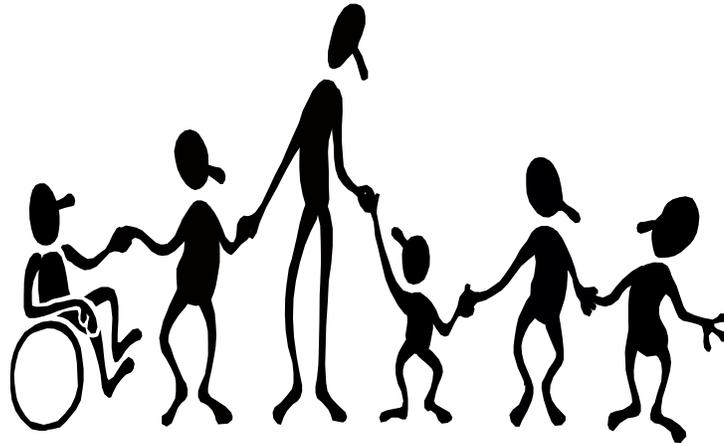


# Beginning School Bus Driver Curriculum



## **Unit VIII**

# **Special Education**

Revised 06-2007  
Revised 10-2013 (Instructional Content)

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## **UNIT VIII Special Education Instructional Content**

The driver will be provided instruction with the following concepts:

- How to communicate important information to special education pupils.
- How to handle behavior problems with special education pupils.
- How to handle health problems with special education pupils.
- When and how special education pupils should be evacuated from a school bus.
- The use and importance of the medical information card.
- The basic concepts of Michigan disability laws and basic interventions for dealing with each.
- The basic concepts of securing a wheelchair to the school bus.
- The basic concepts and importance of Child Safety Restraint Systems.

## **Introduction to Transporting Students with Disabilities**

Before 1975 some children with disabilities did not attend schools. Services varied greatly and quality of service was not a major concern. Now we can easily observe how P.L. 94-142 the education for All Disabled Children Act of 1975 changed education forever. Access to public education became a right. Educational programming must now be in response to the needs of the student and controlled and monitored by a team. Placement in the least restrictive environment is a legal mandate. Related (transportation) Services are a necessary part of the pupil's educational plan.

State and federal civil rights require reasonable accommodation for pupils who are disabled. Both Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Public Act 121 of 1990, the Michigan Handicappers Civil Rights Bill, require school districts to transport pupils in wheelchairs where necessary for them to benefit from public education. Public law 94-142 enumerates services that must be provided by states as a condition for receiving federal education funds.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-476) Part B of this law renamed the Education for ALL Handicapped Children Act (EHA) as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It further changed all previous references from "handicapped children" to "children with disabilities." IDEA was updated again in October 2006 under the IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act), incorporating language about No Child Left Behind regulations.

All students identified as disabled are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. An Individualized Educational Planning Team (I.E.P.T.) should always be consulted to determine eligibility based on recommendations from the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET).

## **School Bus Transportation and Disabled Students**

Every disabled student is eligible for transportation services as needed to make certain their educational program requirements are met. Transportation personnel must develop methods and procedures for transporting disabled children safely. School bus transportation for students with disabilities mandates that the driver and assistant be knowledgeable about the specific needs of each student. Many students will require special physical or behavioral management interventions.

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

## **Inclusion and the School Bus**

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

What does inclusion look like on the school bus? It is nearly the same as in the classroom. A decision may be made to have a disabled student ride the regular bus. They may ride the regular bus from a neighborhood stop to school.

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

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

## **Disability Categories of Michigan**

The State of Michigan has defined 12 disability areas that entitle a student to special education programs and services. These 12 disabling conditions are:

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

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

We really do not know why a student has a cognitive impairment in most cases. Students that are cognitively impaired are not going to make decisions regarding their safety, health and general well being that someone with normal cognitive abilities would.

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

Students who are diagnosed with mild or moderate cognitive impairments have higher mental abilities. These students can express themselves and are able to make some decisions regarding their health and safety. Possible interventions would be simple clear directions as to what you want them to do. The student that is mildly mentally impaired has the highest ability of the students that are in the cognitively impaired range.

