

# **Handbook for Support Professionals Who Ride the School Bus**

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Developed in collaboration with:  
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Pinellas Education Support Professionals Association (PESPA)  
Payroll Department, Pinellas County Schools  
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## **ESE Support Professional Responsibilities**

Under the direction of the bus driver, the ESE Support Professional provides assistance with the safe loading and unloading of students with disabilities, and the supervision thereof, while en-route to and from the school. Duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Assists the driver with securing students in equipment such as wheelchairs, safety vests, lap belts, and/or car seats
- Assists the driver in securing wheelchairs and other equipment on the bus to ensure the safety of the students
- Assists the student with moving, positioning, entering and exiting the bus as needed\*
- Monitors bus safety rules and assists bus driver in maintaining discipline on the bus
- Implements individual behavior plans that have been developed by the student's individual education plan (IEP) team
- Provides input to the bus driver regarding student seat assignments based on individual student needs
- Provides a means of communication with bus driver for students who are nonverbal
- Serves as a communication link between school and parent, upon request
- Assists the driver with stopping and/or evacuating the bus in the event of an emergency
- Serves as a route guide to a relief or substitute driver when necessary
- If necessary, handles minor first aid and the clean-up of body fluids using universal precautions

**\*ESE Support Professionals are expected to assist the student, but should never carry the students. Lifting of students may only be done after specialized training.**

## Absences

In the event you will not be able to report to work, complete the following steps:

1. Contact your school administrator as soon as possible so they can find a substitute.
2. Contact the transportation department to relay the information that you will not be riding the bus.



School Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

School Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Bus Driver Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation Department Dispatch:

**(727) 669-1220**

North County: Extension 2552

South County: Extension 2551

## Special Transportation Needs

Each student that receives special education services has an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP team makes the decision whether or not a student will require assistance to safely ride a bus (special transportation). When the IEP team decides that this is needed, the school assigns a support professional to ride the bus and assist with the student's needs.

## Bus Assignments



Bus assignment will be determined at the beginning of the school year based upon the needs of the students attending your school. However during the course of the school year, a student new to the school may need support and bus assignments will be re-addressed. Individual assignments will be made based on seniority (the school will decide if they will use years of service school-based or county-wide) **OR** a documented process created by an inclusive committee with input from all support professionals and administration. Several schools have developed plans that are working well. If you would like more information on those plans, contact PESPA at 585-6518.

## Parking

Support Professionals should park on school board property whenever possible. If this is not an option, the driver and the support professional must agree on a safe location, get approval from the transportation department, **and** obtain written approval from the management of the property.



## Access to Your Car

In cases of personal emergency, the work site is committed to return the support professional to his/her car. The school should have a documented process that ensures the support professional's return to the location where their car is parked. This process may state that another member of the staff will provide transportation or that paid transportation (taxi fare) will be provided.

## Dress for Safety

It is suggested that the support professional, for safety purposes, wear clothing and footwear that allow for moving quickly within the bus.

## Car Seats and Safety Vests

The support professional assists the driver in securing a student in equipment including car seats, safety vests, and lap belts.

- All PreK students will use a child safety restraint (car seat or safety vest)
- Students 40 lbs. and under must ride in a car seat
- PreK students 41 lbs. and over must be secured in a safety vest
- Car seats remain with the student
- Schools must have a process for loading and unloading car seats
- The equipment must be delivered to the bus driver prior to student dismissal, to provide enough time for the driver to ensure all equipment is properly secured.

## Wheelchairs

The support professional assists the driver in securing wheelchairs on the bus properly to ensure the safety of the students.

### Process for safely loading students with wheelchairs

#### The Bus driver...

1. Sets parking brake and activates “stop arms”
2. Locks the lift door in an open position
3. Activates the lift to lower it to ground level
4. Checks to be sure the student’s lap belt is snugly fastened
5. Positions the wheelchair on the bus lift with the student facing out, far enough back so the footrest clears the safety guard on the front of the lift.
6. Secures the wheelchair on the lift
  - a. Manual wheelchair brakes are locked before operating lift
  - b. Power wheelchair
    - i. Switch power to off
    - ii. Lock the wheelchair brakes
    - iii. Re-engage gears to set internal locking mechanism
7. Secures safety strap (if available)
8. Activates lift keeping one hand on the wheelchair at all times



#### The Support Professional...

1. Unfastens the safety strap (if applicable)
2. Unlocks wheelchair brakes or disengages gears on motorized wheelchairs
3. Manually pulls wheelchair onto bus and guides it off the lift and into a forward facing position to be secured.



