

SAFE ROUTES - SAFE STOPS

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FOREWORD

This manual is designed for use by the transportation department, for a staff of one or many as they strive to provide safe and efficient transportation for children. Each chapter addresses a specific concern regarding stops and routes and a specific focus to best address that concern. This manual is written with the understanding that while most districts already have a system for establishing stops and routes, no document exists which provides a comprehensive overview of that process. This manual provides that overview with basic guidelines for the novice and new ideas for the veteran transportation professional.

The establishment of safe stops and routes is a district specific activity. Few districts require students to be provided exactly the same level of access to transportation. This manual suggests possible efficiencies that may help transportation directors actively evaluate their present system with all those involved in the process and identify where higher goals or standards may be set.

There is no intent to suggest that current practices grounded in safety be changed to meet standards suggested here. Because of the need to design generic guidelines, some districts will find that their circumstances do not fit these standards. Many recommendations exceed the minimum required by law, and so do not bind the district's behavior. The process of district self-evaluation is useful even if no changes are made because there will be a better sense of "why we do it the way we do it now."

Special thanks are extended to: Lee Comeau who provided detailed editing of the entire manual; Pat Steward, SED; Seth Corwin of SCOL Consultants; Bill Northrop, Carmel Central School District; Linda Cary who provided the outline for the chapter on transportation of students with disabilities; Robert Pape and Jim Ellis who provided assistance with the legal chapter; and J. Arthur Rath who wrote the communications chapter. The "Sample Transportation Policy" promulgated by the New York State Education Department in 1978 provided the starting point for the policy chapter. The State Education Departments of Florida and Ohio provided documents which were helpful in conceptualizing this project. The newly published Transportation Supervisor's Handbook provided a valuable starting place for the consideration of many issues referenced. Others who provided specific forms or documents are recognized in the exhibits section and on the following page.

Two surveys were conducted to gather information for this project and a series of informal meetings were held across the state by Value Management Consultants of Rochester/Buffalo, the Madison-Oneida BOCES, and PTSI to identify present practices. We wish to thank over 500 school districts who responded to our surveys and offer our apologies for not mentioning you by name. Well over two-thirds of the people involved in transportation have contributed to our research efforts, clearly indicating the high level of commitment to their profession. This manual is presented to help us establish safe routes and stops for our greatest resource--our children.

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Bus Safety



The Safe Bus Team

Safe stops and safe routes can be a reality only if all those involved understand their duties. Expectations of each member of the school bus safety team are examined in this reference and training manual. The term “responsibilities” is used interchangeably with “behavior” because persons not present during the loading or unloading of children also share the responsibility for a safe trip. This may be a result of their behavior in enacting policy, following the law, or in informing others about bus safety.

School Boards

A school board is responsible for establishing a policy that defines "safe stops and safe routes" within a district. Otherwise, all decisions will be arbitrary; district officials will have to constantly turn to the school board for reinforcement and interpretation.



Stop placement is a function of district policy. Changes should never be made by bus drivers. If drivers make unauthorized changes, they may be subject to disciplinary action.

Policy **must** be followed; a parent could successfully sue a district after requesting a change, if it was found later to not meet district standards, because "the district should have known better."

Since laws, regulations, and accepted procedures keep changing, school boards should evaluate the entire process from time to time. To provide the safest service to children, and because of the great exposure a district faces to liability, these responsibilities must not be taken lightly.

Another important board responsibility is the decision, whether or not to use seat belts provided in all small and large New York State buses manufactured after July 1987. Education Law (See *Legal Section*) sets guidelines for the board to follow, if it chooses to address this issue.

School Superintendent

The school superintendent is ultimately responsible for the actions of all school employees. Through personal or delegated supervision, he or she must make sure that the transportation department is indeed providing for safe routes and stops.

Superintendents need to foster active participation from principals and teachers in school bus safety efforts.

They should encourage school transportation directors to examine practices and policies for potential improvement and updating. A sound district policy may become dangerous if a law or regulation is enacted that overrules the policy.

Transportation Director

The transportation director, supervisor, head bus driver, business official, bus contractor--whoever the superintendent has assigned--is finally responsible for carrying out districts' mandates for the creation of stops and routes. This manual is written for that person. By providing safety benchmarks and an overview of common practices, this manual will allow managers to evaluate their present policies and procedures and to consider steps they might take to create an even safer and more efficient system.

Drivers

Certain driving procedures are basic and must be followed without fail. These are covered in this manual in the next section: "*Drivers' Continuing Education.*"



Communicating with students is the final link in a safe system. Drivers are expected to teach students bus safety rules and procedures and to use established discipline procedures with children whose behaviors threaten the safety of the bus.

Students and Teachers

Pupil training is the cornerstone of appropriate student behaviors at bus stops and on routes. The Transportation Research Board's Report #222, *Improving School Bus Safety*, evaluated various bus safety devices and practices and found that pupil training is the most cost-effective way to reduce student fatalities.

Student training regulated by NYS Commissioner's Regulation [156.3(h)] provides a minimum starting place. (See *Legal* Section for references.) NYSED mandates that bus safety drills be held at specific times, three times a year.

These drills should include 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. Each drill should include training which is relevant to safe stops and routes such as:

- Specific instructions for pupils to advance at least 10 feet in front of the bus so as to be in the vision of the driver before crossing the highway after disembarking.
- Instructions to be in the vision of the driver before attempting to cross.
- Evacuation procedures for leaving the bus safely in an emergency.
- Emphasis on specific hazards encountered by children during snow, ice, rain, and other inclement weather including, but not necessarily limited to, poor driver visibility, reduced vehicular control, and reduced hearing.
- 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.

Student Transportation Safety: A Curriculum and Resource Guide for Classroom Teachers (See Bibliography) provides a standardized description of appropriate student behaviors recommended by the NYSED.

Certain points need to be emphasized repeatedly, clarified, and defined by teachers and drivers alike:

“Be at the stop (number of) minutes before the scheduled pickup (according to district policy);

“Stand back 15 feet from the road;

“Wait for driver’s signal before crossing.”

“Be in the vision of the driver before attempting to cross.”

Pupils must feel that they are an important part of the “safety team” and realize that their proper behavior contributes to the safety effort.

Parents

In order to be successful, safety rules should be understood by parents and reinforced in students' homes. School districts should help bus drivers to be recognized and treated as professionals by parents and other members of the community.



This means that parents should know the rules governing their child's transport and also understand the reasons for the rules. Parents will resist if they perceive a rule as a barrier to meeting their needs. If rules are seen as a "circle of safety" protecting their child, there will be greater compliance.

Parents' first responsibility is to deliver students to the bus stop within the time frame designated by the district:

- Children are parents' responsibility until they board the bus.
- It is a parent's responsibility to get the child to the bus stop five to ten minutes before the scheduled pickup.
- Parents must not try and procure special privileges for their children. They must transport items that are not permitted by district policy, such as oversized school projects, pets, sports equipment, or musical instruments.

Parents who accompany or meet their children at the bus stop must follow district procedures. If a child has to cross the road in the morning, parents should cross it with the child, either before the bus is at the stop, or after the bus arrives and it is safe to do so. In the evening, parents should be on the side of the road where the bus stops to help the child cross the road. This ensures safe crossing. It also helps children to learn crossing procedures they may some day need to follow on their own. Children must be discouraged from running across the road to greet a parent; children have been killed right in front of their parent as a result of this behavior.

Parent training is important reinforcement to the training students receive at school and on their bus. Parents should have no misconceptions about procedures students must follow.

Good techniques for parent training include sending home district procedure explanations which parents must sign and return, district newsletters, and interaction with the bus driver, if the parent meets the child at the stop.

Motorists

Motorists are the piece of the puzzle most difficult to control. There are specific behaviors which they are required by law to follow. Public relations and positive reinforcement can create certain attitudes.



When the bus's red lights are on, motorists approaching from the front or rear are required to stop. They may proceed only on the signal of a law enforcement officer or the school bus driver or when the bus starts moving. Although the law allows the school bus driver to signal motorists to proceed, many districts wisely do not allow drivers ever to signal motorists to proceed through red lights. Motorists are expected to observe signs alerting them to a school bus stop ahead or a reduced speed limit around a school site.

Law enforcement is the secondary choice to public relations, but must be used when other attempts fail. NYSED form F-1 (in the *Exhibits* Section) can be used to report a passing motorist to the NYSDMV, and a warning letter will be sent to the owner of the vehicle. Penalties for violating Vehicle and Traffic Law (V.T.) 1174 are stiff, and a good case must be presented for prosecution. A sample disposition form to use in reporting incidents is in the *Exhibits* Section of this manual. Consult with local law enforcement agencies to see if this is an acceptable format and make changes if necessary.

Principals

Principals are responsible for everything that happens at the school site. They must be familiar with regulations governing school buses on their school sites. All regulations governing the loading and unloading of children at a bus stop apply to the school site. Red lights must be used and obeyed by all, even other buses, for all loading and unloading phases.



Unloaded students must move 15 feet from the bus before it can leave the school site. Buses stopping within 50 feet behind buses using red lights must also engage their red lights. The *NYSED Sample Transportation Policy* (Chapter VIII) details the building principal's responsibility for proper supervision.

Laws provide for the safety of students being loaded and unloaded from buses, but the need of other groups to access the school site cannot be overlooked.

Plans need to be made, with the cooperation of all user groups, which provide for access to parking for staff and driving students as well as parents dropping off students or delivery vehicles which want quick access and egress from the school site. This process is documented in *School Site Safety: Planning for Vehicle and Pedestrian Traffic*. (See *Bibliography*.)

The building principal is responsible for supervising the behavior of pupils and providing appropriate consequences for that behavior. Bus drivers, either directly or through the transportation director, must be able to communicate with the principal, or his or her designate, to reach speedy resolution of an incident.

Principals must not allow others to urge or direct the driver to overlook district rules, such as rules forbidding oversized carry-on objects or to make unauthorized stops. Principals need to realize that they are key players on the school bus safety team; they must recognize their role, be able to discuss policies with parents, and see that persons under their supervision carry out their responsibilities.

Safe Buses

The definition of a "safe bus" extends beyond usual discussions of mechanical soundness, purchasing, and maintenance covered in other publications. The guidelines that this manual focuses on assume that buses have proper working lights and brakes, and that the buses are mechanically sound.

Many safety devices have been designed specifically for bus stop safety. Safety devices basically fall into two categories: those made to make motorists aware of stopped school buses, and those developed to help drivers communicate with children and be aware of them to keep them safe.

■ Devices to Alert Motorists

- Decals.

- Eight-light system.

- Reflective taping.

- Painted bumpers.

- Stop arms with flashing or strobe lights at the front and/or back of the bus on the left side.

- Strobe lights in front of red lights.

■ Devices to Help Bus Drivers

- Drivers can be warned of the presence of children around the bus by:

 - Crossing gates in front of the bus to keep children away from the danger zone.

 - Sensors which detect children's presence near the bus and out of the vision of the driver.

 - Brake activation systems which stop the bus if it contacts a child as it starts up from the stop.

 - TV monitors aimed at those danger areas outside of the driver's vision.

 - Special mirrors to expand the driver's field of vision.

 - Flat-front buses to improve the driver's vision in front of the bus.

 - Outside public address systems which drivers can use to speak to children about sudden dangers in the bus environment such as an uncontrolled motorist.

District transportation professionals are expected to review new devices carefully. They must determine what equipment is applicable for the district and make recommendations to the board.

Putting every available device on a bus would be impossible and impractical. If there is a proven product that could address a persistent problem, a district should consider it. Ignorance of available equipment is no excuse.

Examples: A transit line was successfully sued for not having seat belts in the bus even though federal laws do not require them. A trucking firm lost a law suit because it did not use a "cab-over" model tractor in a situation where it would have provided better visibility to the driver who ran over a child.

Guidelines for Continuing Driver Education

Bus driver training programs are an important starting point in consistent route management. Many driver refresher topics recommended by the State Education Department (SED) refer to route and stop safety. Transportation directors and drivers should meet periodically to reinforce district procedures and to identify trouble spots. Include in these meetings discussions on basic driver responsibilities and procedures such as those 17 summarized here.

1. What is the first thing to do?

A driver's responsibility, after getting a new route, is to *learn that route*. But this entails far more than navigating the roads; it means recognizing the inherent *risks* on a particular route.

Encourage drivers to identify some of the risks.

- Particular student characteristics.
- Road and weather characteristics.
- Stop placement challenges.
- Common traffic problems.
- Others?

Emphasize that the driver, while an employee reporting to the district and or a contract supervisor, is the boss on the bus. No one else is on the bus or at the bus stop to guide the process. The driver is the captain of the bus safety team. This is emphasized to students in the SED classroom curriculum. (See *Bibliography*.)

In fulfilling their role as captains, drivers need to know the roads, stops, and passengers involved within their bus routes. They need to keep a record of this information on their route sheet so it is immediately available for a substitute driver having to make the run on short notice. Does your district use a standardized route sheet? Is the following information on it?

- All roads and turns.
- Bus stop locations and times.
- Students' names with crossers identified.

This information, if not on the bus, should be made available from the dispatcher via radio:

- Students' home addresses and emergency phone numbers, if permitted by district policy.
- Data sheets for students with disabilities or medical concerns such as sting allergies, even for those with invisible disabilities.

When and how do your drivers update their route sheets? Remind them that if a substitute were to have outdated information, confusion could arise, leading to student injuries or fatalities. Updated driver observations or information from the transportation office should be recorded in both places. It doesn't help for an office to know and not the driver, or vice versa.

Use information in this manual to train drivers to recognize characteristics of stops and routing safety issues. If hazardous conditions exist or arise on a route, encourage drivers to report them immediately to the transportation office.

2. What must be done before reaching the stop?

There should be agreement that, inside the bus, a driver should have the trip under control before stopping. Talk about controlling the internal situation and discuss the following safety requirements:

- No active discipline problems.
- No bus-related distractions.
- No radio communications unrelated to the stop at hand.
- No questions as to stop location.
- No uncertainty about crossing and non-crossing students.

If the bus is not under control, pull over to the side of the road, and deal with the problem before entering the bus stop environment.

3. Explain what is meant by this expression: "When approaching the stop, drivers should be aware of the *big picture* regarding outside traffic."

This is to encourage drivers to reflect on the importance of instantly recognizing what may be happening around the stop. Do they have a mental checklist which include the following questions:

- Are there cars approaching from either direction?
- Are they under control?
- Do they appear to be responding to the yellow and red lights?
- Is there short-range visibility one way or the other that the driver must stay concerned about?
- Is there a spot where the driver has often been passed with red lights on in the past?
- What evasive action is the driver prepared or trained to make?

4. What potential human hazards do drivers need to recognize prior to the loading and unloading process?

How can drivers tell if all the students are at the stop? Encourage them to talk about sight barriers such as hedges, snowbanks, parked cars or buildings which could be hiding children.

Discuss these and other potential hazards:

- Anticipating what direction stragglers could be coming from.
- Children running around instead of waiting calmly at the designated stop.
- Seeing parents, young siblings, or pets at the stop.

Students are expected to be 15 feet from the point where the driver will stop the bus. What routines have drivers established to make certain this distance is met? How do they encourage students to wait in line for the bus? How do they encourage students to make eye contact with the bus driver and prepare to board?

5. How can we emphasize our ability to control traffic?

This discussion should focus on laws and regulations that assist the school bus driver in being seen and controlling traffic. Drivers should know that they must always follow regulations without modification.

For example, if a driver must make a turnaround on a route, or is stopping for a railroad crossing, vehicle and traffic law does not permit the use of the eight-light system to control traffic. It would send this message to motorists, "When you see my lights it means I will be loading or unloading children—*maybe.*" The use of the four-way hazard lights is more appropriate, if the bus driver feels that stopping the bus at the railroad crossing would create a traffic hazard to vehicles around the bus. If the bus driver deems the situation potentially hazardous, the

use of four-way lights is appropriate, if not required under section 1163(e) of the vehicle and traffic law.

Drivers are responsible for making sure that the bus is clean before it leaves the garage. Everyone should understand that the school bus's advantage in controlling traffic is its high visibility: bright yellow paint, lights always on when transporting students, school bus sign, eight-light system, and devices such as stop arms and strobes. These advantages are lost if the bus, particularly the back of the bus, is caked with road dirt, ice, or snow.

6. When approaching a stop, what defensive driving actions should the driver be prepared to take?

Begin at the point when a driver activates the yellow warning lights.

Drivers' concerns can include:

- Cars or trucks coming in either direction that might decide to pass through the yellow light.
- Students waiting for the bus who might move onto the road unexpectedly.
- Slowing the bus early while approaching a stop where the road surface is covered with ice, loose gravel, or leaves for safety purposes.
- If students are unruly, the driver should stop before the bus stop and wait for students to get in order before completing their approach.

There may be a situation where drivers would chose not to stop for a pickup. Here are some of them:

- A large truck coming downhill behind the bus might not be able to stop even if it sees the bus and tries to stop.
- If the road surface seems more slippery than expected, a driver might better keep on going rather than risk skidding into children or other traffic.
- If another vehicle seems out of control in the immediate area, it might be best not to begin the loading process as well.

Drivers should be encouraged to share their ideas about taking evasive action. It might take a while to circle back and approach the stop a second time, but transportation director should thoroughly indoctrinate drivers to take caution to avoid a catastrophe. The importance of students not moving towards the bus until the driver signals is paramount. As captains of the school bus safety team, drivers need to instill this understanding in their passengers.

7. Describe dos and don'ts for drivers once the bus comes to a stop.

There should be agreement on the following:

- The driver should open the door, check that all traffic has stopped, and then signal students to load the bus.
(Note: The reason this suggestion does not say "Crack the door open to engage reds and then open the door fully to signal students to start unloading" is that more and more, new buses today have automatic doors which are fully open or fully shut. Students must wait for the driver's signal to move towards the bus.)
- The driver should pull the bus to the shoulder, not allowing any possibility of a car squeezing by on the right.
(Note: Pulling a bus onto a wide shoulder may encourage cars to pass. The district must decide whether the right lane or the shoulder provides greater safety.)
- Drivers should not use the bus as a roadblock by trying to position it in the middle or diagonally in the road to stop cars from passing.
- If the bus is all the way to the right, it is a reliable barrier to protect the children; otherwise, there is no safe place for children to retreat to escape from uncontrolled traffic.

Two specific items in the state's regulation regarding red flashing lights should be mentioned. First, the law gives the bus driver and law enforcement officers the authority to instruct other vehicles to pass through the flashing red lights. A bus driver waiting for the last child to come to a stop might decide to do this as a courtesy to the other motorists. Discourage this; the bus driver accepts responsibility for any consequence of this decision.

In one instance, a young girl was killed by a car that the driver had waved through. The bus driver was waiting for a late student approaching from the front, and this girl approached from the rear, undetected by the driver, and darted out in front of the passing car.

Second, if a school bus comes up behind another school bus, which is using its red flashing lights, the second bus *must also* engage its red lights. This relays information to other motorists that there is a loading or unloading bus hidden by the second bus.

8. Why do "crossers," students who must cross to load the bus, always present a special challenge?

Children who cross roads are exposed to traffic; drivers must take every precaution on their behalf. Your drivers should make sure all

traffic has stopped and then use the a standard signal for the students to cross--moving the hand with a finger pointing in the direction of the cross. Drivers should not wave students across because a motorist could misconstrue the wave, or any other familiar gesture, as a signal to pass the bus, and might hit the children.

Remind your drivers that they are responsible [Regulation SED 1563(f)(4)] for instructing students on safe crossing practices. Do they remind students every day about safe crossing before they leave the bus? The regulation states, "the driver...when discharging children who cross...shall instruct (them) to cross the highway...10 feet in front of the bus so as to be in the vision of the driver." This means every time they disembark and cross. Drivers must be conscious of the short attention span of children aged four to eight and the need for frequent repetition.

Talk with drivers about the precautions they should take:

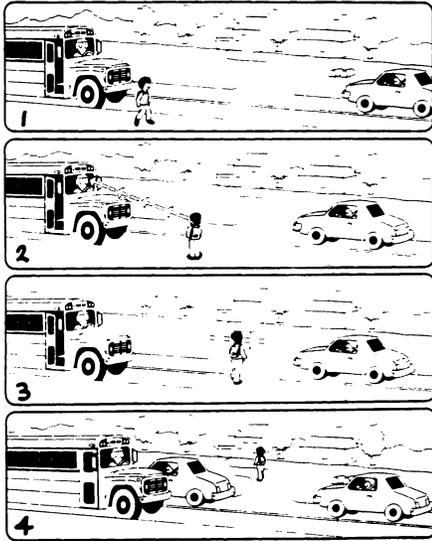
Making sure they know how many students are crossing so they can count them as they get on the bus and double-check to be sure no students have wandered into a blind spot around the bus.

Instructing students to walk far enough in front of the bus *so as to be in the vision of the driver* at all times.

Letting students know that their refusal to comply with this rule is a serious discipline violation. Tell drivers that any infractions should go through the normal discipline process.

Drivers should be sure students know of the warning signal they will use to communicate an unexpected emergency during a crossing. Unless the bus is equipped with an outside public address system, the logical signal is the horn. Students should know that they should *immediately* return to the curb they've just left when they hear the signal.

HOW TO CROSS SAFELY



This Safe Crossing Poster is available in 11" x 17" format for use in elementary classrooms. An 8 1/2" x 11" crack-and-peel version should be placed in school buses for drivers to use as a reference. The poster should be displayed in classrooms and buses at eye-level for K-3 children. Both sizes may be ordered from:

NYAPT
119 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12210

9. What is the procedure for students waiting on both sides of the road?

Explain that on busy roads, the district does not want students to cross the road without the protection of the bus's presence and lights. Once students waiting on the bus side are seen waiting properly, crossing students should be counted and signalled to cross and load. Then non-crossers should be signaled onto the bus. Crossers should be loaded first, because the longer the bus is at the stop, the greater the chance for a potentially dangerous change in the traffic situation. If other students are loaded first, their greeting behaviors on the bus could also distract the driver from observing the critical crossing behavior of those students crossing to board the bus.

10. What seating plan do your drivers use?

Safety should be the guideline. Explain that studies of school bus accidents consistently show that children killed as passengers in a bus accident were sitting in the rear or front seats.

Have your drivers agree on loading students so they fill the middle seats on the bus first, then fill towards the front and back, and fill the front seats and then the rear seats last. If seats are assigned, this should be the order. In the afternoon, if the bus is filled to capacity, those who get off first should be seated in the front seats.

Ask your drivers to describe the procedures they use to make certain that all listed children have boarded the bus. Talk about some of the precautionary measures drivers need to consider before pulling away from the stop, especially when all the expected children were not at the stop:

- Is there a parent waving frantically from a window or door? What is your district policy on waiting?
- Are children running towards the bus either alongside, where they could slip under the bus, or behind the bus, where they could be hit by other vehicles which start to move as the bus starts up.
- Are any other children, adults, or pets still at the stop where they could make sudden movements towards the bus?
- Once students are seated, carefully check all mirrors for traffic, and pull back onto the road.

11. Many of the concerns covered when loading need to be covered when unloading as well.

Equal caution must be used when approaching the bus stop because parents or siblings may be waiting for the children's return and traffic must be under control before the students may be released from the bus. Remember 63 percent of all school bus fatalities in New York State have taken place during the trip home.

Review these procedures with drivers:

- Students to be unloaded should remain seated until the bus has stopped at their stop, and should remain on the bus until the driver releases them.
- The driver must open the door to activate the red lights and wait for all traffic to stop before giving the signal to disembark.
- Discharge crossers before non-crossers (See #13.)
- The driver must count the students as they exit the bus, and account for all those who have gotten off .

12. Drivers should make sure passengers have moved away from the bus. The law [Vehicle Traffic Law (V.T.)1174] states that before the bus leaves the stop, all students must be “at least 15 feet from the bus and either off the highway, street, or private road, or on a sidewalk.” Drivers should make sure that students are 15 feet from the bus, and off the road, or on a sidewalk.

Mailboxes and lack of sidewalks make this rule of particular concern in rural and suburban routes. Students may wish to go directly to their mailbox and peruse its contents before moving away from the road. If the mailbox is within 15 feet of the bus, the driver must direct the student to move away from the bus until it has left. A student living up or down a street that has no sidewalks from the bus stop, must first move away from the bus, returning to walk home along the shoulder of the road after the bus has left.

If there is no room for discharged students to move 15 feet away from the side of the bus, they should move ahead at least 15 feet along the shoulder--away from the bus. Students walking back along the side of the bus are in danger of falling under the rear wheels of the bus. If students need to walk along the shoulder to get 15 feet away from the bus, the bus stop should be placed where students can walk down the road in front of the bus. For instance, students from three houses in a row, may be picked up from a stop placed in front of the first house so that those walking along the shoulder are in the vision of the driver.

13. Be especially wary of crossers.

Discharge crossers before non-crossers when they get down at the same stop. The driver can give crossing students his or her undivided attention. Crossing is one of the most dangerous procedures of riding a school bus. After crossers are across the highway, discharge non-crossers and watch them until they are 15 feet away from the bus.

The driver should use the standard signal for crossing and the horn warning for danger. These signals are described in the video and instructional guide *Safe Crossing, An 'Egg-cellent' Idea*. Make sure that drivers understand the final outcome must be that the driver has completed the district's responsibility to the child. The law is very strict on this point.

