

Advanced Techniques for Special Education Bus Drivers

Reference Guide and Test

Introduction

In part one of the series we demonstrated the skills special ed. bus drivers would need to know in order to operate a special ed. bus. In addition, we demonstrated how to load, unload and tie down wheelchairs. ***In the second part of the series*** we will be following a veteran bus driver as she demonstrates how to safely transport special ed students. During the course of this video the bus driver will cover the major techniques that drivers face during a normal school day. Emphasis will be on the safety for the bus driver as well as the students she is transporting.

The guide will be broken down into the following 9 categories:

- 1) Preparation for Loading**
- 2) Off Loading Ambulatory Students**
- 3) Tying Down the Wheelchair**
- 4) Safe Driving Techniques**
- 5) What to do if a Parent isn't Present to Meet Their Child**
- 6) Special Issues**
- 7) Bus Driver Aides**
- 8) Cleaning up Bloodborne Pathogens**
- 9) Important Additional Issues**

Preparation for Loading

- 1)** The driver must make sure the bus is safe before leaving it. This is done by securing the driver's compartment. Then, depending on the regulations in place for your school district, either turn on the red lights alerting motorists you are loading students, or follow the regulations your district has in place.
- 2)** Next, greet the student affectionately. Remember you are the first person to greet the student at the beginning of each school day. Be friendly and let the student know you are

interested in him or her. Special ed. students respond to this kind of acknowledgement, so make it part of your daily routine.

- 3) Next, talk with their parents and find out if there's anything important going on. Does the student feel alright? Is he or she tired? Remember, you can be an important link in communicating to the student's teacher any changes in the student's physical needs.
- 4) Another important consideration is checking the wheelchair's overall condition before loading it onto the bus. Brakes, seatbelt and all working parts of the wheelchair must be in good working condition. Remember this; if a wheelchair isn't in proper working condition, you must not load it onto the school bus. It is the parent's responsibility to make sure the wheelchair is in good working condition.
- 5) Also, keep in mind that the configurations of wheelchairs vary widely. If you are not familiar with the features of a new wheelchair, go to your supervisor and make sure you get familiarized with the specifics of any new configurations. Remember it's your responsibility to know if a wheelchair is in proper working condition.
- 6) Once the wheelchair has been checked out, you are ready to load it onto the bus. Be sure to maintain proper body mechanics when pushing or pulling the wheelchair onto the bus. Remember to be careful when bringing the wheelchair onto the bus, and to duck your head when pulling the wheelchair inside of the bus.

Off Loading Ambulatory Students

- 1) When loading or off loading ambulatory students, be careful not to expose your back to injury. In one example in the video, the bus driver was using the small of her back to offload a student. In this situation, any sudden quick movement could lead to a back sprain.

2) A safer way to off load a student is to use your legs and hips to bear the weight of the lift. If the student then makes a sudden quick movement, you're in a much better position to avoid injury to yourself as well as the student.

3) Another important consideration is the placement of the students. Special needs students like routine. It makes them feel secure so it's important to place their wheelchairs in the exact same location each school day. Also, place the wheelchairs in the bus in a way that allows you to easily off load them. Make sure that the wheelchairs in the back of the bus are not the first to be dropped off. The first drop offs should be close to the loading platform.

Tying Down the Wheelchair

1) It is important as a special ed bus driver to maintain the highest safety standards. However, this can be difficult to handle when having to tie down multiple wheelchairs within a tight time schedule. A good starting point is to plan ahead. Begin by laying out the tie downs before the students are ready to be loaded onto the bus. This will save valuable work time. Prioritize where each student will be placed and decide upon the most efficient order to lead the students onto the bus. Planning ahead is a major contributor to being able to load multiple students onto the bus in a short period of time.

2) Next, insert the tie downs into the rails, making sure that the tie down is firmly seated and can't come out. Remember, the safety of the students depends on how secure the wheelchair is seated.

3) Follow this up by wrapping the tie down around the strongest part of the frame of the wheelchair. Cinching down the tie downs exerts a lot of pressure on the frame so a welded point is an ideal place to wrap the tie down. Once the tie downs have been wrapped around the frame, ratchet them into place making sure to remove all of the slack. *Don't cinch them*

down to tightly because you could damage the frame.

