

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE

FEBRUARY 2025



Transportation Considerations



This resource guide on bus safety for students with disabilities is designed to provide essential information, tips, and best practices to help students with disabilities, families and school district personnel confidently navigate developing a robust transportation IEP for the student. By working together, we can create a secure and supportive environment for every child, ensuring not only their safe transport but also their ability to thrive in their educational journey.

Contents



Guiding Regulations



Understanding Student Needs



Decision-Making



Policies, Procedures & Practices



Resources



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



PART 1: **GUIDING REGULATIONS**



Guiding Regulations



According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and corresponding state regulations at N.J.A.C. 6A:14, the term "related services" encompasses a broad range of supportive offerings essential for students with disabilities to benefit from special education. As defined under 20 U.S.C. §1401(26)(A) and N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.9, related services include transportation, along with developmental, corrective, and other supportive services.

Specifically, N.J.A.C 6A:27-5.1(a)1 mandates that the district board of education provides transportation services as stipulated in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) of each eligible student with disabilities. These transportation services are integral to ensuring that students have access to and from educational facilities and can fully participate in their educational programs.

The range of transportation services provided will vary based on the individual needs of the student. This includes, but is not limited to, special transportation equipment, transportation aides, and special arrangements for other assistance to and from school (N.J.A.C. 6A:27-5.1(a)1).

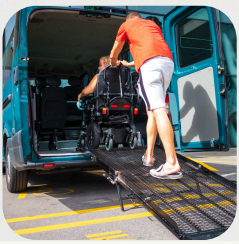
The provision of transportation services under federal and state regulations is fundamental in guaranteeing that students with disabilities have full access to their education programs, promoting their educational success and overall well-being within the school environment. These regulations underscore the Department's commitment to fostering supportive school environments where students with disabilities receive the necessary services to thrive academically and socially.



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



PART 2: **UNDERSTANDING STUDENT NEEDS**



Understanding Student Needs



Decisions regarding transportation and related supports are tailored to the individual needs of each student. Refer to the flowchart for guidance on addressing specific accommodations and support requirements effectively.

Does the student require transportation as a related service?



Is a wheelchair lift required?



Wheelchair Lift Requirements



Weight Requirements



Is a car seat or harness required?



Car Seat and Harness Information



Car Seat and Harness Requirements



Transportation Restraints Information



Wheelchair Lift Requirements

School bus lift requirements for students with disabilities are governed by federal and state regulations to ensure safe and accessible transportation. Here are the key aspects of school bus lift requirements:

ADA Compliance: School buses that provide transportation to students with disabilities must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This federal law mandates that public entities, including school districts, ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities. This includes providing accessible buses equipped with lifts or ramps.

*Click
here*

Types of Lifts: School buses are typically equipped with either hydraulic or electric lifts. These lifts are designed to safely raise and lower individuals using wheelchairs or other mobility devices onto and off the bus. They must be capable of accommodating various sizes and types of wheelchairs.

Accessibility Standards: The lifts on school buses must meet specific accessibility standards outlined in the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) for transportation vehicles. These guidelines ensure that lifts are safe, reliable, and capable of securely transporting students with disabilities.

*Click
here*

Training Requirements: School bus drivers and aides undergo training on how to operate the lifts safely and assist students with disabilities in boarding and disembarking the bus. This training includes understanding proper procedures for securing wheelchairs and ensuring the safety of all passengers during transportation.

*Click
here*

Individualized Needs: The IEP for each student with disabilities may specify the type of lift or accessibility equipment required based on the student's individual needs. It is crucial for schools and transportation providers to adhere to these specifications to ensure the student's safety and comfort.

Maintenance and Inspections: Regular maintenance and inspections of school bus lifts are essential to ensure they function correctly and safely. This includes checking hydraulic systems, electrical components, lift operation mechanisms, and adherence to manufacturer guidelines.

Emergency Procedures: School bus drivers and aides are trained in emergency procedures related to the operation of lifts, ensuring they can safely evacuate students with disabilities in case of an emergency.

By adhering to these requirements and guidelines, school districts ensure that students with disabilities have full access to transportation services, promoting their independence and participation in educational activities.

Weight Requirements



Weight requirements for students with disabilities using bus lifts are important considerations to ensure safety and proper operation of the lift. Here are key considerations related to weight requirements:

Capacity Limits: Bus lifts have specified weight capacities that dictate the maximum load they can safely lift and transport. These capacities are determined by the manufacturer and must be strictly adhered to for safe operation.

