

# UNIT VI

## SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION

State and Federal governments have made a commitment to provide free and appropriate education for all students. For some students meeting this commitment requires special transportation. The following guidelines shall apply when needs of the student could possibly require special attention / transportation.

Special transportation is defined as any service provided for a student on a special education bus or attending a special school or program. In addition to students assigned to specialized bus services there will be students with special needs who are mainstreamed on a regular education bus.

For the purposes of this unit the term “drivers” refers to “drivers of special transportation buses.” For drivers of special education students mainstreamed on a regular bus it is important to understand that there will be a variety of students with differing needs on your bus. All students need to be treated equitably and fairly.

For the purpose of the unit the term “aide” refers to adult assistant that is present on the bus to assist students while on the bus. Aides may also be known as paraprofessionals, bus monitors, and bus assistants.

### **6.1 SEVEN BASICS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION**

- A. The driver needs to know that the route is a special education route – which means that it is different than other school bus routes. All drivers need to be aware that there is the potential for special needs students on any bus.
- B. The driver needs to know that the students on any route may require special handling.
- C. The driver needs specific information about the student’s disabilities.
- D. The driver needs to know that these students may require special equipment and be aware of how to handle and properly secure this equipment on the school bus.
- E. The driver needs to know what constitutes an emergency situation for each student on this route and must be aware of what to do and who to contact in the event of an emergency situation or crash.
- F. The driver also needs a contact person (either within the company or the school district) for questions or problems related to the students assigned to their bus.
- G. The driver should have an understanding and maintain sensitivity to all students and their needs. Remember you are transporting a “student who uses a wheelchair” not a “wheelchair.”

### **6.2 INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (I.E.P.) & LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)**

The Individual Education Program (I.E.P.) is a written document identifying the specially designed instructional program and related services, including transportation (if it is necessary), to meet the unique needs of the student with disabilities. The I.E.P. governs all of the services that are to be provided for the student in order to receive an appropriate education. The overriding rule is that the determination of an appropriate education for a specific student must be made on an individual basis.

Another consideration when writing an I.E.P. is the determination of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) based on the student's abilities. LRE means, to the maximum extent appropriate, that students with disabilities, including students in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with students who are not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a student is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. This same definition extends to determining the appropriate means of transportation to and from educational programs. The I.E.P. must take into consideration that each student with a disability participates with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of that student.

LRE means that when planning for appropriate transportation the I.E.P. team should start with the presumption that a student with a disability will likely ride regular transportation with non-disabled peers if such transportation arrangement can be implemented for that student and is appropriate to meet that student's educational needs. I.E.P. teams should only consider a more restrictive transportation arrangement if regular transportation, with supplemental aids and services, is not appropriate for that particular student. The determination of LRE is made by the I.E.P. team which should include a representative from the transportation department if transportation is identified as a related service.

Types of disabilities:

- a. Autism
- b. Blind-Visually Impaired
- c. Deaf-Blind
- d. Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- e. Developmental Cognitive Disabilities
- f. Developmental Delayed
- g. Emotional or Behavioral Disorders
- h. Other Health Disabilities
- i. Physically Impaired
- j. Specific Learning Disabilities
- k. Speech or Language Impairment
- l. Traumatic Brain Injury

Also, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (usually referred to as Section 504) states:

#### PUBLIC LAW 93-112

Section 504 of Public Law 93-112, passed by Congress as part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, states that:

No otherwise qualified individual in the United States...shall solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

According to Section 504 regulations, "free" education means the provision of education and related services without cost to disabled persons or guardians, except where such costs are imposed on all others.

Section 504 protects all students with handicaps, defined as those having any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (including learning). Examples of potential 504 handicapping conditions would include:

1. Communicable disease (HIV, Tuberculosis)
2. Medical conditions (asthma, allergies, diabetes, heart disease)
3. Temporary medical conditions due to illness or accident
4. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD, ADHD)
5. Behavior difficulties
6. Drug/Alcohol addiction

*All students who are disabled under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.) are also considered to have a handicap and therefore are protected, under Section 504. However, not all students who have been determined to have a handicap under Section 504 may be considered to have a disability under I.D.E.A. Most students who have handicapping conditions are served by regular education staff and curriculum.*

It is important for the special needs drivers and aides to be familiar with the characteristics of the students transported under their care. Resources for learning more about the students you transport would include the students' parents, the teacher, the school administrators, occupational therapist, physical therapist, district special education department and your transportation director or safety staff.

