to open each exit. Don't forget to cover the passenger door – it might be the best way out in a real emergency. Opening passenger doors can be tricky if you don't know how. If your bus has a power door, make sure children know where the emergency override control is located.

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## 5.7 Violence in Society

**5.7.1 Sources of violence.** Unit 2 discussed what to do if a fight starts among students or if a student brings a weapon on the bus, but unfortunately violence can also come from outside the seemingly safe confines of our schools and vehicles. School tragedies have become a staple of the news with names like Chowchilla, Columbine, Newtown, Oklahoma City, and Dale County where violence has come to schools and school buses. Some of the perpetrators have been bullied children, some have a hatred of those of different cultures, religion or politics, some have had mental health issues, some seek a ransom and

some are seeking revenge in personal or gang conflicts.

When the crisis is on school property, you might be called in at any time to transport students to pre-planned safe location.

**5.7.2 What can you do?** There are some basic rules that drivers can follow to keep their bus safe.

Ask your trainer if there is a way to hold or "key" your mike open during an incident or if there are radio codes in place to communicate the situation.

Never, ever let an unauthorized person on your bus – being lenient about parents or others stepping into the stepwell or on the bus will leave you unprepared for someone planning harm. Don't open the door if you don't know those in the area.

Whenever a bus has been unattended for any period of time, a complete pre-trip must be performed for vandalism or dangerous items placed on the bus.

If you can drive away from the danger, drive to a safe and public place. Always notify base if you are leaving the bus or doing anything out of your normal routine.

If a perpetrator is on the bus and makes demands, comply with demands. Try and put them at ease as much as possible. Try and persuade them to release some children, but don't release students to a more dangerous situation.

Never act without evaluating your potential effectiveness and your ability to continue to protect your passengers. Ask yourself, "Can I make the situation better?" before acting.

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## 5.8 Unit 5 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s)..

**1. What are 3 ways you can protect the scene if you've had an accident?**

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**2. Identify 3 early warning signs of a possible mechanical problem on your bus.**

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**3. What should you say over the radio if you've had an accident?**

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**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *“School buses cannot catch fire.”*

**5. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Always evacuate students in a school bus emergency.”*

**6. What should you do if an electric wire comes in contact with your bus?**

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**7. What's the safest way to go out a rear emergency door?**

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## UNIT 5 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT 6: DRUGS AND ALCOHOL AND SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

their responsibilities and use alcohol or illegal drugs while transporting children.

Drug and alcohol testing laws for school bus drivers are intended to weed out these few bad apples. Drug and alcohol testing protects the vast majority of school bus drivers - highly safety conscious individuals, like you.

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## Unit 6 Topics

- 6.1 Understanding Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- 6.2 Drug and Alcohol – Personal Awareness
- 6.3 Drug and Alcohol Standards for School Bus Drivers
- 6.4 Federal Drug and Alcohol Testing Program
- 6.5 Unit 6 Review

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## 6.1 Understanding Drug and Alcohol Abuse

**6.1.1 Traffic fatalities caused by impaired motorists.** In spite of decades of public education about the dangers of impaired driving along with intensive enforcement efforts, motorists under the influence of alcohol and drugs continue to kill about 13,000 Americans every year. An American is killed by a drunk driver every thirty minutes. About one-third of all traffic fatalities in New York State are caused by impaired motorists. A BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) of .08 increases the risk of a crash four times. A BAC of .16 increases it 16 times!

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## Introduction

The Core Units of the Pre-Service Course have tried to illustrate just how demanding and important a job driving a school bus is. Children's safety is an enormous responsibility. A single moment of inattention can lead to a tragedy. The stakes are high every time a child gets on a school bus - high stakes for the child, high stakes for the child's parents, and high stakes for the school bus driver.

Unfortunately, every year a few school bus drivers in our state forget the magnitude of

*School bus drivers have a special historic interest in this sad topic – the worst school bus tragedy in modern American history was caused by a drunk driver.*

**6.1.2 School bus drivers' special interest in this topic.** School bus drivers have a special



historic interest in this sad topic. The worst school bus tragedy in modern American history was caused by a drunk driver. The horrific incident occurred in 1988 in Carrollton, Kentucky. A drunken motorist, driving a pick-up truck the wrong way on an interstate highway, struck a bus returning a youth group from an amusement park head-on. The bus caught fire and 24 children and three adults perished.

*American teenagers are bombarded by tales of the allure of being drunk or high – school bus drivers have a unique opportunity to influence young people about the serious responsibility of driving a motor vehicle.*

Susceptible American teenagers are bombarded by tales of the allure of being drunk or high. Celebrities who very publicly

bounce back from various addictions to resume lucrative careers encourage the illusion that drug and alcohol abuse has few lasting consequences. In spite of valiant efforts to combat it by educators and groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Students Against Drunk Driving, extremely dangerous binge drinking has grown steadily in popularity among teenagers in recent years.

School bus drivers have a unique opportunity to influence young people who ride on their buses, through word and example, about the serious responsibility of driving a motor vehicle and how “uncool” it is to drive while impaired by alcohol or drugs.

### **6.1.3 Recognizing Drivers under the Influence.**

As a bus driver, you share the road with all kinds of drivers, including ones under the influence of drugs and alcohol. These drivers pose a serious risk to you and your passengers. When you suspect that another driver may be under the influence, be sure to create more space between your bus and the other vehicle and anticipate continued poor driving choices. Increase your following distance, do not drive alongside the other vehicle and do not try to pass. Contact your office so that they can alert law enforcement of the suspicious vehicle.

The list below shows some of the behaviors to be on the lookout for as you observe other vehicles in your roadway environment. The percentage following the description is the probability that a nighttime driver doing these actions has a BAC over .10. Think about the implications for this and nighttime sport trips.

- Turning too wide (65%)
- Straddling lanes (65%)
- Weaving/wrong lane/out of lane (60%)
- Swerving (55%)

- Speed 10 mph below limit (50%)
- Disobeying traffic signals or signs (40%)
- Forgot to turn on headlights (30%)

**6.1.4 Drug and Alcohol Effects** The effects of drugs and alcohol on driving are certainly NOT “cool.” There are four categories of drugs that include both legal and illegal substances. They are:

- **Depressants.** Depressants include Alcohol, pain pills, barbiturates and sedatives. They slow down the nervous system so that reflexes and coordination are not available for driving tasks. This leads to the driving behaviors identified earlier that demonstrate an inability to monitor and correct the direction of the vehicle.
- **Stimulants.** Stimulants include nicotine, your morning cup of coffee or cola, amphetamines (speed), cocaine, and designed drugs such as Ecstasy. These drugs speed up the nervous system. Heart rate is increased and a false sense of control and alertness is created. Over stimulation can also lead to paranoia and aggressive driving.
- **Narcotics.** Narcotics include codeine, heroin and morphine. These drugs act to shut down the nervous system, leaving the user with little ability to respond.
- **Hallucinogens.** Hallucinogens include marijuana, LSD, mescaline, inhalants and mushrooms. These drugs alter the mood of the user, sometimes leading to panic, and affect the way that he or she perceives and processes information while compromising depth perception and coordination. They also tend to stay in the system longer than alcohol.

Combinations of legal and/or illegal drugs can produce unpredictable outcomes.

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## 6.2 Drug and Alcohol – Personal Awareness

**6.2.1 Personal medications.** Some personal medications should not be taken while driving a school bus. Some can seriously impair your ability to drive a school bus safely.

It is your responsibility to check the warnings on all medications. This includes both prescription and over-the-counter medications. If a medication’s warning label states “do not operate machinery while taking this medication,” or “do not drive while taking this medication,” you cannot drive school bus while under its influence.

Side effects to these medications can include drowsiness, blurred vision, sensitivity to light, muscle aches, nausea and slower reaction times.

Many people take more than one medication at a time. Make sure all your doctors know all of your medications, including vitamins and supplements. The interaction of various drugs is unpredictable. If you feel unusual symptoms when taking several medications at the same time, contact your physician. It could save your life.

Ask your personal physician or the pharmacist where you purchased the medication if it’s safe to drive school bus while taking it. Pharmacists are often better informed about the potential side effects of a particular medicine than the doctor who prescribed it.

*Pharmacists are often better informed about the potential side effects of a particular medicine than the doctor who prescribed it.*

When having your annual physical, honestly inform the physician conducting your annual school bus physical exam of all medications, vitamins and supplements you are taking. During the year, inform your supervisor of any new medications. This protects both you and your employer.

**6.2.2 Impairment in your personal vehicle.**

If you occasionally use alcohol in your personal life, it's safest to limit it to Friday night or Saturday. Even then, don't drink and drive. What you do in your personal life can affect your ability to drive a school bus. A single DWI or DWAI in your personal vehicle may mean disqualification from your job as a school bus driver.

- **Department of Motor Vehicles (NYS DMV) V&T 509 cc (1), b.(ii, iii)** “A person employed as a driver of a school bus...shall be disqualified from operating a school bus as follows: (b) for a period of five years from the date of last conviction specified herein, if that person (ii) has been convicted of any violation of section 1192 of this chapter or an offense committed outside this state which would constitute a violation of section 1192 of this chapter, and the offense was committed while the driver was driving a bus in the employ of a motor carrier or in the furtherance of a commercial enterprise

in interstate, intrastate or foreign commerce; (iii) has been twice convicted of a violation of any subdivision of section 1192 of this chapter or offenses committed outside this state which would constitute a violation of section 1192 of this chapter, committed within the preceding five year period.”

**6.2.3 Workplace Awareness.** It is unfortunate, but we also need to look for signs of alcohol and drug abuse within our workplaces. Our cargo is precious and our duty is clear. If you suspect a coworker or a school bus driver we see on the road is driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, you need to notify your supervisor immediately. Too many times, students have been terrified by the actions of a school bus driver who is drunk, sometimes even jumping out the rear emergency door to get off the bus when the driver refuses to stop driving.

A driver with a substance abuse problem is four times more likely to have an accident at work, three times as likely to be late for work and uses three times more sick time. Signs of abuse include:

- Impaired coordination and motor skills,
- Impaired vision and perceptions,
- Inability to maintain attention,
- Constant fatigue,
- Excessive talkiness, slurred or rambling speech,
- Dilated or red eyes, and
- Gets caught in lies about activities.

## 6.3 Drug and Alcohol Standards for School Bus Drivers

**6.3.1 State and Federal Agencies Laws and Regulations.** It is against the law to drive a school bus under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol. The following laws and regulations are from the three agencies that oversee school transportation in New York State as well as federal regulations:

- **Department of Education (NYS SED) 8 NYCRR 156.3(e)(5)** “Drivers, monitors and attendants shall not smoke at anytime while within a school bus. Drivers, monitors and attendants shall not eat or drink any liquid, or perform any act or conduct themselves in any manner which may impair the safe operation of a school bus while such vehicle is transporting pupils.”
- **Department of Transportation NYS DOT) (17 NYCRR 723.3(e)** “...nor shall any person be required or permitted to drive a motor bus or go on duty or remain on duty when under the influence of any alcoholic beverage or liquor or any drug or noxious gas or vapor, nor shall any person be permitted to drink any alcoholic beverage or liquor, regardless of alcoholic content, or to take or otherwise use any narcotic or hallucinogenic drug or other substance which may impair his judgment or reaction time, while on duty.”
- **Department of Motor Vehicles (V&T 509-1)** 1. No person shall: (a) consume a drug, controlled substance or an intoxicating liquor, regardless of its alcoholic content, or be under the influence of an intoxicating liquor or drug, within six hours before going on duty or operating, or having physical control of a bus, or (b) consume a drug, controlled

substance or an intoxicating liquor, regardless of its alcoholic content while on duty, or operating, or in physical control of a bus, or (c) possess a drug, controlled substance or an intoxicating liquor, regardless of its alcoholic content while on duty, operating or in physical control of a bus. However, this paragraph does not apply to possession of a drug, controlled substance or an intoxicating liquor which is transported as part of a shipment or personal effects of a passenger or to alcoholic beverages which are in sealed containers.

2. No motor carrier shall require or permit a driver to: (a) violate any provision of subdivision one of this section; or (b) be on duty or operate a bus if, by such person's general appearance or by such person's conduct or by other substantiating evidence, such person appears to have consumed a drug, controlled substance or an intoxicating liquor within the preceding six hours.

*You cannot legally drive a school bus if you have been under the influence of alcohol within the past 6 hours or used it in the past 4 hours.*

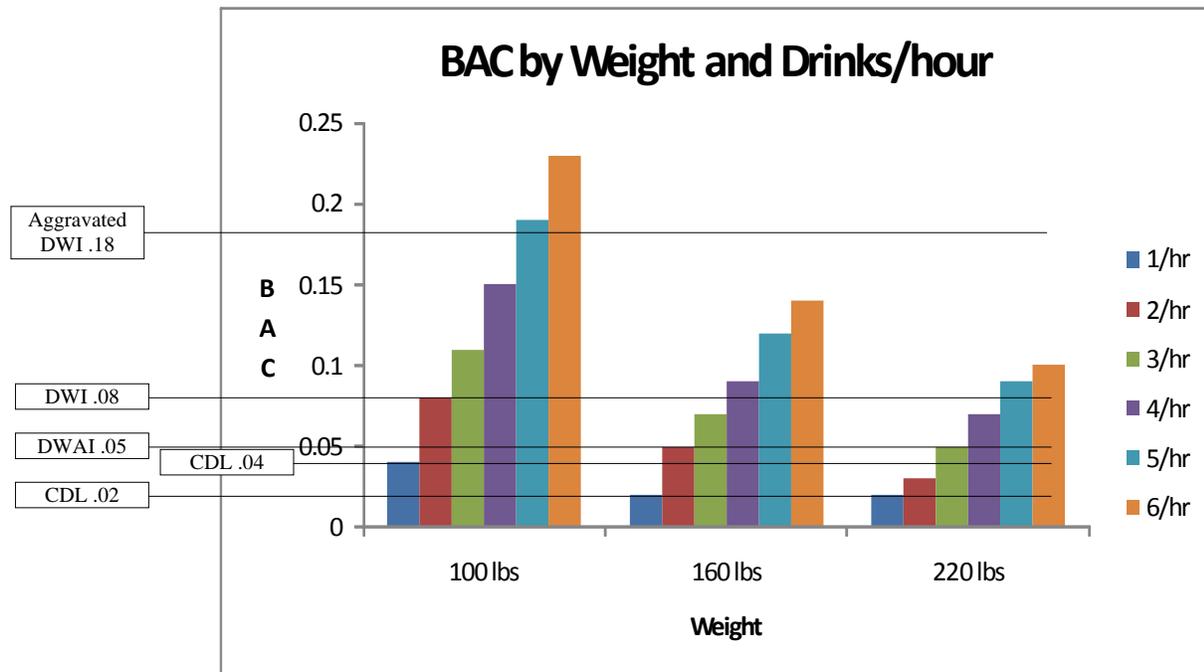
**Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA).** (49 CFR 382.2010 No driver shall report for duty or remain on duty requiring the performance of a safety-sensitive function while having a drug alcohol concentration of .04 or greater. (49 CFR 382.207) “No driver shall perform safety-sensitive functions within four hours

after using alcohol.” (49 CFR 40.23) “(c) As an employer who receives...an alcohol test result of 0.02—0.39, you must temporarily remove the employee involved from performing safety-sensitive functions.”

Penalties for driving a school bus while impaired are severe. Driving a school bus while intoxicated or while ability is impaired by drugs is a Class E felony, carrying a fine of

Having eaten before drinking slows the absorption of alcohol, but it will catch up with you. One drink equals a 12 ounce beer, 5-ounce glass of wine or one shot of hard liquor.

School bus drivers represent the school district “24-7.” Be an ambassador and an advocate for child safety both on and off the job.



\$1000 to \$5000 as well as possible jail time. It will also mean the loss of your CDL for a minimum of one year for the first offense, and for life for a second offense.

**6.3.2 BAC Limits.** Different agencies set different standards for alcohol concentration. NYS DMV establishes Driving While Ability Impaired as a BAC of .5, Driving While Intoxicated at a BAC of .08 and Aggravated DWI as .18. FMCSA establishes a BAC of .04 as a failed alcohol test and a 1-year license revocation and removes a CDL driver from duty at a BAC of .02.

The chart shows the average level of blood alcohol by weight and drinks per hour.

## 6.4 Federal Drug and Alcohol Testing Program

All commercial vehicle operators in the U.S. have been subject to drug and alcohol testing since the federal Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act of 1991. Although some commercial drivers were uneasy about the testing requirements when they were first implemented, school bus drivers have learned that there is nothing to fear and that, in fact, testing can protect you, especially if you’ve been involved in an accident.

(Note: Drivers who transport less than 16 passengers may not be covered by the federal testing program. Employers however may

establish a separate testing pool for such drivers and implement the federal CDL standards through fleet policy.)

**6.4.1 Types of tests.** All school bus drivers are subject to five types of tests:

1. *Pre-employment drug test.* This test should be administered for all new drivers before they engage in any safety-sensitive work. Many operations require pre-employment drug tests before behind-the-wheel training in preparation for the CDL road test commences.

2. *Random drug and alcohol test.* A computerized random draw from the testing pool is conducted throughout the school year. You could be selected at any time. Your name could be picked once in a year, several times a year, or not at all. You will only be notified that your name has been drawn for a random test immediately prior to the test. You *must* make yourself available for the test if you have been selected, and you must go directly to the test site. Do not drink large amounts of water or other fluids before a test. A “diluted” sample could trigger a second test, this time under direct observation.

3. *Reasonable suspicion drug and alcohol test.* If a supervisor suspects you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, he or she has both the right and the responsibility to require you to take a drug and alcohol test. Supervisors receive training about how to detect possible signs of drug and alcohol use, including behavioral changes, odor, speech, or physical evidence. You cannot refuse a reasonable suspicion test. A refusal is considered a positive test and could mean the end of your career as a school bus driver.

4. *Post-accident drug and alcohol test.* Federal law requires a drug and alcohol test for a school bus driver who is involved in an

accident that results in a fatality or is issued a moving violation for an accident that results in an injury that must be treated away from the scene, or for an accident resulting in disabling damage to the bus. Schools and bus companies can require post-accident tests for less severe incidents, and many do. Post-accident testing protects you against a later claim that you were drunk or on drugs. Some bus drivers request a test to protect them, even if one is not required by law or policy

*Return-to-duty drug and alcohol test.*

Consequences for failing a drug or alcohol test depend on school policy. Because school bus drivers are held to such a high standard by the community, in most cases a positive test result means the end of the job. However, in rare cases, a school bus driver who fails a test may eventually return to the job after a period of counseling or treatment. In this case, the driver is subject to periodic “return to duty” testing to ensure he or she stays clean the second time around.

***If a supervisor believes you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, he or she has both the right and the responsibility to require you to take a drug and alcohol test.***

**6.4.2 Testing Protocols** Federal drug and alcohol testing must adhere to strict protocols designed to ensure testing is fair and accurate. Key elements of the federal drug and testing program for school bus drivers include:

- *Implied consent.* Being subject to drug and alcohol testing is a condition of

employment for a school bus driver. Refusal to submit to a test is considered a positive test. Federal law states: “Any person who holds a CDL is considered to have consented to such testing... Consent is implied by driving a commercial motor vehicle.” Refusal to submit to a drug or alcohol test will usually result in the loss of your job as a school bus driver.

- *Testing pool.* Every school bus carrier (public school district or private bus company) must establish and maintain a pool of all currently-employed bus drivers and other transportation employees in safety sensitive positions, such as mechanics. (Drug and alcohol testing is not required for bus attendants or monitors, although a school can require it as local policy. If so, a separate testing pool must be created for attendants.) As new drivers are hired, they are placed in this pool, and as existing drivers leave employment, they are dropped. The purpose of the pool concept is to ensure that all drivers are equally likely to be tested.
- *Who conducts the tests?* Drug and alcohol tests may be conducted by an employee of the school district or bus company, or by a third-party vendor which specializes in drug and alcohol testing. The person actually administering the test does not have to be a doctor or nurse, but the lab analysis of the sample must be performed at a Department of Health and Human Services-certified laboratory. A qualified Medical Review Officer (MRO) must oversee technical aspects of the testing program.

