



safely speaking

ISSUE No. 5
2005-06 SCHOOL YEAR

NYS Education Department Newsletter
for School Bus Driver Instructors

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NYAPT Winter Workshop Re-designed to concentrate on fundamentals

The 2006 NYAPT Winter Workshop had a simple focus – getting back to the basics.

“We are focusing on fundamentals and concentrating on the vital aspects of our job so you can go back home confident and armed with timely information,” NYAPT President Pat Bailey told the 130 conference attendees during her opening remarks. .

The workshop, held Feb. 24 and 25 at the Holiday Inn Turf in Albany, featured longer sessions than in recent years, Bailey said, allowing for more in-depth information to be shared by presenters from the New York Association of Pupil Transportation (NYAPT), the state Department of Motor Vehicles (NYSDMV), the state Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the State Education Department (SED) and the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute (PTSI).

The conference was attended by transportation officials from across the state and employees from Thomas Built Buses, Matthew Buses, Quality Bus Sales and Service, and Nesco Bus and Truck Sales. The business partners not only sponsored conference meals, but also were available to answer questions from attendees.

NYAPT President Pat Bailey encourages attendees to “make time to network with colleagues,” during the 2006 NYAPT Winter Workshop held in Albany in February.



Topics from the workshop included: 19A Program Administration

A team of eight staff members from NYDMV detailed how the 19A Administration Office handles applications, forms, driver monitoring, and the pre-employment, annual and bi-annual requirements that are submitted to them.

Bus Inspection Requirements

NYSDOT Inspector Michael Nuber gave an overview of the semi-annual state bus inspection process, including the essential requirements, how the requirements are measured and how the system ensures the safety of New York State buses.

The Business End of the Bus Business

State Education Department representatives talked about state rules regarding contracts, strategies for writing contracts, effective bidding, and billing strategies.

Paperwork 101

Pete James, a NYAPT past president and director of Chautauqua Transportation

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SAFETY WINNERS



▲ Students from Goshen Central School District earn prizes and recognition for behaving on the bus. The Bus of the Month contest is just one idea Pete Brockmann, the district’s director of transportation, shared with a NYAPT audience in February. See Page 6 to learn how you can improve your bus safety education program.

Where should the bus stop?

A well-defined selection process is key to maintaining safety

Every time a child boards or exits a school bus, there is a chance something can go wrong.

Where the bus stop is located can either add to the danger – or decrease it, said Jim Ellis, director of research and instructional design for the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute, during the NYAPT Winter Workshop in February. That’s why it is essential for transportation departments to establish a written, well thought-out bus stop selection process and then follow it each and every time, he said.

Establishing a system

New York law states that it is the district’s responsibility to establish reasonably safe bus stops. Considering how many factors must be considered when selecting a stop, having a sound and through process is a must. If the bus stop were challenged – by a parent or in a courtroom – would the district be able to justify why the location was chosen? To ensure that answer is yes, the process must be able to answer:

1. How new stops are established.
2. How safety factors at the stop are evaluated.
3. How complaints are handled.

How are new stops established?

Ellis recommends that each new stop be evaluated in person using a standard observation form created by the district. Each form should be kept on file in the transportation office.

The form should define a profile of the stop including:

- ▲ The number of students who are expected to use the stop and their grade levels;
- ▲ The number, if any, of children with special needs; and,
- ▲ If children must cross over a roadway when entering or exiting the bus.

Every time a child boards or exits a school bus, there is a chance something can go wrong.

Safety factors at the location should be observed and clearly documented, including:

- ▲ The stop’s visibility to motorists;
- ▲ The traffic speed (posted and actual);
- ▲ The traffic volume;
- ▲ Any special traffic concerns;
- ▲ The terrain conditions and amount of space at the student’s waiting area;
- ▲ The distance to an intersection;
- ▲ The distance to any known sex offender’s homes;
- ▲ Any unusual hazards; and,
- ▲ Any concerns for wheelchair lift zones.

The observer must clearly state if he or she considers the bus stop safe for students and sign and date the form. Depending on the location, it may be necessary to evaluate the stop in the morning and again in the afternoon.



▲ Traffic is significantly different from a generation ago making it tougher for school districts to decide if a bus stop location is safe enough, says Jim Ellis of PTSI. Ellis recommends that transportation departments establish a written, well thought-out bus stop selection process and then follow it each and every time.

Evaluating the factors

Traffic in most areas is significantly different from a generation ago, Ellis said, stating that roads are more congested, vehicles are bigger, and people seem to hurry more. All of those factors make it tougher to decide if a location is safe enough.

“It is important to balance the positives against the negatives,” Ellis said. “When doing your balancing act, you should be thinking, ‘What questions will I be asked if this bus stop is challenged?’”