For example, a child who is supposed to cross the street after disembarking lingers with friends until the bus has left. If this child is hit when crossing the road later, the district may be guilty of contributory negligence because the student was never delivered to the point across the street where the parent's responsibility takes over.

Similarly, if a student is let off at the wrong stop without permission, the district is responsible for any misfortune.

14. Special situations need extra care.

Route characteristics which produce a certain level of risk are sometimes unavoidable. The district must decide what level of risk it is willing to accept.

Right-hand turns immediately after bus stops can create an extreme hazard and are not recommended. The rear wheels of the bus follow a closer path to the curb, or even over the curb. Unloaded students or others waiting at the stop can be struck by the rear wheels. If, in the district's judgment, there is no option but to use such a stop, the driver must use extreme caution.

Any situation where a bus must be backed up produces risks. Backing buses without assistance should be avoided. When backing takes place in the vicinity of a bus stop, the risk escalates. The best way to limit risk is to always have the children on the bus while the backing maneuver is executed. That is, load children before backing, and unload them after backing. There will still be potential risk involving other persons or vehicles which might be in the vicinity, but the driver's specific charges will be protected. If all students are not there to get on the bus, the driver must be completely confident that a child is not in the vicinity before backing.

15. What drivers should know about trains.

A railroad crossing is a "bus stop" because school buses are required to stop at it whether or not students are on board the bus. Most other vehicles are not required to stop at railroad crossings. This makes railroad crossings dangerous. Trains cannot stop to avoid vehicles on tracks which makes crossings even more dangerous.

Drivers should remember to stop 15 to 50 feet before railroad crossings and to look and listen for warning devices. Opening the driver's window, turning off fans and radios, and asking children to stay quiet, will make it easier for drivers to listen to the train's whistle.

Some districts require drivers to activate their hazard lights when the bus stops at a railroad crossing. If visibility is poor, drivers can open the front door and look out. Drivers should remember to turn off the eight-light system before opening the door.

Because large objects appear to be travelling slower than they really are, it is dangerous to try and beat a train to the crossing. Over 600 people lose their lives each year, trying to do this.

On multiple tracks, as the first train passes, look out for approaching trains on other tracks. Once it is safe to cross, drive in the same gear until the bus crosses the tracks--never shift gears while crossing.

If for any reason the bus breaks down on the tracks, evacuate all children to a safe place.

There should be at least 1000 feet (0.2 mile) of visibility in either direction for drivers to determine, whether or not trains are approaching when they stop at a crossing. If a driver feels that visibility is poor, he or she should report that to the transportation director.

16. Bus drivers need to be aware of their training responsibilities. School buses are extensions of classrooms. Bus drivers and monitors have training responsibilities. They are responsible for the reasonable behavior of students on their bus and for making sure they know safe crossing procedures. In most districts, bus drivers are expected to inform students about bus safety rules and procedures and to initiate discipline procedures for those whose behaviors threaten bus safety. Bus drivers may need training in teaching and interacting with students of different ages and conditions. Review with them proper discipline and reporting techniques.

Your drivers' ability to communicate with the students is the final link which brings "knowing the route" and "knowing the procedures"

together to create a safe system. Remind your drivers that for a vital part of each day, they serve as teachers with more responsibility than if they were in a classroom. Encourage them to discuss ways to improve their teaching skills. They are the captains of the bus safety team.

17. Drivers : Front-line Public Relations Representatives

The way drivers do their daily job contributes to a school system's public relations. That's right: the school system, not just the district's transportation department. Drivers who are proud of their part will work to promote and improve their system's reputation. This sustains public relations—the good opinion of the public and everyone within the school district organization.

Drivers, in running their daily routes, have more contact with the public than any other group of employees. They are responsible for hundreds of children. The parents of these children trust them. They may be on roads with hundreds of motorists. People watch their driving. People expect top driving from them, take their routine good performance for granted, and are quick to complain of any error they make.

Each driver has a responsibility for creating a favorable impression of his or her service and system. Tell your drivers: "Here are several ways of building good public relations. If you follow these principles, you will be an asset to the school system."

Keep good order (discipline) on your bus.

Treat your pupils fairly and kindly.

Deal honestly with their parents.

Keep your bus clean and in safe condition.

Combine courtesy with your skill as a driver.

Be proud of your good record as a school bus driver.

The term public relations is misleading because it suggests good relations with only the public. Good relations with one's organization is important too. The good opinion of co-workers, teachers, and school officials is needed. An organization whose members have mutual friendliness, interest and respect has met a major requirement for good public relations.

Help drivers test their own contributions by asking:

Am I courteous and friendly toward fellow workers?

Am I willing to give new drivers the benefit of my experience?

Do I attend and participate in meetings?

Do I seek to improve my skill in driving and in managing children?

Do I know the principals of the schools I serve?

Do I know the officials of the school system?

Am I willing to help a principal or teacher who asks for my aid?

Am I proud of my record as a school bus driver and of my associate drivers' records?

Complaints: Districts should not rely solely on verbal communication; often problems between parents and administrators worsen because no one from the school followed up with parents in writing to a problem when it first surfaced. This is particularly important when the school is responding to a student discipline matter or a complaint against a driver. The Public Contact Record in the *Exhibits* Section will help to facilitate this process.

School Bus Stops

School bus stops are established by weighing a multitude of factors existing at every stop. There is no formula for districts that does not involve a judgment call. Courts require that a district choose a stop with "reasonable" safety, not the "safest stop."

This manual can help districts define "reasonable." It can make transportation departments aware of safety issues by proposing guidelines adaptable to local use, by examining possible local concerns or situations which might need to be considered by your district, and by suggesting procedures for review.

Getting to the Stop

In the discussion of students getting to the bus stop, no assumptions are made about how students will travel to the stop. Students are not told to "walk" to bus stops, because there are any number of ways for them to get to the stop--including parents driving them there.

Parents are responsible for assisting children to get to the stop and home from the stop. The district is not required to provide a protected corridor from students' homes to the bus stop any more than it is to provide that service for students who do not ride buses and must travel from home to school.

In response to legitimate concern and an understanding that most children do indeed walk to the bus stop, some districts do not require students to cross high traffic state highways or railroad tracks, or to travel streets without sidewalks or that are considered hazardous by other local criteria.

It is important to note that one school district will make all home pickups because of lack of sidewalks, and another district will expect students to travel one mile along similar roads to the bus stop. These are district decisions based on criteria established by

the school board and must be applied equally to all district students in like circumstances.

It is important to be sure that the concern is realistic, and the district's definition of hazard is not just a method to require the district to provide home pickups or transportation for ineligible students. The commissioner of education has ruled that districts are not required to provide any transportation to protect children from a hazardous condition. If parents push the district to provide this service, the district will have to bear the full cost. Be sure to consider if a less expensive option is available to remove the hazard such as providing a crossing guard and traffic control device to help students cross that busy highway.

Distance Between Stops

The distance students must travel to stops needs to be established and the criteria strictly adhered to within the district. Education Law 3635 requires that students be provided transportation if they live more than two miles (K-8) or three miles (9-12) from school. Students can not be asked to go further than this to a school bus stop, unless the school board determines that the road where the student lives is too hazardous for school bus travel. Districts can choose to provide a higher level of service. There must be voter approval for any lesser distances and there will be no state reimbursement for distances under one and a half miles.

Few districts ask students to travel these distances to a school bus stop. Distances of up to one mile are not uncommon within New York State and an increase in distance may sometime become financially appealing.

Advantages of Frequent Stops

- ◆ Parents like to be able to see their children at the stop.
- ◆ Getting to a bus stop can be difficult, given lack of sidewalks, snow-narrowed roads, and density of traffic.
- ◆ Less students at stops can mean less behavior problems and less possible property damage.

Disadvantages of Frequent Stops

- ◆ Route takes longer because of additional bus stops and loading time requiring additional equipment and personnel to transport all students.
- ◆ Stopping and starting creates more traffic hazards and delays, and more vehicle maintenance.
- ◆ More side roads would have to be included on routes.
- ◆ Most school bus fatalities occur while school buses are stopped to load/unload children. More stops mean greater potential for school bus fatalities.

Instead of or in addition to establishing a maximum distance a student may be required to travel to a bus stop, it is possible to establish a minimum distance between stops. This assures proper distance for bus drivers to leave one stop, move into traffic, and correctly signal their intention to stop again. Common distances used for this strategy are one- or two-tenths of a mile. Trying this out on the road conditions in the district will determine a reasonable distance to accomplish this procedure.

Number of Students at Stop

Characteristics of each stop location--such as road speed limit and traffic, actual space to congregate 15 feet from the road, and other hazards in the vicinity--must be considered in determining how many students can safely wait there.

The State Education Department *Transportation Supervisor's Handbook* suggests that not more than 15 students gather at one bus stop. This can serve as a helpful rule of thumb, but a high density setting such as a trailer park, development, or apartment building may make this impossible to maintain.

Road conditions could necessitate a large stop because it might be impossible to stop along the road or negotiate the road at all due to inclines, curves, or lack of public maintenance.

In cases where stops have as many as 30 students, some sort of supervision or control might be considered. Options include a voluntary cooperative schedule developed by parents of students who can be at the stop, a program of trained students similar to a student crossing patrol, or assignment of a district employee such as a bus monitor who might join the route in progress.

While the district is required to select a safe site for the bus stop, it is ultimately not responsible, because it cannot supervise what takes place at the stop while students are waiting. Parents are responsible for their children's behavior, and local police may be called to settle any altercations which might arise.

Mix of Students at Bus Stop

Age and ability levels of those at the stop must also be considered. Kindergarten students, on their own, cannot be expected to maintain a very high degree of self-control and safety at a bus stop. Kindergarten students waiting in a K-6 mix will be much safer due to the supervision provided by the older students.

Expanding the mix to K-12, as a non-public school run or a single-trip policy, does not necessarily increase the comfort level, although it may be successful in some settings. Older students might provide a mix of behavior and language that could cause concern for the younger students and their parents. The potential behavior of mainstreamed students with disabilities must also be considered in evaluating the mix of students at any one stop.

In general, the greater the homogeneity among the group, except for kindergartners alone, the more likely it is that unwanted behaviors will have to be controlled.

Visibility

In order for a school bus to correctly execute a school bus stop, and for traffic to respond properly, there must be adequate visibility in both directions at the bus stop. Motorists must have sufficient distance to react to the bus and to stop their vehicles in a controlled way.

In addition to simple distance, any other factor which might affect a vehicle's ability to stop must also be considered, such as speed, a steep incline, glare, or frequent slippery road conditions. The only suggestion given in regulation is in sections 230.2 and 236.3 of the *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. It regulates the use of "School Bus Stop Ahead" signs.

Based on the regulations for posting distances, motorists need **500 feet to 1000 feet of visibility**, depending on speed, to adequately react to a stopping bus. Actual braking distances range up to 500 feet or 600 feet for a truck at 60 mph under ideal conditions.

The NYS *Basic School Bus Driver Training Manual*, Unit VI, page 21, contains excellent stopping distance information which should be considered in determining if various classes of vehicles could, in fact, stop in time for a stopped school bus.

Rather than trying to establish a sight distance at every speed, it is recommended that a minimum of 500 feet of visibility at 35 mph or below and 1000 feet of visibility above 35 mph be the goal. In order to best simulate real conditions, visibility distance will mean the distance at which a car driver can see the eight-light warning system and top third of the bus. Each stop has characteristics such as slope, road surface, truck traffic, real vs. posted speed, which must all be considered when evaluating stop safety.

Signing

If it is not possible to meet the visibility recommendations for a safe stop, DOT approved signs can be used to warn motorist of the presence of the school bus stop. The NYS DOT *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices* provides a **school bus stop ahead sign (W6-4.)**



Section 236.3(a)(1) reads, "This sign is for use, as necessary, to warn of locations where school buses are not visible for at least five hundred feet when stopped to pick up or discharge passengers." Section 230.2 establishes posting distance from the stop based on the speed of travel on the road with a minimum posting distance established by 236.3(b) as 500 feet.

Traffic Speed

Posting Distance

■ up to 35 mph	500 ft ■
■ 40 mph	545 ft ■
■ 45 mph	640 ft ■
■ 50 mph	735 ft ■
■ 55 mph	830 ft ■
■ 60 mph	920 ft ■
■ 65 mph	1015 ft ■

Section 236.3(a)(2) states that the **school bus stop ahead sign** is not intended for general use anywhere school buses stop. It should be used only where terrain and roadway features limit approach sight distance and it is impractical to move the school bus stop to a more visible location. This mandate places responsibility on the district to seek every possible relief from placing the stop at a location of reduced visibility.

When the behavior of motorists rather than visibility is threatening bus stop safety, the **state law sign** can be used. The purpose of State Law Signs Section 2129.1(a) reads, "...it is sometimes necessary to remind highway users of certain basic statutory rules where violations are causing significant safety or highway problems."



The **state law stop for school bus sign (R9-2)** is available for use according to Section 219.3(a) "where it is deemed necessary to remind motorists of the requirements of section 1174 of the vehicle and traffic law."

In general, the **stop ahead sign** is used in a suburban and rural setting where traffic is traveling at higher speeds and hazards may preclude students walking to a safer stop location.

The **state law sign** can be used in any setting, even school grounds, where motorists are passing buses with red lights flashing. This, rather than visibility, is often the problem in an urban setting, and this sign can help to raise the level of awareness of proper school bus procedure in an area with chronic offenders.

Stop Characteristics

The school bus stop itself must meet certain standards to protect the children waiting at the stop and the owner of the property, as well as allowing the school bus driver to successfully negotiate the loading and unloading process.

V.T. 1174 establishes that there needs to be sufficient room when the students get off the bus for them to move 15 feet away from the bus and off the road or on the sidewalk. If there is no room for students to move perpendicularly 15 feet away from the bus's position on the side of the road, they must move 15 feet in front of the bus along the shoulder. There is a danger that students walking alongside the bus would fall under the rear wheels. In order to avoid that possibility, stops should be established so students will only have to walk in front of the bus. For instance, if children from three houses got on at the same stop, the stop should be established at the first house so the other students would remain in front of the bus as they traveled home.

V.T. 1174 implies that children must be 15 feet away from where the bus stops and off the road or on a sidewalk to be safe at a bus stop. This standard would require that there be sufficient room 15 feet from the road for all the students assigned to a stop to wait comfortably.

Many bus stops are established where students can wait in a driveway and move safely to the bus. Parked cars in an urban setting and snow banks in suburban and rural settings detract from safe loading and unloading.

The only other stop location which would provide a break in snowbanks or parked cars is an intersection stop where sidewalks break through the snowbanks also. **But these are not recommended.**

The location of bus stops on private property must be addressed sensitively to maximize public cooperation. Solve problems before they escalate by writing a letter to the property owner and establishing rules students must follow; provide the name of a contact person to call if problems develop.

Establishing a stop on the property of one of the students at the stop can help to increase cooperation. It is an important issue, when dealing with the property owner, to be aware exactly where the private property starts. The public right of way extends back from the road onto what many property owners consider "my property."

Most sidewalks are actually on public property, not on the front of private property. Students may be able to wait without actually going onto private property.

The issue of visibility at, not visibility to, the bus stop should also be addressed. As a bus driver approaches the stop, he or she should be able to see the stop clearly. If out-buildings, trees or shrubs, parked vehicles, or anything else provides a hiding place for students, they could dash out in front of the bus as it approaches. If the obstruction is on public property, the local municipality can be contacted to seek a solution. On private property, the owner may be willing to help out if the safety aspect is emphasized.

Proximity to Hazard

Bus stops should not be located near known hazards. Possible hazards that should be avoided include cliffs, rivers, railroads, drug houses, intersections, and high speed highways.

There is no legal definition of what constitutes a hazard; it is up to the district to identify them by their community standards. Hazards can be relative. Rather than deny a stop, the hazard might limit the stop.

For instance, a district may decide to limit the number of children at stops along a busy highway since a larger number of students might produce more horseplay and potential for running out into traffic. Districts often prohibit stops where students have to cross a busy highway.

Intersection Stops

Historically, in urban and suburban settings, school bus stops have often been placed at intersections. Research shows real difficulties arise with safely executing intersection stops. Traffic at an intersection

must be carefully evaluated and alternatives explored before considering an intersection stop. Some districts have eliminated intersection stops altogether.

The school bus is designed to alert traffic in two directions: behind and in front of the bus. An intersection involves traffic in two more directions that cannot be alerted. If a bus releases children who might immediately cross any one of the available streets, the children could be hit by traffic that was not controlled by the bus's red lights.

If the bus unloads children and then makes an immediate right turn, it could run over an unsuspecting student who has just been discharged, because the rear wheels track closer to the curb than do the front wheels.

These concerns have led to recommendations of making mid-block stops in an urban setting, and moving stops back a minimum of 100 feet before the intersection in other settings. When the bus is going to make a turn at an intersection, the stop should be established on the road with less traffic.

In general, making the stop after the turn will provide a higher level of safety by blocking turning traffic with the bus. If the bus is continuing on the same road, the stop should be established past the intersection with at least 100 feet from the intersection to the back of the bus. This option puts the bus between the children and any turning traffic.

Safe Enough?

If an alternative to an intersection stop is not available, the traffic volume of the two streets, common traffic patterns at the intersection, and location of students home(s), must all be considered to determine if the stop is "safe enough."

If, for any reason, an intersection stop is deemed necessary, avoid making right-hand turns after picking up students at an intersection. Such a turn would double the danger, because the rear wheels track closer to the curb than the front and could strike a pedestrian.

These recommendations create serious changes in "the way we always did it," but many districts that have implemented these policies are providing a higher level of safety.

Crossing to the Bus

In order to pick up students at bus stops on both sides of a road, school bus drivers have historically "crossed" students to the bus in the morning or "crossed" them to their stop in the afternoon.

In most states, the driver remains in the driver's seat and surveys traffic, giving the signal to cross when all traffic has stopped. The extreme case is in California where drivers leave the bus and walk a child across the road. Bus attendants can play a useful role by getting out of the bus and supervising the crossing procedure. Some districts have gone even further and established that no children will be required to cross the road to get to the bus stop.

A more common procedure is for a district to identify certain roads within a district as "no crossing" roads because of the speed and density of traffic. On these roads, students would not be required to cross the road from the bus stop to the bus or vice versa. If a district has so identified a road or roads within a district, no exceptions should be made, even by parental request. Once the district has identified the acceptable level of safety for its students, it is required to provide that safety. Parents cannot choose the level of safety which will be provided for their children.

If a bus travels a road in both directions on its route, the bus driver should be aware of requiring students to disembark as non-crossers; even if this means keeping them on the bus longer. Crossing the road is the most hazardous aspect of riding a school bus and it should be eliminated whenever and wherever possible.

Parenthetically, parents cannot request that their child practice gymnastics without spotters, or that their child who walks to school ignore the crossing guard, or play varsity football without pads. The district sets standards which pertain to all children.

If a change to a no-crossing policy means a longer bus ride for some students, it is acceptable, as long as the length of ride remains within state and district guidelines.

Curves and Hills

Road characteristics such as hills and curves make stop placements very difficult. Careful evaluation of such stops must be done to provide a reasonable level of safety to these students. Crossings at stops on curves or hills should be avoided because of the extra danger.

Visibility in both directions on a curve can be maximized by putting the stop at the point of the curve. The outside point of a curve, where motorists have greatest visibility, would be in the path of a vehicle which is losing control. That relative danger must be weighed against crossing or moving the stop along the road to a safer location.

A vehicle cresting a hill needs sufficient time to react to the presence of a school bus stop. Stops must not be near the crest of the hill in order to allow sufficient stopping distance. Different concerns exist for establishing the stop on the downgrade or upgrade of the hill.

A bus stopping on the downgrade of a hill faces two dangers: the bus could lose control as it tries to stop and slide into waiting students, and a vehicle could slide into the back of the bus. Students must remain back 15 feet from the road until the driver signals them to approach the bus. Students are protected from vehicles approaching from the rear by the bulk of the bus, but a truck out of control could spell disaster. Vehicles approaching from the front will have the whole incline for visibility and reaction time.

Caution must also be exercised when establishing a stop on the upgrade. Vehicles coming downhill might lose control when trying to stop, but should be able to stay on their own side of the road. Vehicles approaching from the rear should not have any trouble stopping. The concern in particularly icy weather would be that the bus might not be able to start up again, and would have to back down the hill.

If both sides of the hill were equal--they almost never are--then the best choice would be placing the stop on the upgrade. There is no substitute for visual evaluation of the site, determination of sight distances at different locations, and a review of types of traffic expected on that road.

Stop Review

Districts cannot afford to assume that once stops have been established as safe they will always be safe.

Because of changing conditions, it is a good idea for a district to observe school bus routes and stops once a year to ensure the safety of students. Useful forms for this purpose are included in the *Exhibits* Section. A record of this review must be kept on file to document the ongoing supervision which the district is providing. In addition to this review by transportation administrative staff, bus drivers must be trained to evaluate stops and report any problems which might arise on a day-to-day basis. The handout "SCHOOL BUS STOPS YES/NO" in the *Exhibits* Section can be used for sensitizing drivers.

School Sites

The school site is a very special bus stop because hundreds, if not thousands, of students use it every day. All regulations governing other bus stops must be observed and even more detailed plans must be made for safe and efficient traffic control. The principal and transportation manager must work together with the buildings and grounds department and representatives of all user groups to create a plan which creates safe access for all to the school site. A "School Bus Loading Zone Evaluation" has been included in the *Exhibits* Section to help identify potential problem areas.

Responding to Complaint

In order to satisfactorily address a complaint about a bus stop location, a district must have established criteria to define what is a "reasonable" stop, and how far that stop can be from a student's home.

A "Stop Review Form" (See *Exhibits* Section) should be created that contains all relevant information in a structured manner. Parents

bringing the complaint may be aware of traffic patterns in the area or hazards that were not evident at the time the stop was established. Listen carefully to their concerns.

School Bus Route Planning

School bus routing follows the same basic principles in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The goal is to maximize the use of available vehicles and minimize the number of vehicles needed. A small number of larger buses would appear to be the logical solution, but the length of the ride must not exceed accepted standards, and some districts today have to transport students from across the district to many different locations. The net result is the use of buses designed to transport a few children, as well as buses designed for up to 84.

In addition to the basic task of creating a system to transport students, route planners must account for roads designated "no crossing," bridges not rated for a full-sized school bus, availability of state-maintained turnarounds, different start times for public and non-public schools, child care locations, intersection stops, anticipated road construction, new housing developments, and so on.

The crucial first steps for successful routing include:

- maintaining an accurate database for all students in the district;
- maintaining an accurate roster of all the schools to be serviced with opening and dismissal times;
- keeping accurate maps for the district identifying road characteristics;
- keeping a copy of district policy defining provided service; and
- maintaining an accurate roster of available vehicles.

Computer routing is available from many suppliers to program all these variables and create routes for the entire district. Whether routing is done manually or by computers, the basic information required is the same, and procedures are the same.

The importance of accurate information cannot be stressed enough. Everything depends on it as schools, buses, and students are merged together into one system. One snafu can ripple throughout the system, potentially undoing months of work.

ROUTE DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR

Route development is not a summer task. While some districts have more changes each year than others, even the most rural area cannot escape the high mobility of today's society. With proper preparation through the year, you'll have very few surprises when September comes. The following guidelines can be adapted into a format for a district's requirements.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Jan. - Feb. | Notify public regarding April 1 deadline for non-public and/or child care transportation. Obtain enrollment projection figures from district, estimate bus needs, and initiate process to meet those needs. |
| March | Re-notify the public regarding April 1 deadline. |
| April | Determine non-public transportation needs. Begin to develop a routing schedule for non-public students. Identify contract transportation needs and begin renewal or bid process. |
| May | Begin to determine transportation needs for students with disabling conditions. Start developing routing schedules for students with disabling conditions. Identify contract transportation needs for these students and begin renewal or bid process. Begin to develop a basic routing schedule for summer school transportation for students with disabilities and able-bodied students. |
| June | Begin fall in-district routing. Award new contracts and approve extensions. Complete summer school routing. |
| July | Obtain final enrollment data from school district. Review any routing problem areas such as: safety problems, bus stop locations, bus loads, and time schedules from last year. Complete in-district and out-of-district routing, scheduling, and staffing assignments. |
| August | Test run each route by assigned driver with assigned bus and address any concerns. Issue bus passes. Send letters to parents on pickup and drop-off times, stop location, transportation rules, and how to contact transportation staff. Require signed return for transportation eligibility. Do all the things which show up at the last minute no matter how hard you plan. |

Lack of data are the greatest impediment to following these guidelines. Make sure that district planners for regular and special education, understand the importance of readily available data in order to address staff and vehicle needs in a timely fashion.

Cooperatively set target dates for each body of data. Work with participants throughout the year so that you are aware of developing trends that might affect your routing needs and budget requests.

DATA COLLECTION

Complete data must be collected on students, district roads, inventory of available vehicles, district policy, and the schools to be serviced. These data provide raw material to plan adequately for bus routes.

Student Data

The following information may be obtained for each student in the district. Your district's needs will determine how much information is necessary.