## *As a protection, urine samples are broken into “split specimens.”*

- *Driver protections.* Strict collection and chain of custody procedures ensure that the urine specimen’s security, identification, and integrity are not compromised. As a further protection, urine samples are broken into “split specimens.” Each urine specimen is subdivided into two bottles, labeled as a primary and a split specimen. Both bottles are sent to the lab but only the primary specimen is opened and used for the urinalysis. The split specimen bottle remains sealed and stored at the laboratory. If the primary specimen indicates the presence of illegal substances, the driver has 72 hours to request the second “split specimen” be sent to *another* DHHS-certified laboratory for analysis. This procedure essentially provides the driver with an opportunity for a “second opinion”.
- *Substances tested for.* Breath tests are analyzed for alcohol. Urine specimens are analyzed for the five following drugs: marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, opiates (including heroin), and phencyclidine (PCP).
- *How are the tests administered?* Tests for illegal drugs are usually conducted by taking a urine sample. Alcohol tests are conducted with a standard “breathalyzer” unit, just as a police officer would do for a non-commercial driver.
- *When are tests administered?* You may be tested whenever you are on duty. This includes when you are driving a bus, pre-

or post-inspecting a bus, fueling or cleaning a bus, completing paperwork, or still responsible for the bus during a break. You are not required to be notified of a test ahead of time.

- *Privacy.* Urine samples are typically given in a restroom with the door closed, just as at your doctor's office. Unless there are serious complications, the employee being tested has complete privacy. Breathalyzer tests may be conducted in an office or room away from other employees.
- *Confidentiality.* Test results are considered confidential and cannot be shared with anyone other than the employer and the individual being tested
- *Cheating.* Many substance abusers become experts at avoiding detection. In the early years of drug and alcohol testing, every conceivable cheating method was tried. No doubt some still try to game the system, but testing procedures have become increasingly watertight. Magic

*Every conceivable method has been tried to cheat the system, but testing procedures have become increasingly watertight – magic potions bought over the internet do not hide drug use.*

potions bought over the internet do not hide drug use. One of the most common ways a few individuals continue to try to cheat a drug test is by drinking large amounts of liquids beforehand. However, a diluted urine sample does not mean the person being tested passed the test. A

diluted test will only trigger another test – this time, under direct observation. (Don't risk providing an innocently diluted sample – avoid drinking large amounts of coffee or other liquids before a test.)

- *Shy bladder.* Even given a private environment to produce a sample, some individuals become so anxious that they can't urinate. Testing protocols have been adjusted in recent years to accommodate individuals who legitimately and innocently can't produce a sample on demand. Additional time and added fluids are possibilities, depending on the circumstances.

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## 6.5 Unit 6 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. How often are Americans killed by drunk drivers?**

- a. *Once a week.*
- b. *Once a day.*
- c. *Once an hour.*
- d. *Once every thirty minutes.*

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The worst school bus tragedy in modern American history was caused by a drunk driver.”*

**3. Which is NOT a behavior of drunk drivers?**

- a. *Turning too wide*
- b. *Straddling lanes*
- c. *Stopping for an ambulance*
- d. *Swerving*

**4. Driving a school bus while intoxicated will result in which consequences?**

- a. *Class E Felony.*
- b. *\$1000 - \$5000 fine and possible jail time.*
- c. *Loss of your CDL for at least a year.*
- d. *All the above.*

**5. T or F?** *“A school bus drivers should report another driver acting drunk”*

**6. If a urine test is diluted, what kind of test is performed next?\***

**7. What are the four categories of drugs?**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_

**7. If a urine specimen is diluted by large amounts of water or other liquid, what type of urine test will be conducted next?**

**8. What happens if you have a .02 BAC?**

**9. What happens if you have a .04 BAC?**

**10. T or F?** *“If you are selected once for a random test, you can’t be picked again that school year”*

**11. T or F?** *“Your supervisor can require you to take a ‘reasonable suspicion’ drug or alcohol test”*

**12. T or F?** *“If my doctor prescribed a medication, it’s safe for me to take it while driving bus”*

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## UNIT 6 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT 7: PERSONAL SAFETY

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## Unit 7 Topics

- 7.1 Handling the Stress of the Job
- 7.2 Safety in the Bus Yard
- 7.3 Fatigue and the Ability to Drive a School Bus Safely
- 7.4 Infection Protections
- 7.5 Right to Know
- 7.6 Reporting Hazards
- 7.7 Unit 7 Review

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## Introduction

Worrying about children’s safety day after day can be draining. Even under normal conditions, driving a large vehicle through a challenging traffic environment while managing children’s behavior is not a job for the faint of heart. Rising before dawn every day for an early morning run, driving late into the evening on a sports trip, or contending with “white knuckle” road conditions in winter weather, can take a physical and mental toll on any bus driver.

Anyone who’s done it knows driving a school bus can be a stressful profession. This Unit will prepare you for the unique physical,

mental, and emotional challenges of your important job.

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## 7.1 Handling the Stress of the Job

**7.1.1 Ignoring stress does not make it disappear.** Learning how to handle stress is one secret to a successful career as a school bus driver.

Common “school bus stressors” include:

- Student behavior problems
- Irresponsible motorists
- Driving in difficult weather conditions
- Worrying about making a mistake that could result in the injury of a child
- Cliques, low morale among co-workers

Life can be filled with anxiety even when your job is going well. Family problems, marital tension, financial struggles, health worries, or loneliness can darken the sunniest disposition. Anxieties about the broader world – pollution, war, poverty, prejudice, crime, etc. – are not in short supply. We live in stressful times.

*Focusing on safety and interacting with children can be difficult when you’re “stressed out,” grumpy, or depressed.*

Ignoring stress does not make it go away. Pent-up frustration over lingering workplace or personal problems can lead to a generalized anger or lethargy. Focusing on safety and

interacting with children can be difficult when you're "stressed out," grumpy, or depressed.

**7.1.2 You are important.** New York State school districts and contractors value the mental health of their bus drivers. Student safety depends on drivers with the positive outlook and inner resources to stay patient with children and focused and alert while driving – hour after hour, day after day.

Tips for maintaining your "safety energy" in spite of the stresses of the job include:

- *Attend to your physical being.* You might not be a professional athlete or movie star, but simple things like eating healthier, starting a realistic exercise program to drop a couple of pounds, even buying a new outfit can all have a surprisingly positive impact on your energy and self-esteem.

***Stress makes your body tense, but a tense posture also ratchets up your stress level. Excessively nervous, "clenched fist driving" is very tiring.***

- *Be mindful of your driving posture.* Stress makes your body tense; but a tense posture can also ratchet up your stress level. Of course it's important to stay alert, but excessively nervous, "clenched fist driving" is very tiring. Teach yourself to let your body relax just a bit when the driving situation allows it – for instance, when stopped at a red light, or on a straightaway with good visibility ahead. Consciously loosen your grip on the



steering wheel just enough to relax your muscles but still maintain control. Instead of leaning rigidly forward in your seat all the time, try to sit upright in a posture of "relaxed concentration." Move a little in the seat from time to time to stretch your back, shoulder, and neck muscles. When waiting at school, get out of your seat and stand up for a few minutes.

- *Walk.* Walking is one of the best ways to reduce physical and mental stress. Even a brief stroll can make a surprising difference in your outlook. Find a co-worker who will walk with you between runs a couple of days a week. On long trips, shut off and secure the bus and take a short walk when students aren't on board.
- *Have a hobby.* Obsessing over job worries at home is a red flag: you need to think about something else. A hobby is one of the surest ways to periodically recharge your batteries. The list of possible hobbies is virtually endless: gardening, reading, sewing, crafting, photography, cooking, skating, skiing, fishing, hunting, camping, carpentry, music, canoeing, bowling, etc. If your worries have sapped your energy, consider trying out a new hobby – something you have always wanted to do but never got around to. An adult education class at BOCES or a community

college can help you learn the basics to get you started.

**7.1.3 Reach out.** Loneliness amplifies job or personal stress. Being around other people is difficult when you're worried or depressed, but isolation usually only deepens your depression. When you feel overwhelmed, "talking it out" with someone you trust is one of the best ways to get out of the rut. Just being able to "vent" is helpful, but along with listening to you, sometimes a friend can gently offer a different perspective on your problems. Suddenly your stressors seem less insurmountable.

Being around other people can help put your worries in perspective, but they have to be the right people. Most workplaces have a few individuals who seem to enjoy *increasing* the stress level of everyone else. Don't get swept

*Being around other people can help put your worries in perspective, but they have to be the right people – stay away from rumor-spreaders and complainers.*

up in malicious gossip. Stay away from rumor-spreaders and complainers. Negative attitudes about co-workers, the supervisor or mechanic, the training program, or children can spread easily, and negative employees like to recruit others into their fold.

Helping others is also a great way to help yourself see things a little differently. As you settle in to your new job, look for ways to support co-workers going through hard times.

Volunteer for your department's Sunshine Committee. Or, ask your supervisor or SBDI about helping out on a department safety project, such as a "Drivers in the Classroom" student training program or a bus roadeo. If your operation has a Safety Committee, join it.

*Working with other positive employees to better serve children makes going to work every morning a lot more fun.*

One of the best ways to handle school bus stress is to get to know other successful school bus drivers and find out what works for them. Working with other positive employees to better serve children makes going to work every morning a lot more fun.

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## **7.2 Safety in the Bus Yard**

**7.2.1 Bus yards can be dangerous.** Learn the physical layout, parking arrangements, and traffic patterns of your bus yard or parking bay. Ask your supervisor or a mechanic to walk through your yard with you.

Every bus yard is laid out differently, but all are potentially dangerous. Many bus accidents occur in bus yards and bus parking lots. Most are "fender-benders" between two buses, but tragedies have also occurred in bus yards. Bus drivers, attendants, trainers, and mechanics have all been run over by buses in their own bus yards in our state. Bus yard dangers must be taken seriously by all transportation employees.

Common hazards in bus yards include:

- Buses and other vehicles entering and leaving the yard – often, several at once
  - Buses backing up as they leave or return to their parking spaces – several back-up beepers and horns may be sounding at once
  - Drivers and attendants walking between buses, personal vehicles, and the office
  - Many bus yards and parking bays are not big enough to permit a smooth traffic flow or comfortable parking pattern
  - Lighting in certain areas of the yard may be less than ideal
  - Drivers walking around and between buses as they do their pre-trip inspections
  - Mechanics working on or under buses right in the yard, or moving (driving, towing, or pushing) buses between the yard and the maintenance bays
  - Fueling stations always pose a potential risk – thoughtless employees may light a cigarette or talk on a cell phone while fueling, creating a danger of explosion or fire
  - Buses may line up to fuel at certain times of the day – traffic patterns around the fuel station may be unpredictable
  - Some bus yards also serve as transfer points for out-of-district bus runs, and in some school districts drivers are allowed to bring their own children with them on their own runs – children may be present in the yard at various times of the day
  - Trip and fall hazards are common in many bus yards – block heater plug-in cords, fuel hoses, potholes, patches of snow and ice, etc.
  - Fuel and delivery trucks may be coming into the yard unexpectedly
  - In winter weather, snow plows may be clearing the lot at any time
  - Some drivers may leave their buses idling unnecessarily for long periods in the yard, forcing co-workers to breathe polluted air
- 7.2.2 Key mistakes to avoid.** Although every bus yard or parking bay is laid out differently, the following mistakes are always dangerous.
- Do not walk directly behind parked buses – even when you’re “certain” no one is in them. It can be difficult to detect the sound of an engine running in a crowded bus yard. A bus you thought was parked and empty could suddenly start to back up. You could be taken by surprise and run over. It has happened in our state.
- Do not walk directly behind parked buses – even when you’re “certain” no one is in them.***
- Do not walk to or from your bus while doing something else. Looking over a route sheet, reading a note, or talking or texting on your cell phone, are very dangerous while walking through a bus yard.
  - Do not move your bus from its parking slot while distracted in any way. For instance, don’t try to contact base by radio, adjust the driver seat, or fasten your seat belt while backing out of your parking space. Backing in the bus yard requires the highest degree of caution. It’s not a time for multitasking.

- Avoid horseplay in the bus lot or parking bays. It's no place for practical jokes. Snowball or squirt gun fights might break the tension of a long workday, but they're very dangerous in a bus yard. Hopping into the stepwell of a friend's bus to ride across the lot to visit other drivers could result in a tragedy – it has happened.
- If children are permitted on the bus yard premises for any reason, they must be accompanied by a parent or other adult and closely supervised at all times. Children have been run over in bus yards.

### **7.2.3 Seven key bus yard safety procedures.**

Seven simple measures can protect you from injury in the bus yard. Strictly follow these safety procedures throughout your career as a school bus driver:

1. *Stay alert* whenever you're in the bus yard or parking bays – in a vehicle, or while walking through the yard
2. *Drive slowly at all times* in the yard and while entering or leaving the yard
3. *Stay visible in low-light conditions* – wear light-colored clothing or a reflective vest; carry a flashlight
4. *Wear safe footwear* to minimize slips and falls – good tread, full heel, protected toes
5. *Alert others before backing* your bus in the yard – honk three times and pause before beginning to back up (some operations also require drivers to alert other buses by radio before backing)
6. *Secure your bus* whenever you park it in the yard – on an air brake equipped bus, pump down air until the spring brake engages; on a hydraulic brake equipped bus, engage the parking brake

7. *Avoid stopping your bus behind parked buses* – a bus could back into you; whenever possible, conduct your 50' brake check safely away from other buses.

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## **7.3 Fatigue and the Ability to Drive a School Bus Safely**

### **7.3.1 The high cost of drowsy drivers on America's roads.**

A drowsy driver is as impaired and as dangerous as a drunk driver. Sleepy motorists cause as many traffic accidents and fatalities nationally as motorists under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The need for sleep is a powerful human drive. Old-fashioned techniques for combating drowsiness while driving – drinking large amounts of coffee, opening the window, listening to music, talking with someone else, or even talking to yourself – at best have a temporary effect. At some point, fatigue will overcome the most dogged efforts to stay alert.

The effects of mental and physical fatigue on driving ability mimic the effects of alcohol impairment in many ways. Reduced concentration, exaggerated reactions to other vehicles or hazards, tunnel vision, flattened depth perception, poor judgment, and rationalization of risk are typical of both fatigue and alcohol impairment.

In certain ways, fatigue is even more lethal than impairment by alcohol or drugs. Everyone knows drunk driving is risky. It's easier to deny how dangerous it is to drive while sleepy.

### **7.3.2 99% alert is not good enough.**

Driving a school bus is far too demanding to attempt with anything less than complete alertness. The stakes are too high. A reduced ability to concentrate on critical driving tasks due to

fatigue – failing to see a child near your bus, or pulling out in front of another vehicle in an intersection – could result in a tragedy that can never be undone.

*Driving a school bus is far too demanding to attempt with anything less than complete alertness.*

Fatigue is sometimes thought of as primarily a problem for over-the-road commercial vehicle operators such as truckers or charter bus drivers. However, school bus drivers are also vulnerable to spells of inattention caused by fatigue. For instance, school bus drivers often wake up before dawn for their early morning runs. When you've already been awake for ten hours, staying alert for an afternoon run can be a challenge.

School bus drivers often travel the same roads day after day. "Route hypnosis" is the mental state of letting one's mind wander while driving a familiar route. It's an extremely dangerous condition for a school bus driver. One moment of inattention at a bus stop can result in a tragedy.

Fatigue makes it harder to maintain mental focus while driving. Staying fully alert can be especially difficult in the afternoon, when many people's biological rhythms cry out for a nap.

Many adults fail to get enough sleep. Many work a second job in the evening to help make ends meet. Others have family responsibilities that keep them up late, while some people just enjoy staying up into the wee hours, even on work nights.

Many adults suffer from medical conditions, such as sleep apnea, that prevent them from getting the rest they need. Personal worries and depression can also make it hard to fall asleep.

*"Route hypnosis" means letting your mind wander while driving a familiar route – it's an extremely dangerous condition for a school bus driver.*

Both the mind and the body need adequate rest. Long-term sleep deprivation has a cumulative effect on the ability to stay alert through the day. As fatigue wears us down, we become more susceptible to illness, and may also find it harder to control our emotions.

Attempting to drive a school bus without adequate rest is dangerous. Mental alertness, physical stamina, and emotional stability are all necessary to transport children safely.

**7.3.3. Legal requirements.** In New York State, it is against the law to transport students while impaired by fatigue or illness. Reliability and good attendance are important job requirements for a school bus driver, but if you are so sick or so tired that you can't concentrate on driving, you should stay home that day.

School bus drivers are subject to three specific restrictions regarding driving hours:

1. It is against the law to drive a school bus for more than ten hours in one day.

2. It is against the law to be “on duty” – that is, responsible for your bus, even while it’s parked at the destination – for more than fifteen hours in one day.

3. It is against the law to drive a school bus if you haven’t had at least eight hours of rest since the previous day’s tour of duty. For instance, if you return from a sports trip at 11:00 p.m., you cannot resume driving your bus until at least 7:00 a.m. the next day.

These restrictions are intended to protect students, but they also protect you. Should you be involved in an accident, and it subsequently is determined that you violated one or more of the three restrictions outlined above, you could be subject to legal sanctions or even personal liability.

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## 7.4 Infection Protections

**7.4.1 Exposure to illness.** Anyone working around children every day, as school bus drivers do, is routinely exposed to a wide variety of infectious diseases. A few simple procedures can protect you from catching infectious diseases from students. It is your responsibility to consistently follow these procedures:

- Wash your hands often and well. This simple procedure is the single most important way to protect yourself from catching children’s illnesses. You should wash your hands as soon as you can at the conclusion of every run. Wash thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- Practice disease control by sneezing or coughing into the crook of your arm instead of your hands. Teach children to do the same. Hands are the primary medium for transmitting germs. Keep

your hands away from your face – resist the impulse to rub your eyes with your hands, for instance.

**7.4.2 Clean-up procedures.** Learn the contents of the body spill clean-up kit on your bus, and how to use each item in it. Make sure your kit is fully stocked – check the contents periodically. This is especially important when driving a spare bus – perhaps the previous driver did not restock the kit after using it. Clean-up kits are secured in different locations on different buses. Learn where it is on your bus. Kits can be surprisingly tricky to remove from the mount and open – make sure you know how.

There are many different types of clean-up kits. All contain protective gloves. Most include a small amount of stabilizing granules, similar to kitty litter, to sprinkle over the exposed surfaces. (Some school bus drivers carry an additional amount of clean-up powder with them, “just in case.”) A readily identifiable plastic containment bag and small broom are usually included in the kit. Learn your operation’s procedure for how to dispose of the containment bag.

If a child is feeling nauseous on your bus, place a clean plastic trash container with a plastic bag liner nearby. Most children would prefer to vomit into a container than all over the seat or floor – it’s less embarrassing. It also makes it easier to clean up.

Practice universal precautions at all times. There’s no way to know which child has an infectious disease – Assume every child does! Wear protective gloves whenever you are in the presence of a child’s bodily fluids of any kind – blood, urine, feces, vomit, saliva. Protective gloves should be included in the body spill clean-up kit on your bus. Make

sure you have several pairs. Some school bus drivers carry extra protective gloves.

Use a non-toxic disinfectant to wipe down seat surfaces that have been exposed to bodily fluids. (Aerosol spray cans or flammable materials cannot be carried on a school bus – check with your supervisor or Head Mechanic to find out what your operation uses.) Many bus drivers regularly disinfect all surfaces routinely exposed to children’s physical contact, such as handrails and seat backs.

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## 7.5 Right to Know

**7.5.1 You have a right to understand the hazards in your workplace.** Federal and state laws require employees to be informed of potential hazards in their workplaces. The main goal of these occupational safety laws is to protect workers by reducing the frequency and severity of on-the-job injuries and fatalities.

**7.5.2 Hazardous materials in a bus garage.** Hazardous materials can be broken into two general categories:

1. *Health hazards* – poisons, corrosives, irritants, carcinogens, etc. An enormous variety of hazardous materials are in use in most workplaces, including bus garages. Acutely hazardous materials may require only a single exposure to cause significant health damage; chronically hazardous materials require long-term exposure. Hazardous material poisoning can take place through three exposure routes: inhalation, ingestion, or by direct contact with the skin.
2. *Physical hazards* – materials that pose a risk of fire or explosion.

School bus drivers are not routinely exposed to hazardous materials. However, hazardous materials are typically present in at least three places in a typical school bus operation:

1. *Shop area* – corrosives (acids and solvents), irritants (paints), poisons (brake fluids, antifreeze), and flammable and explosive materials (oxygen tanks, fuel cans) are all used or stored in the bus maintenance bays. Bus drivers should not “hang out” in the shop area. Along with hazardous materials, potentially dangerous equipment (lifts, pits, jacks, power tools, welders, etc.) is routinely in use in the shop area. Mechanics know how to protect themselves when working around hazardous materials and machinery. Untrained individuals could be hurt.
2. *Fueling station* – a high risk of explosion and fire always exists at and near a fueling station. Fueling any vehicle while it’s running, fueling a school bus while passengers are on board, and smoking at or near a fuel station are all extremely unsafe and against the law. Extreme caution should be exercised at all times at the fueling station. Cell phones should be turned off while fueling any vehicle. Splashed fuel can cause skin irritation or serious eye damage; stay alert and stand back and to the side while fueling your bus. Immediately report any spills.
3. *On the bus* – hazardous or flammable materials cannot be carried on a school bus. Aerosol sprays and glass containers are not permitted. Alcohol-based disinfectants and cleaners may be allowed, but only in small amounts and only when stored in a secure container. Check with your supervisor or mechanic before bringing any cleaning materials onto your bus. (Some cleaning products and disinfectants leave a residue that could trigger an allergic reaction in children.) Of course, every motor vehicle, school buses

included, contains toxic and flammable materials. In a collision or rollover, fuel, battery acid, or antifreeze could spill or leak, creating the danger of fire and explosion or exposure to hazardous materials.