Crossovers – stops where children must cross the roadway when entering or exiting the bus — should be seriously evaluated and, if possible,

avoided. While Ellis admitted it is virtually impossible to eliminate all cross-overs, he said special attention must be placed on evaluating those stops.

First, consider the ages of the children crossing. Younger children are more vulnerable. Studies show that children younger than 9 do not have the necessary cognitive skills and experience to judge distance and time.

The visibility of the stop must be considered. Can motorists clearly see students as they approach the stop? How do light conditions affect visibility? In the winter is the roadway too dark, or in spring are there issues with blinding light when the sun rises and sets?

Observers must also check for special traffic conditions. Is the stop located near the crest of a hill, making it difficult for cars coming over the hill to stop in time? Do surrounding buildings block a driver's view?

How close is the stop to an intersection? State law recommends that stops not be placed closer than 100 feet to a street corner.

There also needs to be enough room at the stop for students to wait a safe distance off the roadway. What may be safe in fall or spring could become dangerous in winter if accumulated snowdrifts reduce space in the waiting area.

Keep it safe

Even after a stop has been evaluated and is considered safe, there are issues that school bus drivers need to continually address.

Drivers should not create a cross-over where there wasn't meant to be one. For example, on bus routes that loop, children often ask to either board or exit the bus on the wrong side of the road so they can sleep in later or get home earlier. Drivers should be re-

minded that the answer to these questions is always no.

Bus drivers should also discourage children from crossing the road before the bus arrives. Instead students should wait at the assigned bus stop until the driver engages his or her flashing red lights, extends the stop sign and gives the universal crossing signal.

Ellis also encourages districts to eliminate "drop and go" stops – places where drivers let children off, and then leave before the children cross the road.

Bus drivers should be taught to listen to a student's concerns or fears about a bus stop and report them to the supervisor.

Dealing with requests to change bus stops

As long as there are parents, there will be requests to change bus stop locations.

"Parents have deepening worries about their children's vulnerability," Ellis said. "They worry about

what they hear in the media regarding sex offenders and abductions, or they are afraid their child might be bullied at a stop."

Bus litigation is more common these days and parents are more vocal in their requests, Ellis said. It is not enough for a transportation director to say to a parent who wants a bus stop changed, "That is where we have always stopped."

Instead, district officials must be able to subjectively answer why a stop was selected or rejected and be consistent in their decisions. The district's bus stop selection process should take the guess work out of deciding if a parent's request to change a bus stop is reasonable.

"Sometimes parents are right," Ellis said, adding that each complaint or

request must be taken seriously, and the stop should be reevaluated.

A typical scenario

A mother has to get her kindergartner on the bus in the dead of winter. She would rather not wake her 2-year-old, bundle him up in a snowsuit and take him outside to wait at the stop with her daughter.

But the bus stop is out of view of the family home, and it is dangerous for her 5-year-old to wait alone on the street.

The mother has a solution. The bus can turn down her dead-end road to pick up her child in front of her house. What she doesn't realize is that there is not enough room to turn around a full-size bus on her street.

She calls the transportation

director who gives a quick "We can't do that" answer.

Not good enough for mom. She gathers a petition of

signatures from parents on her street and very vocally presents her request during the next school board meeting.

The next morning the district superintendent calls the transportation director asking first, "Why did this problem have to escalate to the district level?" and second, "Why can't you change the bus stop?"

The transportation official is caught off guard, because she assumed the matter was closed.

Winning administrative support

You don't want to be the transportation supervisor on the receiving end of a call from an unhappy administrator.

Bus drivers should be taught to listen to a student's concerns or fears about a bus stop and report them to the supervisor.

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Don't get buried Tips for keeping paperwork under control

If there is one constant in a pupil transportation office, it is the reams of daily paperwork that need constant attention.

You know the drill: Forms that need to be filled out, initialed, filed, updated, copied or mailed to a multitude of federal and state agencies.

By the end of the week, your In Box is no doubt full of training materials, course completion forms, physical examinations, inspection reports, accident reports, drug testing results and fingerprint transmittals and more.

"This job would be almost manageable, if it weren't for all the paperwork," said Pete James, director of the Chautauqua Transportation Service and a NYAPT past president. "If there is one thing that can trip you up, it is managing the mounds of paper."

Transportation officials are required to prepare, submit and retain key documents for state, federal and local agencies. Not only must they update and keep voluminous records, they must be able to access them at a moment's notice.

"When an inspector comes out to conduct the semi-annual inspection, he doesn't want to search in the 19-A files for what he needs. You should have all the required paperwork in order and current," James told attendees of the NYAPT Winter Workshop in February.

Because missing or misfiled forms could cause the transportation department to fail a state DOT inspection, it is essential that paperwork be handled quickly and efficiently.

