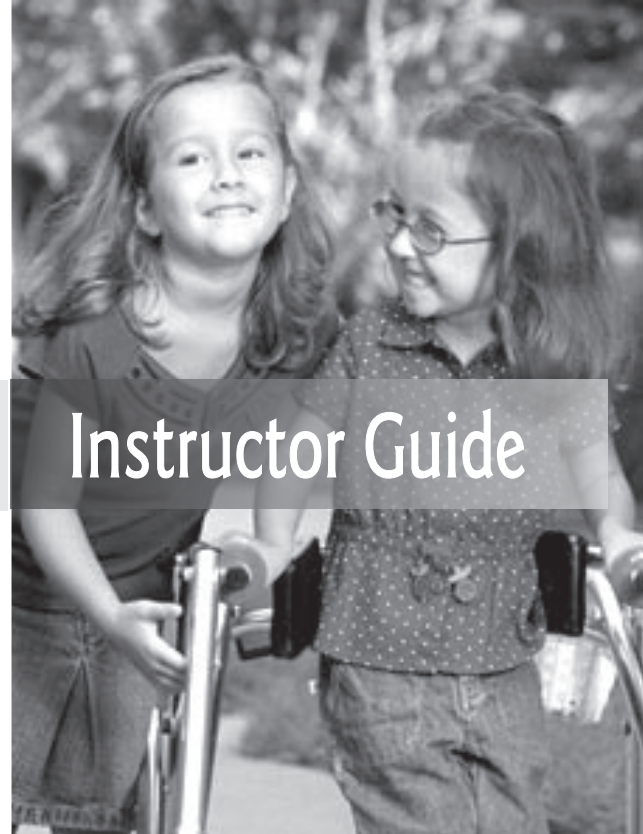


# TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



Instructor Guide



# Transporting Students with Disabilities

## Instructor Guide

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*Moving School Transportation  
from Safe to Safer*

#### The Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

The Pupil Transportation Safety Institute (PTSI) is a national organization dedicated to improving school bus safety across the country. Headquartered in Syracuse, New York, PTSI produces and distributes driver training publications, videos and other safety materials.

PTSI works in partnership with state and federal agencies as well as industry associations and organizations to create innovative approaches to current safety concerns. PTSI consultants, trainers and instructors are drawn from the most experienced and dedicated individuals in the pupil transportation industry.

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# TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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## INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

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# SECTION 1:

## INTRODUCTION TO TRANSPORTING SCHOOL-AGE STUDENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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### OVERVIEW

The opening session of this course talks about requirements for meeting the needs of students with disabilities and young children with developmental delays and disabilities. The requirement to provide transportation as a related service for eligible students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act are presented. Evolving over the past thirty years, the school bus transportation industry and multiple partners, including special education personnel, related service providers such as occupational therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, physical therapists, psychologists, school nurses, and social workers, have played a pivotal role in providing access to educational programs and services that meet those mandates required for serving school-age students with disabilities.

Young children referred to as Infants and Toddlers are served under the provisions of the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of the IDEA). Transportation is defined as an early intervention service under Part C.

Preschool Children with developmental delays and disabilities are served under the provisions of Section 619 of Part B of IDEA, and the definition of transportation for this population is consistent with the Part B definition for school-age students with disabilities.

Under the authority of the Head Start Act, the final Head Start transportation regulation was published on January 18, 2001, with full implementation targeted by January 18, 2006. These regulations discuss the parameters for providing transportation for children with disabilities attending Head Start programs in the community, which includes school sites.

This section explores current challenges facing transportation personnel, including drivers and attendants serving school-age students and young children with developmental delays and disabilities in multiple educational and community settings. This section also provides a general introduction to the course information.

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### OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of Section 1, participants will:

1. Briefly explain the pivotal role of the school bus in providing educational access for students with disabilities.
2. Identify 2 factors that impact school transportation for students with special needs.
3. Identify the four course goals.

## INTRODUCTION

First impressions are important and key to the success of any training program. Participants assess an instructor the moment he or she walks into the room. Planning every presentation detail is the hallmark of a professional instructor; this includes current knowledge and information in all areas presented. Exemplary planning supports confidence. Students of all ages sense the instructor's degree of knowledge and confidence and respond accordingly.