### 7.5.3 Hazardous material labeling.

Hazardous materials must be labeled. Look for warning labels and learn what they mean.

The most common hazardous material warning label is diamond shaped. This “hazard diamond” is usually subdivided into four smaller diamonds, each representing a specific type of hazard.

Severity for each type of hazard is rated from “0” (low) to “4” (high).

Red (top diamond) – indicates flammability.

- Red “0” = will not burn (e.g., water)
- Red “1” = ignites if preheated (e.g., corn oil)
- Red “2” = “ignites if heated (e.g., diesel fuel)
- Red “3” = ignites at most temperatures (e.g., gasoline)
- Red “4” = extremely flammable. (e.g., propane)

Yellow (right diamond) – indicates reactivity (the potential for a violent chemical detonation).

- Yellow “0” = stable, even in fire conditions, and will not react with water (e.g., liquid nitrogen)
- Yellow “1” = unstable if heated (e.g., phosphorous)
- Yellow “2” = violent chemical reaction when heated or wet (e.g., calcium metal)



- Yellow “3” = shock or heat may detonate. (e.g., flourine gas)
- Yellow “4” = may detonate (e.g., TNT)

Blue (left diamond) – indicates a health hazard.

- Blue “0” = no health hazard (e.g., peanut oil)
- Blue “1” = slightly hazardous, may cause slight irritation (e.g., turpentine)
- Blue “2” = hazardous, upon continued or intense exposure could cause incapacitation or lasting injury (e.g., ammonia gas)
- Blue “3” = extreme danger, short exposure could cause temporary or lasting injury (e.g., chlorine gas)
- Blue “4” = deadly, short exposure could cause death (e.g., hydrogen cyanide)

White (bottom) – indicates a special hazard.

- “OXY” = an oxidizer, can greatly increase rate of combustion of other materials (e.g., ammonium nitrate fertilizer, as used in terrorist bombs)
- “W” = unusual reactivity with water – do not use around water; if burning do not attempt to extinguish it with water (e.g., magnesium)
- ACID = an acid
- ALK = an alkaline, also called a base
- COR = a corrosive, could be either an acid or an alkaline

Additional warning symbols may be included outside the hazard diamond:

Poison

(Skull and crossbones)



Radioactive

Biohazard.



#### **7.5.4 Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).**

Manufacturers of hazardous materials must provide end users with information about the product, including the precise nature of the hazard, steps that must be taken to prevent an injury, and what to do if an exposure occurs. This information is summarized on a “material data safety sheet” or MSDS. Employers must maintain a MSDS file for all hazardous materials used or stored on site. The file must be accessible to all employees. Ask your supervisor where the MSDS file is maintained in your bus garage.

unsafe condition must be corrected before continuing to transport children. In many cases you will be provided with a spare bus to finish the route.

You cannot be required to drive an unsafe bus. It is in no one’s best interest to transport children in a school bus that has a mechanical defect or other safety problem. Nor can you be penalized by an employer for reporting a legitimate safety concern. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (Subpart 380) protect “whistleblowers” from employer retaliation.

Few if any school transportation supervisors or terminal managers in our state would refuse to listen to a legitimate safety concern from one of their bus drivers. No one wants a child to be hurt on their watch.

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## **7.6 Reporting Hazards**

Employees have the right to a safe workplace. As a school bus driver, this means a safe bus. School districts and bus companies have a responsibility to provide safe vehicles to transport children to and from school.

The New York State Department of Transportation inspects each school bus twice a year. Our state’s school bus safety inspection procedure is the strictest in the nation, and our safety record reflects it. As a school bus driver, your role in maintaining this high standard is to conduct a careful pre-trip inspection on every bus you drive every day. If you discover a mechanical problem during the pre-trip, it must be corrected prior to transporting students. If a mechanical problem develops during the route, you must report it at once, by radio – do not wait until you get back to base after your route. Any

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## 7.7 Unit 7 Review

Write down or circle the correct answer(s).

**1. TRUE or FALSE?** *“One of the best ways to handle school bus stress is to get to know other successful school bus drivers and find out what works for them.”*

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Few bus accidents occur in bus yards.”*

**3. List at least five of the seven key bus yard safety procedures:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The effects of fatigue on driving mimic the effects of alcohol.”*

**5. TRUE or FALSE?** *“If you return from a sports trip at 11 p.m., you can legally drive bus at 6 a.m. the next morning.”*

**6. Which statement(s) below are true?**

- a. *To prevent the spread of disease, leave the driver’s window open so fresh air replaces air filled with germs.*
- b. *Sick children seldom ride school buses.*
- c. *The best way to protect yourself from disease is frequent hand washing.*
- d. *All statements are true.*

**7. What does “universal precautions” mean?**

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**8. Which statement(s) below are true?**

- a. *It’s OK to take your break in the mechanic’s work area.*
- b. *There is a high risk of fire or explosion at fueling stations - turn off your cell phone.*
- c. *Aerosol spray cleaners are permitted on school buses.*
- d. *All statements are true.*

**9. What does a “Blue 3” rating in the “Hazard Diamond” indicate?**

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**10. What does a “Red 3” rating in the “Hazard Diamond” indicate?**

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**11. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Your employer could penalize you for reporting a safety concern.”*

**12. TRUE or FALSE?** *“It’s in no one’s interest to transport children in a bus with a mechanical defect or other safety problem.”*

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## UNIT 7 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT 8: DRIVING BUS SAFELY IN YOUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

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## Unit 8 Topics

- 8.1 Urban, Suburban, and Rural Driving Challenges
- 8.2 Animals
- 8.3 Highway Driving
- 8.4 Hills
- 8.5 Railroad Crossings
- 8.6 Hazardous Intersections
- 8.7 Know Your Turnarounds
- 8.8 Local Weather Awareness
- 8.9 Unit 8 Review

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## Introduction

While many school bus safety procedures apply in all situations, local driving environments vary remarkably across New York State. Driving a school bus in midtown Manhattan and driving a school bus on a dirt road in the Adirondacks both require staying constantly alert for potential hazards – but the hazards most likely to be encountered in each

setting are far from identical. Adjusting your driving for local road, traffic, and weather conditions is one sign of a professional driver. An awareness of unusually hazardous intersections and roadways in your area is one of the best ways to avoid an accident.

*Local driving environments vary remarkably across New York State.*

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## 8.1 Urban, Suburban, and Rural Driving Challenges

**8.1.1 Urban challenges.** Driving a school bus in an urban environment can be daunting. Intense traffic, disdain for traffic laws, and constricted roadways are only some of the most common challenges in cities.

Urban school bus drivers share the streets with types of roadway users seldom encountered in other driving environments. Taxi drivers, gypsy cab drivers, and transit bus drivers have earned a reputation for highly aggressive driving. Bike messengers dart in and out of traffic. Delivery trucks, garbage trucks, and double-parked vehicles block traffic, and rushing, distracted pedestrians are everywhere. Our largest cities are often flooded with international visitors who may lack full comprehension of our rules of the road.

Bus stops in big cities often have hazards seldom seen outside of urban areas. Dozens of children may be assigned to a single bus stop at large apartment complexes. Multilane and one-way streets, combined with heavy traffic and the frenetic pace of urban life, make it less

likely that all motorists will stop for a stopped school bus.

**8.1.2 Suburban challenges.** Suburban areas near cities have their own driving characteristics. Commuter traffic congestion often overlaps with morning bus routes, as well as late bus runs in the afternoon. Shopping centers and malls create traffic bottlenecks that frustrate motorists and contribute to risk-taking behaviors. Red light runners are common at busy suburban intersections.

*Commuter traffic congestion in suburban areas often overlaps with morning bus routes.*

Bus stops in suburban areas often have distinct hazards. Wide shoulders on newer roadways lend themselves to right-side passers. Suburban housing developments often include short spur roads. Parked cars or snowbanks in cul-de-sacs can make turning around difficult and require backing. Children may be nearby.

**8.1.3 Rural challenges.** In spite of low traffic density, rural roads can be dangerous. A false sense of security at isolated rural intersections contributes to rolling stops, or no stops, at stop signs. Many severe motor vehicle accidents take place at rural intersections.

Crossing a rural intersection without carefully checking for a vehicle speeding toward you with no intention of stopping on the intersecting roadway is a recipe for disaster. View obstructions on school buses (corner pillars and posts, mirrors, etc.) make it easy to



miss vehicles approaching from the side. No matter how isolated, always look carefully left, right, and left again, and “rock before rolling” forward into an intersection. Never become complacent or let yourself be in a hurry at rural intersections.

Visibility is severely limited on many rural roads. Hills and winding roads make it difficult to know what’s ahead. Slow down every time you approach the crest of a hill or a curve. In case an approaching vehicle is over the center line, move to the right of the driving lane as you approach any area of limited visibility.

Dirt roads still exist in some rural districts. “Washboarding” – dried gullies across a dirt road caused by earlier rains – can make it difficult to control a bus at normal road speeds. Bumping on an uneven road could knock a child from the seat. A dirt road in very poor condition might even damage suspension or steering components. Slow down.

Small roads without year-round residences may be considered seasonal by the local highway department. This means they will not be plowed in winter weather. Do not attempt to use seasonal roads after the posted closing date. Even if the road is clear of snow that day, road maintenance will have stopped.

Tree limbs, gullies, or a seasonal gate further up the road could block your travel.

Even on paved roads, weather changes cause damage. “Spring heave” caused by alternating freezes and thaws can buckle or crack pavement, especially around culverts and bridges. Until they are repaired in the spring, potholes torn up by snowplows can be deep enough to throw your bus out of the driving lane or to damage the bus. Slow down.

Rural roads are filled with unusual hazards. Slow moving, oversized farm vehicles are common in most rural areas of our state during the growing season. Even horse-drawn buggies and farm equipment are present in some regions.

***Deep ditches line many rural roads - taking your attention off the forward motion of your bus, even for a moment, can be lethal.***

In the winter, farm vehicles are replaced by equally large snow plows. You may have to pull your bus onto the shoulder to let an approaching snow plow pass. Snow-covered shoulders are dangerous. It’s difficult to know where the shoulder drops off.

Rural roads are often very narrow, with narrow shoulders or no shoulders at all. Gravel and dirt roadsides can become dangerously soft in wet weather. Deep ditches line many rural roads. Taking your attention off the forward motion of your bus, even for a moment, can be lethal. Swerving just slightly off the pavement and dropping a wheel off the

shoulder can result in a sudden rollover. It’s happened many times in our state.

Collisions or other types of bus emergencies occurring in rural areas can be especially challenging because of the distance from emergency services. In outlying areas, it may take rural ambulance services 30 minutes or more to get to your bus. Be mentally prepared for such a delay. Stay calm and continually reassure your students.

In hilly rural areas, you may be out of radio or cell phone range altogether at some points on your route. There may be occasions when it’s best to drive back into radio or cell phone range so you can report an incident or problem. Of course, if your bus is damaged this is not an option. Talk over this scenario ahead of time with your supervisor; it’s against the law to leave the scene of an accident. Never move your bus from the scene of an accident unless immediate student safety urgently requires it.

In rural areas, bus stops are often individual house stops. Homes are seldom close enough together to create group stops for several children at once. Children should be waiting outside five minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. If you have to wait a few minutes at several stops on a morning run, your bus will be late for school. Most children are late on occasion, but repeated infractions constitute a serious safety problem and should be reported to your supervisor or a school administrator. Children who are late and afraid of missing school might do anything to catch the bus as they see it pulling away. Children have been struck and killed in such scenarios.

On rural loop routes, where a bus travels the same road out and back in to school, some students may try catch it on the return trip.

Teenagers are especially tempted by a few minutes extra sleep. If this means they must unnecessarily cross a dangerous roadway, it's a serious safety problem and should be treated accordingly. The child could be struck and seriously injured by another motorist while crossing the road. It's happened.

*On rural loop routes, teenagers may be tempted to catch the bus on the return trip back to school, even if it means they must cross a dangerous roadway to do so. This is a serious safety problem and should be treated accordingly.*

Trailer parks in rural areas can be challenging. Controlling students as they wait for the bus to stop and then move toward it at your signal takes strong, consistent training and rule enforcement. Picking up students on private roads, such as in a trailer park, should be done only with your supervisor's or router's approval.

Most rural school districts are located in a central village. Even small villages are often bisected by a state highway. Traffic through town can be surprisingly heavy. Work with your supervisor to find ways to get on and off your school campus without having to enter a dense traffic stream.

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## **8.2 Animals**

**8.2.1 Taking the danger seriously.** Animals are one of the most common hazards on rural roads. Any type and size of animal could be in the roadway – farm animals, domestic pets, or wild animals. The most common animal collision is with a deer. Thousands are struck every year by New York motorists, including school bus drivers. Collisions are usually most prevalent at the beginning of hunting season, when deer are being moved about.

One reason animals in the roadway are so dangerous is our natural human instinct to try to avoid the animal. If you can safely stop your bus or steer around an animal without losing control, do so. But at highway speeds, swerving a loaded bus to miss an animal is very dangerous. You could lose control of your bus. It could go off the road or roll over and a child could be hurt or killed. Sad as it is, the safest thing to do may be to hit the animal straight on.

*Swerving a loaded school bus at highway speed to miss a deer or other animal is very dangerous.*

If you strike a deer or other animal, pull your bus over in the closest safe location. Stop and secure the bus and activate the 4-way flashers. As soon as you can do so safely, put out your emergency reflector triangles.

Reassure your students. If they witnessed the injured animal, they may be upset or frightened.

Inform base by radio or cell phone. They will instruct you what to do.



### **8.2.2 Avoiding collisions with animals.**

Continually search the road ahead for animals. Know your route well enough to anticipate where deer or turkey are most likely to cross. Take animal warning signs seriously. Scan the shrubbery along the edge of the road ahead for animal profiles. Animal eyes shining in headlights can often be spotted if you're looking carefully. If you see one deer cross the road ahead, expect more to follow. Slow down and be prepared to stop. Activate your 4-way flashers to alert other motorists of the situation.

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## **8.3 Highway Driving**

**8.3.1 Speed on highways.** New York State law limits school buses to a maximum of 55 mph when transporting students. This law applies on all roads, even out of state. Even if a road is posted for 65 mph, school buses with children on board cannot exceed 55 mph at any time.

55 mph is fast enough for a school bus filled with children. "Keeping up with the flow of traffic" is not automatically safer. On some roadways, many vehicles are traveling 75 mph. Stopping distances are dangerously increased at such a speed in a school bus.

Vehicle handling characteristics degenerate. If you come upon a disabled vehicle in your lane or a deer jumps out in front of your bus at such a speed, you could lose control.

Because you will often be traveling slower than other traffic, stay in the right lane on multilane highways whenever it's safe to do so.

Coaches and chaperones should be informed before the trip about the 55 mph maximum speed limit law for school buses. Travel times should be computed accordingly.

Carefully watch your speed on on-ramps and off-ramps. Posted speeds for on-ramps and off-ramps are geared to cars, not large commercial vehicles. You could lose control or even tip over if you enter a ramp too fast.

Slow down when approaching toll booths and EZ Pass lanes. Speed postings vary from exit to exit. It's dangerous to drive through an EZ Pass lane too fast. Thruway employees could be walking across the lane. Vehicles traveling too fast in EZ Pass lanes are automatically photographed and ticketed. You could jeopardize your job.

Strictly observe construction zone speed limits on highways. They're lower for a reason. Many road construction workers are struck by speeding motorists each year. A ticket for excessive speed in a road construction zone could cost you your job as a school bus driver, as well as hundreds of dollars in fines and legal fees.

### **8.3.2 Sharing the highway with trucks.**

Most New York State highways are filled with trucks. Even rural highways can have lots of truck traffic.

Most truck drivers are proud of their safety record and highly safety conscious, especially around school buses. However, if a truck is

tailgating your bus in what appears to be an effort to “push” you, look for a safe place to pull over and get out of his or her way.

Be especially careful when picking up or dropping off students on highways shared by trucks. Insist that students utilize the “space cushion” concept explained in Unit 3. Unless you are filled to capacity, keep at least the last row of seats empty, or use that row to stow sports equipment, coolers, etc. If a truck strikes your bus while stopped to pick up or drop off students, a safety cushion will save lives.

When there are puddles of water or snow on the road from a recent storm, large vehicles passing your bus can throw large amounts of water or slush onto your windshield, temporarily blinding you. Be aware of vehicles about to pass your bus and activate your wipers ahead of time to reduce the amount of time you can’t see.

**8.3.3 Long trips.** Driving a school bus on a long trip can be physically and mentally tiring. Get plenty of rest the night before and eat healthy to keep up your stamina. Take the time to adjust your seat for maximum comfort. You should be far enough back from the foot controls that you can stretch out your legs periodically.

Stop your bus at a safe rest area about every two hours and do a walk-around inspection to make sure your tires are still in good condition and all lights are functioning. Getting out of the driver’s seat for a short walk also helps prevent back spasms and leg cramps.

## *Stop for a rest break even if you’re concerned about staying on schedule.*

If you begin to feel sleepy, stop more frequently. Stop for a rest break even if you’re concerned about staying on schedule. Safety is far more important than schedule.

Occasional brief conversations with a teacher, coach, or parent chaperone riding on the bus may help keep you alert, but don’t become so involved in chatting that you stop concentrating on the road. It is against the law to engage in distracting conversations with passengers.

Make a point of introducing yourself to coaches, teachers, and chaperones at the beginning of the trip. Go over the itinerary and route with them ahead of time. Work together to ensure a safe and comfortable trip for everyone involved.

Remember, it is against the law to drive a school bus more than ten hours in one day or to be responsible a bus for more than fifteen hours in one day. (Also, see Optional Unit 7.) You also need at least eight hours rest before going on duty the next day. Violating driving hours regulations exposes you and the students on board to great risk – don’t do it.

Field and activity trips sometimes involve more than one bus. Before you leave, go over the itinerary and route with the other drivers involved. Decide ahead of time which driver will be lead bus (usually, the driver most familiar with the destination). Before setting out, discuss the details of the trip, such as when to take breaks, etc., with the other drivers as well as with the teachers and chaperones going along.

Do not rely on the team leader for arriving at the location. Every driver should have directions to the location. Trying to “keep up” with the lead bus can lead to unsafe acts like red light running, speeding to catch up and passing. Leaving more space than five seconds between vehicles will also give every driver a clear view of the road ahead.

Once on the road, maintain at least a five second following distance from the bus ahead of you. Unfortunately, many bus-bus accidents occur on field and activity trips, caused by bus drivers tailgating other buses. (In one embarrassing incident, five buses on a field trip collided end-to-end in a single chain reaction.) School bus convoys are not exempt from the dangers of tailgating.

When driving at night on a highway, do not stare directly into the headlights of oncoming vehicles. Keep your eyes directed slightly to the side of the road as you pass approaching vehicles. Headlight glare can blind you for several seconds. A dirty windshield – inside or out – makes glare worse. (Do not wear sunglasses in an attempt to reduce glare at night; sunglasses reduce night vision in general and are dangerous.) Headlight glare from vehicles behind your bus can also be a problem. Adjusting your driving mirrors slightly before driving at night so glare isn’t reflected directly into your eyes may help.

**8.3.4 Breakdowns on highways.** A breakdown on a highway can be challenging. Do everything you can to get your bus well off the roadway. If possible, drive to the next rest area before stopping. If you can’t make it to a rest area, pull as far to the right on the shoulder as you can. Activate your 4-way flashers at once. Shut off and secure the bus. Radio for help or use a cell phone to call 911. Stay calm and reassure the students that everything will be okay. Ask a chaperone,

coach, teacher, or Good Samaritan to place the reflector triangles approximately a football field’s length behind your bus.

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## 8.4 Hills

**8.4.1 Braking on hills.** Proper brake use is critically important on hills and downgrades. Improper braking technique could result in overheating the brakes or depleting the air (in an air brake system), leading to a loss of control.

Correct brake use is especially important when your bus is loaded to capacity. A full load of students adds several tons to the weight of your bus. The added mass puts even more stress on your brakes on steep hills.