- Name
- Student ID number
- School grade
- Date of birth
- Disabling condition (if any) including allergies to bee stings, grand mal seizures, etc.
- Parents' or guardians' names
(be sure to account for all to possibly have different last names)
- Home address (for both parents if necessary)
- Child care address
- Transportation eligibility (quota, non-quota)
- Pickup bus stop number or name.....crosser?
- Drop-off bus stop number or name.....crosser?
- Pickup bus route number or name
- Drop-off route number or name
- Home phone (both parents if necessary)
- Emergency phone #1
- Emergency phone #2

Mapping Data

To create feasible routes, accurate maps with the following information should be used:



- District roads
- One-way roads
- Four-lane roads
- Divided highway
- Speed limits
- Bridges' weight limits
- Impossible right turn with standard bus
- Impossible left turn with standard bus
- Railroad Crossing (guarded or unguarded)
- "No crossing" roads
- House pickup roads
- Roads not traveled in extreme ice conditions
- Steep inclines or sharp curves
- Possible traffic conflicts with factory shift changes
- Persistent fog or snowdrift area
- Private roads and roads not maintained through winter
- Present or anticipated road construction

School Data

To serve each school successfully, these data must be collected.



- School Name
- School Address
- Phone number
- Principal's name
- Emergency number
- Opening and dismissal times
- How early/late students can be unloaded
- How early/late students can be picked up
- Calendar for the year including conference days, early dismissals, etc.
- Location of loading/unloading zones
- Need for late bus (meet district policy?)
- Need for daytime shuttles (BOCES or other programs)

Policy Data

Certain board policies must be in effect to guide the development of safe routes.



- Transportation eligibility criteria
- Public school eligibility and procedures
- Non-public school eligibility procedures
- Maximum ride time (by grade if desired)
- Identification of hazardous roads with no crossing
- Roads with no walking space
- Roads not to travel by bus
- Natural or social hazards
- Railroads
- District-wide crossing policy
- Maximum distance to bus stop
- Late bus criteria

Once these data have been collected, the router can proceed to turn isolated bits of information into an integrated whole. The process by which this is done, whether by humans or computer logic, follows a basic procedure of creating and testing hypotheses.

Maps

There are three broad steps in this procedure: (1) acquiring quality maps and identifying any special road characteristics, (2) locating the students on the maps, and (3) composing routes that bring the students to their schools with available vehicles.

Map scales should be chosen based on population density. For most suburban areas, a scale of at least six inches to the mile will be necessary to identify all students. A rural setting, with sparse population, could be served with a smaller scale map. An urban setting might require even greater detail.

Be sure that special characteristics such as steep hills, curves, or other areas of low visibility are identified. Natural barriers to routes need to be recognized so extra time is not wasted trying to cross busy highways without a traffic light or drive around factory complexes. Mark also if roads are one way, designated by board policy as "house stops only," or "no crossing," if bridges have a weight limit, or whatever else might affect the router's decision. The DOT Regional Office should have a list of all bridge weight limits in your area.

Mount maps on bulletin boards at a comfortable working height; many hours will be spent before them. Identify a coding system for showing students' residences and/or child care locations. Colored push-pins can be used. Another system with greater flexibility is to use heavy plastic roll sheeting or even large plexiglass sheets pinned or hung over the map. These can be marked with wax pencils or overhead projection markers.

Depending on district population and number of schools, all district students or one school at a time can be located. If there is lots of space, a map for each school can be maintained throughout the year. Using the plastic layovers, schools can be superimposed to evaluate possible merging of loads and routes.

If permanently maintained maps are an option, then students can be identified by grade and at the end of each year, graduating class information can be replaced with entering class information. If multiple schools are maintained on one map, each school can have a color to clarify the routing task.

Any system must be flexible. For maximum efficiency, routes, schools, and students may overlap. The router must create methods for maintaining clarity. For instance: Non-public elementary students may be traveling with high school students for a transfer to a bus(es) which takes them to their school(s). This produces two different age groups going to multiple schools, all traveling on the same bus. The final routing priority is the final destination(s) of that route.

Route Planning

Once the students who need to be transported to a school have been identified, routing begins. Routes are limited by two criteria, (1) district established length of ride which affects the number of stops which can be made and the distance traveled, and (2) the capacity of the buses available.

Do not overload buses, planning for standees. Standees are not recommended although they are still legal in New York State. If an area is experiencing growth, consider leaving space on a bus for students who might arrive during the year. Too tight a plan will be upset

by only a few new students and extensive re-routing might be necessary. In some areas, young children are brought to school by parents. Some high school students drive to school. Use past experience to determine the percentage of students that will actually ride the bus and try to fill buses accordingly.

Determine the average number of miles per hour that buses travel on routes. This will give you a rough figure of how long each route is. Urban buses will average around 12 to 15 mph while picking up students, except in very high traffic areas. Rural buses will average 20 mph picking up students, and 30 mph or more on direct travel time. Time district buses on different routes to identify more accurate average speeds for your district.

Travel time is the one factor limiting the number of students to route on a single bus. The NYS Commissioner of Education has established that in certain circumstances one and one-half to one and three-quarters hour rides can be "reasonable." Some districts have policy limiting travel time to one hour or 45 minutes. Since districts range in size from under 10 square miles to over 600 square miles, travel time is a relative issue.

In a small-to medium-size district, travel time is a function of the number of stops made and traffic conditions. In a large, mostly rural district, the actual travel time from the school to the furthest student's home could be 45 minutes by car. The actual distance becomes the limiting factor.

Any one of these factors can limit the number of students able to be picked up within the time guidelines advised by the state or set in district policy. If a standard 60-passenger bus cannot be filled, then a smaller bus with an appropriate capacity can be used with greater efficiency.

Begin the routing process by identifying:

- Students on side roads. These would naturally funnel students to a bus stop on a larger road.

- Segments of roads to travel because of density of students and distances from any other stop possibilities.
- High density stops warranting separate consideration.

If district policy forbids student crossing on all or some roads, each side of the road must be routed separately. The same bus may need to travel the road both ways, or separate buses could service each side of the road as a part of their route.

As people doing the routing begin to get a feel for how all these pieces might fit together, routes will begin to take form. Use colored string to begin to create logical groupings into routes. Consider the types of routes listed to be aware of all the possibilities available.

Generally, one type of route will not be appropriate for every trip. For instance: circular routes could be used to bring buses back from the far side of a district after the first afternoon run to reduce deadhead mileage; shoestring routes could be used on the other side of the school to move towards a second school for a second trip.

Once a pattern has begun to take place, begin to evaluate your plan based on these six general guidelines.

1. Try to equalize route length and bus loads as well as possible. When distances travelled prohibit filling a 60-passenger or larger bus within the time specified by the district, smaller buses will need to be used, either as part of a feeder system, or all the way to school.
2. If there are not enough buses to complete the planned routes, double tripping to one school or additional multiple tripping for the whole district may need to be considered.
3. Avoid dangerous railroad crossings and other driving hazards as much as possible. If it is necessary to use unguarded railroad crossings, be sure that the board of education conducts a public meeting to explain this need. A notice of the meeting should be filed with appropriate officials, as outlined in the Education Law (Section 3636.)
4. Be certain that turnarounds with pupils aboard are safe and necessary.

5. Make certain two buses are not travelling the same road for reasons other than picking up on separate sides. Unless it is a main feeder route to the school, there may be a more efficient possibility.

6. Finally, be sure that routes are planned so buses can get to the next school or route on time.

Empty Bus

Distance from the garage to the first stop, or from the end of one route to the next route or the garage, is called "deadhead mileage" and must be considered in planning routes.

Deadhead mileage for determining state aid is defined more narrowly. It is the distance between the bus garage and a bus route at the beginning and end of the school day.

This mileage and driving time can be considerable if a bus ends its first route in the afternoon in a far corner of the district and then has to drive across the district to get to another school for a second trip. For maximum efficiency, routes should be created with the last stop in proper relation to the next school to be serviced when necessary.

Stop Placement

Once routes have been established, stops have to be placed along the routes. For students living along a feeder road to the route, stops would most likely be placed at least 100 feet before the intersection.

If the bus is going to turn at an intersection, the stop should be placed on the less-busy road. This is assuming that no child lives on the busy road and would have to cross it without the protection of the bus's lights. For students who live along the route, stops should be established at points of good visibility at the frequency established by the district, but not closer than 0.2 mile in order to allow the bus time to pull into traffic and signal an intent to stop again.

Over 150 school districts in New York State responded to a stop placement survey in 1992, while this manual was being prepared. Districts regularly require high school students to get to a bus stop up to 1.5 miles from their house. Middle school students are required to travel up to 1 mile and elementary students are re-

Survey Results

	Minimum Reported	Maximum Reported	Suggested Range
Kindergarten	0	1.0	0.0 - 1.0
Elementary	0	1.5	0.5 - 1.0
Middle School	0	1.5	1.0 - 1.5
High School	0	2.5	1.0 - 2.0

quired to travel 0.5 miles. Kindergartners are generally grouped with elementary students, except when they would be at a stop by themselves. Then they are picked up at home if possible. In general, mid-day kindergarten students are picked up at or near their homes.

Any attempt to suggest a distance students must travel to a bus stop is politically difficult. School boards must set policy based on district setting and community response. The responsibility to be prudent stewards of tax dollars would suggest that they consider the efficiencies available through group bus stops. Parents are responsible for getting children to the bus stop, just as parents living close to the school are responsible for having their children arrive at school.

The "Suggested Range" figures stop short of the state mandates for those who have to walk to school because the goal is not to have as few bus stops as possible, but to provide the greatest flexibility to the route planner for efficiency. From an equity perspective, those bused will be spending additional time on the bus and waiting for the bus to balance the additional time "walkers" might be asked to spend traveling a longer distance to school.

Thirty percent of the districts who responded to the survey provide home pickup to all students K-12. This practice increases the length of time required to complete a run: because of all the extra stops, because of being held at stops in the morning waiting for students to come out of their houses; because of having to drive down every driveable side road in the district; and, because there are no options for efficiency.

Traffic gets backed up behind the bus and is apt to pass unwisely out of frustration at all the stops. The bus does not have time to pull back into the flow of traffic and then properly signal its intentions to stop again. Districts should review carefully if they can afford these risks, from either a financial or safety perspective.

Types of Routes

The bus routes described here can be used individually or combined.

⇒ Circular Route

A circular route surrounds an area by using different roads on the outgoing and incoming trips. If it is run in the same direction in the morning and afternoon, the length of ride will be equalized for students, as first on will be first off.

⇒ Clover-Leaf Routing

Circular routes can be used in a clover-leaf pattern around a school building. Outer and inner circular routes can cover the area of each cloverleaf.

⇒ Shoestring Route

Such routes extend from the school to some end point in the district. If district policy forbids crossing, this route can be run in both directions picking up students on the right hand side of the road in each direction.

⇒ Christmas Tree Routing

When working towards a corner of a district, shoestring routes can be used in combination to create a Christmas tree pattern. One bus is sent to the farthest point and loads back. As it is filled, it breaks away and a second and third bus take over, spreading out as they go until the school is reached.

⇒ Feeder Route

This is generally run by smaller buses on side roads which cannot be navigated by larger buses. The small buses pick up relatively inaccessible students and then meet a larger bus at a transfer point where the large bus loads the children and takes them to school. It may be used in servicing a large sparsely populated area.

⇒ **Natural Barriers Routing**

Districts often have natural barriers such as rivers, interstate highways, or large complexes which provide barriers to route development. The boundaries which these barriers create will provide natural sub-units for route development which can most easily be considered separately.

⇒ **Shuttle or Continuous Route**

A shuttle route extends between two school buildings and would be used when children attending more than one school are bused into a single school. Then a shuttle route(s) from the initial school to other school building(s) would bring children to the appropriate school(s). Additional home pickups would generally not be part of a shuttle route.

⇒ **Express Route**

This is another type of a shuttle run. This route would service one bus stop with a very large number of students. It might be necessary at a development, mobile home park, or apartment building.

⇒ **Emergency Route**

Some districts have areas where ice, floods, or other hazards necessitate emergency routes. These routes will be activated if the normal route is impassible. There needs to be communication to parents to alert them where their children will be unloaded. Radio or telephone can be used, depending on how many children are affected. Often only a few children are affected and a telephone call is the most reliable way to contact parents.

MULTIPLE TRIPS

Establishment of school opening and dismissal times is a community-wide issue affecting parents, teachers, and students. Changing the number of trips the buses run can represent potential savings or expense for the school district and must be evaluated as an option within the larger community setting.

In actuality, few districts follow a single plan. Public schools might be double or triple tripped, some non-public students might travel to the public school and then be transferred to direct shuttle to the non-public school, and some disabled students might live so far from their school that their bus will only have that single trip.

Single Trips

Single-tripping brings the entire student body (K-12) to school(s) on one set of runs. This is the only reasonable option in large sparsely populated geographical areas, because it takes so long to get from one end of the district to another. This system's disadvantage is that it requires the greatest number of buses and bus drivers for a given school population and exposes younger students to the behaviors of high school students.

An option: try to provide a certain level of separation between the grades, have K-6 students in the front half of the bus, and 7-12 in the back half of the bus.

Double Trips

Most school districts operate double trips. One approach for double-tripping is to have buses covering the district picking up junior and senior high school students, bringing them to school(s), and then covering the district again picking up elementary school students. In the afternoon, the process is reversed.

Multiple-tripping does not always directly reverse the process. If a longer school day is desired for high school than elementary students, high school students could be picked up first and dropped off last.

Double-tripping reduces, roughly by half, the number of buses and drivers needed to transport those students. This greatly reduces the district's investment or contract cost. A further advantage is the increased pay for the drivers since they are now responsible for four runs instead of two. This makes bus driving a little more attractive.

Triple or More

If a district is willing to adjust school schedules sufficiently, and if the routes can be kept under one-half hour, triple-tripping or more can be an excellent option.

Some neighborhood schools can be double-tripped even for a single opening time if the routes can take 15 minutes or less because of short distances and large bus stops. The first trip could be unloaded and held in the cafeteria while the second trip was picked up and unloaded as school starts.

When routes are scheduled very close to one another, chances for the weather or a traffic emergency to disrupt service increase. It is important to be realistic in planning. It is also important to remember that reversing the morning schedule directly may not be possible because of deadhead mileage from the end of one route to the next school for pickup or a longer first route. It is okay in the morning because it just means starting earlier, but can't be accommodated in the afternoon.

When routing a multiple-trip system, be sure to know where the bus is located at the end of the previous run and know how long it will take to get to the start of the next trip.

Non-public School Transportation

Districts providing transportation to public school students must also provide transportation in like manner, up to 15 miles from a student's house to non-public schools--whether they are in or out of the district, or even the state. [NYS Education Law 3635(1)(a)]

Parents must request transportation in writing by April 1 preceding the school year they desire transportation, or not more than 30 days after moving into a district.

This benefit is stretched beyond the original definition two times (3635(1)(a)(i and ii) and then once further by the commissioner's decisions. (19 EDR 392)

If one student in the district resides within 15 miles of the non-public schools, one or more centralized pickup points at public schools shall be established in the district where students living beyond the eligibility range may be picked up for transportation to the non-public school. This allows one student to qualify any number of additional students.

If a district provided transportation based on eligible student(s) within the past three years, it may choose, at the board's discretion, to continue to provide transportation from a public school centralized pickup point within 15 miles of the non-public school, despite the fact there are no longer any qualifying students. This option appears to be seldom used.

Additionally, the commissioner has ruled that even if a request for transportation has not been filed in a timely fashion, but there is room on a bus presently going to the non-public school, then the district must allow the additional student to ride. There must be no additional cost to the district. If the bus is already full or if the bus is contracted on a per-pupil basis, or any other factor exists which would increase the district's cost, then transportation need not be provided for a late request.

Extreme variation exists among districts across the state, as one district might be called on to provide service to one parochial school, and another might need to provide service to a multitude of 30 to 50 non-public sites. It is often an area where a closer look at planning for provision of service can be cost-saving for a district.

The target for non-public transportation is the same as for public: full buses and efficient schedules. Often the reverse is true: many buses with only a few students traveling extensive routes.

Three basic plans can be used to streamline transportation to non-public schools. In actuality, districts which have many schools to service will use combinations of the three.

1. Bus Stops

Non-public students can be picked up at their bus stops or centralized pick-up points, depending on eligibility, and driven directly to their school(s). More than one school can be serviced by one bus if the non-public schools are close enough together and their opening and dismissal times provide sufficient leeway for more than one school stop.

Many non-public schools are often willing to be a little flexible in their arrival and departure times, as long as instructional time is not compromised. Be sure that school schedules are agreed upon before the school year starts.

2. Transfer

Non-public students can ride the buses from their bus stops to the public schools along with other district students and then be transferred to buses which will take them directly to their non-public school(s). Again, multiple non-public students may be serviced with one transfer bus. This removes the need to cover the entire district area for each school. The drawback to the transfer system is the length of ride. As long as the combined rides meet the district's guidelines, this is considered by the commissioner to be a "reasonable" system.

3. Cooperative Routes

Often districts surrounding a major metropolitan area find that they are all transporting a few students to the same schools within the city. Rather than each routing many small buses with a few children, neighboring districts get together to share the burden of transporting to these schools. One district may come into another and pick up students going to schools A and B, while the other district comes and picks up the first district's students for schools C and D.

There is no end to the creative possibilities which can be worked out. Districts can exchange essentially similar services, or one district can provide a service and bill the other. A situation might arise in which one school district is open and the other closed. Plan ahead to deal with this.

Because of the ever-changing non-public school population within a district, some districts choose to contract for transportation of this service even when they transport their public school students. All three of

these models can be used for contract transportation as well as district-owned transportation. Even cooperative routes can be used with a contract which charges each district for the percentage of service provided. The total cost of the one cooperative route will be only slightly more than the cost of an individual route for one district.

Activity Buses

The term "Activity Bus," or "Second Dismissal Bus," or "9th Period Bus" (after regular eight periods), generally refers to a bus leaving the school approximately one hour after regular dismissal. This allows students to participate in after-school clubs, band, etc. This service is generally provided to high school students, and sometimes to junior high and middle school students. Activity buses provide access for students to after-school activities. Although not required by law, a district may choose to provide this service. If so, it should provide like service to all students in similar situations.

Generally, districts provide a slightly lower level of service for students on activity buses compared to regular transportation. If buses normally picked students up at their homes, an activity bus might bring them within two-tenths of a mile from their home. A regular bus might go into a large development to pick up students, while an activity bus might drop them at the entrance to the development.

The other difference in service might be that a student might ride the bus a little longer on an activity bus since the whole district is being covered by fewer buses.

Because the mix of students riding these buses can fluctuate daily, there should be guidelines to assure the most effective service. It is possible to go in one of two directions.

A district can establish a route and provide a set of stops within an accepted distance of every student's home.

Another option is to divide the district into sub-sections and each bus be assigned to a sub-section. With this model, bus drivers, based on their knowledge of the district and experience, take students in this sub-section within the specified distance from their home in whatever

way seems most efficient. Because of its flexibility, this model requires more thought and more experienced drivers, but it provides better service to the students.

In order to provide some control to these activity and late buses, a pass with the student's name and address, provided by the adult supervisor of the after-school activity, should be presented to the bus driver. This makes sure that students get on the right bus which has specific information about roads and house numbers. It also ensures that students stayed on after school for an approved activity.

Without it, for instance, a student might say he or she lives on Route 11, and then because of lack of communication, get dropped off on Route 11 ten miles from his or her house, at the other end of the district. This could cause concern for all, and potential liability for the district.

Activity bus service may be provided every day or only on specified days of the week. If a large number of students are involved with activities, as many as half the buses might need to return to the school to provide this second level of service. When many students regularly ride such buses, adjustments can be made to regular afternoon trips to avoid half-full buses.

Additional later buses may also be used. Some districts provide as many as three rounds of activity buses--one, two, or three hours after school is over. Many districts provide two levels, an activity bus one hour after school, and a "late bus" three hours after school.

The "late bus" generally serves students returning from sports trips or from performing arts rehearsals. Again there is no regulation regarding what service must be provided and many school districts do not provide transportation home from sport trips.

Non-public school students also have the right to activity or late buses in the same manner as public school students. In order to control unexpected or occasional requests for this service, where a large expense would service only a few students, many districts develop eligibility criteria which schools, public and non-public must meet to receive this service.

A common guideline is the number of students who would need this service. A school may be required to have at least 10 or 20 students who need the additional bus, or maybe one bus load on a regular basis, to qualify.

Students with special transportation needs identified in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) should be able to receive this service following after-school activities within the same parameters as other students. If these after-school activities are required in the IEP, transportation must be provided even if transportation is not provided for other students. (See the *Pre-School and Disabilities* Section.)

Child Care Transportation

Districts may choose to provide transportation for children from kindergarten through grade eight, from day child care locations to schools, and from schools to evening or afternoon child care locations. [NYS Education Law 3635(1)(e)] They are not required to provide such service, but if the district chooses to provide transportation, it must be provided equally under the following guidelines:

- ⇒ The school and child care locations must be located within the district.
- ⇒ The transportation request must be received by April 1 for the following school year or within 30 days of moving into the district.
- ⇒ If home to school, school to afternoon child care, or morning child care to school qualifies for transportation under district policy for the school the child is attending, the child must receive transportation to and from school.
- ⇒ If the child care location is greater than 15 miles from the school, transportation must be provided if transportation is provided that same distance for students between home and school.
- ⇒ District may restrict transportation service to child care locations within the attendance zone of the student's school for child care locations which are not registered under Section 390 of the Social Services Law.

A district is never required, even if it chooses to provide child care transportation, to provide more than the specified transportation, for example, from home or child care location to school and from school to home or child care location. The district is not responsible for a third trip such as home to school, school to child care location and then child care to home.

Driver Documents

Route sheets maintain the flow of information from the transportation department to the bus driver and if necessary to a substitute bus driver. If transportation is provided by a contractor, then there is another step between the transportation department and the driver.

Either way, it is an absolute priority that there be an accurate record of what route is being driven, what children are transported, and what time each arrival or departure will take place. The bus driver must never change any part of the route, stops, times, or students, without prior permission from a supervisor.

The route sheet provides accurate information to: determine who was on a bus at the time of an accident, allow router to accurately place new residents on a bus, let parents know what time children should be at stop, let substitutes drive the route safely and confidently, and provide emergency medical information if needed. A sample route sheet is included in the *Exhibits* Section for districts to adapt to local needs. The information included falls into three basic areas.

First, an accurate description of the route must be included with location of stops. Some routing programs will automatically print a map for every route with this information. Note that as many as a third of all school bus drivers may be uncomfortable with reading maps. Be sure your drivers know the format of route sheets you use. A map and a written description of the route and students would be ideal.

Second, there must be a list of the arrival time of students at every stop including their names and addresses. They should be designated as "crossers" or "non-crossers." This information will aid the driver in accounting for students and concentrating on safe crossing. It will help in an emergency or accident to determine who should be on the bus.

Third, information must be included on any special medical needs of students. Even if a student does not have a "disabling condition," he or she may be allergic to bee stings and need quick action in case of a sting. As more and more special education students are main-streamed on regular buses, drivers will have to be aware of a student's invisible disabilities such as a seizure disorder or emotional disability.

The importance of updating information on driver records cannot be emphasized enough. Continuous information sharing is a must. In an emergency or when a substitute driver takes over, inaccurate information can be dangerous.

Field Trips

These present different challenges than regular trips. Because the buses and passengers are so far away from the home district, planning must be thorough. Data included in a regular route sheet needs to be gathered for a field trip as well:

- ⇒ What exact route will be travelled?
- ⇒ Is the driver prepared for the trip? Does the trip involve complicated routing instructions, require excellent depth perception and/or night vision? If the trip is "longer than usual," does it require exceptional stamina?
- ⇒ How can the driver communicate with the school district while on the road?
- ⇒ Will someone be available 24 hours a day?
- ⇒ Does the district have phone numbers of other districts or contractors in the destination area who might be able to help out with a mechanical problem? (The New York State Association of Head Mechanics provides its members a directory with work and home phones for all its members. This allows immediate attention from bus mechanics in the area instead of trying to identify a garage long-distance.)
- ⇒ Is the driver's CDL valid for out-of-state travel if necessary?
- ⇒ Does the driver have a copy of insurance information?
- ⇒ Are driving hours within DOT regulations?

- ⇒ Is there an accurate passenger list with emergency numbers on the bus?
- ⇒ Are there any medical conditions of which the driver and chaperones must be aware?
- ⇒ Have provisions for luggage or equipment been made in order to safeguard the passengers?
- ⇒ Does the driver discuss emergency procedures with students and chaperones before beginning trip?

There must be contingency plans to cope with all the difficulties alluded to in these questions. Too often, drivers are sent out without this kind of support and are forced to make decisions for which the district ultimately bears responsibility.

Charter Buses

When a field trip uses a charter bus instead of a school bus, the transportation director still needs to be involved. District policy should require that all contracts for charter service be approved by the transportation director. The charter company should be evaluated for quality of service, not just its cost.

Important areas to look in to: Do the charter bus drivers meet the same 19-A qualifications as the drivers of school buses in the district? Does the charter bus fleet have current inspection stickers? Are the buses well-maintained? Have preparations been made for the charter bus, similar to those made for a district bus trip?

Route Concerns

These include everything that is a concern to those involved with the transportation of students in a district. It is difficult to identify these potentially hazardous situations as either routing issues, or stop placement issues. In general these issues are driving issues which affect the safety of actually driving the routes. They become routing issues and not just defensive driving issues because they exist as a result of route and stop development and placement.

Intersections

Intersections require exposure to traffic dangers well beyond that required to drive along a road. An analysis of school bus accident data from 1983-1986 by the state education department showed that almost 50 percent of all school bus accidents took place at intersections.