▶ Missing or misfiled forms could cause a transportation office to fail a state DOT inspection. It is essential that required paperwork be handled quickly and efficiently, says Pete James. James is the director of the Chautauqua Transportation Service and a NYAPT past president.

Desk/Office Organization 101

Messy desks can be found in almost every place of business. Organizing your workspace can greatly improve how efficiently you manage your paperwork. Keep your desk clean and set up trays or folders for the different types of information you receive. For example, create separate bins for forms that need to be completed or initialed, notices from state agencies and papers waiting to be filed.

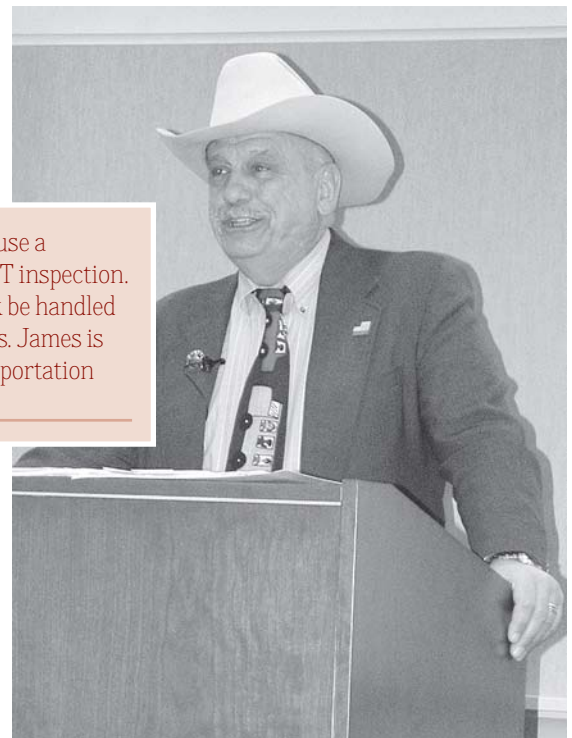
Arrange your office to maximize your working style. If you need to access certain files frequently, move them closer to your desk. You should have a workspace that is comfortable, practical and efficient.

File Effectively

Poor filing systems waste time and slow work. Try to streamline your filing system and keep it simple. It should be understandable even to those who do not use it regularly.

James offered the following tips to keep your filing system organized:

- The information that is used the most should be the most accessible.
- Documentation should be close to, or in the area where it is used.
- Establish a shelf life for each of the different types of files you keep.



- Throw away paperwork, or move it to dead files, when it is no longer relevant. Do not hold it indefinitely, because that can clog the system.
- Keep records of who maintains files and where they can be located.

Through years of trial and error, the Chautauqua Transportation Service has created a filing system that works efficiently. For a glimpse into how that system works, see Page 5.

Staying on top of deadlines

It is not an easy task to keep each file current and complete. James recommends creating standard reminder checklists to keep track of required forms, procedures and due dates. Put a copy of the checklist in each file or in a binder you keep on your desk.

For example, a checklist for a new school bus driver could include:

- A list of the forms required by NYS DMV, NYSDOT, NYSED and USDOT;
- A list of supporting documents;
- The required training certificates;

- All needed road test examinations;
- The physical examination forms;
- Required district approvals (i.e. a superintendents signature);
- Drug testing results;
- The DMV qualification letter;
- Fingerprint cards;
- CDL information (license classification, endorsements, restrictions and expiration date); and
- Any required information specific to your district.

In addition to the new school bus driver checklist, Chautauqua Transportation Service has developed checklists for:

- Post-accident requirements;
- Maintaining school bus driver qualifications (annual and bi-annual requirements);
- Qualifying new school bus attendants/monitors; and
- Maintaining school bus attendant/monitor qualifications (annual and bi-annual requirements).

“The most important thing to remember is that you must know and remain current with the laws and regulations,” James said. “It is your responsibility to stay updated.”

James recommends creating standard reminder checklists to keep track of required forms, procedures and due dates. Put a copy of the checklist in each file or in a binder you keep on your desk.

Efficient filing, the Chautauqua Transportation Service way

The Chautauqua Transportation Service keeps all paperwork relating to DMV 19A requirements for each individual driver in an expanding accordion six-pocket file folder.

Pocket 1: DS-870 application, approvals, disqualifications, re-qualifications, drop/add notices and any other paper work that relates to 19A qualifications;

Pocket 2: Abstracts with DS-872 Interviews;

Pocket 3: DS-873 Defensive Driving Reviews;

Pocket 4: DS-874 Physical/Medical Reports;

Pocket 5: DS-875 Behind-the-Wheel; and

Pocket 6: DS-875Q/DS-875Y Written Exam.

For each driver, CTS also keeps a hanging file with three tabbed file folders.