4) Protecting the back is a major concern for all special ed. drivers while tying down wheelchairs. In the video, take careful notice of how Karen always maintains proper back posture when applying pressure to the tie downs. Karen also protects her back by using the walls of the bus to leverage herself. This alleviates stress and lessens the chance for back injury.

5) Personal safety for a bus driver can never be overlooked. The need for tying down wheelchairs under a tight time schedule must be balanced out by taking the time to provide for your own personal health needs. Remember one serious back injury can end your career.

Safe Driving Techniques

1) Special ed. students lack motor coordination, muscle tone and body strength which makes their reaction to sudden stops or quick turns very limited. Bus drivers have to learn to deal with these limitations by driving in a way that minimizes quick stops, sharp turns or any other type of aggressive driving.

2) Driving in heavily congested city streets means that the driver will have to constantly apply the brakes. To do this while transporting students means that the brakes should be applied gently, yet firmly. By gradually applying the brakes the students will be protected and will not be thrust forward.

3) Another concern for special ed. bus drivers is making turns. Try to avoid sudden, sharp turns. Instead, make turns that are rounded and smooth. This way the students will not be pushed forward or sideways.

- 4)** If you see a student that needs assistance take the time to carefully come to a stop in an area free of traffic congestion. Don't pull over in a busy area or your bus may become a traffic hazard.
- 5)** When stopping to load a student, pull up to the curb as close as possible. By doing this you will make it easier to load or off load the wheelchair.
- 6)** A special ed. bus driver must always stay focused and constantly monitor the bus to see what is going on. If you notice that one of the students isn't where he or she is supposed to be and could possibly get hurt, pull the bus over to the curb quickly but safely. Then take action to remedy the situation.

What to do if a Parent is not Present to Meet Their Child

- 1)** What should a special ed. bus driver when taking a student home to his or her designated drop off point, and there is no one there to meet the students. The following are several options that you can use:
 - a)** First, you the bus driver, can call dispatch and ask them to call the home of the student to see if anyone is there.
 - b)** Second, the bus driver can go to a pre arranged site that the parents and school officials have agreed upon in the event that no one is available to meet the students at their drop off point.
 - c)** Third, the bus driver can return to the home school and drop the student off. The student can then be kept at the school until the parents are able to pick the student up. If the parents do not arrive to pick up the student, the school can contact child protective services for help.
 - d)** Fourth, the bus driver can circle back to the original drop off point and see if the parent has returned to pick up their child.

2) Each school district has different procedures for returning students when parents are not available. Learn what these procedures are and be sure to follow them.

Special Issues

1) A bus driver must be alert to their students at all times. In the video, Karen is always aware of what her students are doing. While driving, Karen noticed that one of her students appeared to be having a seizure. Following is a guide of what action to take if something like this happens to you while driving the bus.

2) Karen carefully pulls the bus over to the side of the street. Next, she goes over to the student to comfort him or her in any way she can. In the example shown in the video, the student was suffering from a petite mall seizure. Karen, in this situation, is instructed to let dispatch know of the students condition. She explains to dispatch that she will continue onto school with the student.

3) When a student suffers a more severe seizure, aggressive action must be taken. This can include having dispatch call 911. Another alternative is to take the student directly to the nearest emergency facility.

Bus Driver Aides

1) When a situation arises where it becomes obvious that a bus driver can't take care of all the tasks alone, it becomes necessary to use an aid. The aid can be invaluable in many different ways. Some special ed. students need constant monitoring. In these cases a school aide must be used. Most special ed. drivers can handle their duties without an aide. However, when a student requires special assistance an aide becomes a necessity and this allows the bus driver to function normally.

Cleaning Up Bloodborne Pathogens

1) Bloodborne Pathogens are viruses that are found in blood or other types of body fluids. These viruses may contain either the HIV virus or Hepatitis B. It's vitally important as a special ed. driver that you know how to safely clean up a bloodborne pathogen spill.