Variability: Different types of bus lifts may have varying weight capacities. It is essential for transportation providers and school districts to be aware of and comply with the specific weight limits of the lifts installed on their buses.

Wheelchair and Occupant Weight: The weight capacity of a bus lift typically includes both the weight of the wheelchair or mobility device and the weight of the occupant using it. This ensures that the lift can safely accommodate the combined weight without exceeding its capacity.

Safety Considerations: Exceeding the weight capacity of a bus lift can compromise safety, leading to mechanical failures, instability during operation, and potential injuries to passengers and operators. Adhering to weight limits is crucial for preventing accidents and ensuring the overall safety of transportation for students with disabilities.

Individualized Assessment: When determining the appropriate bus and lift for a student with disabilities, transportation providers may conduct individualized assessments to ensure that the selected equipment can safely accommodate the student's specific needs, including weight considerations.

Compliance: Transportation providers must comply with all relevant safety regulations and guidelines, including those set forth by federal and state authorities such as the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), to ensure safe transportation for students with disabilities.

Adhering to weight requirements for bus lifts is critical to maintaining safety and accessibility for students with disabilities during transportation. Properly managing weight capacities helps ensure that lifts operate safely and efficiently, supporting the independence and well-being of students with disabilities as they travel to and from school.

Car Seat and Harness Requirements

When it comes to transporting students with disabilities on school buses, ensuring their safety often involves the use of specialized car seats and harnesses. Here are some key considerations:

Individualized Needs: Some students with disabilities may require specialized seating arrangements due to mobility challenges, medical conditions, or behavioral needs. These needs are typically addressed through the student's IEP, which may specify the type of seating or harness required.

Types of Restraints: Depending on the student's needs, they may use various types of restraints, including:

- Car Seats: Some students may require their personal car seat that meets specific safety standards and provides adequate support.
- Harness Systems: Harnesses secure students in their seats, providing additional safety and support. These systems may include chest harnesses, lap belts, or combinations thereof.

Safety Standards: Any car seat or harness used on a school bus must comply with applicable safety standards, such as those set forth by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). These standards ensure that the restraints are crash-tested and provide adequate protection in the event of an accident or sudden stop.



Installation and Securement: Properly installing and securing car seats and harnesses is crucial to their effectiveness. School bus drivers and aides should receive training on how to properly install and secure these restraints to ensure the student's safety during transit.

Comfort and Accessibility: It is important to consider the comfort and accessibility of students using car seats and harnesses on school buses. Proper fitting and adjustment of the restraints helps ensure that students are both safe and comfortable throughout their journey.

Regular Assessment and Updates: The need for car seats and harnesses may change over time as a student's needs evolve. Periodic assessments and updates to the student's transportation plan, in collaboration with parents/guardians and healthcare providers, help ensure that the seating and restraint systems continue to meet the student's needs effectively.

Providing appropriate car seats and harnesses for students with disabilities on school buses is essential for ensuring their safety and comfort during transportation. By adhering to safety standards and individualized plans, transportation providers can support the needs of all students in the school transportation system.

Car Seat and Harness Requirements

Below are key considerations when selecting or designing car seats or harnesses for students with disabilities to ensure their safety, comfort and accessibility:

Type of Disability: The type and severity of the disability will influence the choice of seat or harness. For example, students with mobility impairments may require seats that accommodate wheelchairs or specialized positioning equipment.

Safety Standards: All seats and harnesses must meet rigorous safety standards set forth by organizations like the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) or other relevant authorities. This ensures they can withstand the forces of a crash or sudden stop and protect the student from injury.

Customization: Seats and harnesses should be customizable to meet the specific needs of each student. This may include adjustable straps, padding, or supports to provide optimal comfort and safety.

Accessibility Features: Seats and harnesses should be designed to facilitate easy boarding and disembarking for students with disabilities. This might involve features like swivel seats or easily adjustable harnesses that aid caregivers and bus drivers in assisting students.

Support and Positioning: For students who require additional support due to physical disabilities or medical conditions, seats or harnesses may include built-in supports or attachments for medical equipment. This ensures proper positioning and reduces the risk of injury during transit.

Ease of Use: Bus drivers and aides should receive training on how to safely and effectively use the seats or harnesses. This includes proper installation, adjustment, and securement techniques to ensure the student remains safe throughout the journey.