### **6.3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SPECIAL NEEDS DRIVER**

#### **MN Rule 7470.1600 (Transporting Pupils with Disability)**

#### **MN Rule 7470.1700 (Drivers and Aides for Pupils with Disability)**

The person who accepts the position as a special needs school bus driver will find this a highly rewarding job. These special needs drivers will need additional training based on the specific needs and problems of pupils they transport within one month of the effective date of the assignment. An effective driver is one who encourages acceptable student behavior on the school bus.

The first objective is to assure the highest level of safety, which includes a commitment to operate their assigned motor vehicle and ensure a safe transportation environment. The second objective is to establish a ride to and from school that supports educational goals for all students since this ride is an extension of the student's educational day.

#### **Driver's duties include but are not limited to:**

- a. Know each student's name and disability.
- b. Knowledge of the characteristics regarding the student's disability.
- c. Prepare for bus trip before departure.
- d. Maintain an on time schedule.
- e. Safely load and unload students.
- f. Maintain proper interaction with aide.
- g. Proper use of required safety equipment available for all students throughout the ride.
- h. Know the type of securement for special equipment.
- i. Proper use of wheelchair securements (per manufacturer's instructions) including the use of the lap belt and upper torso support system.
- j. Proper seating used for all students.
- k. Competent handling of occupant assistive safety equipment.
- l. Appropriate communications with student, school, parent and dispatcher.

- m. Report any concerns regarding students to the school or teacher or to the transportation personnel depending on your District procedures or policies.
- n. Procedure developed for safe bus evacuation.
- o. Maintain up to date evacuation plan, to be kept on the bus.
- p. Confidentiality issues – what can be discussed with others, securing confidential paperwork, destroying of confidential paperwork. Refer to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws as well as Minnesota data practices act, Minnesota Chapter 13.
- q. Support the district policy in student management.
- r. Ultimately the driver is responsible for ensuring that each student is safely transported.
- s. Driver and aide work as a team on the consistency of bus rules and the discipline process.

#### **6.4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF A BUS AIDE**

The person who accepts the position as a special needs school bus aide will perform a variety of tasks to help support the driver in providing safe and proper transportation of all students.

Aides' duties include:

- a. Proper use of securements for assistive equipment, car seats, wheelchairs, seatbelts.
- b. Assist the driver in the proper loading and unloading of all students.
- c. Know each student's name and disability.
- d. Knowledge of the characteristics regarding the student's disability.
- e. Proper use of wheelchair securements (per manufacturer's instructions) including the use of the lap belt and upper torso support system.
- f. Maintain proper interaction with the driver.
- g. Supervise and assist students as directed.
- h. Driver and aide work as a team on the consistency of bus rules, and the discipline process.
- i. Confidentiality issues – what can be discussed with others, securing confidential paperwork, destroying of confidential paperwork. Refer to current FERPA laws as well as Minnesota Chapter 13.
- j. Report any concerns regarding students to the driver, school, and teacher or to the transportation personnel depending on your district procedures or policies.
- k. Appropriate communications with student, school, parent and dispatcher.
- l. Work with the driver to develop a safe evacuation plan.
- m. Know the procedures and be physically capable to evacuate students in an emergency situation.
- n. Support the district policy in student management.
- o. Occupy the seat that provides the best opportunity for supervision and student protection.
- p. If an aide is assigned to a specific student the aide will primarily provide direct assistance to that student and provide general assistance to all students.

## **6.5 SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT USE and MANAGEMENT**

### **A. Mobile seating devices and wheelchairs:**

Follow the manufacturer's guidelines when available.

STEP 1. The wheelchair brakes have to be set.