**Emotionally Impaired** students that are diagnosed have difficulty in making good decisions regarding their behavior. These students have average or above average intelligence, but are unable, as a result of their emotional impairment to benefit from regular instruction. These students may be impulsive, may not respond in a predictable way to directions, and may be withdrawn.

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

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

Possible interventions would be a "personalized" set of written instructions and expectations for the bus. Position the student so they could see your face in the rear view (interior) mirror. If they are able to do that, they could pick up if there was something being said to the group. These students often have poor expressive speech and may be hard to understand. The ability to face the student or use of sign language during communication will enhance needed communications.

**Visually Impaired** students are in two categories, one group has low vision while the other group has no vision. These students may be using a mobility aide of some type; it may be a cane, leader dog, or a person providing the necessary assistance enabling them to access the bus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Autism Spectrum Disorder** students have disturbances in the areas of communication, relating to other people and possible disturbances in intelligence. Some of these students have behaviors that interfere with their health and safety. Students with Autism that function in the lower ability range need constant supervision. These students may be very impulsive and will not make a good decision regarding their health and safety. Many persons with Autism are nonverbal and have no established communication system. Sudden changes in routine are not tolerated well by many students in this group.

Possible interventions may include communicating with a speech therapist and/or an autism teacher consultant regarding a visual/picture system to better communicate with the student.

This is just a brief overview of some of the characteristics that are found in the identified disabilities mentioned in the text above. If you feel that an intervention needs to be established, consult the program staff and have them work on this procedure with you. Please keep in mind that the students described in the text above have the same feelings that we do, they may not display their feelings in the same manner that we do, but they are entitled to respect and dignity.

### **Suggested Guidelines for School Bus Staff**

#### **General Guidelines for All Drivers and Aides Transporting Disabled Students:**

You as a driver/attendant have a unique opportunity to provide a positive influence on the lives of disabled students as they are being transported. Many basic tasks of meeting personal care needs, communicating and socializing with others, and physically moving from one location to another can be major accomplishments for these students. Providing an atmosphere of friendly assistance and responding to their individual needs, you become an important link in their efforts to reach greater independence.

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

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

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

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

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

Get to know your students; some special education students may not be left unattended.

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

Give assistance as needed to each child as they board the bus. Only give specific assistance as required. Some students need to be able to help themselves as much as possible.

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

You should always feel free to communicate to the supervisor specific incidents, attitudes, etc., which may be significant in managing the behavior of the student.

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

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

From time to time, parents and/or guardians request that drivers/attendants transport medicine to the school for them. We expect to cooperate in transportation of medicine. When medicine is delivered to the school or home, it must be signed for by someone at the school or home location. The following form could be used.

**SAMPLE**

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

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

You should be aware of the problems of each of the children who ride your bus. Most medical and physical problems are on file and you should feel free to check with the transportation office and teachers to secure the information you need.

### **Behavioral Problems and Safety**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Communication**

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

### **Driver Actions:**

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

### **Hearing Impaired:**

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

### **Visually Impaired:**

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

### **Cognitively Impaired:**

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

## **Cooperative Discipline**

### **Helping Students Feel Capable**

#### **Make mistakes “okay”**

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

#### **Build confidence**

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

#### **Make learning tangible**

- I can
- Accomplishments
- Checklist of skills

#### **Recognize achievement**

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

#### **Acceptance**

- Accept sincerely and Unconditionally
- Accept students’ personal style

### **Attention**

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

### **Affirmation**

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

### **Appreciation**

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

### **Affection**

- Show affection when things go badly.
- Show kindness.
- Show friendship.

## **Helping Students Contribute**

### **Encourage student's contributions to the bus**

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

### **Encourage students to help other students**

- Cooperative learning
- Peer helping
- Peer recognition

## **Another Viewpoint of Student Misbehavior**

We All Have to Feel Important.

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

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

Those students might have a message in their head that says,  
“I’m only important when ... everyone is noticing me.

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

A student operating from this perspective has an Attention Goal.

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

Those students might have a message in their head that says,  
“I’m only important when ... I’m in charge.

...I prove you can’t make me.  
...I’m the boss.”

A student operating from this perspective has a Power Goal.

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

Those students might have a message in their head that says,  
“I’m only important when ... I’m getting even.

