

## Foreward

On a daily basis during the school year, the Plumsted Township School District assumes a major responsibility for ensuring that our students are safely transported to and from school. Knowing that the school bus is an extension of the classroom, it is important to realize that what happens on the bus can have a significant impact on a student's school day. Personnel involved in the transportation of students with disabilities have a responsibility to ensure that students arrive at school ready to learn, and are returned safely to their homes at the end of the school day. This transportation guide is designed to assist transporters, school personnel, and families in becoming familiar with basic terms, operations, and procedures that will foster communication and collaboration to ensure that our students with disabilities receive appropriate transportation services.

Transportation of students with disabilities presents challenges and specific requirements in order to meet individual and unique needs. This guide is designed to offer suggestions and recommendations to meet these challenges and requirements, and to review certain practices that have been successful in the past. The following basic concepts are inherent throughout the guide:

- All service providers, including contracted personnel, must have a clear understanding of the requirements applicable to the education of students with disabilities.
- The individualized needs of each student must be considered in determining the appropriate type of transportation service to be provided.
- On-going communication and collaboration between transportation and special education providers is necessary in planning appropriate services.
- An on-going program of in-service training and professional development should be planned and implemented for all personnel involved in the transportation of students with disabilities.
- All vehicles and equipment must be configured to appropriately serve the individual students being transported, particularly those with medically prescriptive requirements.
- District operational procedures/guidelines for transportation should be developed, published, disseminated, and implemented.

The Guide for Transporting Students with Disabilities is a document designed to offer school/district personnel, parents, and the community information on providing "safe and appropriate" transportation services. It also embraces the realization that appropriate use of resources requires efficient and cost effective applications. While a number and variety of individuals are involved in the total process of transporting students with

disabilities, and each has varied responsibilities and concerns, it is important to remember that the most critical factor is the safety and welfare of the student(s). Successful outcomes will not be achieved by simply reading this guide. They will require the efforts and follow-through of each individual in planning and implementing appropriate policies and practices. All stakeholders must recognize their shared responsibilities if “safe and appropriate” transportation of students with disabilities is to be achieved.

## **TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IN THE L.R.E**

Federal law requires that transportation be a part of the discussion at every IEP meeting when it has been determined to be a required related service for a student. As in all educational instructional settings, a student should be served in the least restrictive environment. The continuum of transportation services listed below may be discussed at the IEP meeting to determine the most appropriate level of service for an individual student:

### **I. Location:**

- *Student uses central pick-up point (without or with special equipment).*
- *Student requires curb pick-up closer to home (without or with special equipment).*

### **II. Bus size**

- *Student can ride the regular district bus (with or without special equipment).*
- *Student requires a smaller bus (with or without equipment).*

### **III. Personnel**

- *Bus Driver and/or Aide require special training*
- *Student requires a bus aide*

In addition, IDEA regulations only obligate the school district to provide those transportation and related services needed to accommodate a student’s needs and do not extend to lifestyle preferences and personal needs. The IEP team will decide if transportation services are needed and how they can be accomplished in the Least Restrictive Environment, but any decisions about where or when the transportation will occur will be the responsibility of the Department of Transportation and the Superintendent of Schools.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION PERSONNEL**

Throughout the entire special education process outlined above, the step in which transportation personnel may become involved is in the IEP process. The IEP is the document that describes the student’s education program and appropriate related services. Since transportation personnel may be service providers, the IEP meeting may be the appropriate time to discuss transportation options with other special education professionals and parents. The IEP meeting may also provide the opportunity for

transportation personnel to initiate communication that promotes respectful interaction between parents and other service personnel.

Transportation personnel should not be required to attend each IEP meeting. However, as a best practice, the district may consider having them available at IEP meetings if:

- Specific medical support or mobility equipment is required for a student;
- Behaviors of the student present a challenging or unusual situation during the bus ride;
- Monitoring or intervention during transportation will be discussed;
- Decisions are being made regarding special transportation provisions as a related service;
- Additional transportation costs will have a significant impact on the district special education transportation budget.

It is in the best interest of students, and the district, for the special education and transportation programs to have on-going communication concerning service capabilities and requirements. Transportation personnel should be proactive with special education personnel to establish the necessary dialogue for a collaborative and communicative relationship. Conversely, special education program personnel need to have an understanding of the level of service that transportation reasonably can be expected to provide.

The development of a “transition plan” may be an additional component of the IEP process. This plan discusses a student’s plan and goals for post-secondary school life and activities. The plans are individually designed programs for secondary students’ ages 14 and older. Frequently, these plans involve providing students the opportunity to experience different job-related activities in their home communities. Transportation may become a necessary related service in developing these plans, and transportation personnel may need to become involved in identifying service strategies in this plan.