Utilize the following techniques to ensure safe braking on hills and downgrades:

- The importance of a careful pre-trip inspection of your braking system cannot be overstated. Brakes are even more important on routes or trips traversing steep downgrades. An air leak that was overlooked because of a cursory pre-trip could result in a catastrophic brake failure on a hill later that morning. (Although modern air brake systems include a spring-activated emergency brake in case of an air leak, emergency brakes can overheat and fail on a steep hill. Regardless of how well designed, no braking system is fail-safe.)
- Slow down *before* starting down a steep grade. The faster you’re going as you start down the hill, the harder your brakes will need to work to maintain a safe speed, and the quicker they will heat up. Overheated brakes can easily “fade” (lose their braking efficiency) or fail altogether.

*The faster you're going as you start down a hill, the harder your brakes will need to work to maintain a safe speed, and the quicker they will heat up.*

- Strictly observe posted speed warnings before downgrades. Speed warnings for trucks also apply to school buses.
- Use your transmission to help control speed on hills. In a standard transmission vehicle, downshift *before* going over the crest of the hill. Avoid downshifting on the hill; if you can't get it into gear, you could lose control. Some automatic transmissions can also be manually downshifted before a steep grade. To protect the equipment, modern automatic transmissions are designed to upshift on their own if the RPM limit is exceeded, even if you've manually shifted into a lower gear. Whether in a standard or automatic transmission vehicle, using a lower gear on a hill is only effective if you also keep your speed down through proper intermittent braking.
- If your bus is equipped with a supplemental engine brake, use it on hills. (There are many different types of engine brakes. Some types are called exhaust brakes or "jake brakes.") Most engine brake systems are activated by a simple "on-off" switch. Engine brakes reduce wear and stress on the service brakes. They are very effective on hills, but you must still use the service brakes properly

to maintain a safe speed through intermittent braking. When the engine brake is engaged, keep an eye on the tachometer to avoid exceeding the RPM limit for your unit. If you have questions about how the engine brake works on any bus, ask your supervisor or Head Mechanic for advice.

- Keep your bus under control and maintain a safe speed on the hill through intermittent braking. Intermittent braking means using the service (foot) brake to slow down approximately 5 mph below a safe speed that allows full vehicle control for that degree of grade. Once you're approximately 5 mph below safe speed, release the service brake for several seconds, just long enough to resume safe speed again. Release the service brake completely for this short period, but do not let your bus exceed a safe, controllable speed at any time. Applying and releasing your service brakes intermittently helps prevent overheating. (However, avoid rapid, repeated pumping of the service brakes. In an air brake system, you could deplete the air faster than the compressor can replenish it.)

*Keep your bus under control and maintain a safe speed on hills through intermittent braking.*

**8.4.2 Bus stops on hills.** Bus stops on steep hills pose special safety concerns.

- Try to predict problems that other motorists will have handling the hill. An inattentive or incompetent motorist could

slide past your stopped bus. Training your students about exactly what the “universal horn danger signal” means is even more important.

- Starting up again from a dead stop on a very steep hill without rolling back can be challenging. Use the spring brake, not the service brake. (This procedure works on both automatic transmission and standard transmission buses.) Release the spring brake just as you apply power to the accelerator pedal. It may take a little practice to learn how to pull off this technique smoothly. Ask your supervisor or a trainer to go out with you on a practice run on a local hill.

**8.4.3 Slippery conditions.** In severe winter weather, assess the condition of a hill before starting down or up. If it hasn't been plowed, or freezing rain is covering the surface, it may not be safe for a school bus. If you don't think it's safe, don't attempt it. If you see other vehicles struggling to negotiate the hill, or already stuck on it, don't try it. Contact base by radio and let them know the situation. Local highway departments respond quickly to any school bus-related road problem. It's better to wait for help and be a little late to school than slide off the road. Student safety is always the priority.

If you've already started down a hill when you realize it's slippery, stay calm. Activate your 4-way flashers. If there's a safe spot to pull off the road until it can be plowed or sanded, wait there. (Let your dispatcher know what you're doing.)

*As a new school bus driver, make it a priority to get to know the hills and downgrades in your school district.*

If there's no alternative and you must continue down a slippery grade, go as slowly as you can, but avoid over-braking. (In a panic, untrained motorists often try to “push the brake pedal through the floor” in slippery conditions.) Locking up the brakes can put any vehicle into a slide. Creeping slowly by “feathering” the service brake (applying just enough pressure on the brake pedal to slow the vehicle without locking the wheels) is usually the best technique for maintaining control in slippery road conditions.

**8.4.4 Know your hills.** As a new school bus driver, make it a priority to get to know the hills and downgrades in your school district. Ask your supervisor or SBDI about them. Take a ride with a veteran driver to learn where they are located and any specific safety tips they've learned over the years.

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## 8.5 Railroad Crossings

**8.5.1 Understanding the danger.** Railroad crossings are dangerous. Nationally, several hundred motorists are killed every year when their vehicles are struck by trains at grade crossings. (Many of these fatalities occur because motorists ignore warning devices and illegally drive around lowered crossing gates!)

The worst school bus accident in our state's history was the result of a train striking a school bus. The tragedy occurred on March

24, 1972, in Congers, New York. Five children were killed and many were seriously injured. The bus driver did not stop for the tracks.

The Congers tragedy shook up our entire state, resulting in many new laws and training requirements for school bus drivers. This *Pre-Service Course*, for instance, was first required in response to the Congers accident. But railroad crossings are still dangerous. Many other school bus-train tragedies have occurred across the country since Congers. Close calls have continued to occur in our state.

No vehicle – including a school bus – is a match for the massive force of a train. Even a low speed train can demolish a bus.

The closing speed of an approaching train is hard to gauge. High speed trains now crisscross our state. View obstructions and other challenging physical features and traffic patterns are present at many grade crossings. As a new school bus driver, you must take railroad crossing dangers seriously.

### **8.5.2 Railroad crossing safety procedures.**

Every railroad crossing is unique to some degree, with its own set of challenges for school bus drivers. Train speed, warning devices, number of tracks, traffic speed, roadway configuration, visibility down the tracks, etc., vary greatly. Any unusual features of a crossing need to be taken into account, but the following procedures represent the fundamentals of crossing tracks safely, and should always be followed:

*When you turn on your 4-way flashers as you approach a railroad crossing, turn off the master flasher switch at the same time. Linking the two steps together makes it less likely you'll forget one.*

1. *Prepare early for the stop ahead.* Watch carefully for railroad warning signs (“crossbucks”) indicating a crossing ahead. As soon as you know you’re approaching a crossing, begin monitoring traffic behind your bus. Inattentive motorists might not realize you’re going to stop for tracks. Activate your 4-way flashers early enough to alert other motorists – a good rule of thumb is at the first crossbuck sign. When you turn on your 4-way flashers, turn off the master flasher switch at the same time. Linking the two steps together makes it less likely you’ll forget one. If necessary to alert motorists behind you, tap the brake pedal lightly to flash your brake lights. (Do not activate student flashers approaching or at railroad tracks.) As you get closer to the tracks, prepare for the stop by reminding passengers to be quiet, opening the driver window, and turning off all noise-making equipment such as heaters, am/fm radio, and fans. (Some buses are equipped with a “noise kill” switch which allows you to turn off all noise-making equipment at once.)
2. *Stop before the tracks.* School buses must stop at all railroad tracks with or without passengers on board, with only three exceptions: if a police officer at the crossing directs you to proceed; if the crossing is posted

as “Exempt”; or if a traffic light at the crossing is green. Small school buses such as vans and school cars must stop at tracks, just like full-sized yellow school buses. By law, you must stop at least 15’ from the nearest rail, but no further than 50’. Some crossings have a stop line painted across the road telling you where to stop. On multilane roads, stop in the right lane – it’s easier for other vehicles that don’t have to stop to go around you. Secure your bus with the parking or spring brake once you’re stopped.

3. *Check for trains.* Once stopped, open the passenger door. (Leave your 4-way flashers on while checking for trains, but make sure your red student flashers are not activated.) With passenger door and driver window open, look and listen carefully for trains. Look left, right, and left again. Move actively in the driver’s seat so you can “look around” view obstructions on your bus or outside. At crossings with multiple tracks, check each track carefully. Make sure there’s adequate room on the other side of the tracks for your bus to be entirely clear after crossing. If other vehicles are lined up directly across the tracks and you’re not sure there’s enough room for your bus, wait. If you can’t see a train or hear a train whistle, carefully check all warning devices at the tracks before starting across. Typical warning devices are a combination of red lights and bells. Warning devices are designed to tell you a train is 20 seconds away from the crossing. If the bells begin to ring or the red lights start flashing, stay put – do not start across the tracks. Never try to beat a train.

4. *Cross the tracks.* Once you’re certain no train is approaching, cross the tracks. Crossings can be bumpy, but get across the tracks as quickly as you can. If you are driving a bus with a standard transmission, do

not shift while crossing the tracks. With an automatic transmission, leave the bus in “Drive” just as you would whenever you resume forward motion. After crossing the tracks, leave your 4-way flashers on until your bus is again traveling at normal road speed for that stretch of roadway. Re-arm the master flasher switch at the same time you turn off the 4-way flashers – there’s less chance of forgetting if you do them both at the same time.

*Ask other drivers or your supervisor about railroad crossings you will encounter on trips to unfamiliar areas.*

**8.5.3 Malfunctioning signals.** If warning flashers at the crossing are activated and/or the gate is lowered, but no train arrives even after several minutes, do not proceed across the tracks, even if other vehicles are doing just that or even if you can see the train stopped at a distance from the crossing.

Contact base by radio and inform them of the situation. Usually, a police officer will be dispatched to the scene to escort your bus across the tracks. Never go around lowered crossing gates – it’s against the law and very dangerous. Even if you make it safely, you could lose your job.

**8.5.4 Railroad crossings on trips.** On trips out of the district to areas you aren’t familiar with, ask other drivers or your supervisor about crossings you will encounter. Stay alert whenever driving in unfamiliar areas – you could suddenly come up on a set of tracks. Teach yourself to systematically read all

warning signs – it’s one sign of a professional driver.

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## 8.6 Hazardous Intersections

### 8.6.1 Intersections are dangerous.

Approximately half of all traffic accidents occur in intersections. Intersections are dangerous because vehicles and other roadway users are often approaching from several directions.

Violations of basic traffic laws at intersections are commonplace. Many motorists fail to make complete stops at stop signs. “Rolling stops” contribute to many intersection crashes, including school bus crashes. Some motorists are in the habit of accelerating instead of slowing down when they see a yellow traffic light ahead. “Red light runners” cause many serious intersection accidents.

School bus drivers must practice a consistently high level of defensive driving to avoid an intersection accident:

- Even if you have the right of way or a green light, slow down and be prepared to stop as you approach an intersection. “Cover the brake” – rest your foot lightly on the brake pedal to reduce reaction time as you enter the intersection.

*Always “rock before you roll” into an intersection.*

- Before you arrive at the intersection, search carefully for vehicles approaching on intersecting roadways. Always “rock before you roll” into an intersection – move actively in the driver’s seat to see around view obstructions on your bus.

- If buildings, trees, billboards, or other physical objects block your view down one of the intersecting roadways, slow down even more. A speeding vehicle could suddenly emerge from the blind spot and into the intersection.
- Do not assume other vehicles will stop for stop signs or red lights. Defensive driving means preventing accidents that could be caused by the unsafe actions of other motorists.
- Never accelerate when you see a yellow traffic light or “stale” green traffic light ahead (a traffic light that’s been green for several seconds is considered “stale” because it’s due to cycle through to yellow). Trying to “beat the light” is very dangerous. Slow down and prepare to stop.
- When stopped at a red light, wait 2-3 seconds before entering the intersection once your light turns green. Be alert for a “red light runner” on the intersecting roadway.

**8.6.2 Know your area.** All intersections are potentially dangerous, but some are more challenging than others. Roadway configuration, view obstructions, traffic controls, traffic density and speed, and accident history vary greatly from intersection to intersection.

Learn about the most dangerous intersections in your area. Talk with experienced school bus drivers about what they do to prevent an accident at challenging intersections in your school district.

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## 8.7 Know Your Turnarounds

### 8.7.1 Safety procedures at turnarounds.

Most school districts utilize turnarounds on at least some routes. Turnarounds are usually located at the end of a route or the edge of the district. Turnarounds save school districts significant amounts of money over the course of the school year by cutting miles off routes

Turnarounds vary greatly, from well-maintained pull-offs that are big enough to swing a bus around without backing, to narrow lanes requiring expert backing skills.

Because of the presence of children, turnarounds at or near bus stops are of special concern. In the morning, always load children before backing at a turnaround, and discharge them after backing on the afternoon run.

If you must back up at a turnaround, follow these safety procedures:

- Scan the area carefully before backing. Are any unusual hazards present? Any signs of children in the area?
  - Position your bus to maximize your view of the turnaround before and during backing. Pick a distinctive object along the perimeter of the turnaround (a sign, large tree, boulder, fence, etc.). Before backing, find the object in your driving mirror, and use it as a reference point to orient yourself as you back.
  - Activate 4-ways before backing. If you must back into a turnaround from the road, activate the 4-ways as you pull up and position your bus. Be aware of other vehicles approaching on the road as you begin to back.
  - Always honk and pause before backing - “just in case.”
- If you have a bus attendant on board, he or she should be a “spotter” from the inside rear of your bus. Make sure you can hear each other before you start to back up. An older, reliable student can also spot for you from the inside rear of the bus. As the driver, you are still responsible for avoiding an accident, but a second set of eyes always enhances safety when you must back up.
  - Back only as far as necessary to turn the bus around. Often, going back a few feet gives you the room to make the turn and pull back on the road. Don’t back up any further than you need to. The greater the distance you back up the bus, the more chance there is of running into something.
  - In snowy weather, take special care at turnarounds. Be sure you know where the edge of the turnaround is. Use a known reference point to orient your bus and prevent backing off the turnaround. Marking the edge of a turnaround with reflectors on poles can be helpful in the winter.
  - Hunters, hikers, snowmobilers, and other outdoor enthusiasts sometimes park their vehicles in turnarounds in isolated rural areas. Farmers or work crews may leave equipment in turnarounds. If a turnaround is blocked, you will need to find an

*Before backing, pick a distinctive object along the edge of the turnaround – find it in your driving mirror and use it as a reference point as you back.*

alternate site to turn around that day, or may need to go around the block – even if it’s a very long block. Report the problem to your supervisor.

- All turnarounds should be approved by the transportation office.

**8.7.2 Local turnarounds.** New drivers often start out as substitutes. Because turnarounds can be so challenging, a concerted effort should be made to familiarize subs with the turnarounds on every route. Ask your supervisor, router, or SBDI to go over the district’s turnarounds with you. Ride with experienced drivers to learn how they handle challenging turnarounds.

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## 8.8 Local Weather Awareness

**8.8.1 Regional weather.** Severe weather can occur anywhere, but weather patterns vary greatly across our state. Be aware of the type of severe weather most likely in your region, and learn what specific locations are most likely to be effected by it.

**8.8.2 Snow and ice.** Snow is the most common type of severe weather likely to be encountered by school bus drivers across the state. Many areas experience heavy snowfall at various times throughout the winter. Areas in the “lake effect” belt downwind from the Great Lakes are usually the hardest hit, but snowstorms can strike any region of the state.

Any snowfall can make the roads slippery. Increased stopping distance and the potential for going into a slide or spin when turning, braking, or accelerating, are recurring concerns on snowy roads. Hills that haven’t been plowed yet may be impassable early in a snowfall. If you’re not sure you can make a hill safely, don’t attempt it.



Motorists who don’t know how to drive in snow are a common hazard. You must drive even more defensively than usual. Pedestrians may walk in the road instead of on snow-covered sidewalks. Foolhardy snowmobilers may fly across the road in front of your bus.

A combination of snow and wind often creates the most challenging driving conditions. Road crews struggle to keep roads clear in blowing snow. An unexpected snow drift could jolt a vehicle out of its lane. Blowing snow can make it tricky to know where the pavement ends. Learn the specific roadways in your district where blowing snow is often a problem. Slow down and stay alert as you approach wind-prone areas in snowy weather.

Whiteouts often occur in blizzard conditions – so much snow is being blown around that visibility is drastically reduced. Do not use your highbeams – they only reflect light back at you from the suspended snow, further reducing visibility.

In whiteout conditions, get well off the road into a known safe area such as a parking lot as soon as possible. Do not stop your bus in the roadway – you could be struck by another vehicle. Activate your 4-way flashers (and strobe light, if your bus is equipped with one) and drive slowly enough that you can stay on the pavement until there’s a safe spot to pull

off the road. Think about the location of safe pull-off areas on your route ahead of time.

***A combination of snow and wind often creates the most challenging driving conditions – an unexpected snow drift can jolt a vehicle out of its lane.***

Icy conditions are likely after roadways have been plowed and salted following a heavy snow. Certain sections of road are usually most prone to icing after a storm. Bridges often ice up when conditions are right. Learn where these ice-prone areas are ahead of time – ask your supervisor or an experienced driver.

“Black ice” is a thin layer of ice that may linger on stretches of roadway that are shaded or exposed to wind. Black ice is treacherous – it’s nearly invisible and can take the inattentive driver by surprise. You can quickly lose control of your bus if you hit a patch of icy pavement going too fast. Black ice can be so slippery that even a gust of wind or a crown in the road can send your vehicle into a spin. Hitting the brakes once you’re on a stretch of icy pavement usually makes things worse. Slow down early whenever icing is even a slight possibility.

Bus stops require special caution in snowy weather. In slippery conditions motorists may have difficulty stopping for children crossing the road. Children may slip getting on or off your bus. Insist that all children use the handrail, and keep bus steps free of ice and snow. Children may slide off a snowbank into the path of your bus as you approach their

stop. They may wear thick hats that block their vision and hearing. As children get off the bus, scarves or mittens attached to a string can get tangled in the door or handrail.

Bus windows often steam up in wintry weather. Turn on defrosters and fans early, before children have boarded. Aim fans at the spots on the windshield, driver window, or passenger door most prone to steaming up. Opening a window or roof vent slightly may help reduce fogging. Ask students in the first row to keep their windows clear with paper towels. Keeping the front passenger windows clear is critical when crossing intersections or merging into traffic.

Make sure your student flashers and other lights aren’t caked with snow in severe weather. Keep them clear with a broom.

If you become stuck on snow or ice, contact base by radio to get help headed your way. Activate 4-way flashers and keep children calm. Gentle, short, rocking can sometimes help regain forward motion, but avoid violent maneuvers that could dig you in deeper or

***Make sure your student flashers and other lights aren’t caked with snow in severe weather.***

result in your bus sliding off the pavement altogether. On some types of buses, disengaging “automatic traction control” may allow you to regain traction in deep snow. Ask your supervisor or Head Mechanic to explain how and when to turn off “automatic traction control”.

Freezing rain is very dangerous. Watch for early signs of the transition from rain to freezing rain, such as icicles beginning to form under signs or guardrails. As the temperature drops below freezing, roadways can instantly become too slippery to drive on. Inattentive motorists can lose control and slide toward your bus.

Ice storms can bring down trees and wires. Except in emergencies such as a school-wide evacuation, buses should not be on the road in such dangerous conditions. If power goes out, traffic lights no longer control traffic. Be aware of intersections on your route that would be especially difficult in such a situation.

**8.8.3 Heavy rain.** Puddles from heavy rain create an ideal situation for hydroplaning. Hydroplaning means momentarily losing contact with the road surface. It is very dangerous. Even a thin film of standing water in the roadway can cause a vehicle traveling too fast to lose traction. Learn which stretches of roadway in your area are most likely to have standing water in heavy rain.

Large commercial vehicles – such as school buses – can hydroplane just like small cars. Slowing down is the only way to prevent hydroplaning. Be alert for other motorists who don't appreciate the risk and keep up their speed in heavy rain. Don't travel next to other vehicles in rainy conditions on multilane roads such as interstate highways. They could suddenly hydroplane and spin into your lane.

Low-lying areas may be prone to flooding after heavy rainfalls. Coastal flooding can occur during hurricanes. Learn which roads have experienced flooding in the past and approach those areas cautiously in heavy rain. Don't try to cross a flooded road even if the

water appears shallow. It may be deeper than you realize and your vehicle could stall.

**8.8.4 High winds.** High winds can be dangerous. Trees and wires may come down. Large vehicles such as school buses are especially difficult to control in high winds. Slow down and be prepared to maintain vehicle control as you approach bridges and open areas when it's very windy.

*Fog is very dangerous for school buses, especially at bus stops – other motorists may not see your bus. Learn the areas in your district that are most susceptible to fog.*

**8.8.5 Fog.** Fog is very dangerous for school buses, especially when picking up or dropping off children. Other motorists may not see your bus. Learn the areas in your district that are most susceptible to fog. Ask your supervisor or SBDI. Activate 4-way flashers and strobe light in foggy conditions. In heavy fog, get off the road to a safe area. Radio base to let them know what you're doing.

