

# Dispatcher Training: **The Centerpiece**

**Reference Guide and Test**  
Produced by Video Communications

## **INTRODUCTION**

**I** A school bus transportation department can be a busy place. This includes: training classes, bus certification tests being administered, school bus routes being examined and the influx of drivers, parents and students through what seems like a revolving door. There is a lot to be said about how transportation departments stay organized with so much going on. Transportation departments rely on many key pieces within the department to make each day successful and each part of the transportation team is essential to ensure that things run smoothly. One of the most critical pieces to this, is a dispatchers role within an organization.

**II** A dispatcher's role in the transportation department is essential for many reasons including: getting drivers timely information about their routes, finding replacement drivers for routes, working as the department liaison, and giving and receiving information from supervisors, mechanics and other transportation personnel.

**III** In the video, we go over the roles, responsibilities and job duties of a school bus dispatcher. The majority of the video was shot in real time to give the viewer the best possible examples of what the typical work day of a dispatcher looks like. The host throughout the video is Beth Sokol, transportation dispatcher at El Dorado Union High School District. The theme throughout the video is to demonstrate how important a dispatcher's position is and that the dispatcher is essentially the hub of the transportation department.

## **THE DISPATCHER'S ROLE IN THE TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT**

1) School bus dispatchers are one of the most important pieces to make a transportation department run smoothly. As a dispatcher you have to be a messenger, a problem solver, a mediator and more. You are also doing all of this while taking multiple calls, keeping an even temper, limiting personal opinions and staying composed with a confident demeanor. Dispatchers must be organized and on top of their game.

2) With that being said, the job of a dispatcher is often overlooked. But, the dispatcher is the go to person for everyone in the transportation department. If a bus breaks down , the driver will immediately call the dispatcher. If a mechanic is needed to go out to the bus, where did they get this information from? The dispatcher. The dispatcher also alerts supervisors about these situations. The dispatcher will also be the first person that can supply information to parents. A dispatcher isn't just a piece of the organization, they are a vital component to it.

3) Many dispatchers are actually former drivers and understand the ins and outs of the operation. Some, however, come from an administrative background or from an entirely

different industry and have little or no transportation experience. In that case, **we suggest that a new dispatcher verse themselves in the school bus driving world to really grasp and understand what drivers face on a daily basis.** By understanding a bus drivers job, it will give you a better understanding of yours.

4) Dispatchers may get calls from bus drivers for any of the following reasons:

- a) A broken down bus.
- b) The driver needing to issue an evacuation of the bus.
- c) Obstructions in roadways.
- d) Student behavior on the bus.
- e) Suspicious persons at bus stops.
- f) Route changes and more.

5) Dispatchers may get calls from parents regarding issues such as:

- a) Unsafe bus stop locations.
- b) Student safety.
- c) Bus driver concerns and a variety of other reasons.

6) Dispatchers keep in close contact with supervisors regarding a number of things like:

- a) A potential threat on campus or the bus.
- b) A notice to all buses for a change of route due to a major incident or weather related activity.
- c) Or to be a relay between supervisors, parents and bus drivers.

7) **Dispatchers also must keep in constant communication with department mechanics.** The importance of knowing what you will have in your fleet is critical if you need to adjust routes due to buses that need maintenance or are having mechanical issues.

8) And if there is a threat on or around the bus that or if the bus was involved in an accident or there is a fire on board, **it is the dispatcher who will be relaying this information from the bus driver to emergency personnel such as the police and/or the fire department.**

## **DISPATCHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

9) It's natural to wonder what the responsibilities are for the job you will be performing. The

thing about a dispatchers position is that one size doesn't fit all. However, keep in mind that there is a possibility of doing a variety of tasks on any given day. A dispatchers responsibilities can include, but is not limited to:

- a) Handling route and bus stop issues.
- b) Handling complaints.
- c) Speaking with parents as well as transportation and school personnel regarding behavioral or disciplinary problems.
- d) Contacting emergency personnel when needed.
- e) Administering bus passes.
- f) Driving the school bus if it becomes necessary.

10) When you are talking about a job where you need to wear many hats, this definitely covers dispatching. Adjustments and adaptations must be made on a continual basis. The willingness to learn every part of the school bus world will take you from being a good dispatcher to a great one.

