

School Transportation Professionals



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Introduction

School buses are the safest form of mass transit in America.

Drivers expertly navigate city congestion as well as isolated country roads and in all kinds of weather.

School bus drivers are the first people to greet children on their way to school and the last to bid them goodbye as they return home. Bus drivers, monitors and aides are often the first to recognize when a child is troubled or ill. In addition to driving,

often in bad weather or heavy traffic, they are responsible for first aid and emergency evacuation procedures, student conduct and discipline, and the safe transport of students with special needs. All employees in a district's transportation department keep up with new safety requirements, regulations and policies. As school budgets tighten, they face the threat of privatization, overcrowded buses and sometimes angry parents. Most of NYSUT's 4,800 school bus drivers, bus aides and monitors will tell you that they find their jobs rewarding and enjoy the time they spend with our youth. They appreciate the personal fulfillment they get from their work.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Privatization	1
Professional Development	2
Health and Safety Concerns	4
Student Behavior	5

Privatization

Privatization, contracting out, and outsourcing – these words all mean the same thing; transferring the work of public school employees to the private sector. This is a direct threat to public education for several reasons:

- Privatizing hands over control of operations and employees to a private company. The district no longer has control of costs or the delivery and quality of the work being done, but they maintain responsibility.
- Our members have a vested interest in the students and community as, more often than not, the school bus drivers, monitors, bus aides and bus mechanics live in the districts where they work. They care about their passengers' safety, well-being and confidentiality of student information.

- Once outsourced, transportation professionals typically lose benefits, salary, and hours. They also lose the benefit of union representation including health and safety protection and grievance procedures.

What to do:

At the first sign that your district is thinking about privatizing their transportation services, speak to your local union leadership who will in turn speak to your NYSUT Labor Relations Specialist (LRS) to begin the process of fighting back this threat. A campaign to fight outsourcing must be well planned out and organized and will require mobilizing your membership as well as your community. NYSUT, NEA and AFT all have excellent resources and staff to help with this effort.

Where to go:

- First, your local union leadership who will speak to the LRS.
- For an excellent source of information, In the Public Interest, a Washington, DC-based company, has produced a booklet called *“Making the Grade? Questions to Ask About School Services Privatization.”* It can be found at: www.InThePublicInterest.org.
- www.nea.org – Put privatization in the search box to bring up information.
- www.aft.org – Put privatization in the search box to bring up information.

Professional Development

School bus drivers have a series of testing they must complete before employment and through their career. From bullying, intrusions, and violent attacks, the school bus is not immune from situations that put drivers’ and students’ security and safety at risk. Often acting as the lone authority figure on the buses, school bus drivers are tasked with the difficult responsibility of maintaining order while operating their vehicle safely – not an easy job!



New Drivers:

Regulations state that new drivers must: obtain the appropriate license, be fingerprinted for a criminal history background check, have three personal references, have a physical within four weeks prior to beginning transporting students, pass the physical performance test, be drug tested, and have completed the SED three-hour pre-service course.

Within the first year:

Complete the SED basic course.

Annually:

Take a minimum of two two-hour refresher training sessions; have a physical; have a defensive driving performance review; conduct three bus safety drills on each route; have driving record reviewed; be subject to random; reasonable suspicion; and post-accident drug and alcohol testing.

Every two years:

Take a behind-the-wheel road test; written or oral test; and a physical performance test.

Skills training and professional development are vital components to building a quality transportation workforce. Suggested topics of worthwhile training for transportation staff include:

- Bus safety
- Positive behavior management and interventions
- Dealing with difficult people
- Bullying – what it is, how to deal with it
- Ergonomics and repetitive stress injuries
- Transporting special needs children
- First aid
- Driver wellness
- Communications skills

What to do:

Survey your members to see what types of training they feel would help them in their jobs. Work with your district to evaluate the current training offered to your transportation staff and discuss the training needs of your members. Set up a schedule of professional development for your drivers, bus aides and bus monitors.

Where to go:

- First, speak to your local union leadership who will in turn have a conversation with your local's NYSUT LRS about your training needs. There are excellent workshops offered through the NYSUT Education and Learning Trust (ELT) on several appropriate topics.
- The Pupil Transportation Safety Institute at www.ptsi.org offers many worthwhile professional development modules.

- National Association for Pupil Transportation www.napt.org offers training modules.
- AFT (www.aft.org) and the NEA (www.nea.org) also offer booklets and information on driver safety and training.

Health and Safety Concerns

School bus drivers face several health and ergonomic issues by the very nature of their job. Air pollution, uncomfortable seats, extended sitting, leg and back problems, infectious diseases, stress, fatigue, long and split hours of work, limited restroom access, violence from students and parents, temperature extremes, and dangerous road conditions name but a few.

It is imperative that those in this profession take care to live a healthy lifestyle. Eating right and getting regular exercise to counter the long sitting periods and getting plenty of undisturbed sleep will help to keep alert during bus runs.

Obstructive Sleep Apnea Regulations

Some states and local school districts already require school bus drivers to undergo further medical review when they display certain risk factors associated with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). At the federal level, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has increased its consideration of whether the effects of OSA impair commercial motor vehicle drivers' ability to perform their jobs safely. Federal guidelines {49FRPart391.41(b)(5)} on lung health can apply to sleep apnea as well as emphysema or other diseases. "If the medical examiner detects a respiratory dysfunction that in any way is likely to interfere with the driver's ability to safely control and drive a commercial motor vehicle, the driver must be referred to a specialist for further evaluation and therapy."