**8.8.6 Difficult light conditions.** Whether at night on a field trip or on an early morning run at first light, low light driving presents many challenges for school bus drivers. Transitional periods such as twilight or as the sun comes up in the morning are often the most challenging. Low contrast objects can be difficult to pick out against the background in twilight conditions. It's easy to miss a pedestrian or jogger dressed in gray along the edge of the

road. Compensate for challenging light conditions by driving slower.

Sun glare can be dangerous. A motorist heading directly into the sun may not see your stopped bus, or a child crossing the road to your bus. It's happened in our state.

Learn the areas on your route where morning or afternoon sun makes it difficult to see. With your supervisor's approval, it may be possible to change the route slightly so you're not headed right into the sun at the worst times.

Don't look directly into sun glare. (A dirty windshield, inside or out, makes glare worse.) Keep your eyes angled to the edge of the road. Drive slowly until you're not headed directly into the sun.

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## 8.9 Unit 8 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. TRUE or FALSE?** *“If your bus is traveling at highway speed and you see a deer in the road ahead, the safest thing to do is swerve your bus to miss it.”*

**2. What should you do if instead of getting on at the assigned stop, a child crosses a dangerous road to board your bus a few minutes later on its way back to school?**

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**3. When students are on board, what is the maximum speed for a New York school bus?**

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**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *“It is against the law to engage in distracting conversations with passengers.”*

**5. TRUE or FALSE?** *“When the engine brake is engaged, you don’t need to use the service brake on a steep hill.”*

**6. Fill in the blank:** *“When you turn on the 4-way flashers approaching a railroad crossing, you should turn off the*

*\_\_\_\_\_*  
*at the same time.”*

**7. What does “cover the brake” mean?**

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**8. What does “rock before you roll” mean?**

a. *Moving actively in your driver’s seat to see around view obstructions on the bus.*

b. *It’s important to enjoy yourself the night before you take a long trip.*

c. *Drive fast over bumps to reduce vehicle sway.*

d. *None of the above.*

**9. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Before backing into a turnaround, pick a distinctive object near the edge of the turnaround and use it as a reference point as you back.”*

**10. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Black ice is easy to spot.”*

**11. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Large commercial vehicles are less prone to hydroplaning than small cars.”*

**12. TRUE or FALSE?** *“On school grounds, children could be present anywhere at any time.”*

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## UNIT 8 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT 9: DRIVING SMALL SCHOOL VEHICLES

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## Unit 9 Topics

- 9.1 Unique Challenges When Driving Small School Vehicles
- 9.2 Inspecting Vans and Cars
- 9.3 Type A School Buses
- 9.4 Unit 9 Review

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## Introduction

Most school districts and bus companies utilize a variety of buses to transport students: full-sized buses, smaller “Type A” school buses, and small school vehicles such as vans and cars. Due to the growing number of special transportation arrangements provided for children with special needs and conditions, small school vehicles are increasingly useful to schools.

Transporting children in small vehicles requires a high degree of caution. Smaller, and usually lacking the distinctive “national school bus chrome yellow,” vans and school cars are less visible than full-sized buses. Motorists are less likely to realize a small vehicle is stopping at a railroad crossing, for instance. Most small school vehicles are not

equipped with student flashers either, so children are offered less protection at bus stops than in a full-sized bus.

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## 9.1 Unique Challenges When Driving Small School Vehicles

**9.1.1 Visibility.** All New York school buses, with or without passengers, must stop at railroad crossings. While most motorists expect full-sized school buses to stop at crossings, fewer realize school vans and cars are going to stop. The danger of a rear-end collision must be taken especially seriously when approaching railroad tracks in a small school vehicle.

*The danger of a rear-end collision must be taken seriously especially when approaching railroad tracks in a small school vehicle.*

When approaching a crossing in a small non-yellow school vehicle, compensate for the relative lack of visibility to other motorists by activating your 4-way flashers earlier and creating a “safety cushion” of other vehicles behind you whenever possible. If necessary, tap your brakes to flash your brake lights to wake up other motorists. Slow down early enough to “gather” a vehicle or two behind yours as you approach the tracks.

While stopped and checking for trains, stay alert for inattentive motorists approaching from behind. If you spot an approaching

vehicle that is clearly not going to stop, do what you can to get out of the way. If you believe you are about to be struck from behind, get across the tracks as quickly as you can do so safely.

**9.1.2 Bus stops.** Whenever possible, small school vehicles such as vans and school cars should receive and discharge passengers off the road. Their lack of red student flashers makes it very dangerous to load or unload in the road – other motorists are not required to stop for a small school vehicle without student flashers.

A driveway or parking lot completely off the roadway is the safest spot to load or unload students when driving a small school vehicle. Activate your 4-way flashers as a precaution.

If you can't get completely off the road, pull onto the shoulder. Activate your 4-way flashers but do not expect other motorists to stop. Never cross students in a van or school car that is not equipped with red student flashers.

***Never cross students in a van or school car that is not equipped with red student flashers.***

Small school vehicles without student flashers should never be used to cross students.

Receive and discharge students from a passenger-side door, not a driver-side door.

If you must get out of the driver's seat to assist young or disabled students into or out of a school van or car, shut the engine off, apply the parking brake, and take the key with you.

***When driving a small school vehicle, it's easy to forget it's still a school bus.***

**9.1.3 Handling.** Being so much lighter, small school vehicles may not have the traction of a full-sized school bus on slippery roads. In heavy snow, you might not be able to make it up a hill, even though a full-sized bus made it just before you. If you're not sure you can make it safely, don't try.

In strong crosswinds, keeping a school van in the driving lane can be tricky at highway speeds – you should slow down.

When driving a small school vehicle, it's easy to forget it's still a school bus. Legally, vans and cars are school buses whenever they are transporting students to or from school or school activities.

A school van may "feel" just like your personal vehicle, but it's not. The maximum speed for small school vehicles is 55 mph just like it is for full-sized school buses. All other school bus laws apply as well. For instance, you can't turn right on red, or drink and eat with students on board, even when driving a school car or van. "Unnecessary conversation" with passengers that could distract you from safe driving is still against the law.

School vans and cars can be deceptively comfortable to drive. It's only human nature

to forget you're driving a school bus and to be tempted to slip into the driving habits of the less than professional motorist: rolling stops, jackrabbit starts, cutting in and out of traffic, speeding, tailgating other vehicles, pulling onto the shoulder to get around other vehicles waiting at a traffic light, etc.

***Small school vehicles lack many important safety features of actual school buses – driving defensively is even more important when you're transporting children in a van or school car.***

In fact, small school vehicles lack many of the most important safety features of actual school buses, such as compartmentalized seating, rollover and crashworthiness protection, student flashers, and “conspicuity” (yellow color, reflective tape). Driving cautiously and defensively is even more important when you're transporting children in a van or school car.

**9.1.4 Seating and student behavior.** Three special rules and cautions apply when transporting students in small school vehicles:

1. Children twelve and under cannot sit in the front seat. The front seat air bag could seriously injure a young child. (Even though it's legal for older children to sit in the front seat, make sure they do not become a distraction to you as you drive.)

2. Although state law does not require students on full-sized buses to use seat belts (it can be required by local school policy), it is mandatory on all small school buses and small school vehicles. All students must buckle up.

3. On a full-sized or Type A school bus, only children under four years old are required by law to ride in a child safety restraint such as a car seat or booster seat with a built-in harness. (See Optional Unit 12.) However, when riding in a school van or car, children under eight years old must use a child safety restraint. Seat belts (lap belts or lap-shoulder belts) aren't sufficient for children under eight.

Keeping children out of the back seat to protect them in case of a rear-end collision is obviously harder in a van than in a full-sized school bus (and impossible in a school car).

***All students must buckle up when riding in a small school vehicle.***

However, if you only have one to three students on board when driving a school van, keep them out of the back row. Because small school vehicles are not built to the same rigorous construction standards as full-sized school buses, it's even more important to keep children out of the back whenever you can.

**9.1.5 Evacuation concerns in small school vehicles.** Although there are fewer children to worry about than when driving a full-sized school bus, some features of small school vehicles could pose unique challenges in an emergency.

- Vans and cars lack true emergency exits. Automatic door locks typically activate at

low speed. Someone outside won't be able to get in to help with a child unless the doors are unlocked first.

- The rear cargo door on most vans cannot be opened from the inside.
- Children or other passengers behind the driver won't be able to open the rear doors from inside unless they physically unlock them first. If the "child safety lock" feature is active, they still won't be able to open the door until the driver disarms it. Children who ride in small school vehicles should be taught how to open doors on their own, even if it means climbing into the front seat to do so. The driver could be hurt and unable to open the door for them.
- Even though they're only a few feet behind you, getting to children in the back seat can be difficult in an emergency. Climbing over the seat to get to them is not easy.

Students who ride small school vehicles are not exempt from bus drills. Because of their many unique features, drills are even more important for children riding in vans or cars. Do what you can to prepare them for handling an accident, fire, or other emergency.

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## 9.2 Inspecting Vans and Cars

**9.2.1 NYS DOT approval.** Vans and cars must be approved for student transportation by NYS DOT before carrying students. Most school and contractor fleets include a variety of support or administrative vehicles that are not used for transporting children.

If a van or car is approved for pupil transportation, it will have a DOT sticker in the lower right windshield just like a full-sized

school bus. If a vehicle is not approved by DOT, it cannot be used to transport students at any time.

**9.2.2 Emergency equipment.** Small school vehicles are not required to carry the same emergency equipment as regular school buses. Reflective triangles, fire blankets, seat belt cutters, first aid kits, and fire extinguishers may not be required by law on certain small school vehicles. Know the vehicle you are driving. If it's not equipped with certain emergency equipment, it's best to know it before an emergency occurs.

State laws are minimum requirements. Small school vehicles can be equipped with all the emergency equipment of a full-sized school bus if the school district or bus company chooses to do so. Finding a good place to locate emergency items can be a challenge in smaller vehicles. Some emergency items may need to be carried in the trunk.

**9.2.3 Wheelchairs and small school vehicles.** Students using wheelchairs must be transported on actual school buses (full-sized or Type A). Taking a child out of his or her wheelchair, stowing it in a seat or trunk, so the child can ride in a school van or car, is against the law.

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## 9.3 Type A School Buses

**9.3.1 Definition.** Most school bus fleets include at least a few "Type A" buses. Unlike school cars and vans, Type A buses are actual school buses. Although smaller, Type A buses are built according to the same strict construction standards as full-sized school buses. Like full-sized school buses, Type A buses have compartmentalized seating, rollover and crashworthiness protection,

student flashers and stop arms, and the distinctive yellow school bus color.

### 9.3.2 Unique features of Type A buses.

Type A school buses have a few unique features not shared by full-sized buses:

- *Driver seat.* A Type A bus consists of a passenger body built upon a cutaway front-section chassis. The front driver seat is usually lower than the passenger area behind it. Sitting slightly below your passengers can be a little unnerving at first.
- *Driver door.* Type A buses have a left-side driver's door along with the normal passenger door. This makes it easier to get in and out of the vehicle on a daily basis, and could be useful in an emergency.
- *Blind spots.* Type A buses can have challenging blind spots. "Rocking before rolling" – moving actively in the bus seat to look around view obstructions on the bus such as mirrors, corner posts, and door pillars – is even more important when driving a Type A bus.
- *Controls.* Because of the left-side driver door, Type A buses lack the typical control panel next to the driver seat. Controls and switches may be located in unusual places. Some Type A buses have a small control panel mounted on the bulkhead above the driver, or to the right of the driver seat. Other models spread controls and switches in several locations in the driver area. Learn how all the controls and switches on your bus are laid out before leaving the yard.
- *Emergency exits.* Smaller-capacity buses are not required to have the same number of emergency exits as large school buses. Most Type A buses lack side emergency doors.
- *Emergency brake.* Many Type A buses have hydraulic brakes instead of air brakes. The parking brake is often located at the driver's feet near the left wall.

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## 9.4 Unit 9 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. Which of the following procedures will help to reduce the danger of being struck in the rear by another vehicle when stopping at railroad tracks in a school van or car?**

- a. Activate 4-way flashers earlier.
- b. Slow down early to create a “safety cushion” of other vehicles behind you.
- c. Tap your brake lights to wake up motorists behind you.
- d. All the above.

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** “A driveway or parking lot completely off the roadway is the safest spot to load or unload students when driving a small school vehicle without student flashers.”

**3. TRUE or FALSE?** “It’s OK to cross students in a small school vehicle without student flashers if you activate your 4-way flashers.”

**4. Which of the following school bus laws do not apply to school vans and cars?**

- a. Maximum 55 mph speed limit with students on board.
- b. Cannot turn right on red with students on board.
- c. Cannot eat or drink with students on board.
- d. All the above laws apply to small school vehicles as well as full-sized school buses.

**5. TRUE or FALSE?** “Children twelve and under cannot sit in the front seat of a school van or car.”

**6. TRUE or FALSE?** “Students riding in small school vehicles must buckle up.”

**7. TRUE or FALSE?** “In a small school vehicle, seat belts are not sufficient for children under eight. They must ride in a child safety restraint such as a car seat.”

**8. TRUE or FALSE?** “School vans and cars have the same type of emergency exits as regular school buses.”

**9. TRUE or FALSE?** “Students who ride small school vehicles are not required to participate in bus drills.”

**10. Which of the following statements about Type A school buses is not true?**

- a. Type A school buses have the same number of emergency exits as full-sized school buses.
- b. Type A school buses can have challenging blind spots.
- c. Controls and switches may be located in unusual places on Type A buses.
- d. Type A buses have a left-side driver door.

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## UNIT 9 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT 10: SCHOOL BUS PRE-TRIP AND POST-TRIP INSPECTIONS

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## Unit 10 Topics

- 10.1 Professional School Bus Driver's Pre-Trip Inspection
- 10.2 Daily Vehicle Reports
- 10.3 Post-Trip Inspection
- 10.4 Unit 10 Review

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## Introduction

Commercial vehicle safety inspections are required by state and federal law, but school bus pre-trip inspection is more than a law. A careful check of all safety features on your bus is the sign of a truly professional school bus driver. Children's safety depends on a quality pre-trip inspection.

Obtaining the CDL is only the starting point of becoming a professional school bus driver. Because of budget constraints and safety considerations, the CDL road test does not include a full pre-trip inspection. The superficial pre-trip required during DMV's road test is insufficient once you begin to actually transport students.

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## 10.1 Professional School Bus Driver's Pre-Trip Inspection

### 10.1.1 Why pre-trips are important.

Compliance with state and federal laws is important, but the most important reason for doing a quality pre-trip inspection of your bus is student safety.

School buses are safe vehicles. They are well built and well-maintained. School bus mechanics and technicians take their demanding jobs seriously, and across the state have established an impressive safety record. The New York State Department of Transportation inspects every school bus twice a year. Its inspection standards are the strictest in the nation. The slightest mechanical problem discovered during a DOT inspection could decertify that bus.

Unlike a generation ago, few school bus accidents today are caused by mechanical failures. However, mechanical problems still occur. School buses are complicated machines and machines break down.

*School bus technicians take their demanding jobs seriously, but mechanical problems still occur – school buses are complicated machines and machines break down.*

Even in a small school bus operation, a log of mechanical failures over the course of a school year will typically include items such as leaking radiator hoses, air line leaks, oil leaks,

fuel leaks, flat tires, broken belts and alternator failures, failed back up alarms, loose seat cushion latches, cut seats, defective emergency window and door buzzers, broken roof hatches, loose stepwell treads, missing exit labels, jammed seat belts, exhaust leaks, cracked springs, electrical shorts, heater motor failures, stop arm failures, brake chamber failures, cracked lenses, and many blown bulbs.

These typical mechanical failures share two extremely important characteristics:

1. Unrepaired mechanical failures or defects can cause injury to a child or cause a crash.
2. Each mechanical problem listed above should be discovered by an alert driver during a pre-trip inspection. (Similarly, a cursory pre-trip – walking around the bus half-asleep, halfheartedly kicking at a tire – could easily miss every mechanical problem listed above.)

School bus pre-trip inspections are too important to just “go through the motions.” A superficial inspection could send an unsafe bus on the road.

Learn how to conduct a professional pre-trip. Although at first it will seem like a lot of items to check, it will become second nature when you do it every day.

### ***Never let yourself become complacent about vehicle safety.***

It takes ten to fifteen minutes to conduct a thorough vehicle inspection. The more you do it, the more efficient you will become at it.

Conduct a meticulous safety inspection of every school vehicle you drive every day. As time passes and you settle into your new

career of driving a school bus, remain alert as you check out the bus. Never let yourself become complacent about vehicle safety.

**10.1.2 Pre-trip safety.** Be careful when conducting a pre-trip inspection:

- Wear shoes with good tread to prevent slips and falls. Avoid loose clothing and long drawstrings or necklaces that could become tangled in vehicle components as you check them out.
- Be aware of what the buses parked next to yours are doing as you proceed with your pre-trip. If they’re pulling out of their parking spaces, stand back.
- Some stop arms have sharp edges. Don’t bump your head on a deployed stop arm.
- Make sure you have good footing as you check your emergency doors from inside the bus. Drivers have lost their balance and fallen out the exit.
- Closing emergency windows can be tricky. You can pinch your fingers if you’re not careful.
- Be careful if you are required to check under the hood. (Some operations require it, and some don’t.) Lift and close the hood gently – take care that it doesn’t “get away from you” and slam down. You could be hurt, or the hood could be damaged. Bus drivers should not check under the hood while the engine is running – that’s a job for the mechanics.
- If you’re checking out a vehicle that’s recently been used by another driver, don’t burn yourself on hot engine or exhaust components.
- Take care not to trip on engine block heater plug-in cords during cold weather. Unplug your bus before starting it. Be

sure it's unplugged before leaving your parking space!

**10.1.3 Model pre-trip.** Learn your school district's or bus company's specific inspection policies and procedures. Some operations require additional items to be checked, some do not require or allow drivers to check under the hood, and some prefer a different sequence than the one presented below.

*A model pre-trip consists of nine basic steps – following this sequence minimizes the number of times you must walk around your bus.*

A model pre-trip consists of nine basic steps. Following this sequence minimizes the number of times you must walk around your bus.

1. Approach the bus.
2. Check under the hood (if required by local policy).
3. Enter the vehicle, check controls, start engine, set lights.
4. Exit vehicle, full walk-around.
5. Re-enter vehicle, check emergency equipment, re-set lights.
6. Exit vehicle, curbside light check.
7. Re-enter vehicle, static brake check.
8. Check interior items.
9. 50' brake checks.

