

PPT 7...

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facilities where testing is conducted near work-related traffic flow.

Speaking of competition, the SBDI must not promote that spirit. We know drivers are going to discuss their individual times with one another, and that's their choice. This happens when we give the driver the time result of the test. I have seen on the videotape an SBDI saying, "You completed the drag in 8.9 seconds. Excellent!" Remember that we are asking each driver to meet a minimum standard, so 28 seconds is just as satisfactory — just as excellent — as eight seconds.

Reviewing the results

It is an important requirement of

Safely Speaking would like to thank Pete James for generously providing his time and expertise to produce the PPT series.

our testing procedures to give drivers a copy of their test results. However, at many locations where testing is conducted, there is no photocopier readily available and/or tight schedules make it inconvenient, if not impossible, to immediately make a copy of the score sheet. Regardless of when they receive their copy, it is important to review the entire test results with each driver immediately

after completing Standard 7.

The SBDI's responsibility for each completed test includes ensuring that the forms (PT900) are filed appropriately. The original goes in the driver's file at the district/carrier's office. One copy must be given to the driver and one filed with the New York State Education Department. Currently, the SED copy must be mailed to the Eastern Suffolk BOCES, which is tracking this requirement for SED.

Hopefully, these articles have covered each standard in adequate detail to ensure they are conducted uniformly across the state. Happy Trails!

Call Pete James for more information on the PPT at (716) 789-4287 or send a note to him at Chautauqua Transportation Services Inc., P.O. Box 1100, Chautauqua, NY 14722. 

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for School Bus Driver Instructors

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These are among the people The Trans Group's many drivers enjoy countless training opportunities with. From left are Ron McKenna, safety supervisor for Chestnut Ridge Transportation; Jackie Ploss, operations manager for Chestnut Ridge Transportation; Virginia Torres, safety coordinator for the Long Island operations based at Educational Bus Transportation; Georges Michel, safety and training coordinator for Chestnut Ridge Transportation; Greg Hill, safety supervisor for Chestnut Ridge Transit; and Jonathan Peltz, operations manager for Chestnut Ridge Transit.

Commitment, diversity keys to provider's training

The Trans Group's supervisors, managers relish challenge of working with drivers who serve 50 school districts

The Trans Group LLC is an enormous transportation operation. It serves 50 school districts in eight downstate counties. Hundreds of drivers transport thousands of children from widely diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. The drivers themselves represent a substantial diversity of cultures.

The challenges for the supervisors and

managers who train these drivers are many. One culture forbids female drivers from transporting male children and demands that all its children be home before sunset on Friday nights. Another does not allow children to listen to radios. Bus drills at one school district were practically ignored before The Trans Group took

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Commitment, diversity...

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over administering them. English is a second language for some drivers.

Despite these challenges, The Trans Group has a stellar safety record. The New York School Bus Contractor's Association named The Trans Group School Bus Fleet Contractor of the Year in 1997. At the National School Transportation Association's 2000 annual convention, School Bus Fleet honored The Trans Group as its contractor of the year. The Trans Group was instrumental in helping one of its clients, the Pearl River School District, receive the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

How do they do it?

"It's a total commitment to safe and reliable transportation," said Jonathan Peltz, an SBDI and operations manager for Chestnut Ridge Transit, one of The Trans Group's component pieces.

"It's all communication, commitment, honesty and dedication," said Virginia Torres, a master instructor and safety coordinator for The Trans Group's Long Island operations based at Educational Bus Transportation.

Continuous safety training is the lifeblood of The Trans Group's student transportation service.

Like other school district transportation departments and private providers, The Trans Group offers its drivers the basic course, refresher courses, behind-the-wheel training and so forth. But the delivery is just as important as the material.

"You, the person, are the best teaching tool," said Torres.

Accolades aplenty



Virginia Torres, safety coordinator for The Trans Group's Long Island operations based at Educational Bus Transportation, poses before a plaque honoring The Trans Group as the School Bus Fleet 2000 Contractor of the Year. It is among many awards the transportation provider has received for its efforts.

