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School Bus Monitors in Western New York

Abstract

The New York State Department of Education defines a “bus monitor” (also commonly referred to as a “bus aide”) as any person employed for the purpose of assisting children to safely embark and disembark from a school bus which is owned, leased or contracted for by a public school district or board of cooperative educational services, and for the purpose of assisting the school bus driver with maintaining proper student behavior on such school bus.

Keywords

Buffalo, Poverty/Low Wage Work/Income Inequality, Low Wage Work, Education, K-12 Education, Fact Sheet, PPG, PDF

School Bus Monitors in Western New York

Brian Hartmann



Who is a school bus monitor or bus aide?

The New York State Department of Education defines a “bus monitor” (also commonly referred to as a “bus aide”) as

...any person employed for the purpose of assisting children to safely embark and disembark from a school bus which is owned, leased or contracted for by a public school district or board of cooperative educational services, and for the purpose of assisting the school bus driver with maintaining proper student behavior on such school bus.¹

What duties does a school bus monitor perform?

School bus monitors help children on and off the school bus safely and maintain order on the bus. Additionally, school bus monitors must have knowledge of the safety equipment on the vehicle (including, among other things, various passenger restraints, escape hatches, first aid kits, and emergency flares), and must prepare for and assist in emergencies.²

What are the requirements one must meet in order to become a school bus monitor?

In order to become a school bus monitor, one must be at least nineteen (19) years of age³ and pass a physical performance test to ensure that she

is capable of escorting students on and off the bus, and is able to assist students in the event of an emergency.⁴ Monitors must also attend training sessions and refresher courses detailing strategies for maintaining order on the bus.⁵ If monitors aid disabled students in the course of their duties, they must also be trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation.⁶

What are some of the advantages of being a bus monitor?

There are a number of good things about being a school bus monitor. Kimberly is a bus monitor who works for the Buffalo City School District and enjoys the opportunity to work with and help children. She also appreciates the free shuttle service the District provides, which takes her from a corner in her neighborhood to the terminal from which she works. Additionally, she finds the training provided by the District to be useful in performing her job more effectively and appreciates the extra hours of work these training sessions provide.⁷

While the limited hours and seasonal employment make paying bills difficult, the time off provides employees with an opportunity to develop other skills if they hope to find work in another field. Kimberly, for instance, would ultimately like to earn a bachelor's or master's degree and counsel people dealing with alcohol abuse. The summer vacation will allow her to take necessary courses at Erie Community College.



What are the challenges of being a school bus monitor?

The biggest challenges associated with working as a school bus monitor are financial. Kimberly is paid \$9.34 per hour. The District does not provide her with health insurance or other benefits commonly offered by employers. As a result of these low wages, Kimberly is forced to supplement her income with food stamps. She also receives Medicaid and lives in public housing. In addition to the low wages and insufficient benefits she receives, Kimberly is limited in the number of hours she may work, as there is no need for her services in the summer.⁸

Bus monitors also face significant challenges in the course of performing their duties. They are often required to control children who are emotionally unstable, or who have other special needs, while also maintaining order among the rest of the students on the bus. As Kimberly notes, it is often difficult to remain professional and upbeat in such circumstances.

School bus aides often struggle to maintain amiable relations with the parents of students who ride their buses. Betty Martin, the president of Transportation Aides of Buffalo, notes that there have been instances where “we’ve had parents go after drivers and aides ...It’s becoming a bigger problem.”⁹ Kimberly notes similar problems with parents. She says that when a student fabricates a claim against a monitor—that the aide was yelling at the student, hitting the student, using foul language, etc.—the student’s parents, and, at times, the bus monitor’s supervisor, will often “take the child’s side.” Circumstances such as these make the job of school bus monitor challenging and extremely frustrating at times.

Is there opportunity for advancement?

There is little opportunity for advancement among school bus monitors. In order to move from a school bus monitor to the position of “team leader,” (a job that includes the supervision of bus monitors), one must have, at the very least, a bachelor’s degree. For many bus monitors, the educational requirements attached to the team leader position prove difficult, if not impossible, to meet.

Do school bus monitors belong to a union?

The school bus aides of the Buffalo City School District are represented by Transportation Aides of Buffalo. Kimberly is a union representative, herself.



How effective is the bus monitors’ union in advocating for their rights?

In 2009, Transportation Aides of Buffalo secured a 10% raise for bus monitors employed by the Buffalo City School District.¹⁰ The union is also working to improve working conditions for bus monitors by attempting to mitigate the threat of irate and unruly parents.¹¹ Kimberly is happy with the job that Ms. Betty Martin, president of Transportation Aides of Buffalo, has done. She feels that Ms. Martin is a zealous advocate for the District’s bus monitors, and looks forward to working with her to eventually secure a living wage for all monitors.

How does Kimberly regard her employer?

Kimberly’s attitude toward her employer (the Buffalo City School District) is positive. She likes the additional training opportunities the

District provides (though these are required by law¹²), as well as the free shuttle service that transports her from the neighborhood where she lives to the bus terminal out of which she works. While she expresses occasional frustration over the willingness of her supervisors to believe schoolchildren and their parents about what happens on the bus, she thinks that the team leaders who oversee her work are fair, responsible, and professional.

How does Kimberly regard her job and working conditions?

In spite of its many challenges, Kimberly likes her job and is satisfied with the conditions under which she works. She expresses occasional frustration with the driver of the bus she monitors (who is employed by the bus company, not the Buffalo City School District), but she is also quick to state that they have a solid relationship with one another and work well together.

Kimberly also enjoys working with children. This is one of the things that she and other bus monitors like best about their job and the environment in which they work.

It must be noted that when asked about her job satisfaction and the quality of her work environment, Kimberly framed the question in comparative, rather than absolute, terms. Specifically, she stated that it was much better than some other jobs she had held. She also noted that she hopes to engage in work that pays better and provides her with a more comfortable lifestyle.



What are some of the challenges of living with a low wage?

There are numerous challenges involved with working a low wage job. Kimberly is forced to supplement her income with food stamps. She receives Medicaid, and she lives in public housing. In addition to these difficulties, she cannot afford a vehicle of her own and takes public transportation to travel to the grocery store or to church. In spite of the fact that four major bus routes include stops by her house, Kimberly cannot afford to use the bus too often on her limited income.

While public transportation proves a minor challenge, the grind of living paycheck to paycheck can result in an overwhelming sense of futility. When asked what a higher wage would allow her to do, Kimberly said that she would finally be able to get her hair and nails done on a regular or semi-regular basis.¹³ In talking to her, it was clear that even a seemingly minor thing, like the inability to afford such small amenities, can be quite depressing.



¹ 8 N.Y.C.R.R. 156.3(a)(3)

² Buffalo City School District, “Bus Aide Handbook,” Buffalo City School District, <http://www.buffaloschools.org/files/6865/Bus%20Aide%20Handbook.pdf>.

³ 8 N.Y.C.R.R. 156.3(c)(2)

⁴ 8 N.Y.C.R.R. 156.3(c)(3)(iii)(a)

⁵ 8 N.Y.C.R.R. 156.3(c)(5)

⁶ 8 N.Y.C.R.R. 156.3(c)(4)

⁷ Kimberly, Interview by author, Buffalo, NY, March 18, 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ American Federation of Teachers, “Transportation Aides Get Overdue Raises,” American Federation of Teachers, <http://archive.aft.org/psrp/news/index.htm>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 8 N.Y.C.R.R. 156.3(c)(5)

¹³ Interview with Kimberly.