*STEP 1: Approach the bus.* In the early morning, use a flashlight, or if you park in

front of your bus, leave your car headlights on to help see underneath the bus. As you approach your bus, check for:

- 1a) Damage to body, broken windows, vehicle leaning to one side, anything unusual
- 1b) Fluids underneath the vehicle (puddles from "static" leaks – oil, coolant, grease, fuel)
- 1c) Hanging items (wires, exhaust, drive shaft)
- 1d) Anything unusual beneath or around the bus (tools, parts, overhanging branches, packages, etc.)
- 1e) Unplug the bus (winter)

*STEP 2: Check under the hood (if required by local policy).*

- 2a) Belts secure, not frayed; no leaks or cuts or signs of rubbing or wear on hoses; check carefully around hose clamps where leaks often start
- 2b) Oil level
- 2c) Coolant level
- 2d) Windshield washer fluid level
- 2e) Air lines intact, no cracks or cuts, no signs of tire rubbing against air line
- 2f) Front shock absorbers intact, no leaks; leaf springs intact, no cracks
- 2g) Front slack adjusters present, pins intact
- 2h) Drag link secure
- 2i) Steering column secure, steering fluid line not rubbing against steering column
- 2j) Battery box, nothing unusual inside compartment, batteries not tipped over - check battery box before starting engine

*STEP 3: Enter vehicle, check controls, start engine, set lights.*

- 3a) Make sure the parking brake is set – turn the key to accessory, but don't start the engine
- 3b) Check the function of all switches and controls (top to bottom, left to right, high and low settings) – listen for fans and heater motors
- 3c) Start the engine – listen for knocking or other unusual noises; do not race the engine, but in cold weather set it at higher idle (1200 rpm)
- 3d) Check the oil pressure gauge first to make sure there's oil pressure and to prevent damage to the engine; then check all other gauges (top-bottom, left-right); make sure the alternator is charging (with some models, you may have to rev the engine slightly to kick it in)
- 3e) Check the steering wheel; turn it several inches both directions – there should be no freeplay, binding, or catching
- 3f) Set lights for your walk-around – turn on headlight low beams, marker/clip lights, sign light, master flasher switch,



and left turn signal

*STEP 4: Exit vehicle, full walk-around.*

- 4a) Start at front right wheel and walk counterclockwise around vehicle
- 4b) Wheels and tires – check each wheel and tire starting from the outside and working in toward the center: inflation; adequate tread (at least 1/8" front tire) all the way across road contact surface of tire; no cracks or cuts in the side wall; no nails or other items in tire; valve stem present and centered between spacers; no dents or cracks in rim or wheel; lug nuts tight and no rust or bare metal visible; no grease visible from grease seals; no stones or other objects lodged between rear duals
- 4c) Marker or clip lights – corners, front and rear, sides of roof
- 4d) Headlights – low beams
- 4e) Running lights and taillights

***Check each wheel and tire carefully, starting from the outside in toward the center.***

- 4f) Left turn signals (including side signals)
- 4g) Mirror brackets secure, mirrors clean (use rag as necessary)
- 4h) Hood latched – both sides
- 4i) Red student flashers
- 4j) Antenna(s)
- 4k) Sign lights (may not be visible in bright sunlight – if not visible, check from inside)
- 4l) Stop signs and flashers

- 4m) All reflectors and reflective tape
- 4n) “Pressure” leaks underneath front and sides of bus – coolant, fuel, oil
- 4o) Emergency doors, buzzers, seals, safety catch – open emergency doors all the way, being careful to not break the safety catch (note: check emergency reflector triangles from outside rear door if they’re located at the rear of the vehicle)
- 4p) Damage to body, windows, roof – report any new scratches or dents
- 4q) Underneath the bus – hanging or loose wires, drive shaft and drive shaft protectors, rear springs intact, etc)
- 4r) Exhaust system secure – push end of pipe with foot (not your hand – it could be hot) : end of exhaust pipe should extend beyond rear bumper
- 4s) Fuel cap tight

*STEP 5: Re-enter vehicle, check emergency equipment, re-set lights.*

- 5a) Step well light, steps clear, handrail secure
- 5b) Fire extinguisher – fully charged, pin present, secure in bracket
- 5c) Seat belt cutter(s) if present
- 5d. First aid kit – stocked (check kit on assigned bus at least once a week; check daily on a spare bus), kit secure in bracket, labeled

***Check inside the emergency reflector box at least weekly on your regularly assigned bus; check every day on spare buses.***

- 5e) Body spill cleanup kit – stocked (check kit on assigned bus at least once a week; check daily on a spare bus), secure in bracket, labeled
- 5f) Vehicle registration, DOT inspection sticker, and insurance cards present
- 5g) Emergency reflector triangles present (if located at front of vehicle) – check inside the box at least weekly on your regularly assigned bus, daily on a spare bus – make sure reflectors haven’t come apart
- 5h) Re-set lights – activate high beams and right turn signal

*STEP 6: Exit vehicle again, check curbside lights.*

- 6a) Proceed to front and then back along right side of vehicle again
- 6b) High beams
- 6c) Right turn signal – front, side, rear

*STEP 7: Re-enter vehicle, static brake check.*

- 7 a) Close passenger door and take seat
- 7b) Turn engine off and leave key in accessory position; place bus in reverse, go to back of bus, and check back-up lights and beeper from inside (unless you

have a buddy to check for you from outside)

7c) Leave the key in the accessory position; release parking brake (place a standard transmission bus in gear to prevent it from rolling; with an automatic transmission bus, rest your foot over the foot brake in case it starts rolling)

7d) Air brake-equipped bus: before starting a static air brake check make sure the air is fully charged, the wigwag is set, and the key is in the accessory position; first, check for air leaks in the spring brake system – with the spring brake pushed in and before applying the foot brake, watch the air gauge needles and listen for leaks; if there are no leaks, hold down the foot brake pedal hard to check the foot brake lines – watch the needles and listen for leaks; if there are no leaks, pump the foot brake repeatedly until all three emergency warning devices activate (wigwag, buzzer, light – they should come on at approximately 60 psi); continue pumping until the spring brake comes on (it should come on at approximately 25 psi); then, re-start the engine and check air pressure buildup – air gauge needles should build simultaneously at approximately 15 psi every 45 sec); remember to reset the wigwag after the system is recharged with air

7e) Hydraulic brake-equipped bus: with key off, depress foot brake pedal, listen for whirring sound of brake booster motor if so equipped; with key on but engine off, check brake warning light/buzzer; pump brake pedal three times - pedal should stay firm

*STEP 8: Check interior of bus.*

8a) With the engine running and the passenger door closed, activate 4-way flashers and amber student flashers

8b) From the driver's seat, check front 4-way flashers and amber student flashers using pedestrian crossover mirrors or by leaning against windshield

8c) Leave your seat and walk the aisle to the back of the bus, checking interior items along the way – seat backs: (look for cuts or other vandalism ); all emergency exits (doors, windows, and roof hatches) must be opened, not just pushed up into the “vent” position; exit labels and decals, and red lights over emergency doors

8d) Open the rear door and lean out far enough to check amber flashers and 4-way flashers

8e) Return to the front of the vehicle, checking seat cushions (pull up on each cushion at the seat “bight” where seat back and cushion meet – cushions often come loose); check seat belts – all should be accessible; check “jump seat” operation next to side emergency door – jump seat should spring back to full upright position

8f) Return to driver's seat – adjust it as necessary before leaving yard; fasten and properly adjust driver seat belt

8g) Ask a buddy (another driver or attendant) to check your brake lights (in low light conditions you may be able to use your driving mirror to see brake lights flashed on and off in a reflective surface behind your bus, such as the windows on other parked buses; some operations mount exterior mirrors across the lot to help drivers check their brake lights)

## *Check mirror adjustment carefully before leaving the yard.*

8h. Check mirror adjustment carefully (driving mirrors and pedestrian crossover mirrors) before leaving the yard

8i. Check horn

*STEP 9: 50' brake checks* (whenever possible, at a safe distance from other parked buses).

9a) Check the parking brake – it should hold your bus with the transmission in “Drive” and the engine at high idle

9b) Perform a 50' service brake check with the bus moving forward at approximately five mph – the bus should stop smoothly and quietly without pulling hard to either side

Note: Wheelchair lifts, wheelchair tie-down systems, seat belt cutter, and the fire blanket **must** also be checked if the vehicle is lift-equipped. Check the full operation of the wheelchair lift before leaving the yard. (See Optional Unit 11 for more about checking wheelchair lifts and other special needs equipment.)

A pre-trip inspection of vans has several unique features.

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## **10.2 Driver's Daily Vehicle Reports**

**10.2.1 Legal requirement.** New York State Department of Transportation requires the driver of every school bus to file a written report of its mechanical condition at the end of

the day. Driver's Daily Vehicle Reports (DDVR) should be taken with utmost seriousness by drivers. Your signature is required twice – first, after conducting your pre-trip inspection, certifying that the bus was in safe condition when it left the yard. Second, after your post-trip inspection at the conclusion of the run, certifying that the bus was still in safe working order at the end of the day. Any mechanical problems discovered during your pre-trip inspection, while driving, or at the end of the day must be described.

***Treat DDVRs seriously – should an accident occur, the DDVR you signed will be reviewed for any indication that the bus was not in sound mechanical condition at the start of the run.***

DDVRs must be filled out completely and legibly. Mileage numbers must be accurately transcribed – any gaps in the mileage of successive DDVRs will be questioned by NYS DOT at the next bus inspection. Should an accident occur, the DDVR you signed will be scrupulously reviewed for any indication that the bus was not in sound mechanical condition at the start of the run. It is very important that you sign the DDVR before leaving the bus yard for your first run. Your signature protects you from a subsequent charge that you didn't inspect the bus as required by law.

If mechanics repair, service, or work on a vehicle for any reason they must indicate what was done and sign off on the DDVR. The next time that bus is used, the bus driver using

it must counter-sign under the mechanic's signature. This legal signature chain is intended to prevent unsafe buses from transporting children.

DDVRs are legal documents and must be retained by the operation for at least a year.

**10.2.2 Mechanics need to know now.** Don't wait until you turn in the DDVR at the end of the day to inform mechanics of a mechanical problem. Tell them at once. If it's a minor problem, such as a blown clip light, it can usually be repaired on the spot. If the problem is more serious, you shouldn't use the bus.

Mechanics work hard. Ask your supervisor or your Head Mechanic what's the best way to communicate with busy mechanics in the morning.

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## 10.3 Post-Trip Inspection

**10.3.1 Your most important responsibility.** You **must** check for children before getting off your bus for any reason. It's a law. This means getting out of your seat and walking the aisle to the back of the bus, carefully checking both on and under seats. Many, many children fall asleep on their buses. Others try to hide under the seats for whatever childish reason.

At a minimum, leaving a child on the bus will result in serious disciplinary action against the bus driver. Often, it will mean the end of his or her career as a bus driver, or even a criminal charge of endangering the welfare of a child.

Losing your job or being arrested, however, is not the worst thing that could happen. The worst case scenario is a panicked child being left on a bus in the bus yard for hours in freezing or sweltering weather. Children have died when left in vehicles by distracted adults.

State law requires both attendants and bus drivers to check for sleeping children. Don't assume the attendant checked. You check, too – every time you park your bus.

**10.3.2 Other responsibilities at the close of the day.** Never be in a hurry at the end of your bus driving day. There are still important duties to fulfill after you've dropped off the last students and parked your bus. Be a professional from the start to the finish of your day.

- Always leave your bus ready for its next use. Never leave a bus with less than half a tank of fuel. What if there's a sudden school or community emergency?
- Before shutting off a diesel bus, let it cool down at low idle for 3-5 minutes. This prevents damage to the engine.
- While your engine is cooling down, do a walk-around, checking lights and looking for any damage or mechanical problem. Report any minor problems such as a light out at once, so mechanics have time to fix it before the next day.

*State law requires both attendants and bus drivers to check for sleeping children. Don't assume the attendant checked - you check, too.*

- When you shut off the engine, turn off all switches and controls. This prevents excessive draw on the batteries the next morning.

- Sweep your bus every day; empty trash as necessary, but at least weekly. A dirty bus is unhygienic and unprofessional.
- Make sure seat belts are accessible. Seat belts should not be left dangling on the floor to get filthy or to trip students.
- With an air brake-equipped bus, always pump down your brakes before you get off the bus at the end of the day (or for any other reason). This is a requirement of the New York State Education Department. Pump them all the way down to approximately 15 psi. This ensures no one can release the spring brake, letting the bus roll.
- Close all windows (including driver window) and hatches. Double-check – open windows and hatches let in rain (which can damage vehicle components) as well as birds, bats, bees, and other critters. Make sure your door is fully closed as you exit the bus.

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**Complete your Driver's Daily Vehicle Report carefully and accurately. Bring it and the bus key into the office according to local procedure.**

## 10.4 Unit 10 Review

Write down or circle the best answer(s).

**1. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The pre-trip inspection required during a CDL road test is adequate once you begin transporting students.”*

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** *“School bus technicians take their demanding jobs seriously, but mechanical problems still occur. School buses are complicated machines and machines break down.”*

**3. List three things you can do to prevent an injury when conducting a pre-trip inspection:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**4. List the 9 basic steps of a model pre-trip inspection:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Which pre-trip step depends on local policy?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. List three things you should be looking for when you approach your bus at the start of the pre-trip:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Which gauge should you check first when you start the engine?**

- a. Coolant temperature gauge.
- b. Fuel gauge.
- c. Oil pressure gauge.
- d. Air pressure gauge.

**8. List 10 items you should check during the full walk-around during your pre-trip:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

**9. List three types of emergency equipment you should check during your pre-trip:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**10. List three things that must happen before you can conduct a static air brake check:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**11. List five things you should check in the interior of your bus:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**12. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The 50’ brake check should be conducted at 20 mph.”*

**13. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The 50’ brake check should be conducted at a safe distance from other parked buses whenever possible.”*

**14. How many times must you sign a Driver’s Daily Vehicle Report each day?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**15. When must mechanics sign the Driver’s Daily Vehicle Report?**

- a. *When they’ve repaired, serviced, or worked on a bus.*
- b. *Every time the bus is used.*
- c. *Mechanics are never required to sign the DDVR.*
- d. *None of the above.*

**16. What are the possible consequences for failing to check for children at the end of a run ?**

- a. *Disciplinary action or firing of bus driver.*
- b. *Criminal charge of endangering the welfare of a child.*
- c. *Child could be hurt or killed.*
- d. *All of the above.*

**17. After checking for children, what are three other duties at the end of the day?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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## UNIT 10 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT

## 11:

# TRANSPORTING STUDENTS USING WHEELCHAIRS

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### Unit 11 Topics

- 11.1 Types of Mobility Devices
- 11.2 Using the Wheelchair Lift
- 11.3 Securement
- 11.4 TLC
- 11.5 Evacuation Planning
- 11.6 Unit 11 Review

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### Introduction

Many children use wheelchairs to get around. Wheelchairs and other types of mobility devices provide children with physical disabilities the opportunity to participate fully in school and school activities.

Safe transportation of children using wheelchairs demands exceptional attention to detail. A lapse of attention while loading or securing a student using a wheelchair could result in a spill and, possibly, a serious injury to the child.

This unit will teach you how to use a wheelchair lift and how to secure a wheelchair and its student passenger in a school bus. You will also learn how and why to practice “TLC driving” when transporting children with orthopedic disabilities.

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### 11.1 Types of Mobility Devices

**11.1.1 Older wheelchairs.** A generation ago, almost all wheelchairs were “hospital” type chairs. This traditional wheelchair design features large rear wheels and smaller front wheels, a tubular folding frame, removable foot pegs and arm rests, a fabric seat, and no securement belt for the passenger.

*Special care must be taken when transporting a student using an older hospital-type chair.*

While hospital wheelchairs are familiar to most people and are still in use by both adults and children, they were not originally intended for transporting on vehicles. Special care must be taken when transporting a student using an older hospital-type chair. Selecting the appropriate “securement points” on the chair frame takes careful consideration. Some areas on the frame of older designs may not be strong enough to keep the chair secure in a crash. Specific guidelines for selecting appropriate securement points are included in Section 11.3 below.

Hospital type wheelchairs are often used as back-ups when a child’s more modern personal chair is being serviced. “Loaner”

wheelchairs are not always in the best condition: wheel spokes may be broken or bent, foot or arm rests or hand grips may be loose or missing altogether, and brakes may not hold the chair.

**11.1.2 Modern Wheelchairs.** Hundreds of different types of wheelchairs are in use today. To better meet the needs of children, mobility devices are constantly being changed and improved.

*Hundreds of different types of wheelchairs are in use today.*

Common types of modern mobility devices include:

- *Transit chairs.* Unlike traditional hospital wheelchairs, transit-style mobility devices are intentionally engineered to be transported on a vehicle, including a school bus. Transit chairs are much stronger than traditional hospital chairs. In compliance with a national wheelchair safety design standard known as “WC-19”, transit chairs are designed to remain intact and protect their passengers in a crash. Appropriate securement points are clearly designated by the chair manufacturer. “D-rings” are usually provided for attaching securement straps. If D-rings are present, use them. They represent the safest securement points for that chair.
- *“Tilt-in-space” mobility devices.* Chairs with adjustable passenger frames accommodate children with physical or medical problems who require frequent repositioning of the seat. Tilting a child back may alleviate breathing problems; tilting forward may help with swallowing



difficulties. Passengers in tilt-in-space chairs should ride with the backrest positioned at an angle of 30 degrees or less from vertical. Ask your supervisor for advice if you encounter a child who needs to be tilted back further than that – it may be necessary to move the shoulder belt anchor point rearward so the belt maintains contact with the child’s shoulder and chest.

Tilt-in-space chairs can be tricky to secure. On older tilt-in-space chairs, securement straps should be attached to the main wheelchair frame, not the tiltable passenger portion of the device. If the straps were secured to the tiltable passenger portion in a crash, it could move and the chair could come loose. The main chair frame, which is suitable for attaching securement straps, must be distinguished from the tiltable passenger seat portion, which isn’t.

- *Power wheelchairs.* Battery-powered mobility devices provide wonderful independence for the user. However, they can be very difficult to load and secure on a school bus. Appropriate securement points may be difficult to access on older power chairs. (Your supervisor, an SBDI, or the child’s occupational therapist may be able to help locate suitable securement points on powered mobility devices.) A power chair with passenger can weigh

several hundred pounds. Additional securement straps may be needed because of the additional weight. Power chairs are usually operated with a joystick-like control. Learn how to operate the steering, accelerator, and brakes. Usually, the child will be proud to show you.

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## 11.2 Using the Wheelchair Lift

**11.2.1 Lifts can be dangerous.** Children using mobility devices usually ride on “lift-equipped” school buses. The purpose of the lift is to raise and lower children so they can enter or exit the bus. You need to know how to safely operate a wheelchair lift.

Wheelchair lifts must be treated with respect at all times. The stakes are high when operating a lift. Children using wheelchairs have been seriously injured and even killed in accidents involving wheelchair lifts. Bus attendants and bus drivers have also been hurt.

There are many different types of wheelchair lifts, but they all share one thing in common: they are complicated pieces of machinery with the potential for injury for anyone not paying careful attention.

Wheelchair lifts operate in two stages:

1. Folding/unfolding the platform from its stowed position inside the bus.
2. Raising/lowering the wheelchair platform that carries the passenger in the wheelchair.

Both functions are driven by powerful hydraulic or electrical machinery. An inattentive operator could easily be hurt. Hands are especially vulnerable. A hand (the student’s or the adult operator’s) caught in one of the lifting or folding mechanisms could be pinched or severed. An operator’s feet could



be crushed as the lift platform drops to the ground.

Long drawstrings on jackets or sweatshirts, and dangling jewelry or long hair, are dangerous when working with wheelchair lifts. They can get tangled in the lift mechanisms.

**11.2.2 Safe lift zone.** When approaching a bus stop where a student using a wheelchair will board or exit, stop your bus so the lift is positioned over a safe, level area. The ideal lift zone is a paved surface. Avoid barriers such as curbs or steps.

Pull to the right side of the road when stopping to load or unload a student in a wheelchair. Avoid dropping the lift into the roadway. If there’s room to safely pull completely off the road, for instance into a loop driveway or a parking area in a front of the child’s house, do so. It takes much longer to load/unload a child using a wheelchair than it does with ambulatory children. Tying up traffic for several minutes should be avoided if possible. Ask your supervisor or SBDI for guidance about exactly where to make a child’s stop when driving a lift-equipped bus.

If the bus stop is in an area with pedestrian traffic, take caution to prevent someone from running into or tripping on the lowered lift platform.

**11.2.3 Lift design.** There are many types of wheelchair lifts. Controls and safety features vary widely:

- Most lifts won't work unless a main lift control is activated. The button is usually located on the vehicle control panel near the driver's seat. Some lift systems have another switch located near the lift door.



- The Raise/Lower and Fold/Unfold controls may be mounted on the bus wall just inside the lift door, or on the inside of the lift door itself. Some are mounted on a removable pendant, and some are fixed to the door.
- Some lifts won't run unless the parking brake is set. A safety interlock prevents the bus from being moved when the lift is in use.
- Some lifts won't work unless the engine is running.
- Some lifts are equipped with passenger belts, others aren't. Lifts with passenger belts won't work unless the belt is latched.
- Newer lifts often incorporate additional safety features, such as proximity shut-offs. If anyone is standing too close to the lift machinery, a light beam or sensor plate

triggers a kill switch, and the lift won't operate.

Always take the time to learn all the features of the lift you will be using. Don't be embarrassed to ask a supervisor or a mechanic for an orientation.

**11.2.4 Lift safety procedures.** The procedures will prevent an injury to a student or yourself when operating a wheelchair lift:

- Red student flashers must be activated when loading or unloading a student in a wheelchair, just as for students who walk.
- Open and secure the lift door. Typically there's a latch or chain to hook it against the side of the bus. If it's not secured, a breeze could catch it and it could swing back into the deployed lift.
- Students in mobility devices must face outward, away from the bus, while on the lift platform.
- Position the passenger in the wheelchair close to the bus – not at the outer edge of the platform. Center the chair in relation to the sides of the lift platform. Some lifts have a chair positioning guide on the platform grid to show you where to place the chair.
- Chair brakes should be set while the lift is being raised or lowered.
- Do not ride the lift with the student. There's not enough room for both a wheelchair and a standing passenger on the platform. You or the student could be pushed into the lift machinery, or knocked to the ground, and seriously injured. The lift platform's load rating could also be exceeded.
- There is absolutely no place for distraction while operating a lift. Do not engage in

distracting conversations with anyone else – child, child’s parent, teacher, attendant – while operating the lift.