...I’m hurting others as I feel hurt.  
...I’m fixing my hurt by getting you.”

A student operating from this perspective has a Revenge Goal.

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

Those students might have a message in their head that says,  
“I’m only important when ... I’m being the best failure.

...I’m proving I can’t do it.”

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

**The New Student Rider and Their Disability**

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

**Sample Transportation Riding Forms (that may be used):**

**SAMPLE**

<b>SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION REQUEST FORM</b>			
Please print or type			
Name: _____	Student #: _____		
Last	First	MI	
Home Address: _____	Home Phone: _____		
Street			
_____	D.O.B. _____		
City	State	Zip	
		Height: _____	Weight: _____
<hr/>			
<b>PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION</b>			
Parent/Guardian Name: _____			
Address: _____	Home Phone: _____		
Street			
_____	Work Phone: _____		
City	State	Zip	
<hr/>			
<b>EMERGENCY CONTACT</b>			
Parent/Guardian Name: _____		Relationship: _____	
Address: _____	Home Phone: _____		
Street			
_____	Work Phone: _____		
City	State	Zip	
<hr/>			
<b>SCHOOL INFORMATION</b>			
Home School: _____	S/E School: _____	Program Code: _____	
Grade: _____	Teacher: _____	Teacher Phone: _____	

## SAMPLE

### MEDICAL INFORMATION

Please check any of the following that apply:

- |   |                                     |   |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seizures                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetic   | <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing Impaired | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually Impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respiratory Problem            | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Verbal | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Ambulatory   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other – Please Describe: _____ |                                     |   |  |

Medication Taken:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Dosage \_\_\_\_\_ Times Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Dosage \_\_\_\_\_ Times Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Dosage \_\_\_\_\_ Times Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Wheelchair?     Yes     No    Type/Brand: \_\_\_\_\_

Physician: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Instructions for attending physician:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leg Elevations | <input type="checkbox"/> Brace                | <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing by mouth  | <input type="checkbox"/> Colostomy     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crutches       | <input type="checkbox"/> Drools               | <input type="checkbox"/> May require snack | <input type="checkbox"/> Vesicotomy or |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sling          | <input type="checkbox"/> Airway difficulty    | <input type="checkbox"/> Elimination needs | Ureterostomy                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Helmet         | <input type="checkbox"/> Oxygen               | <input type="checkbox"/> Gastrostomy       | <input type="checkbox"/> Diaper        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cane           | <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing assistance |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Harness       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glasses        | <input type="checkbox"/> Bleeder              |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing aid    |   |  |  |

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**SAMPLE**

**AUTHORIZATION FOR TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal/Program Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Transportation Dept. Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**AUTHORIZATION FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT**

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

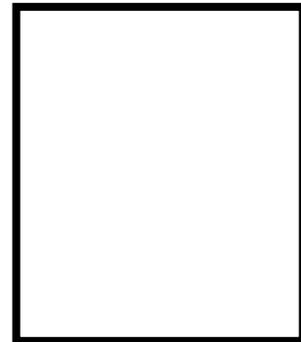
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

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

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



Student Photo

## **Evacuating the Special Education Bus**

Evacuating a bus with special education pupils requires special knowledge and techniques. Drivers need to know and practice these techniques so they are prepared if an emergency should occur.

Evacuating the bus:

- Know when. Be able to locate and use emergency equipment.
- Know your pupils. Who would be most stable in a crisis and most able to help?
- Know your own response. Remain calm.
- Practice bus evacuation drills.
- If bus evacuation is needed, have pupils go to a driver designated location at least 100 feet from bus and sit down.
- Visually impaired pupils need clear verbal instructions and a helping hand.
- Hearing impaired pupils should be taught the basic signs for emergency information.
- Students with orthopedic impairments may need to be carried.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to practice an evacuation drill on a special education bus. It is important that you develop a plan for evacuation that should include emergency information regarding each student. The next few pages will give some guidance for this project.

## **Evacuation**

It is certainly hoped that you will never have to evacuate special needs persons from your vehicle. However, the following will serve as guidelines should this become necessary.