## SETTING THE TONE

An effective introduction to the course provides an instructor with a chance to set the right tone for subsequent teaching. The non-verbal message an instructor demonstrates at the beginning of a course has a significant impact and is as important as verbal communications. For instance, if an instructor appears bored and demonstrates an uncaring attitude or resentment for the assignment, participants will sense the negativity, and lose enthusiasm for the learning opportunity. On the other hand, if an instructor is knowledgeable, prepared and interested in the topic to be addressed, participants will be enthusiastic and positive about the experience ahead.

Although experienced instructors inevitably develop their own introductory style, there are several key messages that should be communicated at the beginning of a course, such as:

- **Instructor introduction:** Share not only personal knowledge and information but also reasons signifying the importance for the topic; discuss instructor credentials and experience demonstrating competency in teaching the specific course content.
- **Housekeeping remarks:** *The following information should be known and addressed.*
  - Registration process
  - Workbook and additional materials
  - Parking areas
  - Location and use of fire exits
  - Location of rest rooms
  - Emergency phone number
  - Cell phone/pager policies
  - Smoking policy
  - Medical emergency protocols, etc.

*All details should be explained at or near the beginning of course. Provide an opportunity and environment in which to ask pertinent questions.*

- **Instructional materials.** Instructors should distribute workbooks/notebooks to each participant, briefly explaining content and design. Participants should be asked to bring pens/pencils to each session; however, table boxes with pens, markers, sticky notes, and paper clips should be available for those who need extra supplies.

## GETTING PARTICIPANTS READY FOR LEARNING

Give participants a time to briefly introduce themselves. Provide an environment that creates familiarity, establishes rapport in the group, and sets the tone for later teamwork.

Whether nervous or a rigid clock-watcher, the instructor who proceeds to the main topic before giving participants an opportunity to address questions will find the concerns invariably re-emerge later, and can cause a distraction at an inconvenient time.

Drivers and bus attendants may need encouragement to verbalize questions in a classroom setting. Effective instructors find ways to encourage participants to ask questions in a respectful, supportive environment. Participants should be reminded the only wrong question is the one not asked.

Knowledge about transporting students with disabilities is imperative for public schools today. Before the 1970s many states did not provide transportation for students with disabilities and young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Before the 1970s, children born with what were then called handicaps rarely had the opportunity to interact with their peers, or receive a free appropriate public education, commonly referred to as FAPE. Children with serious disabilities before the passage of the Education Handicapped Act too often spent their childhoods at home or in institutions. There was little need for training transporters about safety procedures necessary for transportation of students with disabilities because far fewer school-age students and young children with developmental delays and disabilities attended community or school programs.

The challenge of transporting infants and toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities safely on a school bus was not considered a school district requirement or responsibility. For the most part, drivers were not required to transport medically fragile children on buses. If a student had a serious emotional, medical or physical disability, it was likely they spent school days in a hospital, at home, or in an institution. Students with severe disabilities in many states had no entitlement or rights to education before 1975 and often were not permitted to attend school. If they were allowed to attend, parents were responsible for providing transportation.

## POSITIVE ADVANCES IN CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Advancements in educational opportunities for students with disabilities since the passage of the IDEA in 1975 has been positive and has resulted in this population becoming productive, independent citizens.

Profound differences have been brought about in attitudes and ways our society addresses the unique and individual special needs of students with disabilities. Because the importance of early intervention is recognized, entitlement services are available for infants and toddlers and preschool children with developmental delays and disabilities.

The roots of these changes go back a long way. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution ensures no state may deny equal protection of the laws to any person within its jurisdiction. **Equal protection under the law is the heart of our country's democracy.** Over many decades, this fundamental democratic belief has been used to extend citizenship and greater opportunities to groups of people long excluded from the mainstream of American life. Of all the excluded groups, few suffered more discrimination, more stereotyping, more deprivations and indignities than people with disabilities.

Interestingly, many Americans are unaware of how hard people with disabilities have had to fight for greater opportunity and equality. Progress has been steady since the passage of the Education Handicapped Act in 1975, reauthorized most recently as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004.