FILE 1:

- SED Training Certificiates
 - Pre-service
 - Basic
 - Refresher
 - Advanced
- Other Training and Certificates

FILE 2:

- USDOT drug/alcohol testing forms
- SED PPT forms
- NYSDOT 9A certification forms
- Accident reports

FILE 3:

- Employment applications
- SED character reference forms
- SED superintendent approval forms

CTS stores “dead files” or outdated materials in manila envelopes, such as 19A recorders that are older than the two cycles required for an audit. He recommends moving records from active files to dead files every four to five years.



PREVENTING TRAGEDY

School Bus Safety programs must be memorable

It's been proven that bus safety education and awareness training for children can help prevent a tragedy.

The New York State Education Department mandates that school district officials hold three bus safety drills each year. According to state regulations, the drills must cover danger zones around buses, safe crossing procedures, emergency evacuations, proper seat belt use, and how to ride safely.

If the list sounds dry to you, imagine how it sounds to children.

While schools can get by with teaching "just the facts," many districts go above and beyond, creating bus safety programs that are not only educational but memorable.

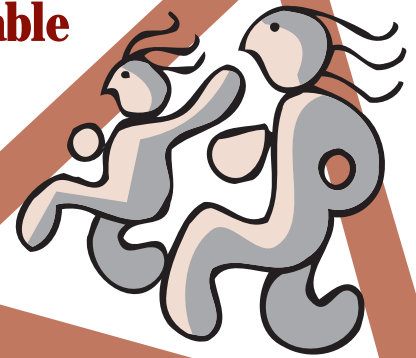
"It is essential that children not only hear the message, but that they remember it," Peter Brockmann, director of transportation for Goshen

Central Schools told an audience during the NYAPT Winter Workshop held in Albany in February. "In order for them to remember the safety message, it must relate to them. What works for a 7-year-old may not work for a middle-schooler."

Brockmann has developed safety education programs that target children of all ages – from bus safety Jeopardy contests and Buster the Bus's Safety Quest starring the cartoon movie ogre Shrek to monthly "Bus of the Month" contests.

Appealing to younger children

Brockmann encourages instructors to keep in mind that while some children learn by hearing the information, others have to see it or do it. Districts can begin by using posters developed by the State Education Department that give information about safe crossings, behavior on the bus and danger zones. These



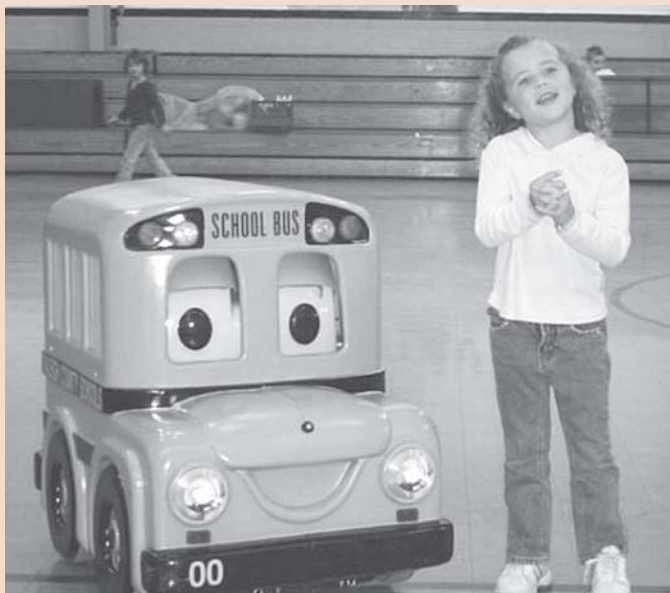
posters, Brockmann said, can help children see the overall concept you are discussing.

Young children respond well to humor. So for some lessons, Brockmann will ask a student to pretend to be a bus driver and a teacher to role-play being a disruptive child. After they perform a skit, and when the children are through giggling, he asks them to explain why the teacher's behavior was dangerous.

A simple demonstration by an adult pretending to get on the bus carrying too many items and tripping over untied shoelaces will be remembered much longer than telling children to limit what they carry on to the bus and to be dressed appropriately.

While many lessons can be learned in the classroom, it is important to reinforce the lessons by having students practice them on an actual school bus. For example, after pointing out school bus danger zones on a poster, take the children outside to walk around the bus. As each zone is pointed out, have the children shout "Danger Zone," and place a magnetic danger zone sign on the bus in the appropriate areas.

"When I'm teaching, I'll often 'accidentally' drop a pen in a danger



◀ Buster the Bus is a child-sized remote controlled robot that can move and talk. Goshen Central School District shares Buster, who has alter-egos as Freddy the Fire Engine and Pedro the Police Car, with a local fire station. The robot can cost up to \$15,000, Brockmann said. Splitting the cost with other local agencies can help make the investment affordable.

zone and reach under the bus to retrieve it. The children always yell out for me to stop," Brockmann said. "But it's my favorite pen, I'll say, asking them to explain why I shouldn't pick it up."