- Know *when* you should evacuate.
  - Check with your supervisor.
  - What are your local policy guidelines?
  - At what point in any given emergency or circumstances should you decide to evacuate?
- Know where the vehicle's emergency equipment is located and learn how to use it.
  - Belt cutter – Know where this is located and practice using this on scrap belts to make certain you can use this successfully. Cuts should be made at a 45° angle!
- Know your passengers – who would be most stable in a crisis and most able to help.
- Know your own response to a given situation and above all remain calm. Use a low, strong slow speaking voice.
- If you do evacuate, have the passenger removed to a location at least 100 feet from the vehicle and sit down.
  - Visually impaired children need clear verbal instructions and a helping hand.
  - Hearing impaired children should be taught the basic signs for emergency information.
  - Orthopedically impaired children may need to be carried.

### **Example Emergency Evacuation Procedures**

1. Preparation
  - a. Mental
  - b. Verbal, with bus aide/paraprofessional
  - c. Written
2. Access student information
  - a. Emergency information form
    - Disabling conditions
    - Medical conditions
    - Verbal or non-verbal
  - b. Seek additional details from parent/guardian/teacher
3. Familiarize self with assistive devices for each student
  - a. Lap belts
  - b. Type of safety vest (harness)
  - c. Trays
  - d. Leg braces/crutches

4. Evaluate student and equipment individually in terms of quick removal from vehicle
  - a. Size (weight/height/type of equipment)
  - b. Student needs (ambulatory but needs assistance, can assist in emergency situation, needs monitoring, etc.)
  - c. Physical impairments/weaknesses
5. Evaluate seating positions of students
  - a. Proximity to emergency exits
  - b. Location of car seats and students using safety vests, lap belts, etc.
6. Once an evacuation plan is determined, commit it to paper. Always update this plan whenever pupil changes occur.
7. It is important that each Transportation Department have clear and concise expectations for drivers/paraprofessionals if and when an emergency evacuation may occur. Some considerations include:
  - a. Emergency evacuation techniques with hands on practice three (3) times per year as recommended by the Michigan Department of Education.
  - b. Many districts publish driver's handbooks which will contain specific information regarding special/regular education evacuation policies and procedures.
    - Make certain to review and understand departmental policies.
    - If the District does not practice special education evacuation drills, plan for emergency evacuations through discussions, mock practices with other drivers, and record evacuation plans in written form.
    - Share planned evacuation scenarios with substitute drivers.
    - Always update emergency evacuation plans as student population changes.
8. Special and Regular Education training sessions are valuable. Any time a District or county-wide training session is arranged, drivers/paraprofessionals should be encouraged to attend. These may include wheelchair lift operations, wheelchair tiedowns, evacuation scenarios, moving and lifting students, proper radio use, medical emergencies, accident reporting, and many, many more subjects.
9. Drivers/paraprofessionals may want to plan for and simulate various emergency evacuation scenarios to assist them in their ability to determine:
  - a. When evacuation is the best, most appropriate decision, or
  - b. When the decision to remain on the bus is the right assessment for the safety of the students.

## **Student Disabilities and Safe Transportation**

Special Education transportation may include students with seizure disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Down's Syndrome, cerebral palsy, mental and physical disorders, and others.

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

## **Transporting Wheelchairs and Equipment**

### **Suggested Guidelines for Handling Wheelchairs**

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

- **The Disabled Student**
  - What disability or disabilities does your student possess?
    - A student diagnosis is important to the transportation staff to assist the driver and team in the student's proper care. For instance, if a student suffers from paraplegia (paralyzed from the waist down), this may present a student who is mentally capable of understanding and communicating.
    - It is important to know what medications a student must take. The most important reason is the ability to share such information with emergency personnel IF the student ever requires such services.
    - Other considerations
      1. Does the student have a seizure disorder, medication or food allergies?
      2. Is your student extremely fragile? This might mean bones break very easily or possibly, the student is very fragile to weather changes and environmental conditions.

