

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS AND SCHOOL BUS AIDES

New Jersey Administrative Code requires that all employers of school bus drivers and school bus aides ensure that they are properly trained in all of the functions necessary for them to successfully perform their duties. Those duties include safe driving practices, as well as student care and discipline. This applies regardless of whether the school bus drivers and aides are employed by a local board of education, a coordinating transportation services agency (CTSA), or a school transportation contractor. Local boards of education must ensure that all CTSA, school transportation contractors, or other school districts acting as a host comply with these training requirements.

Training should include all subjects itemized in the administrative code governing student transportation, as well as any specialized information a driver or aide might need based upon the students they transport on their school bus routes and the characteristics and conditions of the roadways on which they travel. Employers must make sure that their drivers and aides receive this instruction prior to beginning work on a new school bus route. In addition, they should regularly provide their drivers and aides with training updates, reminders when a refresher is needed, and new information when a new student is added to an existing bus route.

State Training Regulations:

N.J.A.C. 6A:27-11.3 Training

- (a) Employers shall ensure that all school bus drivers and school bus aides are properly trained for the functions of their positions.
- (b) Employers shall administer a safety education program for all permanent and substitute drivers and aides. At a minimum, the training shall include:
 - 1. Student management and discipline;
 - 2. School bus accident and emergency procedures;
 - 3. Conducting school bus emergency exit drills;
 - 4. Loading and unloading procedures;
 - 5. School bus stop loading zone safety;
 - 6. Inspecting the school vehicle for students left on board at the end of a route; and
 - 7. The use of a student's education records, including the employee's responsibility to ensure the privacy of the student and his or her records, if applicable.
- (c) In addition to the training requirements in (b) above, employers shall administer to school bus drivers a safety education program that includes defensive driving techniques and railroad crossing procedures.

Training for Drivers and Aides of Special Needs Students

School bus drivers and school bus aides who transport special needs students, or drivers who may substitute on a route transporting special needs students, should be trained in the specific needs of the students on board that route. This includes the handling of special equipment, such as wheelchairs and child safety seats, operation of wheelchair lifts and wheelchair tie-downs, and any special requirements in the student's Individualized Education

Plan (IEP). The driver and aide should be made aware of any special environmental considerations necessary for the students (i.e., temperature or noise level on the school bus). If a student's medical or psychological condition could change or be impacted by anything during the bus ride, the school bus driver and aide should be made aware of this, and be trained in both recognizing this change and what needs to be done, if anything, in reaction to this change.

Both school bus drivers and school bus aides are considered to be school officials who have legitimate educational interest to the parts of a student's record related to transportation without parental consent, including the student's IEP, under the *Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, 20 U.S.C. section 1232g. Any training provided to drivers and aides who have access to this information should include proper use of these records and the drivers' and aides' responsibility to ensure the privacy of the student.

School district child study teams should readily provide the school transportation office with any information pertaining to the student that is necessary in planning for the student's transportation. The student's school bus driver and school bus aide, if applicable, as well as any substitute drivers or aides, should be given any information relative to the student which will be necessary to ensure the student's safety on the bus ride. These individuals should be trained in both the use of and reactions needed to the information, as well as district privacy policies.

***N.J.A.C. 6A:27-12.1* General requirements**

- (j) School bus drivers and aides shall be considered under the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, to be school officials who have a legitimate educational interest to parts of a student's record relating to transportation, without parental consent.
1. Legitimate educational interest, applicable whenever a school official needs to review an education record to fulfill his or her professional responsibility, is defined for school bus drivers and aides as information needed to receive proper training and ensure informed actions to safely transport the student and any other students on the bus.
 2. School bus drivers and aides shall receive training in the use of a student's education records and in their responsibility to ensure the privacy of the student and his or her records.

The Role of Good Communication in the Transportation of Special Needs Students

The sharing of information is vitally important in the transportation of special needs students, as well as training of school bus drivers and school bus aides who will work with these students. District child study teams **must** share any information that is needed to ensure the safe transportation of their classified students with the district transportation office. Transportation office staff needs to know the specific needs of each child so that they can plan bus routes that meet those needs. For example, if noises agitate a student, that student should not be placed on a route that includes other students who call out or act out. The training of school bus drivers and bus aides can be enhanced by the input of students' classroom teachers and classroom aides, the school nurse, and the students' parents, along with the child study team. It is important that these lines of communication exist during the planning of any transportation staff training, and remain open throughout the entire time that the student is provided transportation.

Frequently Asked Questions

For any specific questions, please contact Student Transportation at (609) 984-5757 or email student.trans@doe.state.nj.us.

1. What kind of training is needed in order to perform “the functions of the position”?

Training for school bus drivers is itemized in administrative code at *N.J.A.C. 6A:27-11.3*.

6A:27-11.3 Training

(a) Employers shall ensure that all school bus drivers and school bus aides are properly trained for the functions of their positions.

(b) Employers shall administer a safety education program for all permanent and substitute drivers and aides. At a minimum, the training shall include:

1. Student management and discipline;
2. School bus accident and emergency procedures;
3. Conducting school bus emergency exit drills;
4. Loading and unloading procedures;
5. School bus stop loading zone safety;
6. Inspecting the school vehicle for students left on board at the end of a route; and
7. The use of a student’s education records, including the employee’s responsibility to ensure the privacy of the student and his or her records, if applicable.