Brockmann and his team have created humorous skits with characters from movies such as "Shrek" and "The Wizard of Oz" to talk about safety rules and bullying. Another successful prop is Buster the Bus, a robotic child-sized bus that can move and talk to the children, demonstrating its yellow and red warning lights and flashing stop sign.

Educating older children

While Buster's message may appeal to elementary school students, middle school children are likely to roll their eyes. They are, however, old enough to understand that their actions can lead to serious consequences.

"Sometimes knowing that there is a reward for following the rules holds more weight than a possible punishment."

Brockmann suggests that drivers relate a story about a middle-school child who was hurt or killed in a bus accident - allowing the children to think about their own vulnerability.

He often gives the students a list of facts about fatalities, including: In New York, the average age of a child killed in a school bus-related fatality is 11. He then tells the children stories of how some middle-school children have been killed. These include:

- ▲ Two students were killed when they stuck their heads out of bus windows.
- ▲ A boy was killed when he played with the back emergency door and

fell out, hitting his head on the pavement.

- ▲ A girl was killed while she was standing behind a bus that was backing up.
- ▲ A girl was killed when the drawstring of her jacket caught on the handrail. The bus driver, who was distracted by other students, didn't realize that her jacket was caught in the door. He pulled away. She tried to run alongside the bus but fell and was crushed under the wheels.

After telling these sobering stories, Brockmann asks the students how the accidents could have been avoided.

"It is OK if you scare them a little," Brockmann said. "They will remember the message if they are scared." It is also OK to let them know they can

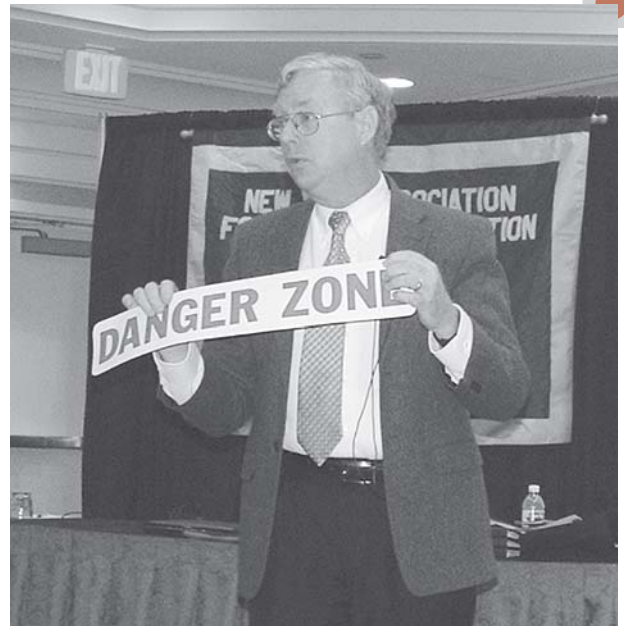
receive detention or suspension if they don't follow the rules.

Offer incentives

Teaching bus safety doesn't have to be all about discipline or fear; offering a reward can also help enforce good behavior.

Brockmann sponsors a "Bus of the Month" contest. The winner is the busload of students who best follow instructions and safety rules and who are respectful of the driver and other students. Occasionally a bus will win for showing the most improved behavior.

Winning students have their pictures printed in local newspapers, and each student is given a certificate and a




▲ Pete Brockmann, director of transportation for the Goshen Central School District, demonstrates props he uses during school bus safety programs to help children remember key safety messages. The magnetic "Danger Zone" signs are placed on a school bus as a visual demonstration of where children should not stand.

coupon for ice cream from a local store.

Older children may enjoy competitions and games such as Bus Safety Jeopardy. Compose a list of questions based on the core messages, and distribute them to the students.

Create a giant Jeopardy board (or a PowerPoint presentation) and borrow buzzers from the school's debate or academic team. Give the children a week to learn the answers, and ask each classroom to choose a team that will compete against other classes. The winning class receives a pizza party

"Sometimes knowing that there is a reward for following the rules holds more weight than a possible punishment," Brockmann said. "This isn't about following a set of rules and guidelines set forth by the state; this is about the most important thing of all, keeping our children safe." 

IN THE HOT SEAT

Dealing with angry, troubled or just plain crazy parents

It's 3:35 p.m., and the elementary bus runs are ending for the afternoon. As if on cue, the phone rings.

"Heads up," your receptionist calls out. "It's Mrs. Burns on line one, and she isn't happy."

Sighing, you reach for the phone. This isn't your first conversation with Mrs. Burns.