- What are the student's mental and physical capabilities?
  - Does the student understand and communicate
    1. Completely, moderately, very little
  - Can the student transfer independently from a wheelchair to a bus seat?
    1. If the disabled student is able to move himself/herself out of the wheelchair into a regular seat, then the pupil should be allowed to do so. There are wheelchair-bound students who have sufficient strength to maintain body posture in a regular seat.
    2. Transferred students may be safer in the confines of a bus seat versus the wheelchair. Students should always be evaluated by appropriate personnel, such as a Physical and/or Occupational Therapist.
  - Can this student walk up and down bus steps?
    1. School personnel shall not physically remove students from their wheelchairs except in the case of an emergency. Lifting pupils in and out of wheelchairs to place them on the regular bus seat may result in physical harm to the physically fragile person, especially those who have wheelchairs specially constructed to accommodate their condition.
- **The Vehicle**
  - Due to their structure and large size, school buses are relatively safe
  - Statistically, frontal impacts cause the highest percentage of fatalities in motor-vehicle accidents
  - Occupants should be oriented in a forward-facing position in order to address this issue
  - It is recommended that larger school buses are safer than the mini buses when transporting wheelchair students
- **The Wheelchair**
  - There are a variety of styles and makes of wheelchairs. Recently wheelchair manufacturers have come together to manufacture safer, more transportable wheelchairs. These:
    - Provide safer transportation
    - Provide easier and faster securement
    - Provide labeling stating the transportable capabilities of the chair including:
      1. crash-worthiness
      2. clearly marked tiedown sites marked by the manufacturer

- Some wheelchair scooters, racing or recreational chairs, stroller type chairs and other similar devices may not be transported on the school bus. Chairs that are made of weak or questionable materials should not be transported. A wheelchair should be capable of sustaining a minimum crash at 30-mph and 20-Gs test. Wheelchairs for school transportation shall be limited in maximum size to 30” wide and 53” long and weigh no more than 200 pounds.
- It should be understood that there may be some chairs that cannot be transported safely due to the construction of the chair. The wheel components of most chairs are their weakest part.
- A team representing the safe transportation of each pupil being transported in a wheelchair should be consulted to make certain the child’s wheelchair is in good working condition, is transportable, and has clearly marked anchor sites. A problem-solving team should consist of those who are knowledgeable in transportation safety and wheelchair configurations. The team may include:
  - Transportation supervisor
  - Mechanic
  - Physical and/or Occupational Therapist
  - Bus driver/paraprofessional
  - Parent(s)
  - Teachers
  - Nurse
  - Specialist in Transportation Research and Safety
- Safe Wheelchair Transportation Recommendations:
  - Transfer student to vehicle or child safety seat if feasible.
  - Orient wheelchairs facing forward.
  - Remove/secure add-on equipment and trays.
  - Consult the wheelchair manufacturer regarding structural alterations.
  - Provide clear space around secured wheelchair and use padding when appropriate for the safety of the passenger.
- Securement of Wheelchairs on the School Bus

All drivers/aides need appropriate training in the securement of wheelchairs which includes matching tiedowns, occupant restraints, and application of the entire system.

- Appropriate wheelchair securement sites, four-point tiedowns, and a three-point occupant restraint system are essential in transporting wheelchair students safely.
- The wheelchair must be effectively secured so that it does not move significantly during an impact.

- Wheelchairs should be secured with a properly applied, dynamically-tested four-point system.
- The wheelchair must be secured independently from the occupant in order to avoid loading the weight of the wheelchair onto the occupant.

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

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

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

○ **Terminology Related to Wheelchairs:**

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

• **Electric Wheelchairs**

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

- **Wheelchair Lifts**

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

### **Other Supportive Equipment**

- There are support devices that may be added to particular students’ stability and/or safety reasons. These are appropriately designed and placed in use by physicians, occupational and physical therapists.
- The variety of support devices may include several different types of postural support devices.
- When a **lap belt** is used for postural control, these are not crashworthy. *The lap belt should cross the pelvis and not the abdomen (soft tissue).*
- If a disabled student uses a tray as an attachment to a wheelchair, the **wheelchair tray should be removed during transit due to the risk of soft tissue damage upon impact**. There are other options during the student’s transportation ride. The transportation team should be consulted case by case.

### **Securing Equipment during Transportation:**

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

## **Responsibility of the School District**

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

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

## **Responsibility of Parent/Guardian**

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

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

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

## **Non-Wheelchair Assisting Devices**

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

## **Pupils Unable to Use Bus Steps**

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

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

## **Authority to Transport Mobile Devices**

Schools should only transport mobile devices that comply with this guideline and are required by the Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) team and approved by the wheelchair committee.