11) Dispatchers are given a detailed description of each the driver's schedule.. This means the dispatcher must be able to relay critical information to drivers, parents and other transportation officials. The critical information being relayed can be for: school closures, weather and road conditions, road work or construction and mechanical issues.

12) The possibilities of job duties and responsibilities of a dispatcher can be endless. Once again, the best thing you can do is familiarize yourself with as much of the transportation departments operations as possible.

## **INFORMATION DISPATCHERS NEED TO KNOW**

13) As a dispatcher you are going to have to know many things. And the key to running an efficient operation is being organized. If a driver calls in because their bus is experiencing mechanical issues on their route, the dispatcher should know: the bus number, the area in which the bus broke down and if an evacuation was ordered. This information is important and it will provide a method for dealing with the issue that the driver of the bus is facing.

14) **Dispatchers should know every route of every driver.** Whether routes are composed on paper or done electronically, every street name and a basic idea of its location will be imperative for the for the dispatcher to know. By knowing the areas along the route, the dispatcher can give drivers critical information for a safer and more efficient ride to school or home.

15) Since dispatchers are the number one relay person within a transportation department, it will be important for you to know and have accessible many different phone numbers and points of contact.

16) **Knowing every driver and the routes of each driver will be important information to have for location and identification of the bus.** Knowing and being able to supply information about a bus's location is critical for a number of different reasons, such as:

- a) A threat on or around the bus.
- b) A mechanical issue.
- c) Accidents.
- d) If an evacuation is ordered, and more.

17) You will also need to know how to operate 2-way radios and a variety of electronic communications equipment. Each organization may have different types of communication equipment, so you will need to familiarize yourself with the types of communication devices that your organization is utilizing.

18) **Many organizations also utilize tracking software for their fleet.** There are a lot of them available and if your organization has this type of software, you should take the time to learn the in and outs of the program. Tracking software is a game changer for dispatchers. It allows dispatchers to see where all buses are at all times. Some tracking software are more robust than others and require additional programming. Nonetheless, this type of software is invaluable for transportation departments to utilize.

19) **You will need to know transportation supervisors numbers, as well as individual school officials, such as principals and assistant principals.** If a behavioral issue takes place on the bus, it will be you many times who will be setting up a meeting between parents, supervisors and other school officials. Since you are the center of contact, the information you receive and distribute is going to play a major part in: How, when and where these meetings are to be conducted.

20) **If something does happen on the bus that requires law enforcement or involvement by emergency personnel, it will be imperative for you to know the phone numbers for these agencies and the main points of contact within them.** You should have these numbers memorized and be able to pass on critical information to the appropriate agencies when necessary to do so.

21) **You should have a knowledge of state laws as well as traffic regulations.** If you

have not driven a bus in the past or not familiar with regulations, procedures and laws, take the time to study up on them.

## **COMMUNICATION AND KEEPING YOUR COOL**

22) Clear communication and communication to the appropriate parties is an essential part to your job. Did you know that a transportation department can receive over 100 calls any given day? If you think this is a job where you're watching the clock, you are mistaken. If you think this is a job where you can be lazy or pass an issue off to someone else, you should be looking for another line of work. To do your job successfully requires you to communicate with co workers, supervisors, parents, students, principals, bus drivers, mechanics and emergency services personnel.

23) **When communicating with the public, school and/or department personnel you need to hold yourself to a level of professionalism that will be a representation of the district** you work for. Here are some examples of effective verbal communications skills. First and foremost is active listening. There is a difference between hearing audibles come from someones mouth and actually really listening to their concerns. By actively listening to someones concerns you can address them appropriately.

24) The next part to actively listen, is to ask for clarification. Do you really understand the question being posed? Do you need some elaboration or additional context? By asking for clarification, you are ensuring the person you are speaking with that you are engaged in the conversation to better address their concerns. When clarifying with someone, try asking open-ended questions to gain additional insight.

25) When speaking with parents or anyone in the organization, you should not only try your best to be polite, but also being: Clear, Concise and complete.