Durability and Maintenance: Given the wear and tear of daily use, seats and harnesses should be durable and easy to maintain. Regular inspections and maintenance schedules help ensure that they remain in optimal working condition.

Collaboration with Healthcare Professionals: Collaboration with healthcare professionals, therapists, and educators is essential in determining the most appropriate seating or harness solution for each student. Their expertise ensures that the chosen equipment supports the student's physical and developmental needs.

Selecting the right car seat or harness for a student with a disability involves careful consideration of safety standards, customization options, accessibility features, support needs, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. By prioritizing these factors, schools and transportation providers can ensure that students with disabilities travel safely and comfortably on school buses.

Restraints

Students with disabilities may require specialized restraints as safety measures to ensure secure transportation. Below are key considerations:

Types of Restraints: Students with disabilities may require various types of restraints depending on their individual needs. Common types include:

- **Harness Systems:** These typically include chest harnesses, lap belts, and sometimes a combination of both to secure the student in their seat.
- **Specialized Car Seats:** Some students may use specially designed car seats that meet safety standards and provide additional support.
- **Wheelchair Securement Systems:** For students using wheelchairs, securement systems are used to safely anchor the wheelchair to the bus floor, often in combination with occupant restraints.

Safety Standards: All restraints used on school buses must meet stringent safety standards to ensure they can withstand the forces of a crash or sudden stop. § N.J.S.A. 39:3B-10 requires seat belts or other child restraint systems that are in conformity with applicable federal standards.

Individualized Plans: The use of restraints is typically outlined in the student's IEP. These plans specify the type of restraint necessary based on the student's disability and safety requirements.

Installation and Training: Proper installation and use of restraints is crucial for their effectiveness. School bus drivers and aides should receive training on how to correctly install and secure restraints, ensuring they are properly adjusted and fitted to the student.

Comfort and Accessibility: Restraints should be adjusted to ensure the student's comfort while maintaining their safety. It is essential for restraints not to restrict movement unnecessarily but to provide the necessary security during transportation.

Regular Inspections: Routine inspections and maintenance of restraints are necessary to ensure they remain in good working condition. This includes checking for wear and tear, proper functioning of buckles and straps, and adherence to safety standards.

Emergency Preparedness: N.J.A.C. 6A:27-11.3 requires school bus drivers and aides to receive training on emergency procedures, including the use of restraints.

By adhering to these guidelines and ensuring proper use of restraints, schools and transportation providers can enhance the safety and well-being of students with disabilities during their school bus transportation. Effective restraint systems contribute to creating a secure environment that supports students' participation in educational activities.



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



PART 3: **DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

Transportation as a Related Service: IEP Development

Including transportation as a related service in the IEP of a student with a disability requires thorough discussion and careful consideration of several factors. This process occurs during an IEP meeting and involves the following key considerations to ensure effective planning:

1. Understand the Regulations

- **N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.9 and N.J.A.C. 6A:27-5** outline the responsibilities of school districts regarding transportation for students with disabilities. Familiarize yourself with these regulations to ensure compliance.

2. Gather Information

- **Student Needs:** Review the student's IEP to understand their specific needs, including any medical conditions, mobility issues, or behavioral considerations.
- **Transportation Options:** Consider the different modes of transportation available (e.g., traditional bus, specialized transport).

3. Collaborate with Stakeholders

- **IEP Team:** Include parents, special education teachers, transportation staff, and any relevant specialists. Collaboration ensures that all perspectives are considered.
- **Input from Parents:** Encourage parents to share their concerns and preferences regarding transportation.

4. Assess Transportation Requirements

- **Safety Needs:** Determine if the student requires special accommodations (e.g., a wheelchair lift, a monitor for behavior support).
- **Travel Time:** Discuss travel times and duration of the commute.

5. Develop the Transportation Plan

- **Route Planning:** Identify the best route that accommodates the student's needs, minimizing travel time while ensuring safety.
- **Bus Assignment:** Decide whether the student will ride a standard bus or require a specialized vehicle.
- **Additional Support:** Determine if an aide or monitor is needed on the bus to assist the student.

6. Document the Plan

- **In the IEP:** Ensure the transportation plan is formally documented in the IEP, including specific details about the transportation arrangements.
- **Clear Instructions:** Provide clear instructions for the bus driver and aides regarding the student's needs and any necessary procedures.