When school districts choose to service small spur roads instead of having students gather at a bus stop near the intersection, repeated exposure to danger re-entering the intersections is increased. The New York State Department of Transportation has promulgated guidelines for sight distance needed to enter traffic from a stop.

If traffic is traveling at 40 mph, there must be 850 feet of sight distance both ways; at 50 mph, 1600 feet; at 60 mph, 2500 feet.

These distances are for urban settings and must be increased ten percent for slower driver reaction in rural conditions.

In order to make a left turn onto a smaller road, adequate sight distance is also important.

To turn left from a two-lane road at 40 mph, 570 feet of visibility is required; at 50 mph, 810 feet; and at 60 mph, 1000 feet. Again, add ten percent for rural conditions.

More Challenges with Four-lanes

If side roads do not provide alternatives, four-lane roads may become necessary in route planning. Because of the difficulty of controlling traffic with a bus, buses should be routed to eliminate the need to cross any highway, especially multiple-lane highways.

If a stop needs to be made before a left-hand turn, the driver must be sure that the stop is far enough back from the intersection so that the bus can successfully complete moving to the left-hand lane in preparation for the turn without disrupting traffic. Consideration can also be given to Education Law 3635 (2)(5) which gives districts the authority to create drive-off places on public highways.

Backing

Backing at bus stops or turnarounds is dangerous and should be avoided if possible. There are situations when it is not possible to "go around the block" because of distance or road configuration, and backing must be done. Drivers should be trained to use absolute caution when backing at a bus stop. Driver training should emphasize backing while children are on the bus. When picking up students, back after loading. When dropping off students, back before releasing them. Watch out for pedestrians in the area.

If backing at a stop on private property is the only option, be sure to have the property owner's permission. Make sure that the bus will not damage their drive or lawn. Residential driveways are not constructed for vehicles weighing as much as a school bus and the district may end up having to pay to replace the driveway surface.

Turnarounds

If a turnaround is used, it must be publicly maintained and have adequate visibility. The turnaround procedure may easily take 30 seconds, so motorists must be able to see the bus and react to its presence.

The same visibility guidelines as have been recommended for bus stops: 500 feet at 35 mph or less, 1000 feet over 35 mph. When a bus is stopping to execute a turnaround, drivers sometimes try to use their eight-light system to control traffic. Use only turn signals or hazard lights. Section 375(20) of the Vehicle Traffic Law permits the use of flashing red lights only when picking up and discharging passengers.

Work with the highway department(s) in your district to identify where they turn snowplows around. When they service a dead-end road they need to get back out. A snowplow is a little shorter than a bus, but the highway department may well be persuaded to keep turns adequately open for the bus.

Remember the highway department is subject to similar citizen pressure as is the transportation department. If parents want the bus stop they may have to lobby for the publicly maintained turnaround. They may be more successful than you in obtaining that service.

Cul-de-sacs exist in developments, trailer parks, and apartment complexes. If the road is publicly maintained and the district makes home pickups, then buses may need to go into the cul-de-sac to pick students up. In this case, the backing must be done as explained previously.

If students gather at a bus stop at the exit to the development, the stop should be placed safely before or after the drive to avoid turning traffic. Before the drive would keep the children in the vision of the driver when they disembark or run late to the stop.

Presently, some districts use the bus to block the cul-de-sac and load the students right in that entrance drive. Blocking the entrance to the cul-de-sac with the bus is not permitted. It is illegal to block an intersection for any reason. The eight-light system which protects students while loading is not visible from the side of the bus, so vehicles exiting the cul-de-sac would not know the bus was loading students. There is nothing to protect students as they enter the bus from that exiting traffic.

Railroad Crossings

There should be at least 1000 feet of visibility in either direction, along the tracks at any railroad crossing used for bus routes. The worst school bus accident in New York State was the result of a train hitting a school bus which had stopped on a railroad crossing.

Education Law Section 3636 prohibits the use of any unprotected railroad crossing in a district, or on a regular out-of-district route, without a resolution adopted by the school board after a public hearing on the issue. The resolution should be filed with the Departments of Education and Transportation at their offices in Albany.

An unguarded crossing is one with no automatic gates or other automatic warning signal, and no persons functioning as crossing guards. Maps indicating intersections with any unguarded railroad crossings should be made available for public inspection at a location designated by the school board.

Unsafe Roads

A school bus should not travel on roads which are unsafe because of poor maintenance and bad construction. Similarly, it should not travel

on roads which are not constructed for carrying loads of over 30,000 lb, or roads without guardrails and other safety devices. Transportation directors should consult with the highway department and/or law enforcement agencies to determine how safe roads are.

If a road is unsafe for bus travel, students living on that road have to travel to the nearest bus stop. Even though a road is unsafe, distance along that road will be used to determine eligibility for transportation.

Private Roads

Private roads should be judged using the same criteria as public roads to determine safety. Steps should be taken to protect the district's use of private roads. Property owners should assure the district that the road will be maintained during winter. Districts should get written permission to use such roads. The district's insurance company should be contacted to ensure appropriate coverage for travel on private roads.

Review Accident Data

Accident data for roads in your district should be available from local law enforcement agencies. The district should keep a record of near-miss data, that is, accidents which almost happened and are reported by bus drivers.

This information can help the district identify in a quantifiable way where the true hazards are in the district. If an intersection has numerous accidents, a bus stop would need to be established a safe distance away from that danger. It is important to have accurate data and not just an individual who reports that "lots" of accidents take place at that spot.

Emergency Routes

These are needed whenever a district has locations where buses might not be able to travel due to serious weather conditions. There may be a steep hill that the bus cannot travel under difficult conditions. Emergency routes can be developed which will probably involve the student traveling further to get from the emergency route bus stop to their home, or just arriving home significantly later than normal.

Another option, used by some districts, is to pull those few students off their regular bus and bring them to their bus stop with a four-wheel-drive Suburban maintained for such a purpose. If many students are affected by the emergency route situation, public announcement on the radio should be made; if only a few students are involved, calls to their emergency numbers can be made to reassure parents of their children's safety and location.

What You Must Do for Pre-school and Special Education Children

PRE-SCHOOL

Growth Pre-school Transportation

These days, more and more children, at younger and younger ages, are found to need special education services. Federal Public Law 99-457 calls on states to provide service to infants and toddlers with developmental delays, or at risk for developmental delay. Not only is the child to receive service, but the whole family as well. Furthermore, school transportation departments may be called on to provide transportation services that are necessary for children with identified developmental delay, or at risk for developmental delay.

Early intervention programs, such as Head Start, are instituted to help pre-school children from disadvantaged home settings to develop the basic skills they will need to enter school. Buses are used to take children in child care centers on field trips, or from home to school.

All children up to four years of age have special transportation needs because of their size. State laws require these children to be in car seats or other restraint devices which are designed to help their small frames have a safe ride. School buses as well must provide special equipment for their transportation.

Seat security

For larger children, compartmentalization provides a high level of safety on a school bus. But for small children, compartmentalization does not provide enough restraint.

The adaptive device selected by a district should follow state guidelines for passenger vehicles. Seat belts, designed for larger high school children, cannot be realistically adjusted by a three- or four-year-old; an adult--parent or attendant--must secure the child into whatever restraint is being used. Lap belts do not provide a high level of safety because of the risk of internal abdominal injury. However, if seat belts are used, the belt must be tightened by an adult--low and across the hipbones.

The disadvantage of restraint devices is how they would slow down evacuation of the bus. Buses should be equipped with seat belt cutters so that adults can quickly release children from the restraints.

The potential need for adult direction and supervision in an emergency may call for more than one adult to be present on a bus. Day care settings, where the possible dangers of traffic accidents are absent, require adult-to-child ratios of 1:7 or 1:10 for three- and four-year olds. Similar ratios are a logical starting place for pre-school transportation.

The routing plan of the pre-school education population should address specific safety issues. Those issues are:

- Bus attendants to assist in loading and unloading a school bus, and to secure students in car seats or adaptive devices properly.
- Federally approved car seats, booster seats and adaptive equipment. Securement of this equipment may require assistance from DOT.
- Appropriate loading time at the pickup point to secure each student.
- All pre-school children must wear an identification badge when they ride the bus. In an emergency, they may forget their name and address.
- Driver and an attendant trained to address each student's behavior, and medical and emergency needs.
- An evacuation plan that prepares staff to remove young children quickly from car seats and harnesses, and help other students. Staff must be trained in the use of seat belt cutters.

Pre-school education is the future and the present. More and more younger children on school buses will become the norm. School districts need to be prepared. Compared to older bus riders, preschoolers have less defined hearing ability, a narrower range of vision; they cannot see over park benches, parked cars, and shrubbery. In order to transport them safely, extra care and supervision must be the norm.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special Ed. Transportation is Unique

The term "Special Education" means instruction specifically designed to meet the needs of a disabled student. The Committee on Special Education (CSE) outlines this program of instruction and related services through the Individualized Education Plan (IEP.)

Transportation is one of the "related services" required, when necessary, to provide support for such instruction.

The special education population in New York State is growing rapidly. The number of students being served has grown 87 percent since 1985. During the 1990-91 school year, 303,766 children aged 3 through 21 received special education services in New York State.

You must plan transportation for special education students carefully. You must consider the individual needs and abilities of each child.

These students can even require the service of a porter, who must go into a building to an apartment to pick up a child. More common are house, curb, or driveway pickups. The route should allow for extra loading time, and requires alertness to proper supervision both on and off the school bus. A "Continuum of Transportation Choices" is included in the *Exhibits* Section.

Districts that plan their bus transportation will be faced with new responsibilities if drivers are accustomed to transporting only able students.

Planning for special ed. transportation can be complex and burdensome if the areas already addressed are not identified and communicated thoroughly and in a timely fashion. The plan requires input from school officials, medical personnel, parents, the committee on special ed. and members of the transportation department.

The routing for the school bus includes assigning drivers and attendants who are knowledgeable in dealing with behaviors that result from a student's disabling condition. This behavior could include: aggressive acting out, trying to open the emergency door in route to jump out, anger, inappropriate language, fighting, screaming, and head-pounding on the bus window.

Mixing able and special ed. students can be done if the drivers and attendants, students, principal, and teaching staff are prepared for the behaviors that could affect discipline and student safety.

The routing of special ed. students must address legal issues. It requires a well-trained transportation staff, specially equipped school buses, and a strong school district commitment to support procedures and policies. Special ed. transportation is a challenge that has to be met with a team effort.

For many students with a mild disability, this may simply mean riding the bus with able students.

Scheduling one student with disabilities can be more complex than scheduling an entire bus load of regular students.

Students with more severe disabilities may require a special bus, a bus attendant, and specialized equipment to take them from their home to their school program.

School districts are developing programs to serve students with increasingly complex conditions. Many students with severe disabilities are being mainstreamed into their neighborhood school.

Determining safe routes and safe stops for disabled children involves examining a wider spectrum of variables than is necessary with able children. Decisions usually made by the transportation department--such as bus choice, stop location, and bus route--can be affected by the CSE through the child's IEP.

Providing a safe stop and route for the child, while also working to contain costs, means getting involved in the IEP process as a professional provider of a "related service."

Role of Role in the IEP

The IEP is the foundation of a special ed. student's program. All aspects of the program are derived from and governed by this document; it should identify the student's specific transportation needs.

Transportation personnel should provide recommendations for IEP meetings in accordance with their individual school district's policies and procedures.

The following are sample situations where transportation staff involvement with the IEP process is strongly recommended:

- When there are special circumstances, such as behavioral problems. Especially when the student is presently being transported and the transportation department is familiar with the student's behavior.
- When any modification to the school bus (equipment) is required to provide transportation.
- When there are special circumstances, such as a medically fragile student to be transported.
- When a student with a infectious disease is to be transported.

Complete Information

A critical component in developing a plan to route special education students is complete up-to-date information, which identifies all their needs for safe transport. The Pupil Data Form should include:

Getting to the Bus

- Bus stop following standard district guidelines
- Walks to bus unassisted, deaf
- Walks to bus, but needs assistance
- Needs to be carried or wheeled to bus
- Parent, driver, monitor or attendant (which?) will walk/wheel/carry student to bus
- Needs to be met at school
- Needs to be met at home or at the bus stop

Needs Help on the Bus

- Needs individual monitor
- Needs to ride a bus with a monitor
- Needs a companion dog

Adaptive Equipment

- Requires restraint system
 - Infant only seat (backward facing - up to 20 lb)
 - Convertible car seat (birth to 40 lb)
 - Booster seat
 - Seat belts
- Requires special restraints
 - Swinger car bed
 - Infant travel bed
 - Spell cast car seat
 - Vests for support sitting or laying in seat
 - Special seats for children up to 100 lb
- Requires wheelchair, forward facing as presently accepted norm
 - Standard wheelchair
 - Electric wheelchair
 - Strollers
- Requires walker or braces

Medical Needs on Bus

- Requires ventilation
- Requires oxygen
- Requires monitoring equipment
- Requires medication, when given
- Requires action for seizures: how long? how often?

Medical Conditions-- examples of the many which might be encountered:

- Severe impairments
- Heart disease
- Bee sting reaction
- Diabetes
- Dangerous/impulsive behavior
- Brittle diabetic reactions
- Specific allergies
- Blindness
- Aggressive behavior
- Need for torso support
- Asthma
- Technologically or medically fragile condition
- Non verbal
- Chronic respiratory problems

Family doctor, address, phone number

Individual Transportation Plan

It is recommended that this information, along with data collected for all students, such as school schedules and emergency phone numbers, be compiled in as an Individual Transportation Plan (ITP) for each student with special transportation needs.

Pupil data, Consent for Medical Disclosure, Request for Medical Status and Needs, and Medical Procedure Authorization forms have been included in the *Exhibits* Section. These forms, together with the IEP as it relates to transportation, an operator's manual for special equipment a child might need, a bus evacuation plan, behavior management plans and other documentation of services provided to the child form that child's ITP.

It must be stressed that this information is covered by the student's right to privacy. All staff must respect confidential information about a student's condition. For instance, a major lawsuit could result from a driver identifying a child as HIV-infected.

STOPS

Establishing Stops

When establishing regular bus stops, the transportation department focuses on the safe placement of the stop. Parents and students have to make the effort to be at the established stop at the appointed time.

When students with disabilities have transportation identified as one of their "related services," the task falls to the transportation system to adapt and provide the specified service.

Different levels of service at the stop can be identified through the IEP. **Nothing** in the IEP or the uniqueness of one child's situation **relieves the driver from the responsibility of using the red lights during the loading process.**

The most restrictive stop definition is door pickup. The district is responsible for taking the child from the parent's supervision at the door of the home. If the parent lives in an apartment setting, the door can mean the door to the apartment; therefore the attendant would have to enter the building to pick up the child.

Most students requiring special service have curb pickup. This means that the bus stops at the side of the road in front of the student's home. Unless provisions exist in the IEP to suggest otherwise, the parent is responsible for bringing the child from the home to the curb for loading, and for bringing the child back to the home in the afternoon.

The school's transportation director should be advised by the CSE as to whether or not the child is able to wait at the curb bus stop with the parent, or needs the protection of the house while waiting.

If the child waits in the house, extra time should be added to the route, because some parents will even wait until they see the bus to put outerwear on.

Keeping Safety First

Establishment of any type of curb or home pickup can create serious safety problems. While parents and students are normally required to adapt to a district established bus stop, the home pickup puts the burden of adaptation on the transportation department. The process of loading a wheelchair student can easily take five minutes, and can have a major effect on rush hour traffic on a busy road. Stop placement could end up on a hill or curve with very limited visibility.

One common way to alleviate this traffic obstruction and hazard is to bring the bus into the driveway to pick up the student. However, although the loading process is out of the flow of traffic, other problems are created: the bus has moved onto private property and any damage, such as a cracked or broken pavement, smashed vehicles or buildings, or even destroyed lawn, will become a district financial responsibility.

If the bus enters one private drive, why won't it drive down a five-mile private road to pick up another child? What if the private property is a trailer park or apartment complex where other vehicle and pedestrian traffic might interfere with the bus's activity? Guidelines about liability, distance traveled, and level of maintenance must be established before venturing off public property.

Re-entering the roadway from the private property can also be dangerous as the bus turns onto the road and accelerates to the speed of other traffic. If the bus must back onto the main road it should not enter private property. A paved turnaround or loop must be provided so that the bus can pull onto the road in a forward direction. A large bus should not enter a private driveway because the driveway has not been constructed to handle the weight of a large vehicle.

The transportation department is the location of transportation expertise in the district. Do not accept an unsafe plan without comment. **Do not acquiesce to unsafe conditions.** Inform all parties involved of the risk they and the district are assuming through the proposed plan. **Often parents have focused on convenience and they need to be educated about safety--this is your role.**

ROUTING

Scheduling Issues

Unlike regular education students, many special ed. students do not attend the school closest to their home. Often their bus ride is longer than other children living in their area. Every effort should be made to shorten their ride, but Public Law 94-142 does not specify a time regulation.

As a general rule, runs should not exceed one hour in each direction, although the commissioner has agreed that in special circumstances rides up to one and three-quarters hours are not excessive.

Extreme distances travelled to the "most appropriate" setting may make the one-hour rule of thumb, or some other limit identified by CSE, impossible to meet. The transportation department needs to make the CSE aware of the realities of ride times to these distant schools.

The question must be asked, "How does sitting on a bus for three hours a day contribute to or detract from the child's education?" The answer may be that it is worth the travel time, but the CSE must be aware of the ramifications of the placement.

In the case of pre-school, medically fragile and/or severely disabled students, much shorter maximum rides are more appropriate; a specific maximum ride time might be established by the IEP.

All special ed. students are required to receive the full instruction time identified in the IEP. This requirement must be considered when scheduling buses to multiple school drops with the same bell-start time. Another scheduling issue is late arrival in the morning or early departure in the afternoon of buses that want to avoid the regular lineup of buses.

Although these practices are helpful for route scheduling, if instructional time is lost, they can result in district liability for compensatory services that could be costlier than appropriate transportation services,

Adjustments to meet school times should be considered when the route is developed. The school day must not be cancelled or shortened for disabled students when it is not for other students. Special ed. transportation cannot be postponed or cancelled because it is more difficult to load wheelchairs in inclement weather, or for any other reason which does not provide equal access to instructional time for disabled students.

Rights and safety should be carefully separated here. Disabled children should be treated like non-disabled children in like circumstances. Ask yourself this question, "If I had an able child who had to travel to a certain school or other location, would I postpone or cancel the trip?" If the answer is yes, then cancel. If no, you must transport.

If a child's parents, who have not cleaned their sidewalk, cannot bring their child to the curb, you have not failed to provide an opportunity for that child to go to school. The parents are responsible for bringing their child to the appointed bus stop--the curb.

If the IEP specifies the weather conditions, for instance very cold temperatures, under which a child should not be transported, for medical reasons, you will not have to transport the child. Follow IEP guidelines in this regard.

If dangerous weather conditions make driving a child to a special school 60 miles away hazardous, don't transport the child; you would not transport an able child in such weather. Your decision in such a case is based on the inability of the bus to travel the route safely, not on disability of a passenger.

You cannot postpone picking up disabled children, even if you think this will make transportation easier. You cannot shorten their school day for the convenience of drivers.

Even if you think bad weather will make it difficult to operate a wheelchair lift, you cannot cancel school for students who ride a wheelchair bus. If able children can get to school, your equipment should be able to transport disabled children in that same weather.

Bus Choice and Route Development

The plan for routing special ed. children is developed according to the factors identified by the CSE; information from the transportation staff, and specific instructions are written into each student's IEP.

Decisions must be made about what bus to use and which students should ride the bus. Very often, special ed. buses service more than one program or type of child at the same time, and the configuration of staff and students must be made carefully.

Some examples:

- A student with aggressive behavior may require a single seat with a specially trained attendant to ensure a safe bus ride for all.
- A blind student with a companion dog may not be able to ride on the same bus as a student assigned to the route who has any allergy, aversion, or problem with dogs.
- A student with temperature-regulating problems may require an air-conditioned vehicle.
- A student who "runs" will always need to be assisted by an adult when loading and unloading the school bus.
- A student who "shuts down" when a loud noise such as the warning buzzer on emergency exits occurs, should be "red flagged" for a bus emergency if the rear door is opened and the buzzer sounds.

Many options exist to transport disabled students:

- Wheelchair vehicles with lifts and emergency ramps are now available with a flat-raised floor which does not have raised wheel housings.
- Bus seats which can be bolted down or removed, and wheelchair position combinations can be created as the district's needs change.
- Full-size buses and van-conversions can be outfitted with lifts for wheelchair transportation.

Districts may want to consider maintaining the protection of at least a van frame with a school bus-type body, and avoid vehicles built using the van body.

The higher position and safer construction of a school bus-type body will provide students riding smaller vehicles with protection closer to that of a full-size bus.

It is important to remember, and to remind the CSE, that the least restrictive transportation environment is as important as the least restrictive educational environment. Students will learn from a transportation service that expects as much responsibility from them as they have to offer.

Other questions to answer when determining a child's IEP for routing :

1. Is transportation needed full day, or should altered schedules be identified?
2. Can the child ride a regular bus?
3. Is a regular route appropriate or is a special, direct route needed? (If the answer for a regular route is "just barely," try and schedule the child as one of the last pickups and first drop-offs. They will gain from the experience with other children, and the driver will not have to deal with that child among 60 others for 45 minutes.)
4. Is special medical equipment such as oxygen going to travel on the bus? Has DOT inspected and approved all special equipment being transported?
5. Is adaptive equipment appropriate and "crash worthy"?
6. Does the child require medical care during the route? What certification is required to administer these needs? Are the ambulance corps and/or hospitals along the route identified in case emergency medical care is needed? For some medically fragile students, the route should be drawn as close to medical care as possible at all times. This information should be known by the driver, attendant, substitute, and dispatcher.

The information should be shared with any emergency response units along the way. This way they will be better prepared to handle the situation if it arises. They will also be able to evaluate their ability to deal with the child's needs and take corrective action if they discover they are not prepared to currently deal with an emergency involving this child.

7. Are specific behavior disorders that could affect bus safety being addressed in the classroom? If so, has a behavior modification plan been developed for the driver? For successful behavior modification, bus and classroom procedures must be compatible.

8. Does the child require special supervision?

9. Is there a "Do Not Resuscitate" order of which the transportation department needs to be aware? What are the specific guidelines which will be followed? Have the guidelines been reviewed and approved by the school attorney?

10. Are all these needs clearly defined in the IEP?

All of these areas, when addressed, create a plan for vehicle selection, route assignment, staff training, and safe delivery of transportation services for disabled students.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Training

It is essential that all personnel working with disabled students receive adequate in-service training and be informed of all students who have IEPs which address transportation services, and students without IEPs who have potentially dangerous medical conditions.

Special ed. students, who once went to school on separate buses and were taught in classes with other special ed. students, are now "mainstreamed"; they ride buses and attend classes with able students. These students may not have special transportation identified on their IEP, but the bus driver should be aware of their disabling condition if it might affect their behavior.

The transportation department should be notified, during the IEP evaluation process, of students who require unique or specialized accommodation. All transportation personnel serving disabled students should have training in the following areas:

- Establishing a daily routine
- Practicing fair treatment consistently
- Managing problem behavior
- Managing seating assignments
- Managing emergency
- Managing school bus evacuation
- Managing medically fragile students--be sure to know what certification is necessary
- Managing oxygen on the school bus
- Administering first aid
- Carrying out communicable illness procedures
- Dealing with exposed blood
- Dealing with information protected by the student's right to privacy
- Dealing with DNR orders

Bus Attendants and Medical Personnel

A written procedure is the most desirable way to identify a need for a bus attendant or medical personnel. It should determine when a bus attendant, nurse, or EMT is needed either for the health and safety of disabled students or for the health and safety of all the children on the school bus.

The IEP will identify supervision ratios and the medical requirements of each child in option classrooms. These same ratios should identify the need for an attendant or attendants as well as medical support on the school bus. If a student has his or her own aide or nurse in the classroom, he or she should have the same adult supervision or medical support on the bus. Often in route planning, an effort will be made to put one student on a bus whose IEP requires a monitor who will then provide support for all the children on the bus. It is possible that while no individual child will need an attendant, the bus as a whole will. It is also possible that one child's needs might be so great, that another monitor will be needed for the other children.

When there are multiple wheelchairs, or other students who are strapped into adaptive devices, multiple attendants must be consid-

ered. It must be possible for the adults on the bus to remove all the students in two minutes or less, which is the time it takes for a bus on fire to be totally engulfed in smoke and flames.

For relatively immobile children, this means cutting them out of restraints with belt cutters and carrying them off the bus.

No student should be placed in a life-threatening situation because of the lack of someone to monitor his or her needs. Conversely, no bus driver should be required to perform a task that interferes with the driver's ability to pay attention to the demands of driving a vehicle.

The driver cannot be expected to monitor a student who is in danger of choking or ceasing to breathe. Neither can a driver monitor a student who has frequent seizures or who is physically aggressive towards other students.

Another problem area is the wheelchair vehicle, which requires that a driver or attendant be outside, and, for some types of lifts, that the motor be running to work the lift while children are on board. State Education Department (SED) Regulation 156.3(g)(4) requires the driver to turn off the bus and remove the key before leaving the driver's seat. Even if the lift still works, this will remove heat or air conditioning from potentially medically fragile children. Not all special ed. students need an attendant, but some do and some bus loads do. This should be addressed as a primary safety issue when routing special ed. students.

