

**New York State School Bus Driver  
Physical Performance Test Guidelines  
For School Bus Driver Instructors**

**Regulatory Authority**

On July 18 the Board of Regents approved an amendment to the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education concerning qualifications for school bus drivers. The amendment clarifies the standards for fitness for school bus drivers consistent with the recommendations of the Commissioner's School Bus Driver Instructor Advisory Committee. The committee was convened pursuant to section 156.3 (c)(2) of the Commissioner's Regulations, as amended at the March, 1996 meeting of the Board of Regents.

The regulation requires all school bus drivers employed by public school districts, boards of cooperative education services, or private contractors providing pupil transportation services to school districts, to take and pass every two years a driver physical performance test. It provides for a 3 year phase in of the testing requirement for individuals employed as school bus drivers prior to September 1, 1997. It minimizes the impact on the 1997-98 school year by only requiring that those individuals hired after September 1, 1997 be tested before they may transport students.

**Who can require the test?**

An amendment to 156.3. adopted by the Board of Regents on July 18, 1997, provides that all school bus drivers hired after September 1, 1997 must take and pass the physical performance test before they may transport students. Drivers hired prior to September 1, 1997 have until July 1, 2000 to take and pass the physical performance test.

**Who can administer the test?**

The regulation provides that only certified school bus driver instructors (SBDIs) as defined in 156.3 (d)(3) shall administer or conduct the physical performance test. SBDIs administering the test during the 1997-98 school year must have completed training in conducting the test as part of the 1997 PDS (Professional Development Seminar). Most SBDIs have completed the training. The training will be required of all SBDIs as part of the 1998 PDS, and will become part of every SBDI certification training course.

**In what vehicle should a driver be tested?**

The test shall be administered on the largest type of school bus that the driver is licensed to drive and is possessed by the motor carrier. If a new hire does not have a license appropriate to the test vehicle, standard #5 which requires driving may be given in a vehicle with an adult seating capacity of not more than fifteen passengers. All other parts of the test shall be administered on the vehicle type which the driver will be trained to drive.

AMENDMENT TO REGULATIONS OF THE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Pursuant to sections 207 and 3624 of the Education Law

Subdivision (c) of section 156.3 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education is amended, effective September 1, 1997, to read as follows:

(c) Physical fitness. (1) Each driver of a school transportation conveyance shall have the physical and mental ability to operate safely a school transportation conveyance and to satisfactorily perform the other responsibilities of a school bus driver; and shall meet the requirements of section 6.11 of the regulations of the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles (15 NYCRR 6.11) to the extent that such requirements are consistent with the requirements of this subdivision and provided that the vision standards prescribed in section 6.11(b)(10) of the regulations of the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles (15 NYCRR) shall not be waived.

(2) Each regular or substitute driver of a school bus owned, leased or contracted for by a school district shall be examined by a physician, in accordance with the provisions of this subdivision. The physical examination shall be reported immediately on forms prescribed by the commissioner to the chief school officer of the district. The physical examination shall include, as a minimum, those requirements specified on the prescribed physical examination report. The examining physician shall require the school bus driver to undergo any diagnostic tests that are necessary to determine whether the driver has the physical and mental ability to operate safely a school transportation conveyance. Each school bus driver shall receive an annual physical examination, and each driver who is to be initially employed shall be examined within four weeks prior to the beginning of service. In no case shall the interval between physical examinations exceed a 12-month period.

(3) Each regular or substitute driver of a school bus owned, leased, or contracted for by a school district shall pass a physical performance test approved by the commissioner, upon recommendation of an advisory group of certified school bus driver instructors, at least once every two years. The testing date shall coincide with the driver's requirement to take the biennial behind-the-wheel road test required by section 509-g (Article 19-A) of the Vehicle and Traffic Law. Additionally, the test shall be administered to any driver following an absence from service of sixty or more consecutive days from his or her scheduled work duties.

(i) A physical performance test shall be conducted by a certified school bus driver instructor and shall assess the driver/applicant's ability to perform the following functions of a school bus driver: repeatedly open and close a manually operated bus entrance door, climb and descend bus steps, operate hand controls simultaneously and quickly, have quick reaction time from throttle to brake, carry or drag individuals in a bus emergency evacuation, repeatedly depress clutch and/or brake pedals, and exit quickly oneself and students from an emergency door.

(ii) A driver/applicant who fails any portion of the physical performance test shall be deemed unqualified to operate a school transportation conveyance until a re-examination is passed. Such driver/applicant may request re-examination which shall be administered no sooner than three days from the prior test. The cost of such re-examination shall be borne by the employer if the driver/applicant passes the re-examination, or by the driver/applicant if he or she fails the re-examination.