(c) In addition to the training requirements in (b) above, employers shall administer to school bus drivers a safety education program that includes defensive driving techniques and railroad crossing procedures.

In addition to all aspects of driving a school bus, railroad crossing procedures and defensive driving should be included. Employers should add any additional items specific to the roads travelled and the needs of the students assigned to each route. School bus aides should be instructed in most of the same topics with the exception of school bus operation and driving techniques.

2. Should specialized training be provided to those who will transport special needs students? Who is responsible for this training?

Yes, additional training in the transportation of special needs students should be provided to all drivers and aides assigned to routes carrying special needs students. Any other school bus drivers who could at any time substitute for a regularly assigned driver on such routes should also receive this additional training.

School districts are responsible for ensuring that drivers are properly trained. Even if districts have contracted with a service provider to complete required training, the district is responsible to ensure that the training is properly carried out and contractual training obligations are met.

3. Should school bus drivers and aides be given access to student records?

School transportation providers have a legitimate educational need for access to confidential student information in order to assist them in providing appropriate and safe transportation to the student. Along with their right to this information comes the responsibility to protect it. The rights of school bus drivers and school bus aides, as school officials with a legitimate educational interest in this information can be found in Part B of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* and the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)*.

School district child study teams should readily provide the school transportation office with any information pertaining to the student that is necessary in planning for the student's transportation. The student's school bus driver and school bus aide, if applicable, as well as any substitute drivers or aides, should be given any information relative to the student which will be necessary to ensure the student's safety on the bus ride. These individuals should be trained in both the use of and reactions needed to the information, as well as district privacy policies.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation (NASDPTS) issued a paper on this subject. It can be found at <http://www.nasdpts.org/Programs/Confidentiality.html>.

4. Are there any specific requirements for transporting specialized equipment which the student may require?

New Jersey Motor Vehicle administrative code sets forth the method by which various types of specialized equipment must be transported.

N.J.A.C. 13:20-49D-14

(a) Portable student support equipment items such as crutches, walkers, oxygen bottles, or ventilators, shall be securely fastened at a mounting location able to withstand a pulling force of five times the weight of the item or shall be retained in an enclosed, latched compartment.

5. What are the regulations governing the transporting of medication on school buses?

Each district is required to develop a policy addressing the transportation of medication on school buses in accordance with the state regulations pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:16-2.1*.

In general, the transporting of medication should be a last resort. The better option is for parents to get the portion of medication to be used in school to the school nurse. If medication must be transported on the bus, it should be in a sealed container and be labeled with the student's name, name of the medication, dosage, etc. A designee of the school (e.g. nurse, principle) should meet the bus and take the medication from the driver.

Check with your school nurse or school physician for guidance.

6. What are the regulations governing the transporting and use of epinephrine pens (EpiPens) on school buses?

Each district is required to develop a policy addressing the transportation of medication on school buses pursuant to state laws and regulations. *N.J.S.A.* 18A:40-12.5 and 12.6 and *N.J.A.C.* 6A:16-2.1.

7. Can service animals be transported on school buses? What should a school bus driver or school bus aide know about transporting such an animal?

Students classified with special needs have a right to bring their service dogs to school with them and also on the school bus. These rights are guaranteed by a number of federal laws including: the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990*, the *Air Carrier Access Act of 1986*, the *Fair Housing Amendments of 1988*, the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*.

Before driving or serving as an aide on a school bus route on which a student will be riding along with their service dog, both the school bus driver and aide should be instructed in the following:

- Procedures for loading/boarding the bus for both student and dog;
- Safe riding positions for the dog and whether or not the dog should be restrained;
- Emergency procedures including evacuation of both the student and the dog, as well as instruction in basic commands the dog is trained to follow should the student be unable to communicate those commands;
- Dog behavior management; and
- If the dog is trained to signal an alert if the child experiences a problem, i.e., impending seizure, difficulty breathing, instruction in how to recognize that alert as well as how to respond in order to assist the student.

A basic overview of the transportation of service animals can be found in an article in *School Bus Fleet* at <http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/Channel/Special-Needs/Articles/2004/11/What-You-Need-to-Know-About-Transporting-Service-Animals.aspx>.

8. Where can student transportation training information/materials be obtained?

A substantial number of resources and contact information for the training of school bus drivers and school bus aides can be found on the Internet. Sources of training programs are widely available, some at no cost and some for a fee. Below is a list of some of those sources.

- National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) at www.naptonline.org/
- National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation (NASDPTS) at www.nasdpts.org/
- Other state transportation offices and organizations, such as California Association of School Transportation Officials (CASTO) at www.casto-one.org/

- School Transportation Supervisors of New Jersey (STS) at www.njsts.org/
- Pupil Transportation Safety Institute (PTSI) at www.ptsi.org/?dp=index
- New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Student Transportation safety video library at <http://www.nj.gov/education/finance/transportation/training/>
- Other school districts: colleagues are often willing to share their materials, programs and procedures with their neighbors. Make sure you give them credit when using their programs.
- Internet Search – many resources are available and numerous contacts can be found on the Internet