"Presentation means everything. There are so many tools you can use — humor, fun, emotions, tone of voice, experience, eye contact — to take something that might be dull and turn it into a masterpiece. That's what makes us unique."

Jackie Ploss, operations manager for Chestnut Ridge Transportation, another branch of The Trans Group, used just such a tool when trying to illustrate the dangers of railroad crossings to her drivers. They were "taken hostage" aboard a bus and driven to a particularly ominous crossing so that they could observe its dynamics firsthand.

"Sometimes explaining a problem isn't good enough," she said. "Sometimes they have to see it to really understand."

The Trans Group also rotates instructors for training sessions under the theory that, while the material taught may be the same, each instructor presents it in his or her own unique way, which may make the presentation more meaningful for some drivers. We each respond uniquely to different teaching styles and stimuli.

Drivers and riders

The Trans Group's drivers are strongly encouraged to provide the fodder for future trainings. For example, those who attend the state, national and special needs Road-eo competitions discuss their experiences with colleagues who might not have been able to go. Feedback is also sought from drivers during their small group safety meetings, held two or three times a year.

"It's one thing for us to stand up here and teach and have it fall on deaf ears," Peltz said. "It's another to be addressing topics they are really concerned about."

Of course, training also extends to riders. Besides emphasizing the rules of safety through bus drills and other instruction, students who behave appropriately are suitably rewarded. For example, students in one school district who demonstrate outstanding behavior (as determined by their driver) enjoy a trip to a local McDonald's restaurant for breakfast. They also receive certificates of appreciation proclaiming them out-

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minimum of 33 feet.

It is important to mark a start and finish line, and ensure that they are accurately 30 feet apart. The SBDI video suggests that the runner be securely fastened to the floor with duct tape. However, if you are able to set up a permanent site for your drag test, that certainly permits other options for gluing or fastening the runner in place. Once it is secure, preparation for testing should include sweeping or cleaning to free the runner of grease, snow, ice or other slippery substances. Also, dirt or gravel (especially small stones) can easily track onto the runner and result in something like walking on marbles.

Speed

Drivers commonly tend to do this standard faster than necessary. Attempting to walk backward too fast increases the potential for slipping and falling. This is especially true at the beginning when you break friction. If drivers are trying to start too fast at this point, there is a higher risk of “spinning their wheels” (feet) and falling. It is important that SBDIs caution drivers.

It is appropriate for the SBDI timing the pull to keep the driver advised of the amount of time passing. This can be done at 5- or 10-second intervals. I have my 30 feet marked with a start and finish line. I also announce how many seconds have elapsed as they pass the 10- and 20-foot marks. This has a good calming effect on their urge to move down the runner too fast.

Privacy

We must also consider the comfort level of the driver being tested. I am not suggesting that this test must be conducted in total confidentiality because the drivers often like to discuss their results. But the SBDI conducting the test is responsible for

minimizing the potential for embarrassment or discomfort of the driver being tested. I think it would be best if onlookers were not present in case a driver is not able to complete the pull. Another advantage is that it reduces the potential for competition. However, this may not be possible at

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This is one standard that comes complete

Drivers perform weight drag in Pete James’ special trailer

Dragging a 125-pound weight 30 feet may sound like a lot of work for new bus drivers. But that wasn’t half the work Pete

James was putting into administering the final part of the Physical Performance Test. James so drivers could watch the pre-test video inside the trailer in case it must be parked in a remote area.

James was putting into administering the final part of the Physical Performance Test.

James, who travels to school districts and carriers that do not have SBDIs on staff to administer the test, had to lug about not only the 125-pound weight, but also a rolled-up aisle runner that the test must be performed on.

James decided two years ago that there was a better way. He ordered a 36-foot cargo trailer and installed 34 feet of runner as well as the weight.