## **Suggested Guidelines for Regular Transportation of Disabled Students**

The following guidelines shall apply whenever there is a need for a disabled student needs to be transported on a general education bus. They will apply whether the student's disability is short term or long term.

1. The district has an obligation to provide transportation that is appropriate to any student's educational needs.
2. The driver is to give whatever assistance the student needs once the student is at the door of the bus. The driver is not to leave the immediate area of the school bus. Driving the bus and caring for the students are both integral parts of a bus driver's job. That care extends from each individual to and including the collective group of students who ride the bus.
3. A parent is responsible to bring the child to the entry door of the bus and to meet the child at the entry door on the return route. The parent is not responsible for helping within the confines of the school bus. They may assist on a voluntary basis.
4. Safe lifting techniques are the responsibility of the school nurse and/or physical therapist. Drivers should be trained by those professional staff members in the proper way to assist the student. In the case of a medical stop for general education student, the school nurse is responsible as designated by Board Policy. In the case of a Special Education student who rides a regular bus, the professional designing the I.E.P. team document are responsible.
5. An aide may be used for a medical stop, if approved. If it is a Special Education stop, the I.E.P. team will dictate the need for an aide.
6. In the event a student develops a documented history of medical or behavior problems the Pupil Transportation Department may request an I.E.P. team meeting. Special education students are transported on regular education buses whenever possible.
7. Training, when needed, may be limited to the staff regularly involved with the student. Special written instructions will be provided for use by substitute drivers.

## **Child Safety Restraint Systems**

- Child safety restraints (CSR) must:
  - Meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS, No. 213)
  - Fit properly into the confines of the school bus seat
  - Be properly anchored to the school bus seat by the seat belt
  - Not be placed next to an emergency exit
  
- NHTSA recommends that all pre-school children be transported in a CSS when on a school bus.
  
- The MDE also recommends that all pre-school children be transported in a CSS when on a school bus.
  - Most states exempt young children on school buses from the requirement to be secured in a CSS, however
  - Federal tests show that the SAFEST way to transport pre-school children is in CSS devices.
  
- Most large school buses do not have seat belts. Seat belts cannot be added to accommodate a car seat.
  - The optional securement system that can be used is a safety vest/cam wrap system.
  
- Safety Vests
  - May be used on school buses with the newer FMVSS 210 seat frames or the older bus seats
  - May be used with a lap belt on reinforced seat frames
  - ALWAYS zipped in the back; always secured at the hips and shoulders
  - Must fit properly within the confines of the school bus seat
  - Must be properly anchored to the bus seat
  
- ALL Child Safety Restraint Systems (CSRS) are permitted seat after seat on the bus.
  
- When transporting both secured and unsecured passengers, unsecured passengers cannot sit directly in back of a student who is in a CSRS.
  - Dynamic testing has proven that an unsecured student during an impact may cause harm to the student who is secured in the seat directly in front of such a student.

## **Maintenance, Disposal, and Storage of Equipment**

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

- Equipment such as car seats, safety vests and cam wraps, wheelchair tiedowns have expiration dates.
  - The equipment should have appropriate labeling which should always be visible on the particular item. The labeling will include the date it was manufactured as well as its life span.
- Disposal of items should be handled with care.
  - Strapping should be cut off
  - Car seats should be marked with permanent marker stating that this item is no longer safe and is being disposed
    - Many of these items can be recycled
- Storage of Equipment
  - Storage is important to keep equipment like safety vests, cam wraps, and car seats clean and in good working order.
  - Keeping the equipment organized also will make certain that equipment is properly matched. Manufactured items, like tiedown equipment, should never be mixed and matched randomly.
- It is important that drivers and aides check equipment often for things like:
  - Broken parts
  - Frayed belts
  - Etc.
- All of the above items should be on a regular cleaning schedule. Our students are placed in safety vests, car seats, etc., several times during the day. It is extremely important that such items are kept as clean as possible.
  - Cleaning can be accomplished with a mild soap and water solution with bleach; to meet universal precautions, use one part of bleach to five parts of water.

## **SUMMARY**

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

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

## **Resources Available for More Information**

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