26) The other thing we want to talk about is self control and keeping your emotions in check. We are all human and sometimes we can all lose our cool. Having an irate parent berate you or be outright rude is not a position anybody wants to be in. But, it will be part of your job to remain level headed. Your job requires thick skin. Your ability to maintain your cool and work towards a successful resolution if your goal.

27) The ability to keep your cool is not just limited to parents, it is to everyone in the organization. There will be times where you will feel overwhelmed and just want to scream, which is completely understandable. Allow yourself to feel those emotions, just make sure they come at the appropriate times.

28) Dealing with so many different types of people and personalities can be mentally exhausting. Your supervisor knows this. If it gets to a point where you feel like you need to take a break, do it. Returning from a break with a clear mind and a level head is far better than letting your emotions get the best of you.

## **WORKSTATION ERGONOMICS**

29) As a dispatcher, you not only have to keep your emotions in check, but your physical health is equally important. And since you're going to be spending a lot of time in your chair, make sure you consider the ergonomics of your job. **Proper ergonomics can help prevent injuries by reducing strain and keeping the body in a healthy posture.**

30) Improper chair height can cause discomfort and pain in the hips, legs, and lower back. **To achieve a proper sitting posture, you should raise your chair to allow your feet to rest flat on the floor, thighs to be parallel to the floor, and hips to be level with the knees.** You should also get up and walk around when you have the chance so you're not injuring your back by sitting in the same position for so long.

31) Desk height is the other thing to be aware of. To avoid wrist strain, which can lead to carpal tunnel syndrome, **users should maintain desks at a height that allows them to keep their forearms parallel to the floor and their wrists in a neutral position.** The other part to this is to understand there are many desk height adjusters that are fairly inexpensive. They can allow you to adjust the height of your desktop. This not only makes it more comfortable, but they also allow you to stand up to do your work.

32) When it comes to monitor placement, **you should position the computer monitor so the top of the screen is at or slightly below eye level**, which will help reduce neck and eye strain. And if possible, avoid positioning the monitor directly in front or behind a bright light source. To reduce glare and prevent eye strain and discomfort.

33) As for the keyboard and mouse, you should place them in a position that allows elbows to be at a 90-degree angle and wrists to be straight. Avoid placing them too far away, which can cause overreaching and shoulder strain.

34) And although obvious, it needs to be stated that **you should never be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while performing your duties.** This includes prescription drugs as well. You need to always be no top of your game when in communication with several drivers at once. A clear head for this type of job is absolutely necessary.

## **CLOSING**

Throughout the video we have covered many of the roles, responsibilities and the information you need to know to succeed as a dispatcher. We have also covered many communication techniques and illustrated the importance of keeping your cool in a variety of situations. In addition, we have went over several techniques that can be applied to reduce injury during your workday. And finally, you deserve all the recognition in the world. A dispatchers job is not easy. It is full of challenges everyday. Your ability to effectively communicate and be a problem solver is what makes transportation departments run smoothly. You are the unsung hero. Your planning, efficiency and role in the department is invaluable.



## TEST QUESTIONS

1) A dispatchers job is not as critical as a bus drivers job since they're not transporting students.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

2) Many dispatchers are former bus drivers.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

3) Dispatchers may get calls from parents regarding issues such as:

a) **Unsafe bus stop locations.**

b) **Student safety.**

c) **Bus driver concerns.**

d) **All of the above**

e) **None of the above**

4) Dispatchers only needs to talk to mechanics when a bus experiences mechanical issues.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

5) Dispatchers only need to know the route of drivers with the most bus stops.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

6) Tracking software is invaluable to have to keep the best track of buses on their routes.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

7) You should take a break if you are feeling overwhelmed.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

8) The best way to get through to a parent is to make sure you get your point across.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

9) Proper ergonomics can help prevent injuries by reducing strain and keeping the body in a healthy posture.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

10) The dispatcher is the hub of the transporation department.  
**TRUE or FALSE**

## **ANSWER KEY**

- 1) FALSE**
- 2) TRUE**
- 3) d**
- 4) FALSE**
- 5) FALSE**
- 6) TRUE**
- 7) TRUE**
- 8) FALSE**
- 9) TRUE**
- 10) TRUE**