Besides accommodating the test, the trailer is equipped with 12-volt electricity and a swinging wooden shelf to accommodate a TV/VCR. James installed these



Above, the trailer Pete James pulls to school districts and transportation providers when conducting PPT testing. At left, James’ administrative assistant, Janette Wagner, demonstrates the 125-pound weight pull inside the trailer.

The trailer is also well-lit and ventilated, and features a curb-side door for easy entry and exit. The interior is adorned with safety posters and leaflets.

“It’s a safety-oriented atmosphere,” James said.

James is willing to bring his trailer anywhere in New York State for school districts and transportation providers who need the PPT service.

“You call, we haul and that’s all,” he said.

Call Pete James at (716) 789-4287 for more information on his PPT service.



SBDIs urged to obtain Operation Lifesaver certification

Presenters teach about railroad safety

The tragedy at Fox River Grove, Ill., in 1995 affected everyone in the school transportation industry. It made us think more seriously about safety at railroad crossings. For Tom Cirrincione and others, it became a rallying cry.



Tom Cirrincione

Fox River Grove, about 50 miles northwest of Chicago, became infamous when a substitute driver there was halted by a red traffic light and did not realize that the bus had not fully cleared some railroad tracks. Six inches of the back of the bus hung over the tracks as a commuter train

approached at 60 mph. Despite the engineer's frantic attempts to stop the train, it slammed into the bus, killing seven students and injuring 28 others.

Cirrincione, bus operations experimenter for the Greece Central School District in Western New York, was among those who wanted to find a way to prevent future tragedies at railroad crossings. So he became a presenter for Operation Lifesaver, a non-profit education and awareness program dedicated to ending tragic collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and on railroad rights of way. As part of its mission, Operation Lifesaver strives to increase public awareness of dangers by educating drivers and pedestrians on making safe decisions at crossings and around railroad tracks.

Cirrincione, whose school district transports 14,000 students, like many others decided to be part of that effort.

"We want to make sure this never

happens to a school bus in New York State," he said.

As Operation Lifesaver presenters, they spread the message of railroad safety to school districts and transportation providers throughout Western New York. While about 150 of the state's SBDIs have obtained Operation Lifesaver presenter training, Cirrincione wants to see them all complete it.

"If we can gradually get the SBDIs qualified, they'll really be able to spread the word," he said.

Becoming a presenter requires only six hours of training at an Operation Lifesaver certification course. That is four hours less than the standard course because SBDIs already undergo so much related training.

Anyone interested in Operation Lifesaver training should call Tom Cirrincione at (585) 621-1000 Ext. 3058 or e-mail him at Thomas.Cirrincione@greece.k12.ny.us



NAPT 2002 conference and trade show Nov. 3-7

The National Association for Pupil Transportation's 28th annual conference and trade show will be Nov. 3-7 in Greensboro, N.C.

The NAPT conference is the pupil transportation industry's largest annual meeting. This year's agenda includes several workshops and special events. The trade show will be at the Greensboro Coliseum.

The NAPT Web site contains a tentative schedule as well as printable and online registration forms for delegates and exhibitors. For more information, visit www.napt.org.

Safely Speaking needs you!

Editorial board seeking superintendent, members

Safely Speaking is seeking a superintendent to serve on its editorial board. We are also looking for transportation personnel to serve as members.

Board duties include committing a couple of hours every other month to meeting at the Capital

Region BOCES in Latham as well as generating story ideas for Safely Speaking.

Potential members can be from anywhere in New York State.

Call Safely Speaking editor Andy Marino at (518) 786-3278 or e-mail him at amarino@gw.neric.org if you are interested in serving on the board.



With critic at large Callthem Asi Seethem

Transporting Special Kids with Commitment & Care

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Durham University
1995

Offers suggestions on transporting children with special needs who have behavioral problems.

Running time: 21 minutes

Audiences: All SBDIs and bus drivers

► “I’ve been told I must be more understanding. How do I explain it to the other kids who think I’m being unfair in expecting more from them?”