"Mr. Smith," she begins, with a tone you recognize only too well. "We have a problem."

You take a deep breath and try to relax so that the frustration doesn't sound in your voice.

"I'm sorry to hear that Mrs. Burns," you say. "How can I help you?"

"My son just came in the door, and he is very upset. Another boy roared at him on the bus," she says.

"Roared?"

"Yes, and I'm extremely concerned." Mrs. Burns says, her voice rising. "The other boy is assigned to the seat across from my son. I want that child moved."

Whether this is your first year in pupil transportation, or your 20th, you may think you have heard it all. From serious problems such as sexual harassment and bullying to children looking at each other funny, the calls from parents are a part of the job that can't be avoided.

What has changed in recent years, said Kathy Furneaux, executive director of the Syracuse-based Public Transportation Safety Institute, is the attitude of parents.

"Parents today are very different from 20 or even 10 or five years ago," Furneaux said. "They are less respect-

ful of authority, and they are increasingly more stressed and pulled by the pressures of society."

Today, not only do most moms and dads both work full-time jobs but when they come home it isn't to relax. Instead, they typically rush out the door to take kids to piano lessons, soccer practice enrichment classes or other activities.

Nationally, the average family sits down to eat together only two out of seven nights a week, according to John Rosemond, a family psychologist and author who coined the term "frantic family syndrome." This is down from six nights a week in the mid-1950s.

The bottom line, Rosemond said in his book "John Rosemond's Six-Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children," is that parents are exhausted, over-extended and increasingly disengaged from their child's daily activities, which in turn makes them feel guilty, fearful and angry.

Furneaux added that in today's society we often identify ourselves as consumers, and for many parents school is just another commodity that they pay for. Most parents, she said, expect to receive services that fulfill their needs and wants.

"I don't know of one transportation director who hasn't heard, 'I'm a taxpayer. I pay your salary,' as if that entitles them to be exempt from the rules others must follow," she said.

Because we can't turn back the clock to the 1950s, and because every person

Steps to problem solving

- S**eek the facts.
- O**verview possible sources of the problem.
- L**ist the most likely causes and verify.
- V**iew several solutions.
- E**stablish the best solution and develop a plan.
- D**eploy the plan and then evaluate it.

who works with children must also deal with parents, learning how to diffuse anger and build working relationships is an essential part of the job.

What makes parents angry?

- ▲ Changes without their input or notification.
- ▲ Managers who automatically defend drivers, policy or procedures without listening to what parents – or their children – have to say.
- ▲ People who say they will resolve an issue and then don't follow through.
- ▲ Labeling or stereotyping of either parents or their children.
- ▲ People who are condescending, rude or dishonest.
- ▲ Not being given credit for knowing their child.

Building a relationship

The first step in dealing with angry parents is to let them have their say.

"Just be quiet, and let them talk," Furneaux said. "We are a generation of communicators who have forgotten how to listen."



Identify who's calling

Parents who are angry...

- Feel we are retaliating against their child.
- Feel the school is not doing enough to prevent the problem.
- Feel their child will fall through the cracks and no one cares.
- Feel we want them to settle for second-class service.

Parents who are troubled...

- Experience pervasive and long-standing worry.
- Feel uneasy, have misgivings and apprehension.
- Have concerns that are open-ended and hard for them to express.
- Connect to core values, which may involve politics, religion and/or race.

Parents who are just plain crazy...

- Have lives that center around school.
- Are abusive sometimes with children as well as school employees.
- May have addictions or could be dysfunctional or mentally ill.
- Are complainers, troublemakers and whiners.

(Source: PTSI)

After you have heard them out, let them know immediately that you are committed to working out a mutually acceptable solution. Defuse their anger by validating that they have a right to be upset and that your job is to fix any problems.

"The worst thing that you can do is to have an attitude back," Furneaux said, comparing a two-way conversation to a helium balloon. If both people are filling the balloon with rhetoric and anger, it just keeps getting bigger and bigger. But if one person is acting as the release valve, gradually the pressure is dissipated and soon the balloon is deflated — just like the parent's anger.

Being disrespectful is not only unprofessional, but it adds time and obstacles to solving the problem.

"If you respond calmly, you get a reputation as being a reasonable, fair professional," Furneaux said. "The next time they have a problem and call you, they will remember that you treated them fairly the last time."

Getting to a solution

After the parent has had his or her say, it is time to start asking questions to be sure you understand the problem. Asking questions also allows the parent an opportunity to provide additional information they may not have told you initially.

During this process, you begin to break the main issues down so you can handle them one at a time. Most importantly, Furneaux said, be open-minded. Don't begin to address the problem assuming you already know the answer.

"You never know what information you will learn," said Furneaux, who has


worked in pupil transportation for the past 25 years.