### **LENGTH OF BUS RIDE**

The IDEA’s transportation requirements do not address matters such as time in transit and the distance of the bus ride. However, if the time of transit in special education transportation is greatly in excess of the length of regular school transportation, and no reasonable accommodations are attempted by the school district, the district may be in violation of Section 504. In addition, excessive daily commutes that result in significant losses in instructional time on a daily basis can result in the denial of a free and appropriate education. These situations may suggest the need for a change in placement. If anyone in the transportation process becomes aware of excessive daily commutes (1 hour or more), he or she will contact the case manager for that student.

## **FASTENING EQUIPMENT AND DEVICES**

Normally, the driver or safety aide will help each student onto the bus and fasten the student's seat belt. In some cases, a parent may assist. Regardless of whether a parent helps a student onto the bus and fastens his/her seat belt or wheelchair-positioning belt, it is still the driver's responsibility to check and ensure that the device is fastened properly before moving the bus.

Normally, parents are responsible for maintaining their child's wheelchair in a manner suitable for transportation purposes. In addition, it is the parents' responsibility to notify transportation of any modifications or changes in a student's equipment. A change in equipment or modifications to existing equipment can impact the placement and securement of the chair on the bus. If special equipment is required by the school district in order to transport a student safely, it is the district's responsibility for its maintenance.

## **TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH ADAPTIVE DEVICES**

It is essential that knowledgeable personnel be consulted on decisions regarding seating devices and securement. The use of safety seating devices should be recommended only after consultation with the parent/guardian and the IEP Team. There are different kinds of equipment that may be required during the period a student receives transportation services, and which should always be used in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines. When transporting students with adaptive devices, it is necessary to secure oxygen tanks, lap trays, wheelchairs, child safety seats, walkers, or other articles not needed during transportation. National Standards recommend that any such unattached article be secured to withstand a pulling force of five times its weight. Walkers, stretchers, and any other assistive devices must be secured so they will not move.

## **TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT AND REGULATIONS**

When a student who has mobility concerns is transported, a vehicle that is equipped with special equipment to assist with loading must often be used. Other devices that can secure a student in a wheelchair may also be required. Transportation vehicles for students in mobile seating devices must be equipped with either a power lift or ramp. Once the student is in the vehicle, transportation providers must secure the wheelchair to prevent movement during transport and restrain the student safely.

## **LOADING GUIDELINES**

A separate loading procedure should be developed for each student who has a specific requirement for getting on and off the bus. This procedure should be noted in the student's IEP and developed with the support transportation personnel. The loading procedure should be designed to require as much student participation and as little adult assistance as possible. However, when writing up a plan in an IEP, the maximum student

effort that can reasonably be expected during loading, as well as the minimal student effort during unusual situations, must be taken into account.

Loading procedures should be recorded and a copy made available in the vehicle. All school personnel should comply with the determined procedure and follow it consistently, without variance. In addition to consistently following the standard loading procedure, transportation personnel should identify safe loading and unloading methods that do not involve equipment to prepare for unexpected equipment breakdowns or replacement. These methods may also be used during emergency evacuations.

### **STAFF TRAINING**

An on-going program of in-service training and professional development will be planned and implemented for all personnel involved in the transportation of students with disabilities. Ideally this training will occur annually prior to the start of the school year. It will be the responsibility of transportation personnel to arrange for this training to be conducted. The Director of Student Services and/or his designee will conduct this training. The content of this training will be jointly decided upon by the Director of Student Services and the Transportation Coordinator. Throughout the course of the school year, as students become eligible for special education and require transportation as a related service, it will be the responsibility of the student's case manager to provide any relevant information and training to the responsible transportation personnel.

### **COMMUNICATION PROCESS**

On-going communication and collaboration between transportation and special education providers is necessary in planning appropriate services. To achieve this communication two important activities must be conducted:

1. As a student becomes eligible for transportation as a related service, the case manager will complete and forward the request for transportation form to the transportation office. The transportation department will notify the parent regarding the details of the transportation arrangements.
2. Prior to the development of the annual budget, the Director of Student Services will provide the transportation department with a list of the students that the child study team anticipates will require transportation. This list will include out-of-district students and any special needs that can be anticipated. It is important for all staff to remember that this list is only a projection and may differ significantly based upon the outcomes of the annual review process.

**Plumsted Township School District  
Department of Student Services**

**REQUEST FOR TRANSPORTATION**

Student:		Grade:	
Parent Name:		Phone No.:	
Address:			
Case Manager:		Date of Request:	
Primary Disability:		Transportation Notified Parents on:	
Type of Change: <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary (Complete line below) <input type="checkbox"/> Permanent			
From:            To: *			
School to Attend:		Contact Person:	
Starting Date:		Days to Attend:	
School Hours:			
Special Instructions:			
Medical Alerts:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Door to Door	<input type="checkbox"/> Bus Aide	<input type="checkbox"/> Wheelchair	
<input type="checkbox"/> Facing Forward	<input type="checkbox"/> Safety Vest	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	

Distribution: Original to File, Copy to Transportation Office