STEP 2. Attach the tie-downs to secure the wheelchair to the floor of the school bus at minimum four points.

STEP 3. The tie-downs must be attached to the frame of the wheelchair, not the wheels. Look for a welded joint. If the wheelchair is WC19 certified, secure at the indicated WC19 securement points.

STEP 4. Tighten the tie-down straps to hold the wheelchair in a secure position.

STEP 5. For effective protection, the occupant shall have a secured lap belt and upper torso support system.

Drivers and aides must report non-functioning and inappropriate wheelchairs to the transportation supervisor.

### **B. Passenger safety devices:**

Safety systems are based on the weight, height, age and the needs of the student. They may include seatbelts, car seats, safety vests or integrated bus seats. All equipment shall be installed and used per manufacturer's instructions.

### **C. Seating:**

Seating arrangements should take into consideration the student's needs, behavior, and equipment. Students may benefit from assigned seats, and a seating chart should be maintained with the written bus evacuation plan.

### **D. Service animal assistance:**

No animals are allowed on board except service animals trained to accompany students with special needs. Service animals should be trained to lie under the seat and not in the aisle or on the bus seat.

### **E. Medical equipment and procedures:**

Special needs drivers and aides must be trained to properly secure all medical equipment during transportation. Adaptive equipment may include respirators, oxygen tanks, suctioning equipment, ventilators, talking boards, torso restraints, tray tables, etc.

## **6.6 BEHAVIOR MODIFICATIONS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS**

To ensure a safe transportation environment, only acceptable student behavior should be allowed on the school bus. Coordinated plans for behavior management should include input from school programs, district transportation policy, and consider the student's disability. All sexual harassment behaviors must be dealt with in a prompt and appropriate manner.

Discipline and conduct reports should be available to ensure equitable discipline throughout the entire educational system. Administrative staff should be aware of the rights and responsibilities of all students and be consistent among all schools regarding the discipline plan of action. Special needs drivers and aides should be able to use school staff as a resource to help in problem situations.

## **6.7 EVACUATION PROCEDURES - INCLUDING EARLY CHILDHOOD**

Best practices in student transportation include a plan for the evacuation of students from the school bus in the event of an emergency. A guiding principle in special education transportation is that “no student should be placed on a bus until a plan for evacuation has been prepared for the student.” Students on a special needs bus will have differing abilities and those must be taken into consideration when preparing an evacuation plan.

Before an emergency:

- a. Plan and know the escape routes before the emergency occurs.
- b. Be prepared for all types of emergencies.
- c. Be prepared for the worst possible situation.
- d. Know the abilities of the students who are being transported
- e. Know the equipment - safety vests, child safety seats, booster seats, safety belts, mobility chairs etc.
- f. Know the vehicle you are assigned:
  - a. How to operate the lift without power.
  - b. When to use the ramp or lift to exit the bus.
  - c. Know how to operate all emergency exits.

Plan of action:

1. Each bus run should have a written plan developed by the driver and aide and reviewed by the transportation supervisor. A copy of the plan should be in the dispatch office and in the bus in the event of an emergency.
2. The plan should indicate which student exits first, second, etc.
3. Students who have limited mobility may be able to assist themselves along the aisle to an exit.
4. Safely execute a one or two person lift to move student to safety.
5. Blanket drag used when appropriate.
6. Plan to utilize bystanders to safely and quickly evacuate your bus

### **DO NOT EVACUATE UNLESS A LIFE THREATENING SITUATION EXISTS**

- a. Fire
- b. Drowning
- c. Roll over
- d. Railroad crossing
- e. In danger of collision
- f. Or other life threatening situations

### **IF YOU MUST EVACUATE, STAY CALM & THINK SAFETY**

1. Radio or call for assistance, tell dispatch it is an emergency.
2. Check for injuries.
3. Determine safest exits from the bus.
4. Ask passing motorists or by-standers for assistance.
5. If possible drop radio microphone and emergency equipment out bus window, take first aid kit with you.
6. Identify a safe location for passengers to gather away from the bus – approximately 100 feet away. Provide a rope for students to hang onto or provide a personal item such as drivers’ coat, purse, etc. to give them something to do and divert attention from the crash.