She recalled an incident that happened when she was a transportation supervisor. A parent called to complain that her child was continually missing the bus because the driver wasn't waiting the entire one minute he was supposed to wait before leaving the bus stop.

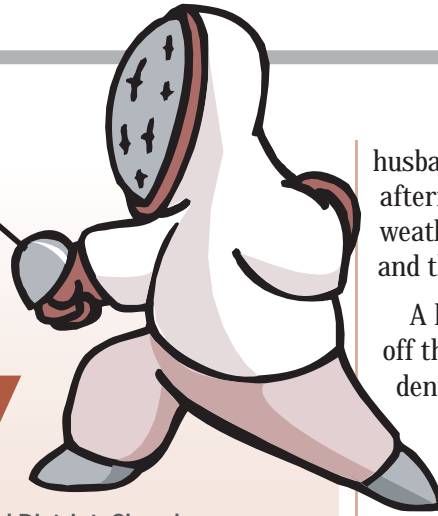
In the process of asking questions, the parent told Furneaux that the driver was too busy drinking his coffee and listening to his radio headset to pay attention at the stops. Although the parent didn't realize it, she had just informed Furneaux of a driver infraction — drivers were not allowed to drink coffee or wear headsets — that wouldn't have been discovered without the questions.

When each side is clear on what the problem is, the next step is to determine a solution. Often the problem cannot be resolved while you are both on the phone. If that is the case, promise the parent you will look into the matter and call him or her back within 24 hours.

"Even if you can't solve the problem within that time frame, it is important to call and let them know you are still working on the issue," Furneaux said. Once the problem has been resolved, there is one final step that is often neglected — the follow-up. Take the time to call the parent back a week later to make sure the solution is working.

"It is very likely that at some point in the future you will need to deal with that parent again," Furneaux said. "They won't forget that you took the time to make sure they were satisfied. As I see it, we can do our job with the parent working against us, or we can do it with them working with us, but either way we are going to have to do it." 

We must FIGHT complacency



By Cynthia Jurewicz

Jurewicz is a SBDI with the Bethlehem Central School District. She also serves as a Safely Speaking Newsletter board member.

Complacency on the job – we all face it at one point or another. We get comfortable with our everyday tasks, perhaps because so much of what we do can be repetitious.

Think about the last time you went somewhere in your car. How many miles went by before you began to wonder, “Where are we?” or “How far have we gone?” The miles just slip away and our minds go somewhere else.

As professional school bus drivers we do the same tasks day after day. We pick up kids, take them to school and then we take them home again. It is the same kids and the same route day after day.

We get comfortable. After a while we can do our jobs without much concentration or even much thought. If this happens to you – look out, because complacency can follow.

We are entrusted with the most precious cargo there is – children. You cannot replace a child. This is the very reason that we must constantly fight against complacency.

Anyone that transports children knows there are many responsibilities that come with the title of school bus driver. We must manage student behavior while driving, maneuver a large bus around residential areas and

congested streets, obey traffic laws and pick up and drop off children who can sometimes be extremely unpredictable.

Even when we do everything exactly right, others may not and tragedy can occur.

I’d like to share two recent incidents that bring this point home.

My husband is a full time school bus driver, as well as a 19-A examiner. In February he was leaving the high school with a busload of students. He was making a left turn out of the high school parking lot onto the main road.

He looked left, right and left again– there was no traffic coming. He was just about to pull out when, from the corner of his eye, he saw a flicker of movement outside of the bus. Instinct made him stop. From the right a high school student riding a skateboard came flying across the sidewalk in front of the bus. Even the high school students on the bus were shocked by the student’s actions.

The second situation happened within a week of the first and it left my

husband shaking. He was driving an afternoon elementary route. The weather was very warm for February and the sun was shining.

A kindergartner and his brother got off the bus with several other students. The kindergartner’s mother was waiting on the other side of the street for both boys.

After exiting the bus the students looked at my husband and waited for the crossing signal. He gave them the signal and the boys crossed over the roadway to their waiting mother. My husband checked all mirrors and accounted for all the students who had exited the bus before he released the parking brake.

He was ready to pull away when he heard the older brother call out the younger brother’s name. My husband stopped instantly. It was a good thing he did, because the kindergartner had run back across the road in front of the bus – so close he could touch the bumper.

Because of the warm weather the boy had removed his jacket and had left it on the bus – he was running back to retrieve it.

My husband tried to explain to the boy how dangerous it was to run in front of

the bus and while the child listened, he had a look on his face that said, “I don’t understand what all the fuss is about.”

My husband followed procedure, there was an adult who met the kindergartner and **still** the student was able to run back across the street in front of a bus that was preparing to move.

Even when we do everything exactly right, others may not and tragedy can occur.