Passage of Public Law 93-112, known as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), was the first law that constituted a national declaration of the rights of the disabled, which included school-age students. This law provided the initial step for students with disabilities to be fully integrated into public schools and transported to programs and activities which receive federal financial assistance.

## THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE SCHOOL BUS

Advancement of opportunities for students with disabilities could not have occurred without school buses and drivers. Transporting students with disabilities to school was a major barrier that had to be overcome. When laws were passed entitling students with disabilities to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) with non-disabled peers, the issue of access also had to be addressed. It is no exaggeration to say special education programs and services could not take place effectively without school buses and well-informed and trained drivers and bus attendants.

## REMEMBERING THE EARLY DAYS OF CHANGE

When children with disabilities were first placed on bus routes in the 1960s and 1970s, suddenly bus drivers faced many new, unknown situations. With little guidance or training, the first drivers of students with disabilities did the best they could to transport students with disabilities safely to and from school.

Working with few resources and limited information about the nature and needs of each individual student, these early drivers of students with disabilities are a testimony to the uniquely caring nature of transportation professionals. In the best interest of the students, drivers learned on the job as they faced new situations, determined to solve unforeseen problems.

In the early days, when Federal mandates were beginning to be implemented, equipment to load and transport children in wheelchairs was inadequate at best. Drivers frequently carried both children and wheelchairs on and off the bus, and wheelchair securement techniques sometimes consisted of devised, homemade apparatus constructed by the local mechanic.

Little information was shared with drivers about the unique needs of a student with disabilities receiving special education and related services. Drivers learned about special needs from families and the students.

The same challenges held true when infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with developmental delays and disabilities began to attend community and school programs and were provided transportation. One of the biggest challenges was serving these small children on vehicles constructed for school-age students.

Fast forward to today! Transportation services are articulated in multiple Federal laws. More and more students with disabilities are attending public schools each year, and the diversity and severity of disabilities and related conditions is increasing. The bus, special equipment, drivers and attendants are all an integral part of special education, Early Intervention, and Head Start programs and services.

The job of a driver or bus attendant serving students with disabilities will always be complex. In spite of major advances in training, involvement of professional organizations, and attendance at national conferences, drivers will always encounter daily challenges that require specific information and training administered by knowledgeable and well-informed instructors.

Students with unique health problems, as well as the significant increase in the numbers of children with autism, continue to pose great challenges. The number of young children receiving early intervention and special education services also increases annually.

However, for all the changes from 1975, a significant factor in providing special education and early intervention programs and services for students with disabilities and young children will be the ongoing role of the driver and bus attendant. Diligence, caring, and commitment to safety begin with knowledgeable transportation personnel.

## A PROUD TRADITION

Without school buses, advances in educational opportunity, and integration of disabled and non-disabled students, serving students with disabilities would not have been possible. New drivers and bus attendants just beginning to serve this population enter a proud tradition as they embark upon a meaningful and rewarding career path.

## TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Several factors create new challenges for schools, drivers and bus attendants serving students with disabilities and young children with developmental delays and disabilities:

1. **Growing numbers:** Increasing numbers of students are being identified and enrolled in schools.
2. **Increasing diversity:** As medical professionals are better able to identify and treat previously unknown and/or new health conditions, including cognitive issues impacting a student's ability to learn, schools are required to provide programs and services for students with more unique and challenging learning requirements.
3. **Increasing number of schools and programs served:** As schools rise to meet the expanding demands required to serve students with disabilities, transporters must provide access to an increasing number of schools and special programs. With shrinking resources and escalating costs, the challenges for transportation operations are overwhelming. Local, state and national leaders are addressing these economic issues, but the daily challenges continue to increase and are even more complex.
4. **New technology:** Equipment for transporting students with disabilities is evolving constantly. For example, both wheelchair securement systems and wheelchairs have improved greatly for transportation purposes in recent years. Drivers and attendants must be kept up to date and be provided with current information from equipment manufacturers and federal agencies.