2) In the video, Karen begins the clean up procedure by putting on a pair of durable latex gloves. It's important to check the gloves and make sure there are no rips or punctures. When putting on the gloves make sure they fit snuggly. Start the clean up procedure by spreading the compound over the spill. This coagulates the fluid and makes it easier to remove.

3) Next, take the plastic scoops and start picking up the congealed material. Place it into an OSHA approved red bag. Continue this process until the spill has been removed. Now take the disinfectant and thoroughly spray the area where the spill occurred. The disinfectant should kill any residue of a virus that may still be in place.

4) The next step is proper removal of gloves. In the video, notice how Karen carefully removes the gloves without allowing any part of the contaminated portion of the glove from reaching her skin. Before disposing of the contaminated material, be sure to check with your district and make sure to follow their procedures on how to dispose of the infected material.

5) The final step is to use universal precautions. Make sure to thoroughly wash your hands and use an anti microbial soap while you are washing up. Also, be sure if any of your clothes are soiled from the spill that they are washed in a laundry separate from any one else's clothes.

9) Important Additional Issues

- 1)** Occasionally the electrical system can fail on the bus and the platform has to be raised manually. When this happens there is a couple of things to keep in mind. First, after placing the wheelchair securely on the lift, get another person to hold onto the wheelchair as it's being raised. Also, read the bus owner's manual to learn how to properly operate the mechanical lift of the bus
- 2)** Another important issue to remember is that a platform that is not folded up after use can become a major safety hazard. Children sometimes don't look where they are going and they could easily collide with an exposed platform. Always take time to fold up a platform as soon as possible to prevent an accident from occurring.
- 3)** Another important safety issue is making sure that the platform after it's folded inside the bus is not left exposed. The rule here is simple. As soon as you return to the bus, cover the platform.
- 4)** Another reminder concerns tie downs. Don't leave them on the floor of the bus where they may become a safety hazard. Pick them up and store them away before you off load your students.
- 5)** It is important to make sure you go over the bus route with your supervisor. There may be valuable information in the bus route book about the habits and specific needs of the special ed students you will be transporting. Parents understandably guard the confidentiality of their children. However, when they are forth coming about the needs of their children this information can be invaluable to a special ed. bus driver.
- 6)** One last important consideration is the configuration of the tie down track. New federal regulations mandate that wheelchairs must be facing forward. Many older buses are set up

like the one you saw in the video, as sideways facing. By reading the bus owner's manual you will be able to determine what type of configuration you should use.

CLOSING

Throughout the video and this guide, we have emphasized the many tasks and skills that are required of special ed. bus drivers. There are probably few jobs in public schools that are more demanding. By performing these tasks successfully, the special ed. bus driver provides a safe environment for the students they transport each school day. We salute you. By doing this you are providing these special ed. students with optimism. You start and end their day on a positive note. Keep up the great work!

TEST QUESTIONS

1) Securing the bus driver's compartment is not part of the preparation for loading or off loading students.

TRUE or FALSE

2) It's all right to load a wheelchair onto the bus even though one of its parts may not be working.

TRUE or FALSE

3) A safe way to off load an ambulatory student is to use your legs and hips to bear the weight of the lift.

TRUE or FALSE

4) The order in which wheelchairs are loaded onto the bus is not important.

TRUE or FALSE

5) It's important to lay our the tie downs before loading the students onto the bus because it saves valuable work time.

TRUE or FALSE

6) The tie down should be wrapped around the strongest welded point of the wheelchair frame.

TRUE or FALSE

7) Cinching down the tie down as tightly as possible will not damage the wheelchair.

TRUE or FALSE

8) Proper back posture is important when applying pressure to the tie downs.

TRUE or FALSE

9) A special ed bus driver must know how to safely clean up a bloodborne pathogen spill.

TRUE or FALSE

10) Special ed students can easily react to sharp turns while being transported.

TRUE or FALSE

ANSWER KEY

1) FALSE

2) FALSE

3) TRUE

4) FALSE

5) TRUE

6) TRUE

7) FALSE

8) TRUE

9) TRUE

10) FALSE