

Letter of Agreement Checklist: Major Items

1. Trip Details and Mileage

The school representative who is contracting with the motor coach carrier should know the date of trip, number of passengers to be transported, and the trip itinerary. This individual must be sure to discuss the mileage with the carrier company's representative. Trips of more than 550 miles should take more than ten hours and therefore will require more than one driver. However, some trips less than 550 miles may require more than ten hours of driving time (e.g., in rural or mountainous areas). The "ten hour rule" takes effect when the driver begins driving the bus for this trip (i.e., leaving the bus terminal). Be sure that the letter of agreement includes either the cost of an extra driver if the length of the trip requires an additional driver or the cost of providing an appropriate location for the driver to rest. The driver cannot rest on the bus. Remember that the trip ends when the bus is parked after the trip itinerary is completed at the bus terminal, not when the students get off the bus.

2. Trip Cost and Payment

The school needs to understand how the cost of the trip will be determined. Make sure to identify whether the charges for the trip will be based on a daily rate or a mileage fee. Be sure to understand and discuss with the motor coach company any special driver accommodations, gratuity, or other costs. Be sure that you understand if there are any other costs—taxes, permits, or fees. Discuss and understand the deposit and refund/cancellation policy that will apply to the trip. Know how much of the total payment is due at the time of the reservation and when the final payment is due.

3. Emergency Contact and Miscellaneous Issues

The school should know how to contact the motor coach company twenty-four hours a day in case of emergency (e.g., if the bus driver or vehicle does not show at the scheduled time and place). The school needs to understand any miscellaneous policies that might affect the trip (e.g., carry-on food or beverages).

At some designated time, typically seven to ten days before the trip, the school contact person should make sure that neither the agreement nor the itinerary has changed. A call to the contracted motor coach company should be made to confirm the arrangements. If changes are necessary, they should be documented in writing.

Monitoring Services on Motor Coach Arrival at School Site

When a charter bus arrives to load the students for a trip, a school representative—typically the school principal, the vice principal, or a teacher—must be on-site to make sure that the motor coach company and the specific vehicles that arrive at the school are what the school has ordered. In addition, the representative needs to make certain that a number of other requirements have been met. A "Pre-Trip Checklist" is attached to make certain that the school representative knows exactly what things need to be checked prior to the start of the trip. It is a quick and easy check to perform but is one that is essential to ensuring that the trip will be safe and successful. The check should be done privately with the driver, not in front of the students. In other words, the review should be completed before the students arrive or before the students are allowed in the boarding area.

1. Review the Driver's Documentation

- A. To ensure that the driver has the authority to operate the motor coach, the school representative should check to see that the driver has the following documents:
 - A. Valid commercial driver's license with a P (*passenger*) endorsement.
- B. Valid medical examiners certificate (pocket card). A medical certificate specifies an expiration date. The certificate is not valid beyond the expiration date shown on the card.

- C. Driver's record of duty status (log book). Make sure that such a log book is on board and that the driver's duty status for the trip to the school loading area has been recorded. The log book should also show the previous seven days record of duty status for each driver involved in the contracted trip.

2. Check Motor Coach Registration and Inspection

The motor coach driver must provide certain information on each vehicle that is to be used on the trip. The purpose of this documentation is to ensure that the vehicle is properly registered and is in good mechanical condition.

- A. Check each vehicle's registration card to ensure that the vehicle is authorized to operate in the states the trip will pass through. Make sure that the bus's license plate and vehicle identification numbers match the registration card.
- B. Check to see a copy of the vehicle's USDOT annual inspection document, either a sticker or on paper. Note: these documents indicate the date of inspection, not the date of expiration, and are usually valid for only one year.

3. Vehicle Safety Check

Perform the safety check on the vehicle(s) that is detailed in the "Pre-Trip Checklist". By the time the bus is loaded and ready for departure, most of the trip details should be in place, and the school representative should have determined that the motor coach company is indeed prepared to provide the services. At this point, it is important that the school representative give the school's letter of agreement with the motor coach company to the school representative who will be traveling with the students so that he or she will have a summary of the services that are to be provided and will know the emergency contact's name and phone number in case the need arises.