- Attendants are assigned to many, but not all, runs transporting students using wheelchairs. If there’s an attendant on the run, one of you should remain inside the bus while the other operates the lift controls outside. Ask your supervisor what your operation’s policy is on this issue. While the chair is on the lift, either you or your attendant should have a firm grasp on the wheelchair at all times. Grasp the wheelchair by the frame, not by an arm rest, wheel, or other removable component. As a safety measure while the lift is being raised, the chair should be passed from whoever is outside the bus to whoever is inside– vice-versa when it’s being lowered.
- Clear communication with the attendant is important when loading or unloading a student using a wheelchair. Work together as a team to provide the highest level of protection to the child.

#### **11.2.5 Ambulatory passengers on the lift.**

A child using crutches or a walker may have difficulty getting up or down the bus steps, but it is not safe to use a lift for a child who is not sitting down. Standing passengers – especially children – can easily lose their balance on the lift.

The best way to prevent a fall is to provide a wheelchair for the ride up on the lift, even if the child can stand with crutches or a walker. Once inside the bus, the child can transfer from the wheelchair used on the lift to a regular bus seat. If the empty chair is then transported on the bus, it must be secured.

Ask your supervisor about your school district’s or bus company’s policy about this issue.

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### **11.3 Securement**

Follow the procedures listed below to position and secure a wheelchair and the passenger in your bus:

**11.3.1 Position the mobility device in the bus.** Wheelchair lifts and wheelchair securement stations can be located in various locations in a school bus: front, midships, or rear. School bus floor plans vary widely.

- Select the securement station. There’s not always a choice, but when there is, students using wheelchairs are best positioned between the axles, near the center portion of the bus. The center of the bus provides a much smoother ride than the rear. This is especially important for children who are physically or medically fragile.

*If there’s a choice, students using wheelchairs are best positioned between the axles, near the center of the bus.*

- Forward facing. The wheelchair and its passenger must face forward. On a school bus, transporting a wheelchair facing sideways is against the law.
- Center the mobility device in the securement station. Once you’ve selected a location to secure the wheelchair, center it in the station. Center it in relation to the

floor mounts or tracks. Center the chair from side to side and front to back in the station. Avoid placing a wheelchair so close to the bus interior wall that a child could hit his or her head.



- When the chair is positioned where you want it, ask the student if everything's okay. Set the device brakes temporarily so that it will stay put as you hook up the securement straps.

**11.3.2 Secure the mobility device.** There are many different types of securement systems. Designs are constantly evolving. Specific features vary widely. You must learn how to correctly use the features of the system on your bus. Instructions should be mounted on the wall of the bus. Your supervisor or SBDI may have additional material, such as a video or DVD, that shows you exactly how to use the securement system on your bus.

The procedures listed below should be regarded as a starting point for securing a wheelchair safely:

- *Secure the mobility device before securing the passenger.* It's best to secure the wheelchair to the bus floor first, *before* starting to secure the passenger with the lap-shoulder belts. Trying to complete both tasks at the same time is confusing.

- *Floor mounts.* Insert securement straps into the floor mounts, pockets, or tracks. Rear straps should be mounted so they're inside the tracking path width of the device wheels; front straps should be slightly outside the tracking path. Rear and front straps should be mounted in the floor far enough from the device so they rise to the securement points on the chair at a 30-60 degree angle. This configuration keeps the device stable in a crash.

Mount the least accessible straps in the floor first. It's sometimes best to insert the least accessible straps into the floor *before* moving the wheelchair into its station. It's harder to get at the floor mounts when the device is in the way.

- *Double-check floor mounts.* Make sure the straps are securely locked into place in the floor mounts. They can be tricky. Before attaching the straps to the wheelchair, pull on them from several directions.

***Make sure the securement straps are securely locked into place in the floor mounts— they can be tricky.***

- *Select securement points on the mobility device.* When securing an older hospital-style wheelchair, attach the securement straps at welded junctions on the main wheelchair frame. Do not attach straps to removable or moving components such as foot pegs or arm rests or the wheel, or to folding cross-members under the chair. Look for securement points as close as

possible to the bottom of the passenger seat. Start under the seat and move down from there. Securement straps should be at a 30-60 degree angle to the floor.

- *Use four straps.* At least four securement straps should be attached to suitable securement points on every mobility device.
- *Heavier chairs.* Heavy power wheelchairs may need additional straps. Check with your supervisor.
- *Tighten the straps.* Once all straps are attached to the wheelchair, release the wheelchair brakes – this avoids a “false positive” when you are tightening the chair. Tighten the straps until the chair won’t move on the floor.
- *If you have an attendant, work as a team as you secure the chair.* Two sets of eyes are better than one. Both driver and attendant should be fully involved in securing each wheelchair. Even a small mistake could result in a serious injury when transporting children using wheelchairs.

**11.3.3 Securing the passenger.** When you’re *certain* the mobility device is adequately secured on the bus floor, secure the student using the lap-shoulder belts. Lap-shoulder belts are required for every type of wheelchair securement system. They must be used even if the mobility device has its own lap belt or harness. Failing to use the passenger lap-shoulder belt could result in a child falling out of the device and being hurt. It’s happened many times.

Lap-shoulder belts can be complicated. You can’t be in a hurry.

- Lap belt first. With most securement systems, it’s best to secure the passenger

lap belt first before attempting the shoulder belt. Route the lap belt as close as possible to the passenger’s body. Don’t route the belt over or against wheelchair components such as arm rests or wheels.

- Shoulder belt. When the lap belt is attached and adjusted snugly across the passenger’s hips, attach the shoulder belt. The shoulder belt should run over the passenger’s outboard shoulder, across the collar bone and chest, attaching to the lap belt at the passenger’s inboard hip. The shoulder belt should be snug, but not tight. Make sure it’s not cutting into the passenger’s neck.
- Newer “WC-19” wheelchairs offer the option of a crash-tested lap belt that is anchored to the wheelchair frame. If the wheelchair does have such a lap belt, complete the belt system by attaching the lower end of the shoulder belt to it.
- If possible, remove hard trays from the wheelchair and secure them elsewhere in the vehicle to reduce the chance of rider injury from contact with the tray. In some cases, a foam tray may be substituted for a rigid tray during the bus ride. If it is not possible to remove a hard tray, place padding between the child and the tray. Make sure the tray is securely attached to the wheelchair so it will not break loose and cause injury to other occupants in a crash.
- A properly positioned headrest can help protect the passenger’s neck in a rear impact.
- If a child needs head and neck support during the bus ride, a soft, light neck collar is best. Stiff collars and head straps are more likely to cause neck injury in a crash.

- Secure the child’s medical or other equipment to the wheelchair or vehicle to prevent it from breaking loose and causing injuries in a crash. A lap belt on an unoccupied bus seat may be suitable for securing equipment the child needs at school.
- Sensitivity. Sensitivity toward the child while attaching and adjusting the lap and shoulder belts is important.

**11.3.4 Safety check.** *Always* carefully check securement before leaving the bus stop. Explain what you’re doing so you don’t startle the child.

***Always carefully check securement before leaving the bus stop.***

Grasp the chair and see if it will move. Double-check that everything’s hooked up properly.

If you have an attendant, conduct the safety check together. You can’t be too careful when transporting children in mobility devices.

Attendants should check securement periodically during the ride, too. A securement strap might wiggle loose during bumps and turns. Most wheelchair spills occur during the bus ride, not right at the bus stop.

If you don’t have an attendant, keep an eye on wheelchair and passenger securement whenever it’s safe to do so during the route, such as while stopped at a red light. If you’re not sure the wheelchair’s still tightly secured, pull the bus over in a safe location, activate

your 4-way flashers, secure the bus, get out of your seat, and check.

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## **11.4 TLC (Tender Loving Care)**

**11.4.1 How would you feel?** All children deserve respect, caring, and sensitivity. Children with orthopedic disabilities or children who have severe medical conditions require special caution. The best way to understand how a child using a mobility device feels is to experience it – try it!

- Riding in a wheelchair over uneven pavement, curbs, drains, snow and other barriers can be unnerving. “What if the person pushing me isn’t paying attention? What if my chair tips over?”
- Maneuvering a walker or crutches to and from a bus stop and on or off a bus is anything but easy. “What if I fall backwards on the steps? What if I lose my grip on the walker?”
- Riding on a wheelchair lift is never routine for the passenger in the wheelchair. Lifts seldom operate smoothly. As it’s raised, the platform may lean with the load. Audible groans and whines may emerge from the lift mechanism. “Is the lift platform going to break? Am I going to fall off the lift?”
- Having a stranger leaning across your body to thread belts and straps across your hips and chest is uncomfortable. “I feel so embarrassed and ashamed. I don’t know where to direct my eyes.”

**11.4.2 Driving.** School bus drivers who drive lift-equipped vehicles must drive even more slowly and defensively than other school bus drivers.

- Starts, turns, and stops must be gentle. “Jackrabbit” starts, whipping around corners, late braking, and abrupt stops are more dangerous when transporting fragile children.
- Bumps caused by potholes, washboarding, speed bumps, and frost-heaved culverts are not only uncomfortable for fragile children – They are dangerous! A child with brittle bones could be hurt from going over a bump too fast. TLC driving means driving slow and constantly scanning the roadway ahead for bumps and potholes.
- Whenever possible, seat fragile children near the center of the bus. The ride is gentler. Unless there’s no other alternative, avoid placing children using mobility devices in the very rear of the bus. This area is sometimes called the “catapult seat” because it is so bumpy. If you must seat a fragile child in the back of the bus, TLC driving is even more important.

1. An engine-generated fire at the front of your bus.
2. A fire at the rear caused by another vehicle crashing into your bus.

Plans must be specific to each run. Every special needs run is different. There is no “one size fits all” evacuation plan.

Questions to be taken into account in creating an evacuation plan include:

- Is there an attendant on board? If so, the attendant’s role must be carefully determined ahead of time. Two people can evacuate a bus load of children much quicker than one – if they’re organized. However, two people can actually slow the evacuation down if the individual roles aren’t precisely defined. Who will get off the bus to receive the children? Who will stay on the bus to bring the children to the exit?
- How many children are assigned to the bus, what is the nature of their special needs, and how would their conditions affect them in an emergency? Can all the children walk to an exit and away from the bus on their own, or will they need assistance? Will they need to be carried, or dragged?
- Where are the children seated (including children using wheelchairs), and how would that affect the ability to get everyone out? Might a child’s condition create a bottleneck that prevents others from getting out an exit?
- Would it be faster to evacuate a child who uses a wheelchair in or out of the chair? What’s the safest and quickest way to get the child out of the chair? Would a seat belt cutter be needed? Are there any medical conditions that could jeopardize

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## 11.5 Evacuation Planning

**11.5.1 Two minutes or less.** Emergency preparation is important for all school bus drivers, but it’s even more critical when transporting children with physical disabilities. Evacuating students who can’t walk may take significantly longer.

Buses can burn quickly under certain conditions. Heat and toxic gases can make the passenger compartment unsurvivable in less than two minutes.

**11.5.2 Planning for two scenarios.** An evacuation plan should be created for every special needs bus run. You need to know exactly what to do in the two most common fire scenarios:

the child if he or she is removed from the chair? Is there any way to evacuate the child while he or she is still in the wheelchair? Through which exit? How can it be done without risk of dropping the child? How long would it take to operate the wheelchair lift? What happens if there's no power to the lift – how long would it take to drop the lift manually?

- How many exits are available on the assigned bus, what types of exits are they, and where are they located? (Don't forget the passenger door, which might be the quickest way off the bus.)
- What's the best sequence for getting children out for each scenario?

These are not simple questions. They need careful thought. As a new school bus driver, your supervisor, an SBDI, or a veteran driver experienced with special needs transportation should be fully involved in helping you create an evacuation plan. Using a chalkboard to sketch out the seating arrangement of your bus – noting exits and where each child is seated – may help to visualize each emergency scenario and come up with a workable plan.

Use the Evacuation Plan form on the next page to write down your finished plan. Plans should be kept on the bus.

# SPECIAL NEEDS RUN EVACUATION PLAN

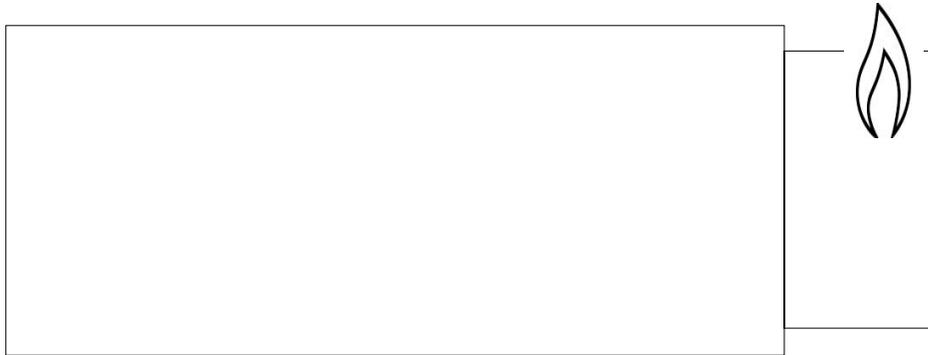
Bus #: \_\_\_\_\_ Route #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Driver: \_\_\_\_\_

Attendant: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Instructions: For each of the two evacuation scenarios below, sketch in the exits of the bus and where each child is seated. Indicate children using wheelchairs by WC. Next, draw an arrow to the best exit for each scenario. Finally, number the children according to the sequence you will use to get them out of the bus.*



Front Engine Fire



Fire at Rear of Bus



**11.5.3 Specialized emergency equipment for children with special needs.** All New York State school buses that transport children using wheelchairs must be equipped with at least one seat belt cutter and one fire blanket. You need to know how to use them.

Seat belt cutters work most effectively when drawn at an angle across a tight belt. Practice doing this with discarded seat belts. Cutting a slack belt straight across the webbing is difficult.

The main purpose of a fire blanket is dragging someone who can't walk to an exit in an emergency. You might be able to carry a young child to an exit, but older children may be too heavy to carry, especially in the tight confines of a school bus. (Blankets can also be used to smother a small fire.)

To drag a child, place the child on a fire blanket. The child should be lying on his or her back. Drag children head first. If you attempt to drag them by their feet, their arms will catch on the seats as you move down the aisle.

Crouch on one knee at the child's head. Bunch the blanket around the child's head and grasp it firmly in both hands. Cradle the child's head between your forearms.

On your knees, "winch" your way backwards toward the exit, one tug at a time. It's possible for even a small person to drag a heavy child in this fashion.

You should also know how to operate the wheelchair lift manually. All power wheelchair lifts can be operated manually when necessary. There are many different types of manual overrides. Most work like a hydraulic car jack, with a simple valve to release hydraulic pressure and lower the lift, and a jack handle to pump it back up.

However, both the valve and the handle may be difficult to find. Sometimes they are stowed under a protective console.

Ask your Head Mechanic or an SBDI to demonstrate how to operate the lift manually. Practice it yourself. However, even when you know how to do it, manual lift operation is often too slow to be of use in an actual emergency evacuation.

Knowing how to operate the lift manually may be useful if you lose power to the lift during a run. In some cases you may be able to get a student using a wheelchair safely off the bus at their stop or at school by using the lift manually, but always call base first. You may be directed to wait until a mechanic can check out the lift.

**11.5.4 Practice.** Evacuation plans that are not actually practiced mean little. This means a hands-on evacuation drill with your students. Students with special needs are not exempt from drills. If anything, drills are *more* important for children who might take longer to get out of the bus.

If students have severe special needs or are medically fragile, teachers or parents should be present during the drill to ensure children's safety. Do everything you can to prevent an injury to a child during a drill. But the more severe the condition of the children on the bus, the more important practice becomes.

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## 11.6 Unit 11 Review

Write down the correct answer or answers.

1. **TRUE or FALSE?** “Wheelchair designs have changed little over the years.”
2. **Which of the following are appropriate securement points on a traditional hospital-style wheelchair?**
  - a. Foot peg or arm rest.
  - b. At a welded joint on the frame.
  - c. Folding cross-members.
  - d. Wheel.
3. **TRUE or FALSE?** “If ‘D-rings’ are present on a transit-style chair, use them. They represent the safest securement points for that chair.”
4. **TRUE or FALSE?** “Whenever possible, ride the lift along with the passenger using the wheelchair.”
5. **Wheelchair lifts operate in two stages. What are they?**
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
6. **TRUE or FALSE?** “On school buses, passengers using wheelchairs must face sideways.”
7. **TRUE or FALSE?** “You must activate red student flashers when loading or unloading a student using a wheelchair.”
8. **TRUE or FALSE?** “If you have an attendant, it is the attendant’s responsibility alone to secure the wheelchair.”
9. **TRUE or FALSE?** “Securement straps should be a 30-60 degree angle to the floor.”

10. **What is the minimum number of securement straps required to secure a wheelchair?**

\_\_\_\_\_

11. **TRUE or FALSE?** “Route the lap belt as close to the passenger’s body as possible.”
12. **TRUE or FALSE?** “Lap-shoulder belts are optional for children using wheelchairs.”
13. **Which of the following statements are true?**
  - a. Always conduct a safety check of wheelchair securement before moving the bus.
  - b. If you have an attendant, conduct the safety check together.
  - c. Most wheelchair spills occur during the run, not right at the bus stop.
  - d. All statements are true.
14. **TRUE or FALSE?** “Jackrabbit starts and abrupt stops are dangerous when transporting fragile children.”
15. **TRUE or FALSE?** “The most effective way to cut a belt is at an angle, with the belt pulled tight.”

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## UNIT 11 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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# OPTIONAL UNIT 12: TRANSPORTING PRESCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Unit 12 Topics

- 12.1 Understanding the Preschool Child
- 12.2 Restraints for Preschool Children on School Buses
- 12.3 Loading and Unloading Preschool Children
- 12.4 Evacuation Concerns
- 12.5 Unit 12 Review

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## Introduction

Transporting preschoolers on a school bus can be delightful, but it can also be challenging. Their impulsiveness and their limited mental development, combined with their small stature, make safety at the bus stop and during the bus ride a real test of adult skills and patience.

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## 12.1 Understanding the Preschool Child

### 12.1.1 Characteristics and challenges.

Some of the reasons preschool-aged children are challenging to transport on a school bus include:

*A preschooler might climb into the rear wheelwell because he thought it would be fun to ride down the block on top of the tire. It's happened.*

- Young children are extremely unpredictable. They are easily distracted and their attention spans are fleeting. A four-year-old could suddenly bolt toward your bus as she sees it approaching her stop. A young child might crawl underneath your stopped bus to retrieve a treasured item, chase a family pet, or see how the bus works. A preschooler might even climb into the rear wheelwell because he thought it would be fun to ride down the block on top of the tire. Each of these hair-curling examples actually happened in our state. Given the chance, preschool children will do just about anything.
- Without close supervision by an adult or a responsible older child, preschoolers will wander off as soon as they get off your bus. They cannot be relied upon to go into their houses on their own. Children under five need to be escorted on and off the bus. This includes on school grounds and in bus loading areas.

- Preschoolers are expert nappers. A bus ride at the end of a long school day is like a rocking cradle for a young child. Without the careful post-check required by law, it's easy to leave a sleeping preschooler on your bus. It's happened many times in our state.
- A young child's ability to gauge traffic dangers is very limited. Skills adults take for granted – assessing how far away an approaching car is, or how fast it's traveling – are impossible for preschoolers. This limitation is based in cognitive development and cannot be overcome through training and reinforcement. Preschoolers are not ready to cross the road on their own. Their brain's auditory processing has not developed to the point that they can accurately pinpoint the origin of a sound. Their brain's visual processing cannot yet comprehend perspective. For a young child, a distant vehicle that's gradually growing larger is just growing larger, not getting closer.

### *Preschoolers are not ready to cross the road on their own.*

**12.1.2 Behavior management tips with young children.** Working with preschoolers can be an energizing, even hilarious, experience. Many school bus drivers who do it every day love it. But managing young children's behavior is not always easy – ask a daycare provider. Ask a parent.

Time-tested behavior management tips for preschool bus runs include:

- *Activity bag.* Small children are often too short to see out the bus window,

contributing to boredom, restlessness, and mischief during the ride. Age-appropriate picture books, children's magazines, coloring books and crayons, or simple handheld electronic games can help keep them occupied during the bus ride.