(iii) A school bus driver who is employed by a school district, board of cooperative education services, or contractor as of September 1, 1997 shall have until July 1, 2000 to take and pass the driver physical performance test. All drivers hired by school districts, boards of cooperative education services, or contractors after September 1, 1997 shall be required to pass the driver physical performance test before they may transport pupils.

Example: If the driver has a CDL B and will only be required to drive a Suburban, then they may be tested on the Suburban. If they do take the test on the Suburban, they may not drive any larger size school bus until they have successfully completed testing in the larger vehicle.

### Using the PT 900 form.

The following outlines the testing procedures and equipment needed for completing each of the seven standards in the New York State School Bus Driver Physical Performance Test using form PT 900.

Complete the Driver Name, Address, and Motorist ID# from the driver's license. Be sure to visually confirm that the driver's appearance matches the picture on the license. Be sure that all restrictions and endorsements are listed in addition to license class. The section for Person Requiring the Test, has been changed to 19A Carrier. Test Location should be a street address. If the location does not have a street number, enter a location description such as "Anywhere CSD Bus Garage."

"Vehicle Type" guidelines have been amended with new size limits. Any school bus with a seating capacity below 30 passengers should be entered as "small." Any school bus seating 30 or more passengers should be entered as "large." For any other vehicle such as a sedan, suburban, or minivan the Vehicle Type should be listed as "other." Taking the test on any vehicle within a type qualifies a driver on all vehicles within that type. For example, if a driver tests on a 66 passenger bus and then the employer adds a 72 passenger bus, they are already qualified to drive the larger vehicle because it is with the same "type".

Timing must be measured with a watch which can be stopped and started, not just by looking at a second hand and estimating elapsed time. Measuring time for each standard should begin with the SBDI giving the instruction to "start" and ending when the task is completed. List the manufacturer and model of the watch on the "Test Equipment Inventory" on page 8.

## ADMINISTERING THE TEST

**Standard # 1:           Climb and descend bus steps.**

**Measurement:        Climb and descend the bus steps 3 times within 30 seconds.**

This standard measures the driver's ability to enter and exit the vehicle effectively. Not only do drivers need to perform this function as they begin and end their run, they may also be required to perform this act to check for children around the bus, to operate a wheel chair lift, to assist a child in crossing, or even multiple times while evacuating children.

The standard begins with the driver on the ground facing the step-well. The driver should walk up the bus steps, turn around at the top of the steps, walk down to the ground, turn around and perform this task two more times. Drivers must turn around at the top of the stairs; attempting to exit the bus facing backwards is very dangerous. Field testing showed that this

task can be performed in under 10 seconds by most individuals. The time has been extended to 30 seconds to make the point that there is no need to rush.

If a driver may ever be required to drive a large school bus, then they must be tested on that size vehicle. If not, they must be tested on the largest vehicle type they will be required to drive. If they drive a consumer type vehicle (sedan, suburban, or minivan) they must enter, turn around, and exit facing forwards the entrance most often used by students to enter and exit the vehicle. Example: a sliding door on a van and rear passenger door on a sedan or suburban.

**Standard # 2: Have quick reaction time from throttle to brake.**

**Measurement: Demonstrate the ability to alternately activate the throttle and brake controls ten times in 10 seconds.**

This standard evaluates the driver's ability to operate the brake and throttle effectively. The seated driver must move their foot from the throttle to the brake and back to the throttle. This throttle/brake cycle must be repeated ten times within ten seconds. The SBDI conducting the test should be sure to be in a position where he/she can clearly see that each pedal is at least briefly depressed and the minimum number of repetitions is accomplished.

**Standard # 3: Repeatedly depress clutch and/or brake pedals.**

**Measurement: Depress and hold the brake pedal a minimum of 3 seconds, 5 consecutive times. In vehicles equipped with a clutch, the driver must depress and hold the clutch pedal for the duration of the brake pedal test.**

This standard evaluates the driver's ability to operate the vehicle's pedals effectively. For vehicles with a clutch, the driver is required to operate two pedals simultaneously as opposed to consecutively as required in standard # 2. If the driver will ever be required to operate a vehicle with a clutch, then he/she must be tested on a vehicle with a clutch.

The driver should hold and release the brake pedal for 5 consecutive 3 second periods while fully depressing the clutch for the duration (15 seconds) of the test. The SBDI conducting the test should offer clear instructions of "hold", "release", "hold", etc.

To prepare for conducting this portion of the test, the SBDI must determine how far the brake or brake and clutch are depressed when adequate pressure to fully engage each pedal is applied. The SBDI can then visually evaluate the pedal position when it is being held by the driver. If there is any question that the pedal(s) are being held in place adequately, the SBDI can create a spacer which would be placed under the pedal which the pedal would have to be depressed to the point of touching.