Many of the issues concerning on-bus supervision have been addressed in this chapter, but because of the broad variation of needs, no "formula" can be offered. The conclusion is that there needs to be appropriate staff on the school bus to handle those situations which can be anticipated either from a vehicular accident or malfunction, or from a student's medical or emotional emergencies. Will a jury consider that attempting to transport without a monitor or monitors was reckless endangerment of student life? Can a district argue from its transportation and special ed. expertise that sufficient service was being provided?

EDUCATION OF DISABLED CHILDREN: LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Special Needs Transportation

In accordance with Public Law 94-142, transportation must be provided as a related service to a student who has been identified as disabled. Transportation must be provided as a "related service." required by the student's disability. Transportation, as defined in Public Law 94-142, consists of:

1. Travel to and from school and between schools.
2. Travel in and around school buildings.
3. Specialized equipment (such as special or adapted buses, lifts and ramps) if special transportation must be provided to a disabled child (300.13.)

Related services, in connection with the IEP document, are services which are required to assist a disabled student to benefit from special ed. If a student does not require special ed., he or she is not eligible for related services under Public Law 94-142.

Federal Law

[Public law 99-457: Amendments To The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1986.] This was added to Public Law 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act a new program (Part H) designed to encourage states to develop a comprehensive multidisciplinary system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, and at individual state option, those at risk of delay. This enactment requires a statewide system of coordinated comprehensive interagency programs. Case management is a key component which must be made available to disabled infants and toddlers and their families. Service delivery is provided in accordance with the written Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP.) One of the early intervention services is transportation (303.23.) **Transportation responsibilities are defined as:** The cost of travel (e.g., mileage, or travel by taxi, common carrier, or other means) and related costs (e.g., tolls and parking expenses) that are necessary to enable a child eligible under this intervention service.

[Public Law 101-476: Amendments To The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1990.] These amendments renamed the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA.) All references in EHA to "handicapped children" are changed to "children with disabilities." Two new categories of disability were added. These categories are "Autism" and "Traumatic Brain Injury."

On August 19, 1991, proposed regulatory changes were published in the federal register. The following new related services were defined: (1) social work services and rehabilitation counseling services, (2) assistive technology, devices and services. These services will have a direct effect on special ed. service delivery requirements.

Legal Contest of Addressing the Individualized Education Public Law [93-112 Section 504: Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 504] states:

"No qualified handicapped person shall, on the basis of handicap be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Under this regulation, free appropriate public education is defined as follows: (104.33) "Implementation of an individualized education program developed in accordance with the Education of the Handicapped Act."

The "Education for All Handicapped Children Act" brought significant changes to the provision of special ed. services throughout the United States. In accordance with this Act and its subsequent amendments, the regulations promulgated by the commissioner of education have been amended.

New York State Law

Chapter 853 of the Laws of 1976 brought New York into compliance with Public Law 94-142 by revising Article 89 of the Education Law--Children With Handicapping Conditions. Chapter 683 of the Laws of 1986 requires school boards of education to furnish educational opportunities for children with disabilities during the months of July and August if a child's condition is severe enough to exhibit the need for a twelve-month program to maintain developmental levels.

Chapter 243 of the Laws of 1989 transferred the responsibility for pre-school education programs from family court to the local board of education. This chapter brought New York State into compliance with Public Law 99-457.

Although states that accept federal funds are required to comply with the Act, the methods they employ may vary from state to state. New York State's classifications of disabilities differ from the federal categories. The local board of education has primary responsibility for overseeing special ed. programs within the district.

The board is also responsible for appointing a CSE which creates an IEP for each child and monitors the child's progress. The board and CSE are two of the primary groups affecting the special ed. process.

Disabling Conditions Defined

The regulations promulgated by the New York State Commissioner of Education define a pupil with a disabling condition as a person who:

1. has not attained the age of 21 prior to September 1;
2. is entitled to attend public schools pursuant to 3202 of the Education Law;
3. for mental, physical, or emotional reasons, has been identified as having a disabling condition; and
4. can receive appropriate educational opportunities from special services or programs approved by the education Department.

The Law: Be Prepared

School bus stops and routes provide a school district's greatest potential exposure to liability.

Except for loading and unloading on the school site, all other transportation activity takes place off the school property--in a fairly hostile environment.

Bus stops are generally on or adjacent to private property. Roads are shared with people who really wish they weren't being delayed.

Legal liability is created when the school, its driver, or other employees connected with the operation of the transportation program, fail to exercise reasonable care under the given circumstances. Districts must not only meet requirements prescribed by laws and regulations, they are also responsible for providing whatever care the court will deem "reasonable."

Examples of judicial decisions show how extreme the responsibility of a district is expected to be:

A car drove around the school bus with red lights flashing and struck a crossing child. The district and the bus driver were found negligent since, "the district and bus driver were **relying on the blind fiction that the driver of the car would obey the law.**" (McDonald v. Central School District #3, 178 Mics. p. 333)

A car hit a student who was crossing the street after the school bus had left the bus stop. The judge's opinion was that V.T.1174 established absolute liability for the district and driver **since they knew that the student would eventually have to cross to get home.** (Van Gaasbeck v. Webatuck C.S., 21 NY 2nd 239)

A seven year old student was injured while running alongside a bus, despite previous warnings. **The district was found to have failed to supervise.** (Raymond v. Paradise Unified School District #31 Cal. Rptr. 847)

Liability and negligence offer great concern to those responsible for school district operations, and rightfully so. Juries have felt very

strongly that school districts and those who transport children have a special level of responsibility because of the intrinsic value of children. A school district has a duty to exercise every reasonable care in maintaining its transportation program in a safe condition. This manual was developed to help transportation directors plan and operate their system of stops and routes efficiently, while avoiding legal liability, and providing children with the safest transportation available.

Rule Makers

In general, the establishment of bus stops and routes is governed by decisions of the NYS Commissioner of Education and the courts. Actual running of the routes is regulated by vehicle and traffic law and the State Education Department (SED), the Department of Transportation (DOT), and by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV.)

The DOT oversees school bus construction standards and modifications, school bus inspections (every six months or less), school bus accident investigations, and school bus labor hours.

The Department of Motor Vehicles establishes vehicle and traffic laws pertaining to school bus operation and driver qualifications.

The State Education Department sets standards for student school bus safety, approval of school bus routes, school bus driver qualifications and training, district purchase or lease of school buses, contracts, and contractual processing for districts using private contractors or mass transit systems.

Districts' Responsibility

Regulations governing supervision at the district level have become more and more stringent.

School districts must consider the likelihood of injury to a student resulting from a dangerous condition on the property (that is the stop, route, or bus), the severity of potential injuries, the probable cost of avoiding the risk, and the foreseeability of a potential plaintiff's presence. [Paraphrase of *Kush v. City of Buffalo*, 59 NY 2nd 26 (1983).]

Additional measures of safety have been added to school transportation

steadily over the last 15 years. A number of things bring heightened liability exposure to school transportation: new legislations concerning seat belts and headlights, higher training standards for bus drivers, increased fines for motorists who pass buses with red lights on, stricter requirements for commercial drivers, and the two revisions of V.T.1174.

V.T.1174b was amended, effective September 1988, to require that school buses remain stopped while unloading passengers with red lights flashing "until such passengers are at least 15 feet from the bus and either off the roadway or on a sidewalk."

The revision of V.T.1174a of November 1990, closed the question of whether or not traffic had to stop for red flashing lights on private roads or drives and school property. There are no exceptions now.

School districts need to be aware of the continually escalating standards. The school traffic safety committee should seek legal counsel for all the issues that it addresses. The material in this section should not be considered a substitute for legal review. However, it will help districts recognize their responsibilities as viewed by the court system.

What constitutes liability

Liability generally stems from breach of duty in the areas of instruction, supervision, or safety. Liability generally cannot be assigned unless it can be established that the individual's negligence was a deciding factor in the outcome.

- A person is negligent if he or she had a duty and has violated that duty. Furthermore, the person is negligent if he or she intentionally harms someone.
- It must be proved that an injury occurred.
- It must be proved that the violation of duty was the cause of the injury.
- There is no district liability unless the act is proven to be negligent.

In order to avoid liability and ensure the highest degree of safety, a district must work to avoid being negligent. Negligence generally occurs when duties are not communicated properly from the board to those who must perform the duties, or when duties are not carried out, or when reasonable people do not exercise reasonable care in the execution of their duties.

Use this check list to see if the administrative aspect of routes and stops is well managed in your district.

- We have a board policy on the subject.
- It is clear, and in keeping with federal, state, and local laws.
- It has been reviewed by legal counsel.
- It has undergone insurance review.
- The district policy clearly identifies the fact that the superintendent or designate will carry out the policy.
- The superintendent has specifically assigned responsibility in writing for carrying out the policy with the transportation manager.
- The superintendent has seen to the necessary training of the supervisor or has reason to believe that the supervisor is generally competent to carry out the assignment.
- The superintendent has taken reasonable steps to assure that the supervisor is in fact carrying out the duty.
- The supervisor had made it clear in writing to those assigned the actual duty, the "what, how, and why" of performing the duty.
- The transportation manager has taken reasonable steps to be sure that the duty is in fact being performed.
- Bus drivers, trainers, mechanics, office staff, and others who are assigned some duty:
 - Understand the duty.
 - Have sufficient training and ability to perform it.
 - Carry it out as a reasonable and prudent person.
 - Function as a well-trained professional.

Management systems can help avoid liability

This list suggests ongoing management activities for school districts. Each activity carries the implicit assumption that districts not only meet the requirements, but also completely document the process and outcome.

1. Adoption of specific criteria for the establishment of safe stops and routes as well as specific procedures for reviewing changes in such.
2. Careful examination and pre-employment screening of all employees, as well as continuing evaluation of present staff which includes candid written evaluations and appraisals together with proper documentation.
3. Use of tachographs or even more sophisticated computer systems which record all activity of the school bus while on route.
4. Evaluation of supervision on school buses, behavior on the bus, and progressive discipline for students.

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5. Supervision of loading and unloading of students on buses and review of safety procedures.
 6. Review or establishment of driver and pupil safety programs and training. Accurate records of subject matter, instructional time, and those in attendance must be kept.
 7. Periodic surprise inspections and riding of school buses to ensure adequate supervision, proper behavior by drivers and students, and adherence to the district's safety and maintenance standards.
 8. Procedure for promptly investigating complaints about drivers and taking action for resolution.

Employees

District liability is reduced and employee liability may be increased when employees act outside the scope of their employment, for instance, when an employee uses a bus for private errands without consent, or for criminal, fraudulent or malicious acts. An exception to this rule is when an employee has done this before, and the supervisor is aware of it.

The transportation department must have a progressive discipline policy--verbal warning, written warning, suspension, hearing--in place. If the supervisor knows that a driver has committed an infraction, the action must be noted in the driver's file, or it will be assumed that the driver's activity is acceptable to the district.

The district does have the duty to defend employees and/or indemnify (pay back costs) when employees are sued for acts done within the scope of employment. A district may choose to defend employees charged with acts outside their employment.

If an employee is charged with acts outside the scope of employment and is later found to have been within the scope of employment, the district must supply indemnification.

Information to share

Advise drivers they are not subject to individual liability if an act was authorized or required by law. They will be part of the lawsuit, but will be covered by their employer. For instance, they would not be liable for refusing to drop off a child who wanted to get off the bus before the authorized bus stop, if the child was aboard in a subsequent accident.

Remind them of the layers of insulation that protect them from being successfully sued and being held individually liable. They protect themselves if they:

- Follow school policy and regulations.
- Have good faith defenses.
- Apply the reasonable person standard. Did they do everything that could have been reasonably expected of a person in their position?

Employees are individually liable and no insurance policy will protect them if they:

- Act outside the scope of their employment in a malicious, arbitrary, or capricious manner.
- Have an act of conduct which constitutes a crime, actual fraud, actual malice, or willful misconduct.
- Show utter or reckless disregard for rules and regulations, and fail to apply what the court might judge as a "reasonable person standard."

LAW SUITS BEGET LAW SUITS

Often even unfounded claims will be settled by insurance companies against a district's or an individual's wishes. This is the result of the high cost of litigation and it may make financial sense to insurers.

Unfortunately, it creates an impression or climate that promulgates more lawsuits and complications for districts. Because of the potential success of even unfounded claims, it is extremely important for transportation directors to know what to do right from the beginning of an accident or incident.

Serious school bus accidents do not happen often. If one happened, would you know what to do? Minor slipups at any stage can hinder chances for a full and complete defense.

When An Accident Occurs

You should have the accident investigated by a specialist in order to determine its cause and report it immediately to your insurance company.

Your school district should comply with all state and local reporting regulations concerning driver employment, operation of vehicles, and accidents. Remember that the plaintiff's attorney may immediately start taking depositions or subpoenaing records.

Never allow a driver to sign an exoneration card or make statements concerning the accident to anyone except the police—if required by law—and your organization's representative investigating the accident. Send a representative from your organization with the driver when he or she makes a statement to the police. Make sure the wording is correct and not harmful to you.

Make it your company policy, with instructions to all employees, that any legal papers go directly to a specified person or persons within the organization immediately after the accident.

Be certain that a person who receives a complaint or summons writes down the information and files it, and that the transportation director is told where it is filed. Documentation is critical.

Time is essential. Some jurisdictions allow as few as seven days in which to answer a summons. Action needs to be swift to avoid default. Call your insurance company immediately to advise them of what you have, and forward the documentation that day by Certified Mail. Make a copy for your files. Some organizations are self-insured for smaller claims, so filing will be done internally.

Assuming valid coverage exists, your insurance carrier has the rights and obligations to make settlement of any claim or suit as it deems expedient, pay all sums the insured shall become legally obligated to, and pay because of bodily injury or property damage.

Between the time of the accident and the time you are served lawsuit papers:

Don't throw away any notes or material on the accident collected during your investigation.

Don't take it upon yourself to settle small claims with anyone in the belief you're helping the insurance company or saving your district money.

Document equipment damage and keep repair bills, invoices, estimates, etc.

The situation may call for disciplinary action against the driver. Personnel policy may not let disciplinary measures hang over the driver's head. Union time limitations may be involved. Note "per company policy, per union contract, or per defensive driving standards" to document whatever action is taken. This prevents confusion of disciplinary action with an admission of your driver's legal responsibility for the accident.

COMMISSIONER'S DECISIONS AND CASE LAWS

Many disputes that have been appealed to the commissioner of education, or the courts, could have been easily avoided if a district had formulated a board policy or administrative regulation, such as those referenced in the next chapter on *Policy*.

The most common legal disputes involving transportation routing decisions in school districts entail:

- Hazards
- Stop location
- Length of bus route (time)
- Type of service provided (public or district bus)
- Door-to-door service
- Distance eligibility

Numerous legal decisions have addressed these topics. This summary is provided to help districts reduce or eliminate the need for appeals to the commissioner or the courts. Many of the questions districts present to state education department officials, other government agencies, and counsel can be answered by reviewing the *Education Department Reports* and *McKinney's Consolidated Laws of NY Annotated*. Many references in the following pages are to decisions of the commissioner of education, i.e., (21 EDR 484). Each citation shows the volume number first (21), the name of the text next (*Education Department Reports [EDR]*), and then the page on which the case begins (484.) These can be found in most school district administrative offices and local libraries.

Regulations for buses in New York State are established by state and federal agencies. Local school boards authorize all functioning aspects of the school system, including transportation.

Eligibility for Transportation

"You are making my child walk to school. The roads are hazardous." This is one of the most common complaints made by parents to boards of education.

School districts do not determine if children should walk to school. Parents do, by choosing how their child will get to school once it has been determined that the district will not provide transportation.

School districts determine if children are eligible for busing based on legal mandates or their district's transportation policy which is approved by voters--or, in the case of city school districts, it is approved by the school board.

The basic eligibility requirements for the transportation of children with non-handicapping conditions are found in Section 3635 of the Education Law.

With the exception of city school districts and common school districts, children with non-handicapping conditions in grades K-8 who live more than two miles from school, and those in grades 9-12 who live more than three miles from home are entitled to transportation to and from school.

At the other end of the distance scale, children who live more than 15 miles from their school of attendance, are not usually entitled to transportation. This does not

hold true, however, in districts that are so geographically large that many children live in remote areas of the district which are more than 15 miles from their resident school of attendance. (Section 1807 of the Education Law)

Liberality in Providing Transportation

Local non-city districts may adopt more liberal transportation eligibility requirements with annual voter approval. (16 EDR 393) City and enlarged city school districts may adopt more liberal requirements by a majority vote of the members of the board of education.

Out-of-District Schools

In another appeal before the commissioner (19 EDR 439), it was held that resident pupils attending a non-public school outside the district boundaries would not be entitled to transportation if the distance from home to school were greater than 15 miles (or a greater distance if approved by the voters of the district or a majority vote of the board members of a city board of education.)

Non-public school children attending non-public schools within the district are, however, entitled to transportation to their public school of legal attendance under the "like circumstances" doctrine established in Section 3635 of the Education Law.

Distance, Not Hazard

Generally, in providing transportation to children, districts must do so to all children in "like circumstances," without regard to hazard. (17 EDR 405, 20 EDR 407) The criterion for eligibility for transportation is generally distance.

Chapter 69 of the Laws of 1992, amended Section 3635 of the Education Law. It provides for transportation to children in child safety zones. See Education Law 3635-B for details (not available at time of printing.)

Hazard may be a consideration in determining whether or not a road is safe to travel. The board of education may determine that a particular road is unsafe for travel, and may refuse to travel that road to pick up children for transportation. If this is the case, those on that road will have to travel to the nearest location designated by the board of education as being a safe spot for pickup.

Groups of children with disabling and non-disabling conditions, BOCES, in like grades (K, 4, 8, or 11), and in like conditions (living within city boundaries or living outside city boundaries or living beyond established distances), must be treated in "like circumstances", i.e., they either qualify or do not qualify for transportation services. (22 EDR 381)

Measuring Distances Between Home and School

In determining whether or not children are eligible for transportation, it has been held on many occasions in appeals before the commissioner, that the decision of the local board of education will not be overturned so long as the method used to

determine eligibility is basically fair and used consistently throughout the district. (1 EDR 281, 14 EDR 303, 21 EDR 91, 22 EDR 453) Based on this decision, boards of education would be wise to include the procedures for determining eligibility in their local transportation policy document.

School Site Supervision

There must be supervision at school site bus loading and unloading areas. Rules should be established and enforced for student behavior while waiting outside school buildings to ensure safety. (Barth v. CSD#1 of Towns of Carmel and Putnam Valley, Putnam County et al.)

Responsibility to Ineligible Students

Children who are not eligible to receive transportation for travelling to and from school are merely not eligible for transportation. How they arrive at school is a decision left to the parents. (22 EDR 405, Pratt v. Robinson, 39 NY 2nd, 554, 1976)

No Door-To-Door Transportation

There is no requirement in law that entitles children to door-to-door transportation. (18 EDR 412, 19 EDR 583) It is also not possible for all children to travel equal distances to and from bus stops. A natural consequence of efficient and economical routing of buses is that some children will travel greater distances than others in travelling to and from bus stops. (18 EDR 412)

School districts are responsible for the selection of safe bus stops (21 EDR 32) and this too will result in some children travelling greater distances than others when commuting to and from bus stops. The safety of children in travelling to and from bus stops is the responsibility of the parents, just as it is for those children who do not qualify for transportation from home to school. (19 EDR 59, 22 EDR 405)

Disabling Conditions

Children with disabling conditions are entitled to "suitable" transportation (Section 4402 (4)(a) Education Law, 21 EDR 183). The law does not mandate door-to-door transportation for all children with handicapping conditions.

It does, however, require transportation "suitable" to meet the needs of the child's handicapping condition. Decisions concerning suitable transportation should be addressed by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) when recommending a program to the local board of education.

Should the board of education decide the recommendation of the CSE has no merit, the aggrieved party can appeal the board's action as stipulated in Section 4404 of the Education Law and Part 200 of the Rules and Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

Student Discipline

Until 1980, there were no significant guidelines for districts to examine when considering student discipline related to school transportation.

At this time an appeal was brought before the commissioner which resulted in the first really significant basis for formulating student discipline policies and procedures for school transportation. (19 EDR 377)

Since that time, four more appeals (19 EDR 108, 20 EDR 470, 21 EDR 654, 20 EDR 300) have helped to clarify the role and responsibility of both the student and the school in this important segment of school transportation.

Empty Seat Rule

The "empty seat rule," as it is often called, is usually applicable in situations which pertain to transportation to non-public schools. In usual scenario, a request for transportation to a non-public school is not filed in a timely manner, i.e., by April 1 of each year, and the petitioner has no reasonable excuse for the untimely filing.

Under the "empty seat rule" transportation would have to be provided if there were room on the bus and there would be no additional cost to the district to provide the requested transportation--both conditions must be met.

If a district were contracting for its transportation on a per-pupil basis, the fact that an empty seat exists would be nullified by the fact that it would cost the district additional money to transport the petitioner's child. (4 EDR 70, 126, 131, 167; 5 id. 107; 6 id. 84)

Late Bus Service

Districts are not required to provide late bus service; but if they provide it, they are eligible for transportation aid.

Public school districts providing late bus service may also be required to provide the same to resident students who attend non-public schools.

It has been held in appeal before the commissioner, however, that considerations of economy and efficiency may enter into the decision as to whether or not late bus service is required for non-public schools. (16 EDR 312; 19 id. 518, 530; 20 id. 629)

The consideration of a program at the non-public school was also the basis for two decisions reached by the commissioner in 1983. (22 EDR 443, 22 id. 445) It was also held in 20 EDR 407 that the rule of "like circumstances" does not apply in situations concerning late bus service.

Transportation from One Public School to Another

Occasionally, a public school will be asked to transport a resident pupil to a public school in another district.

If the district of residence does not offer the programs required by pupils, then it would be obliged to provide transportation for the pupil to another public school district. (19 EDR 547)

If, however, the district of residence offered all the required programs, it would not be obliged to provide transportation, but could do so if the other public school district agreed. (19 EDR 139, 547; 22 id. 23)

Reasonable Transportation

Over many years, transportation services have been provided to the students of New York State's schools, and questions have arisen as to what is "reasonable" transportation.

Is the use of mass transit "reasonable" or must a district purchase national chrome-colored school bus type of vehicles and hire its own drivers?

The answer is: "Yes, mass transit is an acceptable alternative to providing transportation for pupils." (18 EDR 507)

Is it "reasonable" to mix K-12 students on the same bus?

"Yes, mixing K-12 students is permissible." (17 EDR 404)

Is it "reasonable" for a child to spend one and one-half to one and three-quarters hours riding a school bus?

"Yes, depending on the circumstances, it could be 'reasonable' for a child to spend one and one-half to one and three-quarters hours riding a school bus." (14 EDR 350, 21 EDR 347)

Is it "reasonable" for a non-public school to have a widely varying schedule for the opening and closing of school?

"No, it is unreasonable for a non-public school to expect service from the public school based on a schedule that is extremely varying." (21 EDR 30)

Reasonable Excuse

Chapter 719 of the Laws of 1978 requires that public school authorities consider the "reasonable" nature of excuses for late-filed requests for service to a non-public school.

If the reason for submitting a late request for transportation is deemed to be reasonable by the board of education, then transportation must be provided regardless.

Since the passage of Chapter 719, the following have been held in appeals before the commissioner to be unreasonable excuses and not worthy of requiring transportation from the district:

"My child received an unsatisfactory progress report."
(19 EDR 40 + 392)

"I was just notified by the non-public school that I could enroll my child." (19 EDR 556)

"I couldn't make up my mind until after April 1"
(19 EDR 70,149).

"The non-public school never filed the request with the public school." (21 EDR 392)

"We changed our residence moving from one location to another within the district." (19 EDR 419)

The following have been deemed to be reasonable:

"I just moved into the district yesterday."
In this situation, the parents have 30 days from moving into the district to request transportation. (3635 Ed. Law)

"You have room on your bus and are already going to the location." (19 EDR 302)

"It was not known until recently that my child requires special service." (20 EDR 259)

LAWS, RULES, AND REGULATIONS

The actual operation of a school bus is regulated not through case law, but through laws and regulations of three state agencies: The State Education Department, the Department of Motor Vehicles' Vehicle and Traffic Code (V.T.), and the Department of Transportation. Within the State Education Department, the Bureau of Management Services provides oversight to school transportation; within the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Bus Driver Certification Unit monitors driver qualifications; and within the Department of Transportation, the Carrier Safety Bureau sets safety standards for transportation.

These three departments provide an overlapping, sometimes contradictory, web of regulations which school transportation directors are responsible for implementing. Naturally, school buses must obey standard vehicle and traffic laws; only those specific to school bus transportation are included here.

Laws and regulations have changed even while this manual was being written. Every effort has been made to be accurate at the time of printing. Readers should consult *McKinney's Consolidated Laws* or other books containing updated language to be sure of the present accuracy of laws referenced here.

Definition of a School Bus

(V.T. Law 142) Every motor vehicle owned by a public or governmental agency or private school and operated for the transportation of pupils, teachers and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity, to or from school or school activities or privately owned and operated for compensation for the transportation of pupils, teachers, and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity to or from school or school activities is a school bus.

Use of Flashing Red Lights

(V.T. 375 20a) The driver of every bus shall keep such red signal lamps lighted whenever passengers are being received or discharged, or whenever he or she has stopped within fifty feet of the rear of a vehicle with such red signal lamps lighted, and shall light all other required signal lamps, as a warning, prior to stopping to receive or discharge passengers.