## **Process for Safely Unloading Students Using Wheelchairs**

### **The Bus driver...**

1. Sets parking brake and activates “stop arms”
2. Locks the lift door in an open position

### **The Support Professional...**

3. Manually guides the wheelchair onto the lift with the student facing out
4. Unlocks wheelchair brakes or disengages gears on motorized wheelchairs
5. Secures the wheelchair on the lift
  - a. Manual wheelchair brakes are locked before operating lift
  - b. Power wheelchair
    - i. Switch power to off
    - ii. Lock the wheelchair brakes
    - iii. Re-engage gears to set internal locking mechanism
6. Secures safety strap (if available)

### **The Bus Driver...**

7. Activates the lift and lowers it to the ground, maintaining a grip on the wheelchair frame while the lift is in motion
8. Unlocks the brakes and guides the wheelchair off of the lift

## **Loading and Unloading Students**

The support professional may be responsible for escorting a student from the bus into the school, or to the classroom door, and returning them to the bus in the afternoon. Support professionals do **not** walk students to the door of the home or day care facility. Meeting the student is the responsibility of the parent or their designee. Students in PreK–3<sup>rd</sup> grade and non-ambulatory Elementary students must be met at the bus by the parent or their designee. Parents of older students may opt not to meet the bus by completing a waiver which must be approved by a school official.

### **When a parent or their designee fails to meet the bus:**

- First offense—Deliver the other students on the bus and then return to the residence or the school.
- Second offense—Deliver the other students on the bus, return to the residence or the school, **and** notify the ESE Transportation Liaison who will have a documented telephone conference with the parent.
- Third offense—Deliver the other students on the bus, return to the residence or the school, **and** notify the ESE Transportation Liaison who will have a documented conference with the parent and school officials.
- Subsequent offenses—Deliver the student to the Department of Children and Families **and** notify the ESE Transportation Liaison who will have a mandatory conference with the parent, school officials, and transportation officials.

## **Discipline and Safety**

The primary responsibility of the support professional is maintaining the safety of the students who require assistance as determined by the IEP team. The support professional assists the bus driver with maintaining a safe environment by:

- Helping to determine the most effective seating arrangement to minimize problems
- Keeping an up-to-date seating chart of all students who ride the bus
- Actively monitoring student behavior and supporting the management plan
- Documenting incidents in writing as requested
- Staying alert to possible safety issues that may occur on the bus
- Working with teachers, behavior specialists, and school administrators to address individual behaviors
- Implementing individual students' bus intervention plans
- Remaining respectful, kind, firm, and consistent

### **What should I do if I'm having problems with a student's behavior on the bus?**

1. Talk with the student's case manager or teacher to see if a positive behavior plan is in place and whether it could be extended to include behavior on the bus. The teacher, case manager, behavior specialist and guidance counselor are good resources for strategy suggestions.
2. For severe problems that may include regular education students, talk with your school administrator.

## **Bus Referrals**

In the event a student's behavior warrants a referral, remember that writing bus referrals is the responsibility of the bus driver. However, both the driver and the support professional should sign the referral.

You may be asked to participate in a conference with parents and administrators in regard to a student's behavior on the bus. Keeping written documentation of the behaviors and events will help you accurately remember what happened and is very useful in helping the team to problem solve a solution.

## **Bus Suspensions**

**Bus Discipline:** Students with disabilities may be suspended from the bus. If the student is unable to attend school as a result of the bus suspension, the bus suspension day(s) are considered as out-of-school suspension days in computing the 10 day cumulative total allowed within the year. As a result of the limit on out-of-school suspension days without ESE service provision, principals may elect to utilize other interventions, e.g., in-school suspension, or fewer out-of-school suspension days when assigning disciplinary action.

1. When a student with disabilities reaches a cumulative total of 5 bus suspension days, an IEP meeting will be scheduled to develop a Bus Intervention Plan and make any needed changes to the IEP.
2. When a student with disabilities reaches a cumulative total of 10 bus suspension days, an IEP meeting will be scheduled to develop/review the Functional Behavior Assessment and the Bus Intervention Plan. In addition, a Manifestation Determination will be conducted and any needed changes to the IEP will be made.

3. As transportation may be a related service for a student with disabilities, if expulsion from the bus is recommended, transportation alternatives will be considered.

#### 5500.11 CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT

## **Emergency Evacuation**

In the event of an emergency, the support professional assists the bus driver in evacuating the bus safely. A written bus emergency plan should be developed with the driver. The plan must identify exactly what each person will do in case of an emergency requiring an evacuation of the bus. This plan should be practiced during mandatory bus evacuation drills.

Here is a sample of items on a bus emergency plan:

- The driver, after making the decision for an emergency evacuation, instructs the support professional, shuts off and secures the bus, calls 911, gets out belt cutters and first aid kit, does a headcount, instructs and reassures the students while clearing an exit path.
- Ambulatory student are told to undo any seat belts and are assisted by the support professional in getting out of their seats, while the driver removes or cuts seat belts.
- The support professional opens the back emergency exit, exits the bus, assists the students in exiting, and leads the students 100 feet from the bus.
- The driver gets children out of car seats and hands them to the support professional outside the bus or cuts the straps securing the car seat and hands the entire seat to the support professional.
- The driver removes or cuts straps securing a student in a wheelchair. The support professional and the driver lift the student (driver at the legs and support professional at the head) out of the wheelchair to the floor (with the student's head toward the exit).
- The support professional leaves the bus to take position at the emergency door.
- The support professional puts his/her arms through the armpits of the student, grasps his/her wrist, and drags the upper body, while the driver squats and grasps the student's ankles.