The child had been taught safe crossing procedures. The Bethlehem Central School district has a pre-school program to educate both parents and students about school bus safety. The program is held every August, just before the start of school.

In September the kindergartner, along with all district students, had been through a school bus drill. Still the message did not get through to this student.

The boy was lucky that day – so was my husband.

So, how do we fight against complacency, both as supervisors and as bus drivers?


As drivers we have to mentally challenge ourselves everyday to stay alert. We need to share stories like the two above and remember that this could happen to each of us any day we are on the job. We must remember to treat each bus stop with caution and attention.

As trainers and supervisors, we need to make our training messages memorable so our drivers know that any day something could go wrong.

In the Bethlehem Central School district we are trying different ideas and methods to get drivers' attention.

We are making posters with safety tips and placing them where they can be seen everyday.

Our refresher classes involve more participation from drivers and we talk to them in smaller groups. We are developing hands-on practical applications of safety techniques that each of us are supposed to follow everyday.

We can't afford to be complacent. Not when we drive. Not when we train. Many young lives are depending on us. 

DOT, Leonard Bus Sales offer expertise to train school bus mechanics

Are we doing enough for our mechanics? This question always receives mixed answers when asked of transportation directors across the state.

On Dec. 28, the Warwick school transportation department hosted a training session for 86 mechanics from Orange, Rockland, Sullivan, Dutchess and Westchester counties. The session was conducted by professionals from Leonard Bus Sales and the state Department of Transportation (DOT).

During the presentation, Joe Scesny of DOT offered his insight into what makes an effective fleet maintenance program, and DOT inspectors shared common defects found during maintenance inspections. The mechanics in attendance found these segments very helpful.

DOT officials inspect more than 50,000 school buses in a variety of different settings every year, so it was helpful for people in the field to know that everyone is working together for the safety of students across the state.

The presentation also included a discussion on how bus shops relate to the success of maintenance programs. Scesny compared a bus shop to an operating room—but he had no takers when he offered to perform surgery.

Joe Doyle of Leonard Bus Sales gave the mechanics technical advice to help them repair multiplex electrical systems on buses. Doyle shared his knowledge on troubleshooting the systems and ways to repair problems by analyzing codes on laptop computers.

During lunch, mechanics discussed problems they have experienced in their own operations with DOT inspectors, and the day concluded with a question and answer session.

Anyone interested in hosting a similar program should contact Leonard Bus Sales or Joe Scesny at DOT. Both organizations have the commitment to the industry and would be happy to hear from you.

Information provided by Robert Zeller, director of transportation, Warwick Valley Central School District

Where should the bus stop? continued from page 3

Thus, it is essential that you establish a relationship with school administrators before problems arise. Explain how you evaluate and select bus stops. If administrators understand the rationale, and know that you have a process in place, they will be less likely to question your decisions.

It is important to keep an open line of communication with school officials — don't let them be caught unaware. Inform them about an issue that is brewing before the parent calls them.

When talking to administrators, "Don't forget to use the 'S' word – safety," Ellis said. If need be, you can enforce your safety message by gathering second opinions from other professionals such as law enforcement, the local department of transportation, or if necessary, an outside consultant.

"Safety is the first consideration," Ellis said. "Everything else is secondary." 

NYAPT Winter Conference continued from page 1

Services, shared his best tips and advice for dealing with the reams of paperwork that transportation officials are required to prepare, submit and retain (see story on page 4).

Special Needs Issues

Dona Beauchea, an M.I. and trainer for the Baldwinsville Central School District, talked about the challenges of transporting students with special needs and the state and federal rules that must be followed to ensure their safety and comfort.

Safety Program Requirements

Peter Brockmann, transportation director for the Goshen Central School District, shared his successes and ideas on how to make mandatory safety education programs memorable for children of all ages (see story on page 6).

Creating safe Bus Stops


Jim Ellis, from the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute, gave an overview of the requirements and best practices for bus stop selection (see story on page 2).

One well-attended event was the table topics dinner in which participants discussed by table such topics as homeless students and NYAPT legislative advocacy, to best practices in school bus replacement and new rules regarding fuel requirements.

“Our presenters were very successful in delivering the message on the fundamentals. They stayed focused and delivered extremely relevant information,” said NYAPT Executive Director Peter Manella. “The people at the conference told me they enjoyed the workshop because it was all



▲ Paul Overbaugh, transportation supervisor for Greenville Central School District, left, leads a dinner conversation about working with middle school students during the NYAPT 2006 Winter Workshop.

about the business and that we need to stay focused on the fundamentals. They came to learn about best practices and new procedures, and they told us it was completely worthwhile.” 

Safely Speaking is a bimonthly newsletter for School Bus Driver Instructors published by the New York State Education Department

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