Driver's Role in Permitting Motorist to Proceed

(V.T. 1174a) The driver of a vehicle upon a public highway or street, upon meeting or overtaking from either direction any school bus marked and equipped as provided in V.T. 375 20a which has stopped on the public highway for the purpose of receiving or discharging any passengers, or which has stopped because a school bus in front of it has stopped to receive or discharge any passengers shall stop the vehicle before reaching such school bus when there is in operation on said school bus a red visual signal as specified in V.T. 375 20a; and said driver shall not proceed until such school bus resumes motion, or until signaled by the driver or a police officer to proceed. For the purposes of this section, and in addition to the provisions of section 134 of this chapter, the term "public highway" shall mean any area used for the parking of motor vehicles or used as a driveway located on the grounds of a school or Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) facility or any area used as a means of access to and egress from such school or facility.

Bus Halted Until Students Are Out of Danger Zones

(V.T. 1174b) The driver shall keep the bus halted with red signal lights flashing until passengers have reached the opposite side of the highway. Whether such passengers are crossing such highway or discharging to the same side of such highway, the driver of such bus shall keep such school bus halted with red signal lights flashing until such passengers are at least 15 feet from the bus and either off the roadway or on a sidewalk.

Rules Affecting Pupils

S.E.D. 156.3(f)(1) Drivers shall not allow pupils to enter or leave the bus while it is in motion.

S.E.D. 156.3(f)(2) Drivers are held responsible for reasonable behavior of pupils in transit.

S.E.D. 156.3(f)(3) Drivers shall not allow pupils to thrust their heads or arms out of open windows.

S.E.D. 156.3(f)(4) The driver of a school bus, shall discharge pupils who must cross the highway at a distance of 10 feet in front of the bus, so as to be in the vision of the driver. The driver shall also keep the school bus halted with red signal lights flashing until such pupils have reached the opposite side of the highway.

S.E.D. 156.3(f)(5) Gas tanks shall not be filled while pupils are in the bus.

D.O.T. 721.8i Passengers shall not be permitted to stand forward of the marking, gate, or turnstile, as may be applicable, while the bus is in motion.

D.O.T. 721.25c Passengers shall not be permitted to stand in the stepwell, nor in any locations so as to obstruct the driver's vision to the front and sides while a bus is in motion.

D.O.T. 721.25g While driving a bus, no driver shall engage in any unnecessary conversation or other activities tending to distract his or her attention from the operation of such vehicle.

Driving Rules

S.E.D. 156.3(g)(1) Drivers shall be familiar with the Vehicle and Traffic Law, regulations of the commissioner of motor vehicles, and regulations of the commissioner of education pertaining to pupil transportation.

S.E.D. 156.3(g)(2) Drivers shall make a full stop at all railroad crossings and at state highways before crossing. No stop need be made at any railroad crossing where a police officer or a traffic control signal or signs direct traffic to proceed.

S.E.D. 156.3(g)(3) Drivers shall give warning before making a left-hand or right-hand turn.

S.E.D. 156.3(g)(4) Drivers shall not leave a school bus when children are inside except in case of emergency, and in such case, before leaving the bus the driver shall stop the motor, remove the ignition key, set the auxiliary brake, and leave the transmission in gear.

S.E.D. 156.3(g)(5) Drivers shall not smoke, 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.

V.T. 375.20i Every (bus) shall be operated with headlights and taillights illuminated at all times of day or night when pupils are being transported.

V.T. 1111d5 No school bus, while transporting pupils for any purpose, shall be permitted to proceed when facing a steady red signal. Do not take a right turn on red.

V.T. 1211a The driver of a vehicle shall not back the vehicle unless such movement can be made with safety and without interfering with other traffic.

D.O.T. 721.6a All doors shall be securely closed and the driver's view of the entrance doors shall be unobstructed while the bus is in motion.

D.O.T. 721.11c The front 'cross-over' mirror shall be located on the left side of the bus in such manner that the seated driver may observe through its use the road from the front bumper forward to the point where direct observation is possible.

The 'right fender' mirror shall provide a clear and full view of the right side of bus, including the front of the right front wheel and an area at least six feet from the right side of the bus from in front of the right front door to the rear of the bus.

Bus Safety Drills

S.E.D. 156.3(h)(1) Drills on school buses required by section 3623 of the Education Law, shall include practice and instruction in the location, use, and operation of the emergency door, fire extinguisher, first-aid equipment, and windows as a means of escape in the case of a fire or an accident. Drills shall also include 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.

Each drill shall include specific instructions for pupils to advance at least 10 feet in front of the bus before crossing the highway after disembarking. Each drill shall emphasize specific hazards encountered by children during snow, ice, rain, and

other inclement weather including, but not necessarily limited to, poor driver visibility, reduced vehicular control and reduced hearing. All such drills shall include 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. Such instruction and the conduct of the drills shall be given by a member or members of the teaching or pupil transportation staff. Pupils attending public or non-public schools who do not participate in the drills held pursuant to this paragraph shall also be provided drills on school buses, or as an alternative, shall be provided classroom instruction covering the content of such drills.

A minimum of three such drills shall be held on each school bus during the school year, the first to be conducted during the first week of the fall term, the second between November 1 and December 31, and the third between March 1 and April 30.

No drills shall be conducted when buses are on routes.

Regulation of Traffic within Municipal Facilities

V.T. 1670 Any local authority or school district, with respect to driveways or parking fields accessory to any school playground, park, municipal building, installation, or facility, and under the jurisdiction or such local authority or school district for general regulatory or custodial purposes, may by ordinance, order, rule, or regulation:

1. Prohibit, restrict, or limit the stopping, standing or parking of vehicles.
2. Regulate the direction of traffic.
3. Establish lower maximum speed limits than the 55-miles-per-hour statutory maximum speed limit at which vehicles may proceed.
4. Adopt such additional reasonable ordinances, orders, rules, and regulations with respect to traffic as local conditions may require subject to limitations contained in the various laws of New York State.
5. Make special provisions with relation to stopping, standing, or parking of vehicles registered pursuant to Section 400a (of this chapter) or those possessing a special vehicle identification parking permit issued in accordance with Section 1203a.

EDUCATION LAW

Section 3622 Routes

The commissioner shall plan and approve each route in a manner to promote maximum efficiency in the operation of a school bus in such route. Whenever practical, each route shall be planned to operate within the boundary of a school district. If any or all pupils of a school district receive instruction in a school or schools beyond the boundary of such district, the commissioner shall plan and approve a route or routes beyond the boundary of such district to such school or schools for such pupils.

Section 3623 School Buses

1. [Eff. July 1, 1991, as amended by L.1990, c. 661] The commissioner of transportation in consultation with the commissioner shall adopt, promulgate, and enforce rules, standards, and specifications regulating and controlling the efficiency and equipment of school buses used to transport pupils, with particular regard to the safety and convenience of such pupils and the suitability and adaptability of such school buses and few requirements of the school district. No school bus shall be purchased by a school district or used for the transportation of pupils unless and until it has been approved by the commissioner of transportation as complying with the rules, standards and specifications relating thereto. No bus manufactured after January 1, 1974, shall be used to transport pupils under any contract with a school district or board of cooperative educational services unless it has been similarly approved by the commissioner of transportation, except that no such approval shall be required for buses used to transport pupils also used to serve the general public under a certificate of public convenience for the operation of a bus line, granted pursuant to the transportation law or for buses used to transport pupils, teachers, and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity to and from school activities and which bus does not receive or discharge passengers on or along the public highways on regularly scheduled routes and is operating under a permit as a contract carrier of passengers granted pursuant to the transportation law or by the interstate commerce commission. School buses manufactured or assembled prior to April 1, nineteen hundred seventy-seven may not be used to transport pupils, teachers and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity to and from school activities. The commissioner shall establish and provide for the enforcement of rules and regulations requiring instruction on the use of seat safety belts as specified in subdivision five of section three hundred eighty-three of the vehicle and traffic law and section thirty-six hundred thirty-five-a of this chapter, drills in safe boarding and exiting procedures and emergency drills to be conducted on all school buses and shall emphasize specific hazards encountered by children during snow, ice, rain and other inclement weather. All such drills shall include instruction in the importance of orderly conduct by all school bus passengers. A minimum of three such drills shall be

had on each school bus during the school year, the first to be conducted during the first week of the fall term.

Section 3635 :Transportation

1. (a) Sufficient transportation facilities (including the operation and maintenance of motor vehicles) shall be provided by the school district for all the children residing within the school district to and from the school they legally attend, who are in need of such transportation because of the remoteness of the school to the child or for the promotion of the best interest of the children. Such transportation shall be provided for all children attending grades kindergarten through eight who live more than two miles from the school which they legally attend and shall be provided for each such child up to a distance of fifteen miles, the distances in each case being measured by the nearest available route from home to school. The cost of providing such transportation between two or three miles, as the case may be, and fifteen miles shall be considered for the purposes of this chapter to be a charge upon the district and an ordinary contingent expense of the district. Transportation for a lesser distance than two miles in the case of the children attending grades kindergarten through eight and three miles in the case of children attending grades nine through twelve and for a greater distance than fifteen miles may be provided by the district, and, if provided, shall be offered equally to all children in like circumstances residing in the district.

Non-public Schools

(i) School districts providing transportation to a non-public school for pupils living within a specified distance from such school shall designate one or more public schools as centralized pickup points and shall provide transportation between such points and such non-public schools for students residing in the district who live too far from such non-public schools to qualify for transportation between home and school. The district shall not be responsible for the provision of transportation for pupils between their home and such pickup points. The cost of providing transportation between such pick-up points and such non-public school shall be an ordinary contingent expense.

(ii) A board of education may, at its discretion, provide transportation for pupils residing within the district to a non-public school located more than fifteen miles from the home of any such pupil provided that such transportation has been provided to such non-public school pursuant to this subdivision in at least one of the immediately preceding three school years and such transportation is provided from one or more centralized pickup points designated pursuant to this paragraph and the distance from such pickup points to the non-public school is not more than fifteen miles. The district shall not be responsible for the provision of transportation for pupils between pupils' homes and such pickup points. The cost of providing transportation between such pickup points and such non-public schools shall be an ordinary contingent expense.

City School District

(c) The foregoing provisions of this subdivision shall not require transportation to be provided for children residing within a city school district, but if provided

by such district pursuant to other provisions of this chapter. Such transportation shall be offered equally to all such children in like circumstances. City school districts with a population of more than 2,25,000 and less than 300 which elect to provide transportation shall do so in accord with the grade and distance provisions of this subdivision including transportation outside the city limits.

Child Care Transportation

(d) Nothing contained in this subdivision, however, shall be deemed to require a school district to furnish transportation to a child directly to or from his or her home. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to impose a duty upon boards of education to provide transportation to or from before-and/or-after school child care locations. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to authorize boards of education to provide to any child transportation between a before-and/or-after school day care location and that child's home.

(e) [Eff. July 1, 1991, as amended by L.1990, c. 665] In lieu of the transportation provided pursuant to the foregoing provisions of this subdivision, a board of education may, at its discretion, provide transportation to any child attending grades kindergarten through eight between their school such child legally attends and before-and/or-after-school child care locations. For the purposes of this subdivision, a before-and/or-after school child care location shall mean a place, other than the child's home, where care for less than twenty-four hours a day is provided on a regular basis for a child who attends school within the school district. The definition includes, but is not limited to, a variety of child care services such as day care centers, family day care homes and in-home care by non-relatives. Such transportation may be provided for children attending grades kindergarten through eight where the distance between the school they legally attend and before-and/or-after-school child care locations is more than two miles, and may be provided for up to a distance of fifteen miles, the distance in each case being measured by the nearest available route from before-and/or-after-school child care locations to the school they legally attend, except that transportation for a lesser distance than two miles or a greater distance than fifteen miles may be provided if transportation for such distances is provided to students between home and school. Where a child receives transportation from a before-school child care location to the school he or she legally attends, such child shall be entitled to receive transportation from the school he or she legally attends to his or her home or to an after-school child care location in accordance with this subdivision. Where a child receives transportation from the school he or she legally attends to an after school child care location, such child shall be entitled to receive transportation from home to the school he or she legally attends in accordance with this subdivision. Transportation may be provided to any child attending grades kindergarten through eight between the school the child legally attends and before-and/or-after-school child care locations upon written request of the parent or legal guardian submitted not later than the first day of April preceding the next school year, provided, however, a parent or guardian of a child not residing in the district on such date shall submit a written request within thirty days after establishing residence in the district. The provision of transportation to or from before-and/or-

after-school child care locations, if provided, shall be offered equally to all children in like circumstances residing in the district, provided that a board of education furnishing transportation pursuant to this paragraph may limit the provision of such transportation to child care locations located within the attendance zone of the school the child attends and to child day centers and school age child care programs or registered pursuant to section three hundred ninety of the social services law located anywhere within the school district. The cost of providing such transportation between two or three miles, as the case may be, and fifteen miles shall be considered for the purposes of this chapter to be a charge upon the district. Such substitute transportation expense shall be eligible for state aid in accordance with clause one of paragraph b of subdivision seven of section 3620 of this chapter. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to impose a duty upon boards of education to provide transportation to or from before-and/or-after-school child care locations. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to authorize board of education to provide any child transportation between a before-and/or-after-school day care location and that child's home.

Children Transported with Parents

(f) A board of education may, in its discretion, provide transportation pursuant to this subdivision to a child of less than school age residing within the school district to and from the school which his or her parent legally attends; provided that such child is accompanied by such parent, that such parent is under twenty-one years of age and has not received a high school diploma, and that such transportation is furnished for the purpose of allowing the child to receive child care services and/or attend a nursery school, preschool or parenting program. For all purposes under this chapter, a child receiving such transportation shall be deemed a pupil legally attending the school which his or her parent legally attends. The cost of providing such transportation shall be considered for the purposes of this chapter to be charge upon the district and an ordinary contingent expense of the district. Such transportation expense shall be eligible for state aid in accordance with subparagraph (i) of paragraph b of subdivision seven of section 3602 of this article.

Request for Transportation

2. A parent or guardian of a child residing in any school district, or any representative authorized by such parent or guardian, who desires for a child during the next school year any transportation authorized or directed by this chapter shall submit a written request therefore to the school trustees or board of education of such district not later than the first day of April preceding the next school year, provided, however, that a parent or guardian of a child not residing in the district on such date shall submit a written request within thirty days after establishing residence in the district. No late request of a parent or guardian for transportation shall be denied where a reasonable explanation is provided for the delay. If the voters, school trustees or board of education fail to provide the transportation authorized or directed by this chapter after receiving such a request, such parent, guardian or representative, or any taxpayer residing in the district, may appeal to the commissioner of education, as provided in section 310 of this chapter. Except as hereinbefore provided, the commissioner of education shall not require that such

parent, guardian or representative provide a request for such transportation to any meeting of the voters, school trustees, or board of education in order to appeal. Upon such appeal, the commissioner of education shall make such order as is required to effect compliance with the provisions of this chapter and this section.

Section 3635-A: Safety Belt Usage

1. A board of education or board of trustees may, in its discretion, following a public hearing for the purpose of determining whether a resolution shall be adopted, provide for the use of seat safety belts on such school buses, in accordance with regulations and standards established by the commissioner under subdivision one of section 3623 of this chapter.
2. Such public hearing, conducted upon reasonable notice, shall be held to consider:
 - (a) Whether the district shall install seat safety belts on buses purchased and/or contracted for prior to the effect date of this section and require their use.
 - (b) When such installation shall be provided, and (c) whether use of seat safety belts shall be required on all school buses within the district so equipped after a date to be determined by the board of education or board of trustees.
3. Such hearing shall consider the effect of seat safety belts installation on the total number of students that can be transported on such buses.
4. Within twenty days after the public hearing, the board of education or board of trustees shall, by resolution, determine whether to require installation and use of seat safety belts on some or all school buses.
5. This section shall apply only to vehicles owned or leased by school districts and non-public schools, and to vehicles used to perform contracts with such school districts and non-public schools for the purpose of transporting school children for hire.
6. Nothing in this section shall be construed to impose a duty upon boards of education or boards of trustees to provide seat safety belts on school buses purchased or contracted for prior to the effective date of this section, nor shall any board of education or board of trustees be held liable for failure to provide seat safety belts pursuant to this section. School board members or trustees shall have immunity from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed as a result of the provisions of this section provided that such person shall have acted in good faith. For the purpose of any proceeding, civil or criminal, the good faith of any such person shall be presumed.
7. The provisions of this section shall not apply to school districts which are using safety belts on school buses or have installed or have contracted for the installation of seat safety belts prior to the effective date of this section.

Section 3636: Passage of School Buses across Railroad Crossings

1. No school bus transporting pupils between home and school or between schools which such pupils regularly attend either within or outside the district which operates or contracts for the operation of such bus, or transporting pupils for any purpose within such district, shall cross railroad tracks at grade except at a guarded railroad crossing, unless the governing body of the school district which operates the bus or contracts for the operation of the bus shall have adopted, at a regular meeting after a public hearing thereon, a resolution by which it shall have determined that the use of a route which would avoid an unguarded railroad crossing by the school bus would be impracticable.

A copy of any resolution adopted pursuant to the provisions of this section shall be filed with the Department of Education and the Department of Transportation at their respective offices in the city of Albany.

2. For the purpose of this section, a guarded railroad crossing shall be defined as follows:

(a) Any railroad crossing having automatic electrically operated gates that meet the specifications for such gates in the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation.

(b) Any railroad crossing where a member of the approaching train's crew disembarks from the train which has stopped for the crossing and positions himself at the crossing to halt traffic while the train passes. Such procedure must be in accordance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department of Transportation.

(c) Any railroad crossing protected by an automatic warning signal which meets the specifications in the rules and regulations as promulgated by the Department of Transportation.

(d) Any railroad crossing protected by one or more persons serving as a railroad crossing guard.

3. Each school district shall prepare and maintain a map indicating the intersection with any unguarded railroad crossing of each route used by a school bus transporting students to and from school either within or outside the district, or for any purpose within the district, and shall make such map available for any inspection by any resident of the district at a place designated by the governing body of the district.

4. The commissioner of education shall have the authority to promulgate such regulations as he shall deem appropriate to implement the provisions of this section.

Policy Guidelines for Safe Stops and Routes

The safe stops and routes Sample Policy outlined in this section is adapted from the Sample Policy promulgated by the Bureau of Management Services of the State Education Department (1978).

It is prepared for transportation directors and school boards as a guide, suggesting areas and topics that should be considered. It is not intended for replication in total by all school boards; each district is different. It does not follow that if a pupil transportation policy works well in one particular district, then it will work well in another.

Throughout this manual, reference has been made to the importance of a school district transportation policy document on stops and routes. One is needed to provide district administrators with guidelines to follow in administering their transportation program. It adds consistency to administrative decisions and reduces the time boards of education must spend in dealing with transportation issues.

The guidelines presented here were developed to meet state laws and to follow the commissioner of education's rules and regulations. A school district's policy may exceed laws and regulations, but should not be written to reduce the effect or intent of established laws and regulations. The Sample Policy moves beyond rules and regulations in its recommendations when safety so dictates.

Why do you need a policy statement?

The legal responsibilities of the board of education are usually stated in broad terms. Since the statutes cannot address all questions that arise, the board of education must establish policies within the framework of state and federal legislation. An established policy should accomplish the following:

- Eliminate the need to make the same decision repeatedly in recurring situations.
- Permit consistency in the decisions of the school administrator.
- Solve many management problems before they happen.
- Improve board-administration relations and help to maintain the stability of this relationship.
- Raise staff morale through uniform and fair treatment.
- Provide a legal foundation upon which to build a program.
- Give citizens an understanding of the objectives of the pupil transportation program.
- Enable staff members to better understand their work in relationship to the total school program.

Policies will vary according to local conditions or situations, but there are general rules which should be followed:

- ✦ Policies should always be in written form.
- ✦ Policies should be kept up to date to accommodate changes in conditions and in the state law.

Policies should cover only those situations that can be reasonably expected. In addition to district policy, a procedures manual may be created which outlines all the guidelines governing transportation activity. Every action of the transportation department does not need to be addressed by action of the board, but guidelines should exist which guarantee the provision of like service for every student in the district. The procedures manual should be reviewed by the superintendent to assure compliance with district policy and state laws and regulations. Policies and procedures need to be subject to review and evaluation at periodic intervals by board members, administrators, parents, and members of the faculty.

Policies

A well-planned policy should meet certain minimum requirements; it should do the following:

- ↳ Specify the extent of the transportation services to be provided, the criteria by which pupils are entitled to transportation by law and the conditions, if any, under which it will be provided to pupils who do not qualify.
- ↳ Describe rules of behavior for all transported pupils, including discipline procedures.
- ↳ Designate the person responsible for the enforcement of such rules of behavior.
- ↳ Outline the procedures for the use of buses for extracurricular activities and by other groups permitted by law.
- ↳ Establish requirements for the employment of transportation personnel.
- ↳ Develop policies to conserve the use of energy.
- ↳ Establish different beginning and closing hours for elementary and high school attendance centers which would permit school buses to make multiple runs.
- ↳ Outline the availability and use of late buses.
- ↳ Recommend the use of a larger capacity bus where there is a sufficient number of pupils on routes where the riding time would not be too long.
- ↳ Make a careful analysis of all bus routes to reduce deadhead mileage.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The following questions have been designed to identify the areas in which your transportation policy might be strengthened. As you read each question, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

	Agree	Disagree
1. The school board has adopted specific written policies and rules regarding the pupil transportation program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The school board has adopted written policies concerning the responsibility of the chief school administrator for the transportation program (or process).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The school board policies comply with all applicable state and federal laws.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Agree	Disagree
4. Parents and pupils are informed of the policies and rules that have been established regarding the transportation program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The school board has defined what is considered a safe and reasonable distance for children to travel to the bus stop. (This may vary according to grade level.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Discipline procedures for passengers and bus drivers are in place.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Rules for going to the bus stop are detailed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Rules for waiting at the bus stop are detailed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Procedures for boarding the bus are outlined.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Disembarking procedures at school or home are listed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Extracurricular activities and field trips plans are made.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. We have evacuation drills and emergency trial situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Training programs are carried out for members of the pupil safety patrol.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. All students in the school should participate in a safety program, not only bus students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. A copy of the bus route is contained in each bus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Emergency numbers such as police, school garage, hospital, etc., are posted in each bus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Agree	Disagree
17. Safe traffic patterns for approaching, parking on, and leaving school grounds are established.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Designated personnel are present in the bus loading area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Drivers are furnished with the names and addresses of pupils assigned to their routes and crossers are identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Buses are inspected regularly for cleanliness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Drivers are instructed in emergency procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Drivers are instructed in procedures for body fluid cleanup, use of plastic gloves for first aid, and transportation of students with infectious diseases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Having reviewed the above, you are now ready to develop a transportation policy to satisfy the needs of your district.

TRANSPORTATION PHILOSOPHY

Pupil transportation is a major function of our educational process. It requires special attention so that the greatest benefit will accrue to the school district from the dollars expended. It is important to set forth the major objectives which serve as a guide in the management of the pupil transportation program including the following:

1. To furnish transportation to those pupils whose health or distance from the school makes the service essential.
2. To provide the safest possible transportation.
3. To operate the transportation program efficiently and economically.
4. To adapt transportation to the requirements of the instructional program.
5. To maintain conditions on the buses which are conducive to the best interest of the pupils, including mental, moral, and physical considerations.
6. To promote a sympathetic public understanding of the entire transportation program, including safety, adequacy, efficiency, and standards of service.
7. To comply with all state laws, regulations, and mandates.
8. To establish and review at least once a year the pickup and discharge points which are safest.

TYPES OF TRANSPORTATION

To meet and carry out the above objectives, your district should provide the following types of transportation:

Regular transportation for public and private school students necessary to transport such students to and from school.

Transportation for field trips, for public school students, which are of an instructional nature, organized and supervised by a member or members of the instructional staff, which are conducted during the normal school day, evenings, or holidays.

Extracurricular transportation, for public school students, for events of a non-instructional nature, which are conducted after normal school hours, during weekends, and holidays.

Activity buses, after the normal school day, for students involved in approved school activities.

Transportation on Saturdays, Sundays, and/or holidays for resident, district, and public school students who are participating in approved school district programs which are under the supervision of certified instructional staff members.

Transportation to private schools only as required by law.

Transportation during summer recess only if specifically authorized by the board of education.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

All of the following distance criteria are to be determined by measuring the distance from the legal residence of the pupil desiring transportation to the school of attendance, using any device capable of such measurement over the nearest available public route.

Kindergarten pupils who live at least ___ miles and not more than 15 miles from school are eligible for midday transportation to or from half-day day programs.

Elementary pupils who live at least ___ miles and not more than 15 miles from the school are eligible for transportation.

Middle school pupils who live at least ___ miles and not more than 15 miles from the school are eligible for transportation.

High school pupils who live at least ___ miles and not more than 15 miles from the school are eligible for transportation.

Private school students will be provided transportation services equal to services provided to public school students in like circumstances. Application for such transportation must be postmarked by April 1 for the coming school year or within 30 days of moving into the district.

If at least one student in the district qualifies for transportation to a private school, then a pickup point will be established at a public school for other, non-qualifying, district students to be transported to the non-public school. Transportation to the pickup point is each parent's responsibility.