5. **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Students with disabilities are required to be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement is sometimes referred to as inclusion and may also include transportation services. Under certain circumstances, a separate school bus can be viewed as an isolated environment. While transporting students with disabilities with non-disabled peers may benefit all, under certain circumstances it also creates new challenges for transporters.

The days when a clear line existed between transporting students with disabilities on a bus serving only special education students and a regular bus are gone. All decisions are required to be made on a case-by-case basis. Students with disabilities should ride buses with non-disabled peers as appropriate. Reasons for not doing so must be made by an individualized education program (IEP) team, including the parent, and should be based on the unique needs of an individual student. Always keep in mind, decisions about programs and services for a student with disabilities are determined on a case-by-case basis by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team.

If transportation services are necessary as a related service, a transportation representative should be invited to participate on the IEP Team when appropriate. Full disclosure of student information should be shared commensurate with the individual needs of each student to provide a safe ride. In many instances, students with disabilities do not need transportation service as a related service because the nature of their disability does not interfere with their ability to ride a school bus differently from their non-disabled peers. Therefore, drivers and bus attendants are required to work with students with disabilities on a daily basis on buses transporting students with disabilities and non-disabled peers, as well as on buses serving students with disabilities exclusively.

## COURSE GOALS

Instructors should take adequate time to make sure participants are clear about every aspect of the course. This course has four (4) overall goals:

1. **Awareness:** A greater awareness of the challenges facing drivers and bus attendants transporting students with disabilities is a key goal.
2. **Current information:** Transporters of students with disabilities and young children with developmental delays and disabilities require continuous learning opportunities. Students' unique needs are changing constantly and information and knowledge are expanding. Providing up-to-date information is an important goal of the course.
3. **Confidence.** Transporting students with disabilities and young children with developmental delays and disabilities is an extensive responsibility. A key goal is providing resources, skills, and adequate knowledge so transporters can confidently address their respective job functions and requirements.
4. **Sources of support.** No matter how comprehensive the curriculum or knowledgeable the instructor, no course can teach everything about the unique needs of each student with a disability. A key goal of this course is identifying sources of support and convincing participants of the importance of asking for help in any unfamiliar situation. This is a professional judgment issue. Solving a difficult situation appropriately may result in the difference between a safe or unsafe ride. Always encourage participants to make the best choice and feel free to ask for assistance.

## COURSE GUIDELINES

Instructors should explain expectations and suitable protocol for participants during the course.

- Attention and courtesy: Instructors should not accept inattention or private participant conversations during the course. Participants should be encouraged to share thoughts with everyone in the room.
- Active participation: The course content is greatly enriched by active participation. Participants should be encouraged to ask questions, share experiences, and contribute suggestions, throughout the course.
- Attendance and timeliness: Instructors must explain attendance requirements and explain participant expectations to attend all sessions. Inform all participants of sign-in requirements. Late arrivals are distracting and should be addressed and discouraged.
- Emergencies: Procedures for a genuine emergency or other such reason for a participant to miss the course should be clearly explained.
- Final Review: The course includes a final review. Instructors can reassure participants they will do well if they actively participate in discussions.
- Evaluations: Participants should keep notes during the course so they can evaluate the course at the end. Encourage honesty. Assure participants all comments will remain confidential.

## COURSE AGENDA

Participants should understand what the course will cover. Questions about scheduling should be cleared up early.

An organized review at the conclusion of each section clarifies questions, prevents misinformation, and reinforces key learning points.

## SUMMARIZE INFORMATION IN A MEANINGFUL MANNER

Briefly summarize the points made and issues addressed under the sections main topics:

1. How far we have come in educating students with disabilities
2. The pivotal role of the school bus in advancing the provision of special education and related services
3. New and daily challenges facing schools, drivers and attendants serving students receiving special education and related services and
4. Course overview, including goals, guidelines, and agenda

Use the summary review as an opportunity to clarify any uncertainty participants may have about the topics. Strongly encourage participants to ask questions.

## ASSESSMENT

Return to the section objectives. Assess participant comprehension of the topics covered. Carefully correct any misunderstandings.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

Use the Review Questions, included on the overhead slides and in the participant's workbook, as a group oral quiz, or homework. If time permits, develop a more formal review before the start of Section 2.