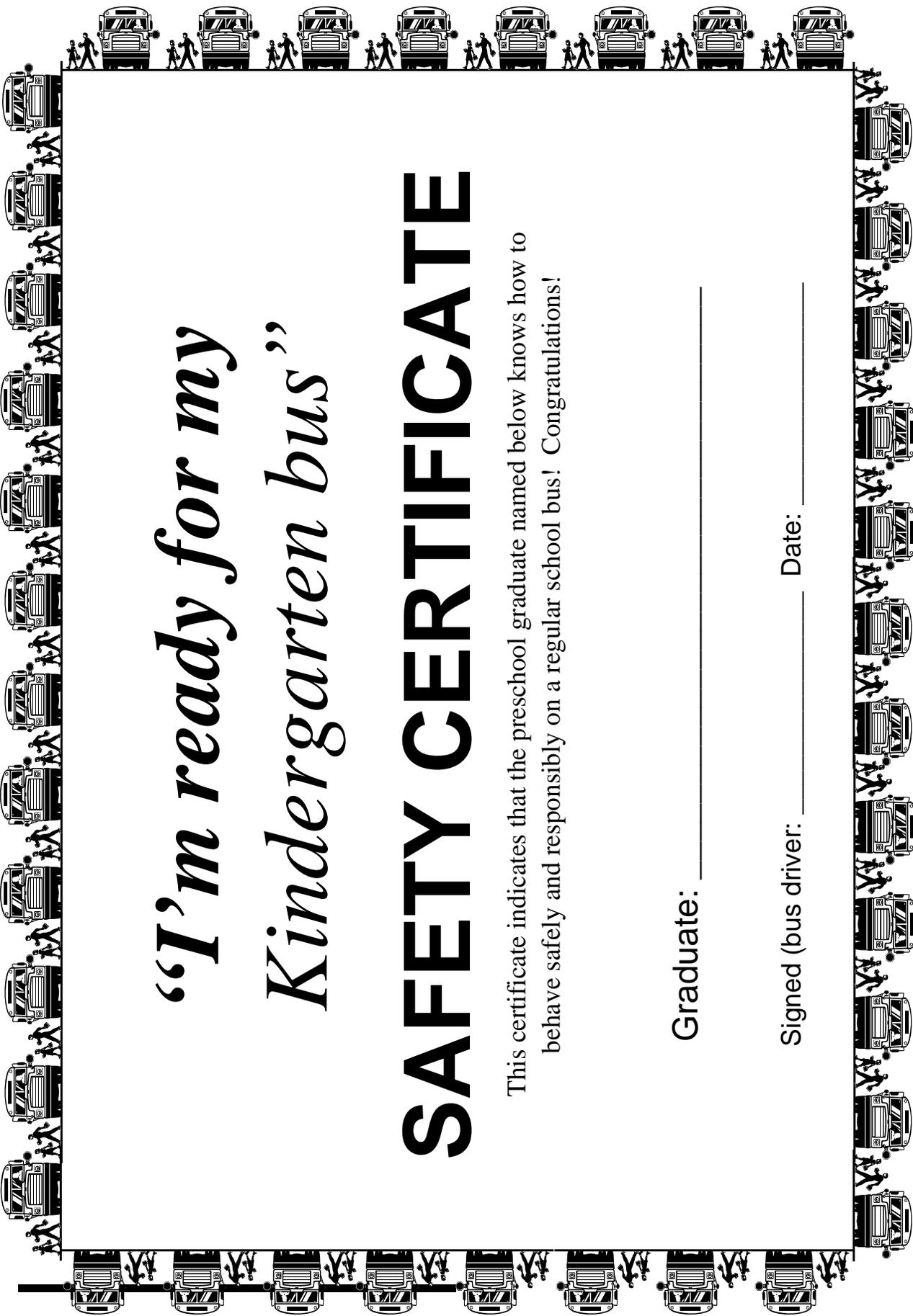
- *Games.* Young children love to play games. Simple "find it" games are usually a hit: "Count the red cars," "Who do we pick up next?", "Spot the cows," etc. Of course, many children get sillier and louder the longer they play a game. Know when to transition to a quieter activity before things get out of hand. "Who can keep quiet the longest?" is always worth a try.
- *Music.* Most young children love music. Sing-alongs such as "The wheels on the bus" are usually a big hit. You might attract a few startled looks from other motorists as you sing along, but so long as you maintain focus on driving, who cares? A CD of young children's music – media stores and large bookstores have a children's music section – can often keep children occupied for much of the ride. If your bus doesn't have one, a basic CD player that runs on batteries can usually be purchased for a few dollars. (Be sure the CD player is secured appropriately.)
- *Helpers.* Most young children love being a helper. Give them simple, safe tasks, like straightening seat belts before getting off the bus at school. Like Tom Sawyer, you might even be able to use simple bus chores as a "reward" for a child's good behavior during the ride.
- *Restraints.* Section 12.2, below, explains the laws covering the use of child restraints for preschoolers on a bus. But beyond legal requirements, the fact is that

young children behave better when restrained. If young children are free to move from seat to seat, they will. Sooner or later, mischief will ensue. Preschoolers who have “aged out” and are no longer required by state law to use a child restraint still behave more safely when using a lap belt or a lap-shoulder belt. Seat belt use for school-age children is not *required* on school buses in New York State. It’s up to local school policy. Check with your supervisor about your school’s policy regarding seat belt use for preschoolers who no longer require a car seat.

*If you work consistently with young children day after day, you will be surprised how much they learn about school bus safety over the course of the year.*

- Safety. Teaching preschoolers safety rules is important. Most preschoolers want to

learn. “Lessons” should be simple, short, and fun. Make a game of it. Ask simple questions while waiting to discharge children at school in the morning: “Who can point to the closest emergency exit?”, “Who can tell me why you should stay in your seat?” Remind children to raise their hands so you can pick one at a time to answer. If you work consistently with young children day after day, you will be surprised how much they learn about school bus safety over the course of the year. As the end of the year approaches, prepare “I’m ready for the kindergarten bus” certificates for your preschoolers who are about to graduate into kindergarten. (Use the certificate template on the next page, or create one of your own.) Your patient efforts to train preschoolers in safety fundamentals will be appreciated by their new bus drivers next fall. The safety training you provide at an early stage in a child’s school career could one day save that child’s life.



*“I’m ready for my  
Kindergarten bus”*

# SAFETY CERTIFICATE

This certificate indicates that the preschool graduate named below knows how to behave safely and responsibly on a regular school bus! Congratulations!

Graduate: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (bus driver): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 12.2 Restraints for Preschool Children on School Buses

**12.2.1 Legal requirements.** In New York State, all children under four years old **must** be seated in an appropriate Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) when riding on a yellow school bus. A seat belt alone is not adequate for preschoolers on school buses.

The CSRS must be the right size for the child. Height and weight limits are indicated on a label on the restraint.

*A seat belt alone is not adequate for preschoolers on school buses.*

The law is different for small school vehicles (vans and cars). In a small school vehicle, children under the age of eight must use a CSRS.

**12.2.2 Types of child restraints.** There are many types of child safety restraints. Designs continually change and evolve.

Typical child safety restraints include:

- *Rear-facing infant seats.* Children less than one year old, or weighing less than 20 pounds, **must** ride in a rear facing infant seat on a school bus. Children should stay rear-facing as long as the seat height and weight limits allow. Some newer seats go up to 35 pounds or more.
- *Forward-facing restraints.* Children at least more than one year old and weighing more than 20 pounds can ride in a forward-facing car seat or other type of safety restraint.

- *Integrated safety seats.* Some types of school bus seats have harnesses specifically designed for young children. No other type of restraint is needed when transporting children in integrated safety seats.
- *Safety vests.* Safety vests are available for all children of all ages, not just preschoolers. (Safety vests are sometimes used when transporting older children who cannot stay in their seats.) Safety vests are usually attached to the bus seat with a “cam-wrap” that goes around the seat back. Safety vests on school buses must include a crotch strap to prevent a child from sliding down and choking.
- *Booster seats with built-in harness.* The only booster seats that can be used on school buses are those that come with a built-in “five-point” harness. Older types of booster seats that are secured with only a lap belt (“belt-positioning boosters”) are not permitted on school buses.



**12.2.3 Placement of safety restraints on the bus.** It's usually best to place children riding in safety restraints near the front of the bus. You can keep a closer eye on them in the first few rows. In an emergency, you have quicker access to them.

Keep in mind two important “**nevers**” when deciding where to place safety restraints:

1. Safety restraints should **never** be placed in a seat row adjacent to an emergency window or door. The restraint could slow down an emergency evacuation.
2. Unrestrained passengers – other children, or the attendant – should **never** ride in the row behind a child in a safety restraint. It is dangerous.

**12.2.4 Proper securement of safety restraints.** Properly securing car seats and other types of safety restraints is extremely important, but it's not easy in a school bus. Bus seats are closely spaced, leaving little room to work as you secure the restraint.

*Attach the restraint to the bus seat first, then secure the child in the restraint – thinking of it as a two-step process is less confusing.*

Utilize the following procedures when securing child a safety restraint in your bus:

- Take the time to familiarize yourself with a restraint before trying to secure it in your bus. Each type of restraint must be secured according to its particular design. Always read the manufacturer's instructions before trying to secure an

unfamiliar restraint. Instructions should be provided with every restraint. Instructions are often stored in a plastic sleeve attached to the base of the restraint.

- Attach the restraint to the bus seat first, then secure the child in the restraint. Thinking of it as a two-step process is less confusing.
- Car seats are usually secured in a bus seat by the bus lap belt. The lap belt must be routed through the back of the car seat exactly as directed by the manufacturer. Follow instructions carefully.
- Kneel on the car seat when tightening the lap belt. Use your weight to press the car seat into the seat cushion as you pull on the lap belt. This is the best way to get a restraint tight enough in the bus seat. It should be so tight against the bus seat that it won't move.
- If the “stalk” of the bus lap belt – the shorter, non-adjustable portion of the belt with the female buckle at the end – is too long, it can be difficult to access it behind the car seat. Long belt stalks make it harder to tighten the car seat. The large buckle can also be uncomfortable for the child sitting in the seat. It may help to twist the belt. To shorten the belt slightly, you may twist the stalk up to three times. Do not alter a belt in any other way. Never knot a belt to shorten it. Do not connect two different belts.
- Booster seats with built-in harnesses are usually attached to a bus seat with securement belts that wrap around the seat back. The lower cushion of the bus seat usually must be unfastened and lifted up to do this. School bus cushions are often held in place by metal clips under the seat. Clips can be difficult to access or release.

Don't be embarrassed to ask a supervisor, an SBDI, or a mechanic for help. It's essential that the restraint is properly secured.

- Before placing a child in the restraint, double-check to make sure it's properly secured in the bus seat. If you have a bus attendant, work as a team. Two sets of eyes are better than one. Make sure it's tight enough and correctly attached to the bus seat.
- Once you are confident the restraint is tight enough in the bus seat, secure the child in the restraint with the 5-point harness.
- Harness straps on most restraints are adaptable to different sizes of children. Often there are two or more sets of slots through which the harness straps can be threaded. Make sure the harness straps are coming out of the right slots for that particular child. On forward-facing car seats, the upper slots should be at or above the child's shoulders and should be in a reinforced slot. On a rear-facing seat, the straps should be at or below the shoulders.
- The harness retaining clip should be positioned at the child's armpit level – adjust it if necessary.
- Harness straps should be snug but not tight against the child. Straps are adjustable, but it can be tricky to figure out just how to do it. Harness straps on older models might have to be adjusted from behind the restraint, which can be highly inconvenient. Newer restraints usually have a single adjuster strap located on the front base of the unit.
- Harness straps must lie flat against the child – they shouldn't be twisted. If you

can pinch a loop of the belt between your fingers, it is too loose. In a crash or even a sudden stop, a twisted strap could hurt a child.

- There is no way to secure a young child in a car seat or booster with built-in harness without touching the child. Be as brief and as sensitive as you can. Whenever possible, keep the back of your hand against the child's body rather than your palm – it's a little less intrusive.

*Like anything else young children are in close contact with, safety restraints need regular cleaning.*

**12.2.5 Cleaning restraints.** Like anything else young children are in close contact with, safety restraints need regular cleaning. Frequent wiping down with a non-allergenic disinfectant or a mild detergent and warm water is a good practice.

If a restraint is very soiled, it should be taken out of the bus and thoroughly cleaned. Some models allow the fabric seat material to be removed and washed. Read the instructions carefully to avoid damaging the restraint.

**12.2.6 Replacing restraints.** Child safety restraints do not last forever. Federal law requires manufacturers to define a mandatory retirement date for each restraint. A sticker with the retirement date should be attached to the restraint (usually the back or base).

Restraints with any visible damage – cracks in the shell or base, tears or cuts in the belts – should be replaced immediately. Restraints

that were on board a bus involved in a significant crash should also be retired.

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## 12.3 Loading and Unloading Preschool Children

**12.3.1 Challenges.** Preschoolers are short. It's hard to spot them when they are near your bus.

As noted above, preschoolers are naturally impulsive. They are incapable of fully grasping traffic dangers. You **must** expect the unexpected every time you pick up or drop off a preschooler at a bus stop.

Preschool children often have a hard time getting up and down bus steps. The first step up into the bus is especially tough. Trips and falls are common. Teach them to hold the handrail. Remind them every day.

**12.3.2 Custody.** It's not safe to release preschool children from your bus unless a responsible adult or older child is present to receive them. Anything could happen.

If no one meets the bus at a preschooler's house, keep the child on board. Radio base to report the situation. Often, you will be directed to keep the child on board while your office tries to contact a parent. Reassure the child that everything's okay.

*If no one meets the bus at a preschooler's house, keep the child on board – radio base to report the situation.*

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## 12.4 Evacuation Concerns

**12.4.1 Evacuation planning.** Having a plan for getting everyone off the bus quickly is essential when transporting young children. A fire on a bus filled with preschoolers in safety restraints is a frightening prospect. Such incidents have occurred in our state and across the country.

Buses can burn quickly under some conditions. Heat and smoke can make the passenger compartment unsurvivable in two minutes or less.

**12.4.2 Preparing for two evacuation scenarios.** Most school bus fires are caused by either of two scenarios:

1. An engine fire at the front of the bus.
2. A fire at the rear of the bus caused by another vehicle crashing into it.

Factors to consider when creating an evacuation plan for a preschool run include:

- Is an attendant assigned to the run? The attendant's role in an emergency evacuation of preschool children should be defined. In most cases, it makes sense for the attendant to exit the bus first to receive the children as the driver removes them from their restraints. However, on preschool runs with more than six children on board, the attendant might need to help remove them from their restraints too. Work this out ahead of time with your attendant.
- In most cases, the quickest way to get a young child out of the bus in an emergency is to remove the child from the restraint. This can be accomplished by unbuckling

the restraint or by cutting the straps with a seat belt cutter. Decide ahead of time what's best for each particular child and each restraint.

- For a very young or small child, it may be faster to leave the child in the car seat and remove the child and car seat together. This can be accomplished by cutting the belts that secure the car seat to the bus. Decide ahead of time what's quickest for each child on your run.
- How many exits are there on your bus, what types of exits are they, and where are they located? Think carefully about which exit(s) would be best for each scenario. Can you find and open each exit with your eyes closed? (Thick smoke could make it impossible to see.) Don't forget the passenger door, which in a rear fire might be the quickest and safest way off the bus.
- What's the best sequence for getting children out of the bus in each scenario? It's best to get children closest to the fire out of their seats first and away from the smoke and heat. However, be careful about creating a bottleneck in the aisle as you shepherd children toward the best exit.
- How will you keep children from wandering off once they're outside your bus? Teach preschoolers ahead of time, during bus drills and reinforced with periodic reminders, to use a buddy system or to make a "safety chain" by holding hands as soon as they exit the bus. You can practice this every day as children get off your bus to go into school. Some preschool bus drivers carry a safety rope on the bus for young children to hang onto as they move away from the bus. Placing the fire blanket on the ground in a safe area at a safe distance (at least 3 bus

lengths) from the bus gives children a visible reference point. Tell them to stay on the blanket.

***Teach preschoolers to use a buddy system or to make a "safety chain" by holding hands as soon as they exit the bus in an emergency – you can practice this every day as children get off your bus to go into school.***

Discuss these important evacuation questions with your supervisor, an SBDI, or a veteran preschool driver when thinking about an evacuation plan for your bus.

Use the Evacuation Plan form on the next page to write down your completed plan. Keep it on your bus. If new preschoolers are placed your route during the year, revise your plan as necessary.

# PRESCHOOL RUN EVACUATION PLAN

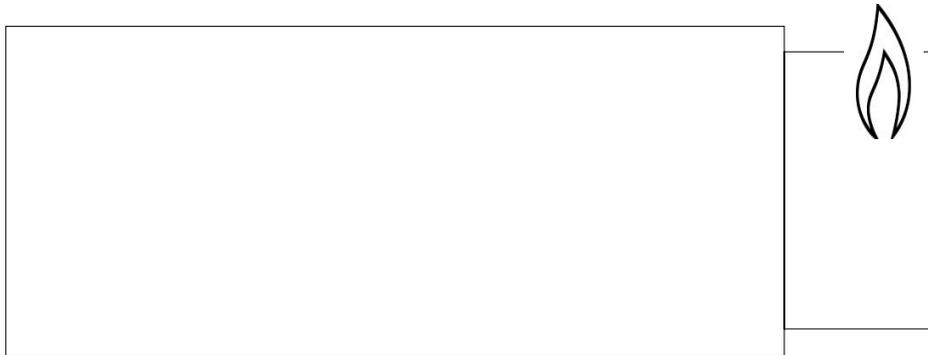
Bus #: \_\_\_\_\_ Route #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Driver: \_\_\_\_\_

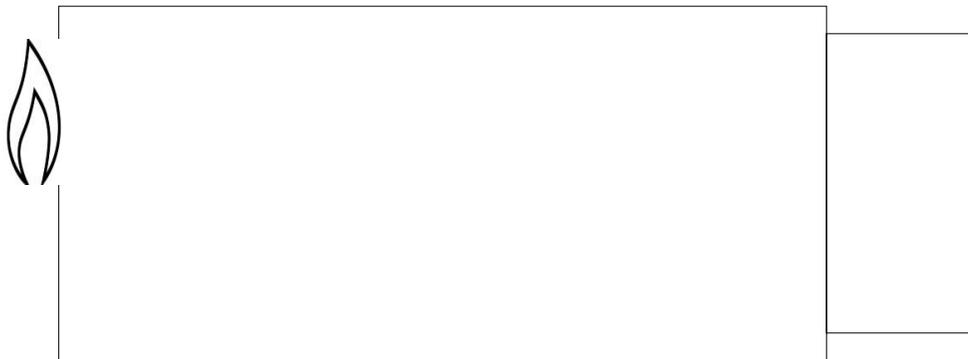
Attendant: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Instructions: For each of the two evacuation scenarios below, sketch in the exits of the bus and where each child is seated. Indicate children using wheelchairs by WC. Next, draw an arrow to the best exit for each scenario. Finally, number the children according to the sequence you will use to get them out of the bus.*



Front Engine Fire



Fire at Rear of Bus



**12.4.3 Seat belt cutters.** Sometimes the quickest way to get a child out of a safety restraint is to cut the straps.

Seat belt cutters work most best when drawn at an angle across a tight belt. Practice this with a discarded belt.

A seat belt cutter should be located near the driver's seat so you can reach it quickly in an emergency. In a rollover, you might need it to free yourself from your own seat belt before you can rescue the students.

Seat belt cutters are inexpensive. Some bus drivers carry one of their own too – “just in case”. On a run with many preschoolers on board, an additional cutter near the rear door is a good idea.

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## 12.5 Unit 12 Review

**1. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The vision and hearing of preschool children is so good they can usually get out of the way of an approaching vehicle before an adult can.”*

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Children under five need to be escorted on and off the bus.”*

**3. What type of booster seat may be used on a school bus?**

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**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Sit unrestrained passengers in the row behind children in safety vests.”*

**5. Where should the harness retaining clip be located?**

- a. *At the child’s navel level.*
- b. *At the child’s armpit level.*
- c. *At the child’s chin level.*
- d. *Retaining clips are not required on harnesses.*

**6. If you need to shorten the lap belt slightly to better secure a car seat, which method is acceptable?**

- a. *Tie one or more knots in the belt.*
- b. *Twist the belt as much as necessary.*
- c. *Twist the belt no more than three times.*
- d. *Use a large safety pin to shorten the belt.*

**7. TRUE or FALSE?** *“On forward-facing car seats, the upper harness slots should be below the child’s shoulders.”*

**8. TRUE or FALSE?** *“If no one meets the bus at a preschooler’s house, tell the child*

*to wait on the porch until someone gets home.”*

**9. What’s a seat belt “stalk”?**

- a. *Longer, adjustable, male portion of the lap belt.*
- b. *Shorter, non-adjustable, female portion of the lap belt.*
- c. *Metal clip holding the seat cushion on.*
- d. *Retractable portion of the belt.*

**10. TRUE or FALSE?** *“In most cases, the quickest way to get a young child out of the bus in an emergency is to remove the child from the restraint.”*

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## UNIT 12 NOTES & QUESTIONS

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