Students with disabilities shall receive transportation services as identified on their IEP. Drivers will not enter houses or schools for the purpose of receiving or discharging these pupils. It is expected that an adult at the home, and trained instructional or non-instructional staff

members at the school will be available to assist the children at these points.

Child care transportation for K-8 students who attend a child care facility in the district before or after school will be provided in the morning and evening if the child care location meets the distance qualifications established by district policy for the student's grade level. In order to qualify for transportation, a child care location outside of the student's attendance zone may be required to register under Section 390 of the Social Services Law.

Transportation requires voter approval if it is for distances not authorized by state law, that is, less than two miles for K-8, and three miles for 9-12. Such transportation becomes an expense to the taxpayers of the district, and must have annual voter approval.

ROUTING

Bus routes are established under the direction of the chief school officer in cooperation with the transportation supervisor and/or contractor.

Limitations - Bus routes will be established so that no elementary pupil regularly spends more than ____ minutes; no middle school pupil spends more than ____ minutes; and no high school pupil spends more than ____ minutes on a bus from the time of loading to the time of discharge.

Authorized bus stops will be located at convenient intervals in places where pupils may be loaded and unloaded, may cross highways, and may await the arrival of buses with the utmost safety allowed by road conditions.

No pupil will be required to cross the following more heavily traveled major highways: (list highways).

All loading and unloading along the aforementioned highways will be accomplished at the pupil's residence side of the street.

Fixed Stops - Fixed stops will be established using these guidelines:

1. Bus stops will be established with sufficient space for the assigned students to wait 15 feet from the highway at a location at least 100 feet from any intersection.
2. Generally, dead-end and loop streets will not be serviced by school buses. Stops will be near the intersection of such streets with the bus route.
3. In an effort to reduce traffic tie-ups, it will be the practice, whenever possible, to have pickup points on side rather than through streets.
4. Numbers of pupils at bus stops will be varied according to the concentration of riders in an area, the degree of traffic, the presence of stop signs and speed limits, and bus turn-around requirements.
5. A maximum of 30 pupils at a stop will be acceptable only where there is adequate waiting space away from heavy traffic areas. Approximately 10 to 15 pupils will be the usual number scheduled for pickup at any one point.
6. Travel distances to pickup points may be varied according to grade level. Elementary students will not be required to travel more than ____ miles to the bus stop; middle school students not more than ____ miles; and high school students not more than ____ miles.
7. Bus routes will be designed to minimize student crossing, especially for younger students.

Side roads/roads deemed unsafe - No road will be included on a bus route which is not suitable for bus travel due to size, surface, or lack of maintenance. The transportation director will maintain a list of such roads. Examples of unsafe conditions are flooding, road erosion, ice and snow, and mud.

Transportation will not be provided on private roads--highways that have not been dedicated and/or maintained by town, county, and/or state highway departments.

Unguarded railroad crossings will be avoided whenever possible on bus routes. Maps indicating such crossings within the district are available at _____.

Turn arounds - Unless adequate space is available and this space is properly maintained by town, county, and/or state highway departments, no turn arounds will be established.

Major highways - Stops along major highways will be at intervals of no less than _____ tenths of a mile.

Pickup and discharge times - Students will be picked up and discharged according to the following schedule:

Grade Level	PICKUP		DISCHARGE	
	No Earlier Than	No Later Than	No Earlier Than	No Later Than
Elementary	_____ a.m.	_____ p.m.	_____ a.m.	_____ p.m.
Middle School	_____ a.m.	_____ p.m.	_____ a.m.	_____ p.m.
High School	_____ a.m.	_____ p.m.	_____ a.m.	_____ p.m.

Standees are not permitted on district buses. There must be a seat for every student.

Activity bus(es) will be provided to an intermediate or high school if at least _____ students regularly need such transportation.

Activity buses will be provided to middle school students _____ minutes after the end of the regular school day on _____ (list days).

Activity buses will be provided to high school students _____, _____, and _____ minutes after the end of the regular school day on _____ (list days).

District map - Maps will be used to determine the transportation requirements necessary to satisfy the needs established by state law, board policy, and voter mandate. These maps will clearly show pupil location, loading and unloading locations, and routes traveled. They will be revised annually.

ADMINISTRATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Superintendent's Responsibility - The responsibility for administering the transportation program rests with the superintendent of schools, and the administration should adhere to all applicable laws, regulations, and policies established by federal, state, and local authorities. This responsibility is, in part, delegated to the director of transportation who reports to the superintendent or his or her designee.

The director of transportation will report to _____. The director of transportation is responsible for the following:

- ↳ Establishing bus routes and assigning bus drivers.
- ↳ Arranging for, recording, and reporting bus driving overtime.
- ↳ Arranging transportation for special trips, such as outdoor education, recreational programs, educational trips, and others.
- ↳ Preparing specifications for bidding of new buses and arranging for special transportation for students attending other school districts.
- ↳ Arranging contracts for all charter bus trips which involve any school group; checking company, driver, and vehicle records to assure safe and professional service.
- ↳ Planning and arranging for preventive and other maintenance on buses and other vehicular equipment.
- ↳ Reviewing and approving payment of bills for maintenance, special transportation, and overtime.
- ↳ Maintaining a continuous analysis of transportation costs and providing reports as requested.
- ↳ Preparing transportation contracts and State Education Department reports.
- ↳ Assisting in school bus driver personnel management and training.
- ↳ Assisting in the transportation budgeting process.

Principal's responsibility - Each building principal is responsible for the following:

- Keeping accurate records of the number of pupils transported at public expense.
- Requiring that regular classroom instruction and pertinent safety regulations as prescribed by law are provided for all pupils in each school.
- Providing adequate supervision at bus loading and unloading zones; bus riders should not be permitted to move toward the bus at school loading zones until the bus has been brought to a full stop; pupils should line up behind the safety line and take their turn at entering the bus in an orderly manner.
- Requiring that pupil behavior expected in the classroom is practiced on the school bus.
- Taking prompt action on all behavior problems.
- Enforcing safe traffic regulations on the school site.
- Reporting in writing any overcrowding and other unsafe condition or practice relating to the transportation program to the Director of Transportation.
- Informing pupils so that they ride their assigned school bus and do not board a bus going to any destination other than their home or an assigned activity.

Parents' responsibility - Parents have an important role to play in the safe and efficient operation of the school's transportation system. If the system is to function effectively, parents must assume an obligation to the program and to the people responsible for its operation. It is suggested that the director of transportation and the school business administrator meet with a committee of parents and develop a statement in writing that will set forth effectively their interests, duties, and responsibilities in relation to the transportation program.

Such a list should include a statement on rules that could be sent home, that would promote the observance of safe driving conditions by private automobiles. In addition, the statement should set forth the need for cooperation with school authorities and with bus drivers to promote efficient service for all passengers.

Parents should make sure that their children are at the proper bus stop on time and properly clothed for the weather. Parents must be informed of the need to follow safe loading and unloading procedures at the bus stop. If their child crosses the road, parents should wait on the side of the road that their child will be discharged and walk through the safe crossing procedure with the child. Parents must not supersede the bus driver's directions to children by calling them across the road or in any way distracting children from the bus safety procedures established by this policy.

Provisions should be set up so that parents can make written suggestions to school authorities for any improvement of the bus transportation program.

Parents should insist on the good behavior of their children at bus stops and on the bus so that drivers can concentrate on safely driving the bus. Parents should become familiar with the educational goals and objectives of the board of education so they can better understand the cost implication of demands they may make and how these would affect the overall expenditures for education.

STUDENT RULES AND REGULATIONS

Waiting for the bus

1. Be on time for the bus. Arrive at the stop at least five minutes, but not more than ten minutes, before the bus is scheduled to stop.
2. Do not allow pets or younger children who are not yet attending school to accompany you to the bus stop.
3. Observe all safety precautions while waiting for the bus:
 - Do not play in the roads.
 - If possible, avoid crossing streets.
 - Whenever you must cross a street, look both ways and cross only if you are sure that no moving vehicles are approaching from either direction.

- Do not push, pull, or chase any other pupils.
 - Avoid trespassing on private property and being noisy.
4. As your bus approaches, line up at least fifteen feet off the highway, and do not approach the bus until it has stopped and the driver has opened the door and signaled you to approach the bus. Again, avoid pushing others in the line.
 5. If you cross the road to the bus from your bus stop, observe these precautions:
 - Wait for the drivers signal to cross
 - Cross far enough in front of the bus so the driver can see you (at least ten feet).
 - If the driver sounds the danger signal, the bus horn, return to the shoulder of the road and wait again for the driver's signal to cross.

Loading the bus

1. Get on your bus quickly and be seated at once.
2. Fill the seats in the middle of the bus first, then fill towards the front and rear. The rear seat should not be used unless every other seat on the bus is filled, and the front seat should be next to last to be filled.
3. Listen carefully and obey any directions issued by the driver.

Riding the bus

1. Do not eat food on the bus.
2. Do not throw anything on the bus.
3. Avoid extending your arms or any other parts of your body out of the windows.
4. Do not change seats while the bus is moving.
5. Avoid shouting and other excessive noise that may distract the driver and lead to a serious accident.
6. Help keep the bus clean and sanitary.
7. Be courteous to other pupils.
8. Listen carefully and obey any directions issued by the driver.
9. After boarding the bus in the morning, remain on the bus until arrival at school.
10. Students will be allowed to disembark from the bus in the afternoon at other than the authorized bus stop only upon written authorization.
11. Pupils transported in a school bus are under the authority of and directly responsible to the driver of the bus.
12. Continued disorderly conduct or persistent refusal to submit to the authority of the driver is sufficient reason for a pupil to be denied transportation on a school bus.
13. The driver of any school bus is responsible for the orderly conduct of the pupils transported.
14. A school bus cannot be put in motion until all pupils are seated.
15. No school bus can stop to load or discharge pupils except at stops regularly designated by the school committee.
16. No pupil can engage in unnecessary conversation with the driver while the bus is in motion.

17. Smoking in a school bus is prohibited.
18. No intoxicating liquor can be transported at any time in a school bus.
19. No animals can be transported in a school bus.
20. Students will not attempt to bring any item such as large musical instruments, school projects, or sports equipment on the bus which cannot be safely held in the student's lap.
21. No loaded weapons of any sort, except sidearms carried by authorized police officers, can be transported on a school bus.
22. No person will be allowed to occupy a position in a school bus that interferes with the vision of the driver to the front, to either side of him, or through the mirror to the rear, or with the operation of the bus.
23. Nothing can be thrown within the bus or out the windows.

Unloading the bus

1. Do not leave your seat until the bus has come to a complete stop and the driver has opened the door.
2. Obey any directions issued by the driver.
3. Leave the bus quickly but in a courteous manner without pushing other pupils. Move 15 feet away from the bus and wait for the bus to depart before travelling home.
4. If you must cross a street as you leave the school bus, observe these precautions:
 - Walk in front of the bus (never in back) along the shoulder of the road until you can see the driver (at least ten feet). If you get too close to the front of the bus, the driver will not be able to see you, and a serious accident could occur.
 - Wait for the driver's signal to cross. Stop midway across the road and check for traffic yourself.
 - If clear, move across the road to your destination.
 - If the driver sounds the danger signal, the bus horn, return to the bus side of the road. Begin procedure again.
5. Again, be sure to observe all safety precautions as you travel from your bus stop to your home.
6. Violation of the bus rules may result in loss of bus privileges.

SUPERVISION AND DISCIPLINE

All pupils must behave appropriately as passengers of a school bus. Clearly understood and well-enforced rules are necessary for the successful management of pupils who ride school buses. (A progressive discipline policy should be established for school bus behavior similar to that used within the school buildings.)

The State Education Department Sample District Policy addresses additional transportation issues beyond the scope of this manual on *Safe Routes, Safe Stops*, and should be referred to in creating a comprehensive transportation policy along with more recent sources for changes in mandates and procedures.

How to be Smart About Communicating

Why is communications one of a transportation director's most important jobs?

It's important because communication creates an informed public. And an informed public that trusts the transportation department can be a supportive and understanding force.

On the other hand, when communication fails, parents complain. And almost any complaint can erupt into litigation.

One person with an unresolved complaint usually shares it with six others. Bad news travels quickly.

Because of the influence they have on others, parents and school administrators are two of the most important persons on the bus safety team.

This section suggests ways to improve communication on a district's safe routes and stops program. Ideas for ongoing public relations activities are outlined in the *Exhibits* Section of this manual.

A meeting with yourself

Why not take an hour or two of uninterrupted time to think about how well your communications style helps to foster bus safety and resolve complaints. What you bring from this meeting may save you many hours and many headaches in the months to come.

The past is a good indication of the year ahead. Do you use a form to report on public contacts? If not, there is one in the *Exhibits* Section you can reproduce and use.

Reflect on your contacts for the last two or three years.

Are they computerized so it is easy to spot trends and the incidence of activity?

Are there things you'd like to change?

Do you know approximately how much time you spent on a particular problem area?

What particular problems do you anticipate this year and why?

Can you list mass communications opportunities such as special events you planned or missed out on by not knowing of them in advance, or not planning for them ahead of time?

You are now ready to frame a communications plan that will contain the strategies or series of actions to help you attain your goals. Once completed, you will want to review and evaluate it for next year.

List your objectives.

Try to identify at least 10 communications objectives such as these:

To respond to parents and make them feel they've been given proper attention and a satisfactory answer to a complaint the same day.

To resolve most complicated complaints within one week, whenever possible, and keep parents informed during the interim.

To have a spring or summer kindergarten orientation event involving large numbers of incoming kindergarten pupils and their parents.

To distribute school bus safety rules and behavior standards to every parent in the district.

To report and discuss public relations activities during every regular meeting with the school superintendent or designee. To gain his or her confidence that the transportation director is the primary source for information on safe routes and stops.

To develop a crisis communications plan with the school superintendent or designee. To agree on procedures to use during minor interruptions such as school bus delays and major incidents. To update these procedures yearly, more often if key participants change.

To involve every K-6 teacher in some phase of school bus safety training at the beginning of the school year and remind them regularly about the changing risks as seasons change. To introduce them to the *Student Transportation Safety: A Curriculum and Resource Guide*.

To interest the school's public relations representative (if your district has a public relations person, if not, work with your school business official) in the communications challenges of your transportation program. To arrange a meeting and orientation at your facilities, review communications materials you have or need. To introduce key staff personnel, including drivers, who you feel are particularly good public relations representatives for your department. To discuss promotional opportunities and story ideas. To foster a continuing working relationship, arrange to meet on a regular basis to review developments and communications opportunities.

To conduct a driver safety training program at least four times during the academic year, applying the material from this *Safe Routes and Safe Stops* manual.

Think about people

Judging from your past experience, can you identify which area or group of residents causes the greatest amount of problems with their complaints or with children who do not adhere by school district standards.

How can personal communications resolve this?

How can parents be reached?

How many are there?

Where are they?

What can you offer them that you aren't now?

How can you convince them to rely on and trust in you and your staff?

For instance, would it be appropriate to schedule a meeting with a group of parents in a particular area? Are there one or more parents who might be willing to organize such a meeting? What avenues exist for getting to know some of the parents and communicating with them? Are there neighborhood action agencies or Head Start programs where school bus safety information can be shared with parents? Can you encourage area day care centers to use your training materials?

Review, update, and organize your communications materials

Do you have an informational folder that summarizes the scope of your operations? You are running a substantial business in terms of budget, people, and equipment. Do you have its story written up for people to read? Included should be number of buses, garage facilities, maintenance program, number of employees, area covered, facts and figures, bus driver hiring and training standards, safety record, and general history.

Do you need to provide information for parents' reference? Does it contain answers to the questions parents ask most? Do you include your name or the names of other persons whom parents can call for information on procedures? Does it include emergency procedures -- what to do when a bus is delayed, and what station to listen to for school closings? What other basic information are you or drivers asked repeatedly?

Is it time to create or update a booklet on school bus safety rules for parents to explain to their children? Children should clearly understand their responsibilities as members of the school bus safety team. A booklet on school bus safety should include the following:

- Rules for crossing
- Rules for getting on the bus
- Rules for leaving the bus
- Rules for waiting and arriving

Behavioral rules on the bus (the bus driver is captain of the school bus safety team.)

Do parents have route information (stops, times) as well as the rules their children must follow? Parents should have information for their child in advance of the beginning of school. They should also receive a set of rules governing student behavior and parental responsibility.

Parents who are aware of safety programs and driver training programs will have confidence in the operation and be more supportive.

Are parent teacher groups advised of all policies and special programs? Discipline rules should be reviewed with them at least once a year. Often this group can provide suggestions on troublesome areas before they get out of hand.

Do you prepare a yearly media kit that includes much of the above along with information on new rules or developments for the year? This can be distributed to newspapers and broadcast stations in your area for background use. It can also be used for reference when making speeches to community groups.

What other literature do you have or need?

Should you update your drivers training manual with information on public relations and safety training, perhaps excerpted from this *Safe Routes and Safe Stops* manual?

Think about spokespersons

In your organization who has the best communications skills? To which groups are they most suited—students, teachers, parents?

Find out from your superintendent or designee when she or he wants you to be a spokesperson—certainly with parents, but what about business persons and the press? Make absolutely clear who is to be the lead media contact if an incident occurs—be certain your role as the technical authority is recognized.

Think about how to handle complaints against drivers

As you hold this meeting with yourself, you will probably conclude that complaints against drivers fall into two categories.

The first category has to do with student safety.

The driver is :

driving too fast

leaving a stop before students are seated

allowing students to hang out the bus windows

not putting on the yellow lights far enough ahead of the stop

not pulling over between stops to let vehicles pass.

What are your formal and informal procedures to address such complaints?

When receiving them, do you begin by discussing the complaint directly with the driver?

If a second complaint comes in, would you go out to monitor the driver while making a run?

If you noted a problem, would you give the driver a written warning?

Are the rules governing driver discipline incorporated into the contract the driver's union has with the district?

If your district contracts pupil transportation to a private company, do you have a list of the range of actions that can be taken to respond to driver complaints subject to their contract provisions? Most contracts allow the district to request removal of any driver from any run it deems necessary.

It is important that you know the answers so that you can respond to a parent readily. Your district should have a system of due process in place to fairly and consistently administer bus driver rules and regulations insuring student safety. This, too, is important to communicate to parents.

The second group of complaints has to do with a driver's perceived behavior:

The driver is perceived to be:

physically reprimanding a student

using profanity to control a behavior problem

treating a particular student unfairly

These are difficult to address or to take action against. Your first step may be to meet with the driver accused of improper behavior; call the driver into your office while you place a call to the parent lodging the complaint.

Your role at this stage may be to facilitate a meeting of minds between the parent and the bus driver.

What should you do if further actions are required?

Considering the implications, you will probably choose to show that you are responsive to parental complaints regarding drivers and communicate openly with the parents lodging the complaints. Make certain they know you take their complaint seriously.

You may wish to review your written follow-up procedures; make certain that a document exists in the event a problem persists.

Do you write parents as well as call them the same day they complain? Districts should not rely solely on verbal communication; often problems between parents and administrators worsen because no one from the school followed up with a letter to parents when the problem

first surfaced. This is particularly important when the school is responding to a student discipline matter or complaint against a driver.

You might remind yourself that persons in authority who deal with the public, like you, need to constantly refine their listening skills. Listening is the most important communication activity; it will enable you to learn what is happening. It can help you determine potential and current problems, areas of concern, areas of satisfaction, and what is most important to the speaker at that particular time. Listen not only to what is being said, but the reason the speaker is saying it. This will give you further insight into what the speaker is trying to communicate.

Use your public contact record as a ready reference of what was said for future use. It will tell the speaker you are truly interested in what they are saying.

For complaints about hazards and stops

Find out what the complaint is, try to identify the real root complaint, perhaps by applying some of the listening techniques suggested in this chapter. If it is a serious situation, you may want to talk with your boss before you do anything else—this is a judgment call. Once you have identified the real problem, then you need to learn the facts of the case. Talk to the driver. If it seems necessary, you may need to do a personal inspection of the site, and even observe the run where the incident is taking place. You will want to do this before you get back to the person making the complaint. Then call the person back and review your findings.

Emphasize that district guidelines are established to provide a “circle of safety” around their child. They may look at a potential inconvenience to them without understanding the traffic or safety dynamics of the situation. Some of the material in this manual can help you to educate parents.

You may choose to give the person making the complaint, a copy of some of the information from the *Legal* Section in this manual.

As you wrap up this meeting with yourself

Reflect on how you can improve your working relationship with your communications allies:

The transportation department staff—drivers, mechanics, and office personnel.

Teachers can be an enormous assistance in dealing with discipline problems and can also be resource persons to assist training drivers on how to deal with children. With teacher support, special pupil transportation programs can be included as part of the classroom scene.

Other school employees such as custodians, bus zone monitors, secretaries, school lunch staff may need to be provided with some of your informational material; they should know whom to contact when they have questions not readily available in literature.

Personal communications

Meeting with small groups of the staff helps the transportation director to give that group directions and information or easily obtain information concerning the status of the transportation program or the effect of proposed changes in the program.

Group meetings with administrators usually involve reporting on the status of the transportation program, receiving instructions, presenting ideas for improving pupil transportation, or answering questions.

Expert communicators emphasize preparation:

Deciding what goals you need to achieve.

Organizing what you want to say—be honest, tell it like it is.

Writing it down in outline form.

Checking to make certain the sequence is right—an orderly development of your ideas is best.

Reading it out loud, to discover ways to improve your presentation.

Listening to audience input--write it down, if important.

The administration--business officials, building principals, and superintendent-- should be informed. Regular communications regarding extra trips, loading zone supervision, and other changes from normal operations are important. They can be helpful with pupil discipline problems.

The school board should be given information on the establishment of new policy and be supplied with feedback on existing policy. Transportation directors should keep their lines of communications open with the board by attending meetings of the committee that handles transportation matters. The transportation director may choose to report directly to the board to ensure the board's directions are clearly understood and the board is kept aware of what is happening in the department. Your superintendent or designee will be able to tell you the level of involvement he or she wants you to have with the board.

You'll want to make sure that your school bus safety team carries out its communications responsibilities related to routes, stops, and bus behavior:

Bus riders- should know what the rules for riding are and what the consequences are should they break them. This includes regular riders such as elementary, secondary, disabled, and vocational students. Periodic riders such as athletic teams and special events passengers should be briefed as well.

Highway personnel should be aware of bus routes for their plowing schedules and for the development of turn-arounds. They can assist with assessing the safety of stops and by providing resource persons for driver training programs.

Service clubs provide a forum to communicate programs to the public and are generally very supportive in providing funds and personnel in assisting in special programs such as bus "road-eos" or monitoring programs.

The motoring public is difficult to instruct. Enforcement, while an important tool, produces a negative image for the school district, especially when used in excess.

Motorists and other members of the general public—voters, politicians, local government, business people, volunteers, and senior citizens—can be usually be reached through news or special events.

How will your performance be evaluated by others?

When you've completed this meeting with yourself, you'll know what communications aids you need to prepare and what personal communications procedures you need to refine. If others are asked if you communicate well on bus safety, their answer will probably be based on your general management style. Your effectiveness will be determined by how well you do the following:

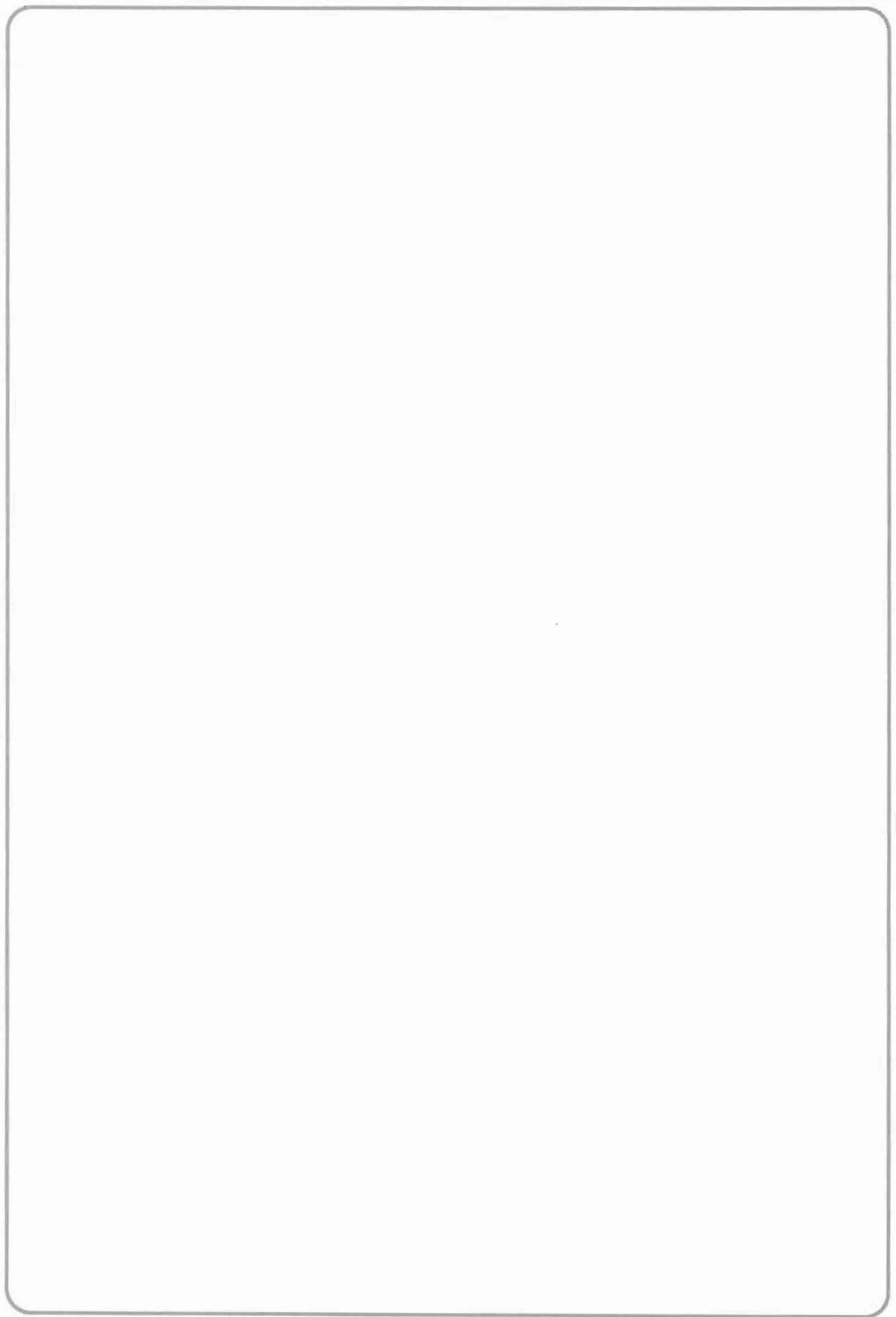
- Keep the school staff and general public informed about district's transportation services.
- Issue periodic reports to the school's business official, superintendent, and the board concerning accomplishments and needs.
- Recognize that drivers are front-line communicators, and encourage drivers to improve their interpersonal skills.
- Maintain a positive outlook and become involved in community activities.