**Standard # 4: Repeatedly open and close a manually operated bus entrance door.**

**Measurement: Manually open and close the bus entrance door 3 consecutive times.**

The purpose of this standard is to determine if the driver is capable of this basic task which may be performed as many as 200 times a day by a school bus driver. If the driver may be required to drive a school bus with a manual door, they should be tested in that vehicle. If they will only be required to drive a bus with an automatic door, then they must demonstrate their ability to operate the manual override on that door three times in succession. If they are only required to drive a consumer type vehicle (sedan, suburban, minivan) they must show the ability to open and close 3 times the door which is most often used for student entry of the vehicle. This may be done from the inside or the outside of the vehicle.

There is no time limit for this activity because of the wide variety of doors in use. The term "consecutively" means that there should be no stopping between the three opening/closing cycles. The driver must show their ability to perform this action effectively and competently.

**Standard # 5: Operate hand controls simultaneously and quickly.**

**Measurement: Demonstrated while the vehicle is in motion, with the driver operating a minimum of 2 hand controls on both sides of the steering wheel, while maintaining control of the vehicle at all times. Each response must be completed within 8 seconds of the request.**

The timing for this portion of the test will start when the command is given and end when driver's hand or prosthesis has returned to the wheel. Each request must be completed within 8 seconds. The driver shall be tested on the largest vehicle they will be required to drive and are licensed or have a permit to drive. A driver with a standard operators license may drive a van designed to seat up to fifteen adult passengers. Such a vehicle should be used for a new hire that will be trained, but is not licensed or has a permit to drive a large type bus. It is also strongly recommended that testing of new hires be done in a safe location away from traffic. The test must be conducted at a speed of at least 5 mph.

The SBDI conducting the test must enter on form PT 900 the controls used on each side of the steering wheel and the time required for each response. Instruct the driver before the standard test that they will have 8 seconds in which to respond to each command. Tell them which controls they will be asked to operate so they can familiarize themselves with the location and use of each control. This is especially important for new drivers or drivers who are not driving their regular bus. It is not recommended that drivers be given the task of downshifting as one of the procedures. Drivers are naturally nervous in a testing situation and a shift into reverse could create a costly repair. If two different controls are not available to the right of the steering wheel, the same control can be used two times. Choose controls which drivers are most often required to operate such as loading lights, radios, windshield wipers, or fans.

Once the driver has the vehicle underway the SBDI should give a clear command for the driver to operate one of the previously identified controls. The eight second time limit gives the driver time to quickly check the road before shifting their eyes briefly to the identified control. Again, the driver should be instructed that **this is not a race**. Eight seconds is plenty of time in which to perform this action in a safe and prudent manner.

**Standard # 6: Exit quickly oneself and students from an emergency door.**

**Measurement: Starting in a seat belted position, leave the driver's seat and exit the bus from the rear most floor level emergency door exit within 20 seconds.**

This standard is designed to evaluate the school bus driver's ability to use a secondary exit on the bus and to move freely throughout the bus as they might be required to do in an emergency. The standard must be performed on the largest type bus that the driver will be required to operate.

The driver will begin this portion of the test from the driver's seat with their seatbelt fastened. When the SBDI says "start", the driver is to release their seat belt, walk to the rearmost floor level emergency exit on the bus, open the emergency exit, and exit him/herself from that exit to the ground. The SBDI should be positioned outside the bus to start the standard and meet the driver at the back as they exit the bus. The standard must be completed within 20 seconds.

There are some simple ways in which an SBDI can help to ensure that this is a safe portion of the test. First, make sure that you **instruct the driver not to jump out the emergency exit**, but to sit and slide, just like the children are trained for evacuation. The "sit and slide" method will reduce liability and also help prevent drivers from hitting their heads on the doorway as they exit the bus. Second, a foam rubber gym mat, not thicker than four inches, can be placed on the ground behind the bus emergency door. This will not only help to cushion knees and ankles from shock, it will also provide a more comfortable surface if a driver falls forward after landing. Third, it is permissible to have another individual present to "spot" as in gymnastics activities, to help prevent injury. The individual spotting should not touch or otherwise assist the driver in exiting the vehicle, but be available to help if the driver starts to fall.

The standard applies to the "rearmost floor-level emergency exit" for all vehicles. For rear engine buses this exit would be the side emergency door which has full access without seats in the way, not the exit over the back seats. For all other school buses, the correct exit would be the rear door emergency exit at the back of the bus. There are two possible scenarios for consumer type vehicles (sedan, suburban, or minivan). For sedans the driver must exit from the passenger door. For minivans, the exit would be back between the front seats and out the rear side door.