Additional Considerations

Review and Revise

- Plan for regular reviews of the transportation arrangement to address any issues. Adjust as needed based on the student's progress or changing needs.

Communicate

- Ensure that parents are aware of the transportation details and whom to contact for concerns.

Encourage Feedback

- Create a system for parents and staff to share feedback on the transportation experience to support continuous improvement.



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A white outline map of the state of New Jersey is centered in the background of the slide.

PART 4: POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND PRACTICES

Policy Development and Revision: *Guiding Questions*

Robust policies, procedures, and practices surrounding the transportation of students with disabilities are essential to ensure that students with disabilities receive the necessary services to thrive academically and socially. For many students with disabilities, reliable transportation is a related service that directly impacts the provision of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Clear, well-defined policies help school districts meet legal obligations under the IDEA, while comprehensive procedures ensure that these policies are implemented consistently. Effective practices, such as regular staff training and appropriate accommodations, help address the unique needs of each student and prevent potential issues. Together, these elements contribute to a safe, supportive transportation system that center the well-being and success of all students with disabilities.

LEAs can use these guiding questions to drive essential discussions in developing or revising transportation policies for students with disabilities, ensuring that policies address safety, accessibility, and individual needs. Including both internal stakeholders, such as special education staff and transportation personnel, and external stakeholders, like families and transportation providers, adds valuable perspectives on practical challenges and community needs. This collaborative approach helps create realistic, effective policies that foster trust, promote clear communication, and ensure safe, reliable transportation for all students.





Accommodations

- ▶ How are accommodations tailored to meet individual student needs during transport?
- ▶ Are there options for quiet spaces or calming tools for students who may need them during the ride?
- ▶ Does the LEA work with transportation vendors to ensure students are not on the bus for long periods of time?



Communication

- ▶ How are families notified of changes in the transportation schedule?
- ▶ Who is the point of contact for transportation-related questions or concerns during the school day?
- ▶ Who is the point of contact for transportation issues that occur outside of normal school hours?



Consistency & Reliability

- ▶ What efforts does the LEA take to ensure the same driver and aides are assigned to a specific student's route whenever possible?
- ▶ What measures are in place to address late arrivals, missed pick-ups or other issues that may affect transportation reliability?
- ▶ How are such transportation issues communicated to families?

Guiding Questions



Eligibility & Services

- ▶ Can you explain the criteria used to determine if a student qualifies for transportation as a related service?
- ▶ Are there different levels of services based on disability or eligibility category?



Incident Protocols

- ▶ What procedures are followed in the event of an emergency or incident during transport? How are families notified?
- ▶ Are there policies addressing behavioral issues that may arise during transport? How are families involved in discussions and decision-making?



Monitoring & Feedback

- ▶ Does the LEA have a process to collect feedback from families regarding transportation services?
- ▶ Does the LEA regularly assess transportation services and vendors to ensure they are meeting student needs? How is this information shared with families?



Service Coordination

- ▶ How is transportation coordinated with other IEP services?
- ▶ What measures are in place to address late arrivals, missed pick-ups or other issues that may affect transportation reliability?
- ▶ How are such transportation issues communicated to families?



Staff Training

- ▶ What training is available for drivers and transportation providers receive to support students with disabilities?
- ▶ How often is the training updated?
- ▶ Is student-specific or equipment-specific training provided when needed?
- ▶ Is the training provided by the transportation company or the LEA?



Transportation Options

- ▶ What types of vehicles are available for transporting students with disabilities?
- ▶ Are there options for door-to-door service versus designated stops, and how is that determined?
- ▶ What safety equipment is available on the vehicles to ensure the well-being of all students?



Transition Planning

- ▶ What plans are in place to support transportation needs for students transitioning to post-secondary options?
- ▶ Does the LEA include transportation-related post-secondary goals and objectives in student IEPs when appropriate?



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



PART 4: RESOURCES



US Department of Education

Safe Transportation for School Age Children



Q&A on Serving Children with Disabilities Eligible for Transportation



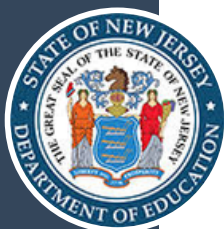
National Highway Transportation Safety Administration

School Bus Safety



US Department of Justice, Office for Civil Rights

2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design



New Jersey Department of Education

Special Education Regulations



Student Transportation Regulations



Student Transportation Website