7. Calmly inform the students that they will be evacuating the bus, remind them which exits to use, and where to go when they get outside the bus.
8. Ambulatory students exit first. The lift could be used if absolutely necessary.
9. Students who use wheelchairs but have limited mobility may be able to assist themselves along the aisle to an exit.
10. Evacuate non ambulatory students in any of the following suggested ways:
  - a. Use the wheelchair ramp/lifts if operable.
  - b. Single person lift (cradle lift) with legs, carry close.
  - c. Two people lift if student is too heavy for one person to carry.
  - d. Blanket drag – standing or squatting.
11. Keep calm – lower your voice. Make sure students understand you.
12. Make sure all passengers are accounted for. If aide is available, have them watch the students.

## **6.8 EMERGENCY CARD and CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

A significant amount of information is developed and maintained regarding the evaluation, placement, transportation, health needs, and performance of students with disabilities. It is essential that these records be accurate and up to date. As a driver and aide for special needs students you will need to have access to confidential information.

1. It is critical that this information remain strictly confidential. School staff and the school bus team must ensure that the privacy rights of students with disabilities are protected.
2. At NO time may a school official or a school bus team member identify, or provide information about, a student to any individual other than a parent or legal guardian.
3. The only exception would be in an emergency situation when the information is given in a “Need to Know” situation. This may be done if the knowledge of such information is necessary to protect the health and safety of the student or other persons.
4. Parents must be notified as soon as possible that information has been released as well as the purpose for its release.

According to Minnesota Rules, Chapter 7470.1700 Subp. 2 a driver and aide, if one is assigned, must have access to emergency health care information for the students with disabilities transported on the bus; The health information may be maintained either in a hard copy on the vehicle or immediately accessible through a two-way communications system with the dispatch office.

This information is to be updated annually by the parent or guardian or teacher and must be revised if the student’s needs, medication, program placement, or adaptive equipment use changes during the school year.

It is imperative that the transportation department work closely with the special education department and the parents to maintain accurate and timely information.

**6.9 ADDITIONAL ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION YOU MAY NEED TO KNOW HOW TO HANDLE. YOUR TRANSPORTATION OFFICE SHOULD HAVE PROCEDURES DEFINED FOR THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS:**

1. A parent or caregiver is not home to receive a student when eye to eye or hand to hand drop off is required.
2. A student is not ready at pickup time from home or school
3. What to do when a student is not ready to ride due to illness, behavior or other unsafe circumstances
4. Bodily fluids and blood borne pathogens
5. There is a weather emergency
6. Road conditions change
7. Know your local district policies and procedures concerning what to do when there is a medical emergency.

It is the driver's responsibility to know and understand the district and/or contractor procedures for handling these situations.

**RESOURCES:**

1. Minnesota Department of Education Due Process Manual – Chapter 11 on Transportation
2. Minnesota Department of Education, Special Education Policy (651) 582-8614
3. Minnesota Department of Education, Student Transportation (651) 582-8855
4. MN. Stat. 125A.02; 125A.03 to 125A.24
5. MN Rule 7470.1700 (Drivers and Aides for Pupils with Disability)
6. MN Rule 7470.1600 (Transporting Pupils with Disability)
7. Minnesota Department of Education “Reference Guide to Transporting Students with Disabilities and Special Transportation for Selected Students in Minnesota” handbook, July 2010
8. Video – “Confidential Records: Training of School Bus Drivers”
9. Education Compliance Group, Inc. <http://www.educationcompliancegroup.com/>
10. “The Answer Book for Transporting Students with Disabilities” LRP Publications [www.lrp.com](http://www.lrp.com)
11. National Conference & Exhibition on Transporting Students with Disabilities & Pre-Schoolers, sponsored by Edupro Group [www.eduprogroup.com](http://www.eduprogroup.com)
12. Bus Attendant Training & Resource Manual  
PTSI, 443 S. Warren ST., Syracuse, NY 13202 <http://www.ptsi.org/>