► “A mother told me I expected too much of her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder son. There’s no way he can sit still for 25 minutes while I transport him. How can I drive safely if he’s running around the bus?”

► “How do we manage these kids when no one tells us what to expect or what to try if there’s a problem? If they don’t trust me with information about the kids, how can they trust me to transport them?”

Have you heard any of these questions from your drivers about transporting special needs students? If so, you might want to check out “Transporting Special Kids with Commitment & Care.”

The video begins with three dri-

vers asking the questions listed above. A narrator then explains that drivers may become frustrated when dealing with the growing population of special needs children. “Drivers are left feeling exposed and pretty overwhelmed by the challenge,” he says.

Footage continues of drivers complaining about the obstacles and headaches they face in transporting special needs students. The narrator returns to encourage drivers to try to maintain that difficult balance of being sensitive to special needs students without compromising established standards of behavior.

Strategies

There are no magical answers, but the narrator suggests three strategies, which the balance of the video addresses:

- Commit yourself to safety, order and the rights of others.
- Be an effective observer of behavior.
- Creatively choose appropriate intervention or affirmation.

On the first item, the narrator says drivers are responsible for making children understand that the bus is safe. An example of keeping order is encouraging riders to be on time at their stops in the morning so the driver can keep to schedule. Drivers deal with rights issues when one student interferes with the rights of another.

Understanding these three con-

cepts helps drivers decide what behaviors to deal with as well as avoiding overreacting, the narrator tells us.

On observing behavior, we are told that drivers must be quick to notice and intervene when there is a problem and affirm when a student has done something positive. An example of the latter is illustrated when a student, after teasing another, apologizes for his behavior. The driver later commends him for it.

The video then presents several scenarios of disruptive student behavior and how drivers responded to each. Viewers were encouraged to stop the video after each response to evaluate them.

The narrator returns after this segment and concludes by saying that drivers who try something creative that works should ask themselves why it worked then add it to their repertoire of interventions and affirmations.

“Transporting Special Kids with Commitment & Care” clearly illustrates suggestions for dealing with special needs students who display disruptive behavior. Some of the actors portraying bus drivers are obviously reading from cue cards, and some exchanges between drivers and students are not convincing. But this video offers viewers plenty of tips on forming strategies for safely transporting special needs students.

SCORING SYSTEM:

Five buses = Excellent

SCORE FOR THIS VIDEO: 4 buses



Physical Performance Test Standard 7: The 125-pound weight drag



This is the final installment in a series *Safely Speaking* has asked Pete James to write on administering the Physical Performance Test for school bus drivers that is required by the New York State Education Department. James is a certified master instructor and member of the original school bus driver advisory committee that helped develop the PPT. He worked 31 years for the Chautauqua Central School District.

This standard requires drivers to drag 125 pounds 30 feet in 30 seconds. The intent is to ensure that our drivers are capable of evacuating non-ambulatory, unconscious or injured students or passengers.

This seems to be the part of the test drivers fear most. However, while dragging the weight can be a challenge, it often seems not to be as challenging as Standard 6, getting out an emergency exit in 20 seconds.

Accurate weight

There are some key requirements to conducting this test to ensure uniformity for all drivers. First, the weight must be 125 pounds, with a margin of 2 pounds permitted for the bag. I strongly urge SBDIs to have the total weight verified or certified to ensure accuracy. There could be serious implications if a driver is disqualified because the weight exceeds the standard or passes the test with weight less than the standard.

Many SBDIs borrow five 25-pound weights from their physical education departments at school. These (and weights obtained from any source) should be confirmed for accuracy. As

an independent SBDI working in many districts but an employee of none, it was necessary for me to purchase weights. I took the first ones, which I obtained from a sporting goods store, to a certified scale for confirmation. Although each was stamped "25," they weighed in at 121 and a fraction. A second set, obtained from the same source, totaled 128 pounds.