**Standard # 7: Carry or drag individuals in a bus emergency procedure.**

**Measurement: Demonstrate the ability to drag or carry a 125 pound object 30 feet in 30 seconds.**

This standard evaluates the driver's ability to potentially evacuate or move an incapacitated student in a school bus emergency. It is not recommended that this standard be performed on a school bus because of the difficulty in moving the weight into and out of the bus to perform the standard. The test for Standard # 6 has already demonstrated the drivers ability to move through the bus, so this portion of the test does not need to measure that ability.

This is the one standard in the driver physical performance test that requires the use of equipment other than a school bus or a stopwatch. The testing equipment for the carry or drag requirement has been standardized. Your compliance with the following procedures will ensure that all school bus drivers are tested uniformly and fairly:

1. Attach to the floor, parking lot, or sidewalk a piece of rubber bus flooring which is at least 30 feet in length, plus a few feet extra for turning the bag around. Mark off the 30 foot distance on the mat. The mat may be attached permanently to the surface or taped to the floor just for the test. This surface was chosen to standardize testing surfaces across the state and to simulate the same surface as the floor of a school bus. No spray coating may be used on the flooring to make it slippery or easier for the bag to slide.
2. The SBDI should use a military style duffel bag made of cloth, canvas or a cotton material which has a strap attached to the top and/or each side for assistance in pulling the weight across the flooring. Duffel bags are available from Army Navy stores. PTSI is working on developing a stronger, more durable duffel style bag with the same weight and pulling characteristics of a military duffel bag. No extra material or spray coating on the outside of the duffel bag may be used which helps it to slide easier.
3. The SBDI should use certified barbell weights. If the weights you are using are not certified by the manufacturer, you can contact your county weights and measures department. They will weigh and certify the weights you are using. There should be no cost for this service. You may not use any other material in place of certified barbell weights for this test. **We recommend that you use 5, twenty-five pound weights, stacked and taped or tied together so they do not flop around in the bag. The weights must remain stacked throughout the test. They may not be placed two or three abreast lying in the bottom of the bag and stretching 2 or 3 feet in length on the ground. It is substantially easier to pull the bag if the weights are in multiple stacks lying in a long row in the bottom of the bag rather than in the required stack. If you are using smaller individual weights place 20 to 25 pounds on the first level of the stack, and repeat the layers until you have reached the 125 pounds. Once you have assembled the 125 pound weight, complete the Test Equipment Inventory and retain for your records.**

Place the weighted bag at one end of the flooring behind the 30 foot mark. The driver must pull the bag along the flooring until it has traveled thirty feet to the other end of the flooring. This must be completed in thirty seconds. In order to best prepare the driver for this portion of the test, encourage the driver to bend their knees to get lower to the ground, not just to bend from the waist and put undue stress on their back. The closer their pulling point is the floor, the more efficiently their energy will be transferred to the weight. Drivers should take continuous small steps backwards so that the motion will not be a series of jerks on the bag. Breaking the weight free is the hardest part and a continuous pulling motion will mean that the weight will only be started one time.

Have the driver demonstrate their pulling position to you before the test starts. Let them take a pre-test pull or two on the bag if they like so that they can see that this standard is not overly difficult and that 30 seconds is a long time. Over 100 drivers field tested these standards and all passed the test easily. Offer to call out the seconds as the driver pulls the bag. This will reassure the driver that they have sufficient time to complete the test and encourage them to slow down and avoid injury. It is possible to complete this portion of the test in 6 to 10 seconds, however there is no need to do so and risk injury.

### **Record Keeping**

SBDIs should complete form PT 900 with the results of the driver test. Please fill out the form completely, noting driver name, address, motorist ID number, class, 19A carrier or employer, and test location. For each standard except # 4, list the time in which it was completed. Circle "pass" or "fail", as appropriate, for each standard completed. If the standard is not completed, the letter DNC (Did Not Complete) should be written in the time space provided on the form. The SBDI should not add any comments on the form relative to the driver's performance other than noting time and circling "pass" or "fail" or using "DNC".

**If a driver fails a standard, stop the test immediately. Do not continue and risk possible injury to the driver.**

When you have assembled a kit of material or equipment that you will regularly use for testing, complete the Test Equipment Inventory on page 8 and retain a copy with your records. If you change any equipment for testing, complete a new Test Equipment Inventory and file that with you records. If the results of any test you conducted are challenged, you will need to provide detailed information concerning the testing equipment.

A copy of the completed PT 900 should be given to the driver. The original should be put in the driver's personnel file. Retain a copy for your records and forward a copy to SED at: State Education Department, Management Services, Room 876 EBA, Albany, New York 12234.