At this juncture, New York state school bus drivers are exempt unless and until New York adopts laws governing this. Currently, the OSA regulations are only for long-haul drivers and private bus companies. President Obama recently signed H.R. 3095 (now Public Law 113-45) which requires the FMCSA to go through a formal notice and comment rulemaking proceeding when issuing guidance on the screening, testing and treatment of commercial drivers for OSA and other sleep disorders.

Because fatigue from lack of proper sleep can contribute to accidents, there is a lot of concern about OSA. OSA is not the only cause of sleep disturbance and fatigue, but it is one that can be under the driver's control. OSA is affected by weight, medications and alcohol use, and by health problems including reflux disorder and allergies. Since the safety of our students - as well as our drivers - is of utmost concern, the National School Transportation Administration (NSTA) and the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services have been advocating for this legislation. NYSUT will monitor this matter and keep members informed.

What to do:

Work with your union and your LRS to help create working conditions that will reduce hazards and enhance health. What are your member's health concerns? What improvements can be made to be sure the bus is a safe, healthy, clean and comfortable place for everyone on board?

Where to go:

NYSUT's health & safety specialist, Wendy Hord, is available to help with issues. She can be reached through your LRS.

Student Behavior

The school bus driver not only has to be a master driver and follow all the road rules, he/she must also have great student behavior management skills. This is not an easy job considering the driver's back is to the students most of the time. Some drivers are fortunate to have a bus aide or bus monitor to help out with student behavior. The key to successful behavior management is training for all bus personnel.

Setting the tone for your bus, much the same way a teacher sets the tone in their classroom, will help prevent problems. Be sure to greet every student every day. Get to know students' names and set an example of courtesy and friendliness.

It is important the driver establish and review clear rules and expectations right in the beginning. Rules establish expectations for acceptable behavior and safety. Rules should be simple, realistic and enforceable and posted where everyone can see them. Rules should be short and stated positively to promote good behavior. Enforcement should be consistent. Ideally, students should take a copy of the rules home to be reviewed with parents and signed and returned.

Overcrowded buses can contribute to or exacerbate student misbehavior and jeopardize safety if students are not fully within the confines of a seat. Currently, school bus capacity is not regulated by a federal entity. Three-to-a-seat fits differently for elementary students than high schoolers. As districts try to cut costs, bus runs are being combined leading to overcrowding on the bus and spillover in the aisle. Large school buses depend on compartmentalization to keep students safe while small buses require that all seating positions must be equipped with properly installed seat belts for students. Major safety issues arise when students are in the aisle while the bus is in motion. If the bus is involved in an accident or needs to make a quick stop the children are not protected by the seat in front of them.

Bullying on the bus is a serious issue that must be addressed. Due to the construction of buses, bullying can be easily hidden in the back of the bus and behind seats. Bus drivers need to be diligent and listen to what is going on behind him/her and respond quickly to all reports of bullying. Everyone is affected by bullying. It is reported that 50 percent of students are bullied at some point in their school career. School personnel cannot afford to be silent bystanders; they must act to make the school and bus a safe place for all students. As of July 1, 2012, the New York State Dignity for all Students Act mandates schools and school personnel to act on and to report incidents of bullying. Know your district's bullying policies

and procedures. Many schools include this as part of the code of conduct. Make sure you know what is expected of you when a bullying incident occurs and know the district staff who are trained and responsible for handling these situations. Districts often have strict requirements for reporting so you must understand these. If you cannot find them, ask the building administrator.

What to do:

This is another issue where training is key to helping transportation staff know how to handle situations. Union leaders should work with their districts to provide necessary training.

Where to go:

Your state and national unions have excellent bullying programs.

- NYSUT Education Learning Trust (ELT) offers a workshop “Bully, Bullied, or Bystander” www.nysut.org/elt
- AFT offers “See a Bully, Stop a Bully” www.aft.org
- NEA offers “Bully Free, It Starts with Me” www.nea.org

Transportation professional supplemental materials are available free through NYSUT. Contact Linda Watkins at lwatkins@nysutmail.org to order the following:

- Health and Safety Fact Sheet *Bus Garage Ventilation*
- AFT *Guide to Employee Substance Abuse Tests for CDL Holders*
- NEA *ESP One Education Workforce: Transportation Services*
- *PTSI 2014 NYS Laws & Regs for School Bus Drivers, Monitors & Attendants* (NYSUT makes the updated books available each year)
- Pamphlet *Managing Student Behavior on the School Bus*
- *Employees’ Retirement System Q&A booklet*

Sources used:

- American Federation of Teachers – www.aft.org/psrp
- Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration – www.fmcsa.dot.gov/
- National Education Association – www.nea.org/esp
- New York Association for Pupil Transportation – www.nyapt.org
- Pupil Transportation Safety Institute – www.ptsi.org
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - <http://www.nhtsa.gov/School-Buses>
- National Association of State Directors for Pupil Transportation Services at www.nasdpts.com

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Several sources have been used in the creation of this document. They include: the AFT, NEA, NYSUT, State Department of Civil Service and the above web sites.