I have found that weights, with a certification of accuracy, are available from some of our industry's parts or service and supply vendors. A disadvantage is that to protect that certification, the weights are glued together so transporting them from one place to another involved lifting, carrying, loading and unloading a 125-pound weight, which seemed to test my own physical performance more than that of the drivers. However, for SBDIs who set their weight drag up in a permanent location, this would not be a problem. I recommend posting weight certification near where the test is conducted to present a message for the drivers about our credibility and concern that they all be treated fairly.

The 125-pound requirement was

derived from the average weight of male and female high school students in New York State when the standards were developed. Many passengers far exceed that weight. Studies have shown that we can safely drag three times our own body weight. In a real emergency, a driver who can handle the 125 pounds under test conditions will undoubtedly be able to move considerably more than that due to an adrenaline boost. When the test is complete, the weight should be stored so that no one will trip over it.

SBDIs testing a substantial number of drivers are aware that the bags wear out and must be replaced. Bags for this test are available from various sources including some specific to our industry. When replacing your bag, ensure that the accuracy of your weight is not lost. If you have questions about the bag you are using, check with others SBDIs.

The runner

All drivers must be asked to drag the weight on a similar surface, so we use a length of school bus center aisle rubber flooring. This must be the same floor covering material used on the center aisle of school buses, and is available from various bus distributors and parts supply sources. Since the length of drag is 30 feet, the roll of runner used must exceed 30 feet enough to accommodate taping or fastening it to the floor and sufficient additional length for the driver to stand on while moving the weight. I believe that the accompanying videotape suggests a

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keys to provider’s training**
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standing riders.

Meeting the needs of riders is no small challenge for drivers, assistants and their supervisors. For example, some special needs riders are unable to communicate verbally, so drivers and assistants must learn to perceive nonverbal cues when necessary.

“We tailor the training of each driver to meet the needs of the people they’re transporting,” Peltz said.

Seeking perfection

The Trans Group’s supervisors and managers also continuously monitor their programs for signs of what is working well and what needs improvement.

“There’s no perfect program,” Torres said. “But we’ll always strive for perfection.”

And anyone who wonders why striving for perfection is so important need only look at their cargo, said Greg Hill, safety supervisor for Chestnut Ridge Transit.

“The difference between a good driver and an average driver is that the good driver will always refer to their passengers as ‘my kids,’” he said. “The best compliment I could give a driver is ‘You can drive my child.’ I want all the drivers to say that all the kids on their buses are their children.”

Contact Gary Catapano at garycatapano@thetransgroup.com for more information on The Trans Group’s safety and training programs.



DMV eliminating K restriction from CDLs

State working to comply with federal law

To comply with federal law, the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles is developing procedures to eliminate the K restriction from Commercial Driver Licenses.

This means that first-time applicants or CDL holders who have not been assigned the K restriction will be asked if they meet medical and other requirements specified by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Existing CDL holders assigned the restriction will still carry it.

A section on the DMV’s “Application for Driver License or Non-Driver ID Card” asks, “If you are applying for a Commercial Driver License and will be driving interstate, do you meet 49 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 391 physical qualifications and medical requirements for driving in interstate commerce?” Currently, applicants check either a “Yes” or “No” box. Those checking “No” are assigned a K restriction and are not allowed to drive school buses out of state.

However, the U.S. Department of Transportation is requiring that CDLs

no longer carry the K restriction. The New York DMV is working to comply with that requirement and should have the framework in place this fall, said Mike McLoughlin, CDL policy specialist with the DMV.

Existing CDL holders who have been assigned the K restriction can get it lifted only by certifying they meet the 49 CFR Part 391 standards, McLoughlin said. CDLs were a product of the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1986, which sought to

improve highway safety by ensuring that drivers of large trucks and buses are qualified to operate such vehicles. The act established minimum national standards that states must meet when licensing commercial motor vehicle drivers.

The Federal Highway Administration later issued standards for testing and licensing drivers. For example, a state must administer knowledge and skills tests related to the type of vehicle to be operated. Drivers have been required to obtain a CDL to operate commercial motor vehicles since 1992.