You may choose to have this meeting with yourself every year. After all, every year new students and parents start with no awareness of their responsibilities for school bus safety.

This section contains forms for transportation directors to adapt to local needs. Your district guidelines for route and stop criteria are not expected to be the same as those on the forms in this section. The forms will provide a useful starting place for creating tools which you can use in your district.

We hope these forms promote accurate record-keeping, uniform evaluation procedures, and quality training. Many of these exhibits have been adapted from other sources. We'd like to thank those persons for beginning the process. We hope our efforts will in turn be adapted and improved as the school bus community strives for higher and higher standards.

<u>Exhibit #</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Original source</u>
1	SED Form F-1	NYS SED
2	School Bus Incident Report	Richard Rogers Homer CSD, NY
3	School Bus Stop Review	Hugh Mills Suwannee District, FL
4	School Bus Stops YES/NO	Pete James Chautauqua CSD, NY
5	Loading Zone Evaluation	Florida SED
6	School Bus Route Review	Bob Riley Palm Beach District, FL
7	Sample Route Sheet	Jim Brown Region II, NY
8	Continuum of Transportation Choices	Dianna Linder Marion Ind. District, IO
9	Pupil Data Form	1990 National Standards for School Buses and Operation
10	Consent for Medical Disclosure	1990 National Standards for School Buses and Operation
11	Request for Medical Status and Needs	1990 National Standards for School Buses and Operation
12	Medical Procedure Authorization	1990 National Standards for School Buses and Operation
13	Public Contact Record	Clifford Bertchtold Monroe-Woodbury CSD, NY
14	Ongoing Communications and Public Relations Activities	Rath Inc. Syracuse, NY



SCHOOL BUS INCIDENT REPORT

Date _____

State of New York: County of _____ : Justice Court: _____

The People of the State of New York against

_____, defendant.

I, _____, residing at _____ by this supporting deposition, make the following allegations of fact in connection with an accusatory instrument filed, or to be filed, with this court against the above named defendant(s):

That at or about _____ *(AM) (PM), on the _____ day of _____, 19____, a vehicle, to wit, a _____ (year/color/make), bearing registration plate *_____, from the State of _____, and being operated by a *(male) (female) about _____ years of age, and a person I *(can) (cannot) identify, did while traveling in a _____ direction, pass a school bus, to wit, bus #_____, owned by the _____ (District or company), and being operated by the deponent, on

_____ (location), in the *(Village)(Town)(City) of _____, _____, New York. At said time and place deponent *(had bus completely stopped) (was preparing to stop) to

*(engage)(discharge) passengers, to wit, _____ (names), and at said time and place the front and rear red warning flashing lights were engaged and operational, as was all other equipment associated with said bus,

and that all equipment was checked by me at about _____ *(AM) (PM) on the aforesaid date.

The foregoing factual allegations are based upon personal knowledge of the deponent.

'Verification by Subscription and Notice under Penal Law Section 210.45'

It is a crime, punishable as a Class A Misdemeanor, under the laws of the State of New York, for a person, in and by written instrument to knowingly make a false statement which such person does not believe to be true.

Sworn to before me this _____ day of _____, 19____.

Affirmed under penalty of perjury this _____ day of _____, 19____.

Notary Public _____ deponent

*Supply or Delete information where applicable and where known.

SCHOOL BUS STOP REVIEW FORM

ROUTE# _____ STOP# _____ DRIVER _____ DATE _____

TIME OBSERVED _____ STOP TIME: AM _____ PM _____

LOCATION _____

IS THIS AREA ---> (check one) RURAL ___ SUBURBAN ___ TOWN/CITY ___

SPEED LIMIT IS ___ MPH TRAFFIC IS LIGHT ___ MEDIUM ___ HEAVY ___

HOW MANY STUDENTS AT STOP? AM CROSSERS _____ NON-CROSSERS _____

PM CROSSERS _____ NON-CROSSERS _____

Is the stop at least 200' from railroad tracks? YES NO

Is there clear visibility for at least:
 from any direction a vehicle 500' 35 mph or below
 might approach the stop? 1000' above 35 mph

Is the stop sufficiently clear of curves, hills, truck
 traffic or other potentially hazardous factors?

Is the stop clear of non-traffic barriers to
 visibility for the bus driver? (trees, shrubs,
 buildings, etc.)

Is there room for students to wait safely 15' from
 the road and room for students to safely disembark?

Does the bus stop at least 100' from an intersection
 and at least 300' before a left hand turn on a four
 lane or wider road?

Is this stop at least .2 miles from any other
 bus stop for this school?

Is the distance all students travel to the stop
 within district guidelines?
 (K-5 1.0 miles 6-8 1.5 miles 9-12 2.0 miles)

Can all students get to the stop without crossing
 barriers which Board policy has agreed to transport
 around? (railroads, Interstate, lack of sidewalks, etc.)

Do you feel this is a safe stop?

COMMENTS - please explain all no answers _____

 OBSERVER (sign) _____

SCHOOL BUS STOPS

YES NO

Don't try and control traffic on two roads with bus stop

If you stop at a corner you can't obey the 10' rule or control turning traffic.

You must stop at least 100' away from the corner. If you are turning, place stop on smaller road.

Allow at least 100' behind the bus for following traffic to clear the intersection.

On multiple highways place bus stop far enough back to allow changing lane, if necessary.

Don't leave more than 18" of driving lane on right. Avoid being passed on right.

Place bus stop on the upgrade side of hill with adequate visibility.

If you must stop on a curve, stop where you are visible from both directions.

If you can't be seen 500' (up to 35 mph) or 1000' (over 35 mph) in both directions, try to move the stop or use a SCHOOL BUS STOP AHEAD sign and avoid crossers.

Bus stops should not be closer than 200' to a railroad crossing or similar hazard.

You are responsible for a precious cargo. Handle it professionally.

SCHOOL BUS ROUTE REVIEW FORM

ROUTE# _____ BUS# _____ DRIVER _____ DATE _____

OBSERVED AM ____ PM ____ SCHOOL DESTINATION _____

NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____

YES NO

Is the bus traveling the safest and most direct route?

Are all roads adequate for school bus travel, and are they adequately maintained? Is there adequate visibility to negotiate all intersections safely?

Is the driver's route sheet up to date with the route and the information in the office in regards to roads used, present stop locations, and students riding?

Have all unguarded railroad crossings used been approved by Board action? Is there at least 1000' of visibility down the tracks in both directions at every railroad crossing?

Are students waiting 15' away from the road in an orderly fashion as the bus approaches and do they use correct loading, crossing, and riding procedures? (NO? use district STUDENT DISCIPLINE REPORT forms)

Does the driver follow proper procedures for loading/unloading (10' rule, 15' rule, crossers first, proper use of eight light system, daily instruction) and exhibit good defensive driving skills? (NO? do 19-A DEFENSIVE DRIVING REVIEW to identify problems)

Do stops meet all district criteria for stop safety and location? (NO? use STOP REVIEW FORM to investigate)

Where stops unavoidably have short sight distances, have SCHOOL BUS STOP AHEAD signs been erected and have areas of chronic passing offenders been posted with STATE LAW - DO NOT PASS STOPPED SCHOOL BUS signs?

Are school bus loading/unloading areas at the school sites free of automobile and pedestrian traffic and is there adequate bus zone supervision? (NO? use SCHOOL BUS LOADING ZONE EVALUATION form)

Do you feel this is a safe and efficient route?

COMMENTS - please explain all no answers _____

OBSERVER (sign) _____

SAMPLE ROUTE SHEET PAGE 1

ROUTE: # 101A BUS #: 15 Cap.: 60 SCHOOLS: Brentwood Middle School
 DRIVER: _____ Smithtown High School
 Attendant: _____

STOP #	DESCRIPTION OF ROUTE -- DIRECTIONS	CROSS	NON-CROSS	TIME	TASK
0	RIGHT MAIN STREET TO GIBBS (APX 1 MILE) RIGHT GIBBS TO GROVE (1 BLOCK)			6:45	OUT
1	LEFT GROVE TO #384 (GREEN HOUSE RIGHT SIDE)	1	1	6:55	STOP
2	CONTINUE GROVE TO #425 (RED BARD - SMITH ON MAILBOX)	1	4	7:00	STOP
3	CONTINUE GROVE TO #875 (5 BLOCKS - BRENTWOOD APARTMENTS ON RIGHT - GROUP STOP AT BUS SHELTER) CONTINUE GROVE TO SMITH STREET (1 BLOCK) LEFT SMITH TO JONES ROAD (STATE ROUTE 107)	0	16	7:10	STOP
4	LEFT JONES ROAD TO #1072 (BIG OLD HOUSE - STONE FENCE - ADAMS ON MAILBOX) CONTINUE JONES TO HILLHAVEN DRIVE (APX 1 MILE) RIGHT INTO HILLHAVEN DRIVE	2	2	7:22	STOP
5	CONTINUE TO BUS SHELTER - GROUP STOP CONTINUE LOOP BACK TO JONES VIA HILLHAVEN DRIVE	0	24	7:30	STOP
6	RIGHT JONES ROAD TO #421 (APX 1.5 MILE - BLUE FENCE - BROWN ON MAILBOX) CONTINUE JONES TO UNIVERSITY (APX 100 YDS.) RIGHT UNIVERSITY CONTINUE TO SCHOOL LANE (APX 2.2 MILE) LEFT SCHOOL LANE CONTINUE TO END OF ROAD	4	2	7:35	STOP
7	LEFT ON DRIVEWAY INTO SMITHTOWN BUS LOOP (DON'T DROP BEFORE 7:45) (LEAVE BUS LOOP BY 7:50) RIGHT SCHOOL LANE TO BRENTWOOD JR BUS LOOP		32	7:45	DROP
8	LEFT ON DRIVEWAY INTO BRENTWOOD BUS LOOP (DROP BY 8:00 LATEST)		26	7:52	DROP
DO POST CHECK OF INSIDE OF BUS					
RIGHT SCHOOL LANE TO NEXT ROUTE					

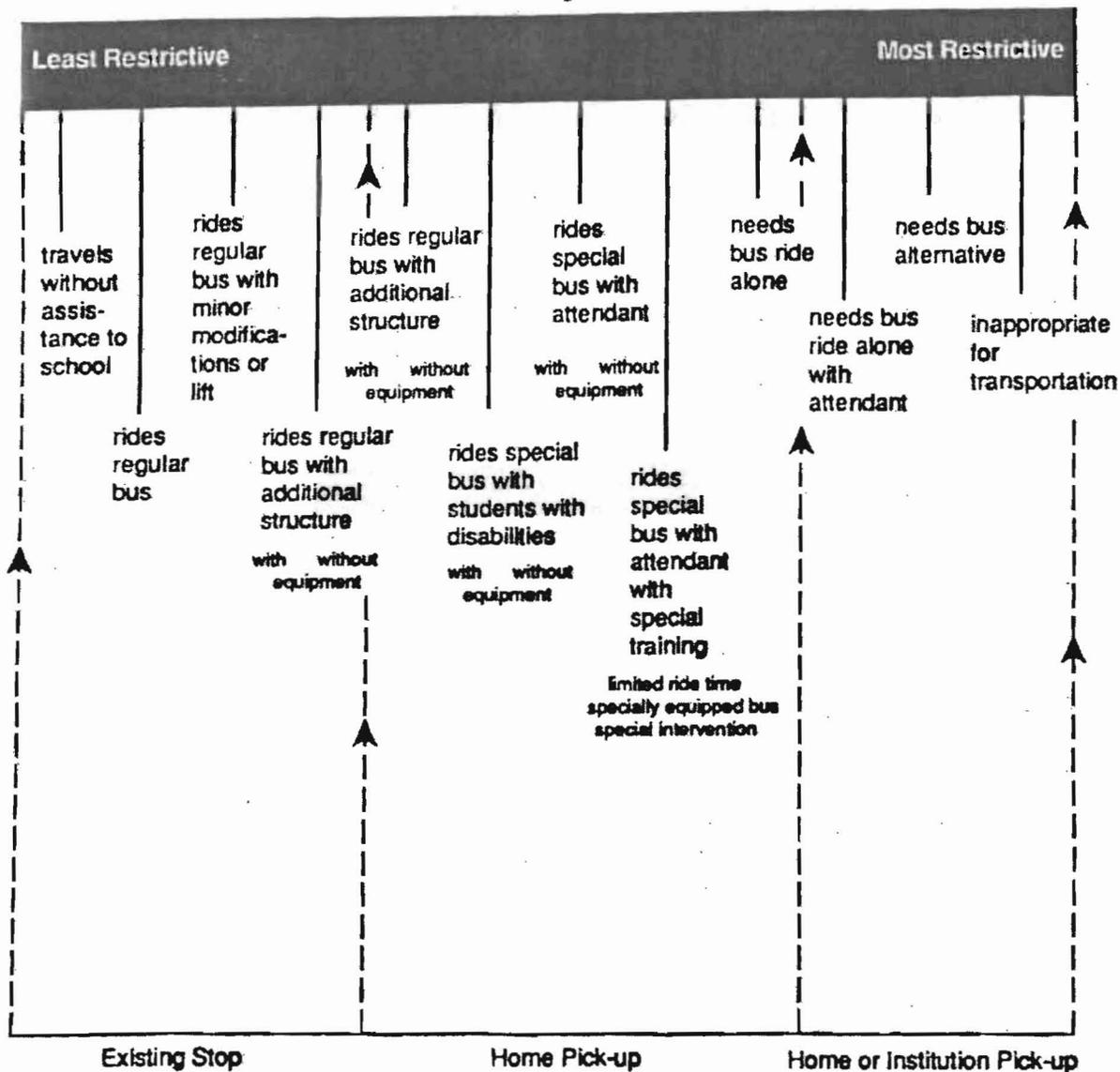
STUDENT LIST ON BACK

SAMPLE ROUTE SHEET PAGE 2

STUDENT LIST ROUTE # 101A

SP#	C	GR	NAME (LAST, FIRST)	ADDRESS	SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS
1	X	07	DAVIS, MARY	384 GROVE	
1		10	SAMSEL, DAVE	15 DROVE LANE	BEE STING ALLERGY
2	X	08	HANDEL, FREDERICK	440 GROVE	
2		08	SMITH, SUE	425 GROVE	
2		07	SMITH, DAVE	"	EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED
2		10	SMITH-JONES, PAM	"	
2		10	SMITH-JONES, ALICE	"	MOTION SICKNESS
3	SE		RODHAMEL, JEFFERY	HILLHAVEN APT. 230	DIABETES - IF HE GOES INTO SHOCK, HAVE DISPATCH CALL DR. BROWN 555-1234
3		12	ADDISON, PAUL	HILLHAVEN APT. 345	
			ETC.		

Continuum of Transportation Choices



PUPIL DATA FORM

Student's Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

Father's work phone: _____ Mother's work phone: _____

Emergency phone & name: _____

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE TYPE OF TRANSPORTATION REQUIRED FOR YOUR CHILD:

___ Walks to bus unassisted ___ Walks to bus, but needs assistance ___ Wheelchair ___ Needs to be carried

___ Requires a car seat ___ Requires special restraint (specify): _____

NEEDS TO BE MET AT SCHOOL? ___ OTHER (specify): _____

ON RETURN HOME, NEEDS TO BE MET AT BUS STOP? _____

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF PERSONS NEARBY STUDENT'S RESIDENCE WHO HAVE CONSENTED TO CARE FOR THE STUDENT IF THE PARENTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE:

1. NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____ PHONE: _____

2. NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____ PHONE: _____

3. NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____ PHONE: _____

PLEASE CHECK IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING APPLIES TO YOUR CHILD: ___ Asthma ___ Heart Disease ___ Diabetes ___ Chronic Respiratory Problems ___ Blind ___ Deaf ___ Non-verbal ___ Hemophilic ___ Sting allergies - to what? _____

SEIZURES: How long do seizures last? _____ How often do they occur? _____

Action, if any: _____

Is your child on medication? ___ Yes ___ No If yes, what medication, what dosage, and when? _____

FAMILY DOCTOR: _____ ADDRESS: _____ DOCTOR'S PHONE: _____ FAMILY DESIGNATED HOSPITAL: _____

PARENT CONTACT: If possible and practical, in the event of major emergency, parent contact will be made.

PARENTAL APPROVAL: If in the opinion of the driver a major emergency exists, the parent(s) have agreed in writing and will assure the cost of:

- 1. Contacting the family doctor..... Yes ___ No ___
2. Contacting any doctor available..... Yes ___ No ___
3. Contacting rescue squad..... Yes ___ No ___
4. Transporting to designated hospital..... Yes ___ No ___



OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION: _____

As parent(s) or guardian(s), I agree to one or more of the above procedures as indicated and agree that this information may be shared with my child's transporter. CONFIDENTIALITY WILL BE MAINTAINED

Date: _____ Parent(s) or Guardian(s) signature(s) _____

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

Bus Company: _____ Bus #: _____ School Attending: _____ Company phone: _____ Special Instructions for Drivers: _____

CONSENT FOR THE DISCLOSURE OF MEDICAL INFORMATION AND RECORDS

TO: _____

(Physician's Name and Address)

I, _____, the (parent) (guardian) of
_____ consent and authorize you to disclose and
(Student)
provide to the _____ its nursing and other necessary
(School District)
staff, upon their request, any information or records which you have or have
obtained concerning the diagnosis, evaluations, tests, medical problems or
conditions, medications, or treatments of my child or ward named above.

It is the expressed intent of this document to waive any and all
privileges which I or my child or ward might have with respect to disclosure of
the above information and records to the school district, including the doctor -
patient privilege, psychologist - client privilege, and social worker - client
privilege.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Dated: _____

Please return to: _____

(School District)

REQUEST FOR MEDICAL VERIFICATION OF HEALTH STATUS AND NEEDS

School District: _____

NAME: _____ BIRTHDATE ____/____/____

ADDRESS: _____ PHONE: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS (IF DIFFERENT) _____

PHYSICIAN: _____ PHONE: _____

Note to Physician: Should you have any questions regarding this request, please

contact: _____ PHONE: _____

VERIFICATION OF MEDICAL, HEALTH, AND BEHAVIOR STATUS

1. Briefly describe the current medical, health, and behavior status.
2. Identify any medical conditions not addressed in (1) above.
3. Identify any health concerns not addressed in (1) above.
4. Identify any behavioral concerns not addressed in (1) above.

PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL DAY PROGRAM

1. Briefly describe the staff supervision and interventions necessary for the student to safely participate in the normal school day program given the student's health and medical status.
2. Identify the training required for all staff including bus attendants and drivers to provide the supervision and interventions addressed in (1) above.
3. Identify any additional restrictions or modifications in school activities or medical care that would be necessary for the student to safely participate in the school day program.
4. Identify any additional special equipment, aids, restraint, or mobility assistance needed for the student to safely participate in the school day program.

MEDICAL PROCEDURE AUTHORIZATION

I delegate and authorize the staff of the _____
(school district) to perform for _____ (student) the
acts, tasks, and functions indicated on the REQUEST FOR MEDICAL VERIFICATION OF
HEALTH STATUS AND NEEDS, dated _____ which I previously provided to the
district. This authorization is subject to the condition that district staff
assigned to perform these activities have been provided the required training as
specified in the above REQUEST.

I have reviewed the attached procedures for _____
(procedure) which will be utilized and approve them, subject to any specific
modifications necessary for this student which I have noted on the procedures.

I agree to supervise the performance of these activities and procedures by
being continuously available through direct communications with district staff
performing them and by regularly reviewing the student's health/medical status and
needs, as well as the procedures being utilized by the staff.

Signature of the Physician

Date

Public Contact Record

Date: / / Time: a.m. p.m. Rcd by:

Name: Call Back? Yes No

Address: Home Phone:

Town: Business Phone:

School: Bus: Driver:

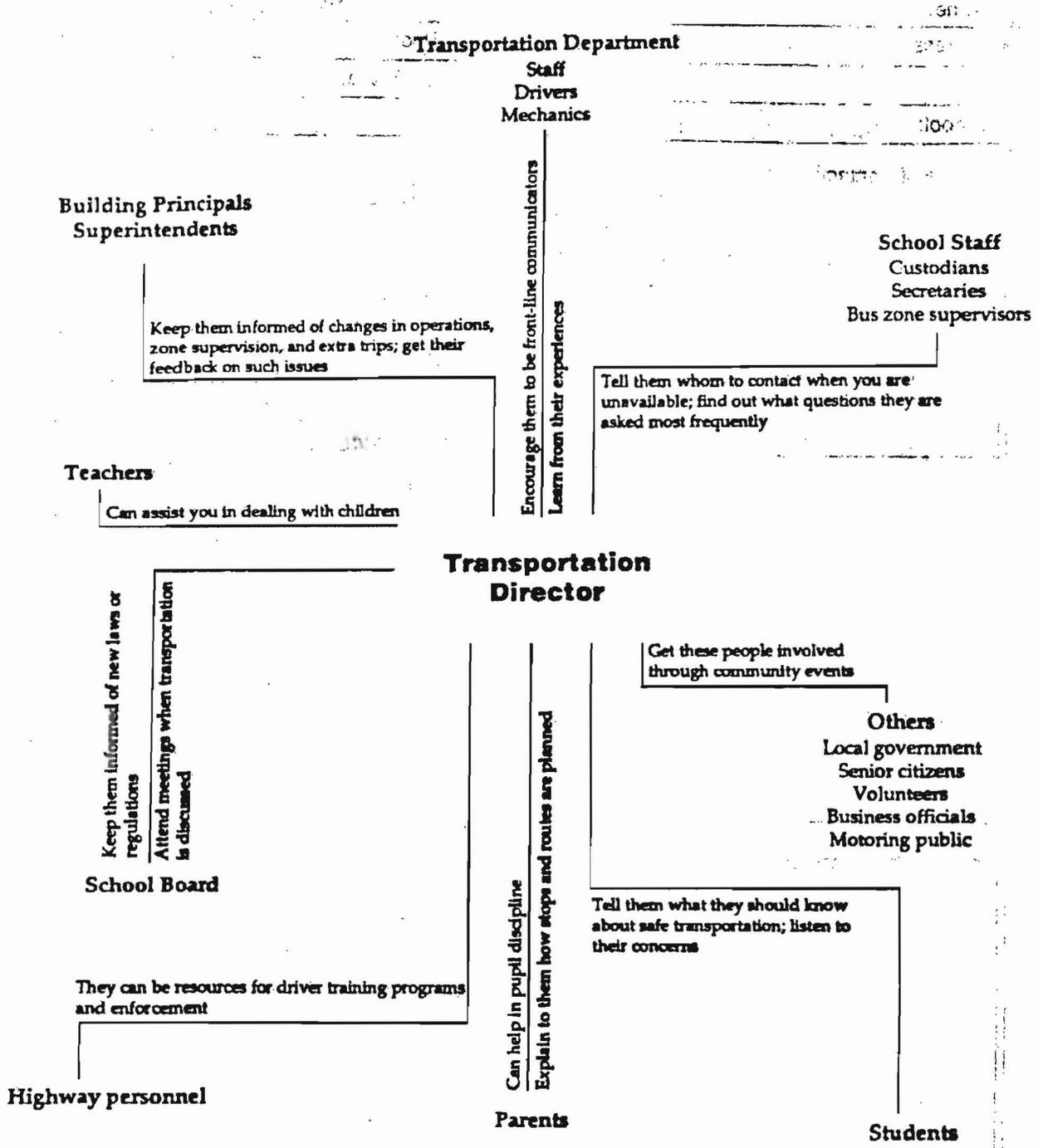
Nature of Contact:

Research:

Disposition:

By: / /

Ideas for Ongoing Communications and Public Relations Activities



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