- The driver then kneels and drops to his/her stomach, lowering the student's legs as far as possible before releasing.
- The support professional begins dragging the student away as the driver exits the bus.
- The driver grasps the student's legs to assist the monitor, and the team carries the student to the other students.
- After the evacuation, a headcount is done to assure that all students are accounted for and the transportation department is contacted.

## Confidentiality

The support professional treats students and their families with professional respect and is careful to maintain confidentiality. Don't talk to other students or adults about problems a child or his family is having.

*"We should never violate a family's right to privacy by discussing confidential information with family and friends; doing so is unlawful, unprofessional, and unethical."*

*- Office of Professional Standards, PCS*

## Communication

The support professional helps with communication between the bus driver and students who are nonverbal, or students who have trouble communicating clearly with people they don't know.

***Remember: You are the first contact a child has with the school experience every day. You can make the difference in his/her day by the way you respond to him/her. You are also the last person that the child sees at the end of his/her day. A positive word from you may make their evening.***

## Hands-on Professional Development

For refresher hands-on training focused on skills and information needed to safely assist students with disabilities on the school bus, have your school administrator contact the ESE Transportation Liaison at 547-7208.

# Reporting of Bus Time

It is important to understand how you are paid for your time when riding a bus. Often your schedule will differ from that of the hours of the school. The bus routing sheet will designate the time you will begin to be paid for your work day, and recorded on your time log. Even if the bus is running late, as long as you are at the designated location that will be your official start time. You are off the clock when you get off the bus. This end time is also detailed on the bus log but may be different due to unexpected circumstances. Your work day may begin or end before or after school-based employees report to work or end their day. The normal workday is defined per Pinellas Education Support Professionals Association (PESPA) contract. Principals may look at creative ways to provide employees a 7-hour workday if hours are impacted by a shortened bus route.

Personnel who are assigned to ride buses to supervise students with disabilities shall receive a supplement of three dollars and twenty-five cents (\$3.25) per ride not to exceed six dollars and fifty cents (\$6.50) per day for duty on the bus. A rider who only rides one time, either morning, midday or afternoon, receives a daily supplement of three dollars and twenty-five cents (\$3.25). Six dollars and fifty cents (\$6.50) will be paid for two or more rides.

Support Professionals will be disciplined for not reporting their time for bus riding accurately as detailed in School Board Policy 4140 Discipline of Support

**Bus Rider's Time Log**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ (print) Run # \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTIONS for bus associates: Enter all time in hours and minutes. Start bus time is when you are scheduled to get on the bus. End bus time is when you get off the bus at the end of the day. Fill out log daily and have bus driver initial each day or have an administrator or supervisor sign the time sheet at the end of the pay period.

WEEK OF: 08/17/09 thru 08/21/09

Day	Start Bus	Begin Schedule	Extra Time AM		Lunch	End Schedule	End Bus	Extra Time PM		Extra Total	BUS Supplmnt			Bus Driver's Initial
			full	half				none	B1		R1	none		
Mon			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Tue			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Wed			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Thr			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Fri			0:00					0:00	0:00					
<b>Total Wk 1</b>			0:00					0:00	0:00					

(Rounded to Nearest 1/4 Hr) E1 0.00

WEEK OF: 08/24/09 thru 08/28/09

Day	Start Bus	Begin Schedule	Extra Time AM		Lunch	End Schedule	End Bus	Extra Time PM		Extra Total	BUS Supplmnt			Bus Driver's Initial
			full	half				none	B2		R2	none		
Mon			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Tue			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Wed			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Thr			0:00					0:00	0:00					
Fri			0:00					0:00	0:00					
<b>Total Wk 2</b>			0:00					0:00	0:00					

(Rounded to Nearest 1/4 Hr) E2 0.00

I catch my bus at (location) \_\_\_\_\_ Route \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that this statement is accurate (sign) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Administrator/Supervisor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Staff. The penalty could range from Caution to Dismissal. The office of Professional Standards will be recommending very stiff consequences for those found to be paid for hours not worked.

Falsification of time may be cause for dismissal.

**Important Note:** This is the official online log from Payroll for verifying time on the bus for payroll purposes. Time reported should be the actual time (e.g., 7:13 AM–3:47 PM) **NOT** rounded up daily. Rounding to the 1/4 hour is for the Weekly Total.

*Thank you for filling such an important role in ensuring the safety of students with disabilities on the school bus!*