

TRANSPORTING STUDENTS SAFELY

*Cemil YÜCEL**

ABSTRACT

The study deals with safety of student transportation. Features of transportation vehicle, tests for drivers, rules students should follow, and training programs to improve safety of transportation are summarized.

Key words: Student transportation, Transportation safety, School Business Management

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada öğrenci taşımacılığında güvenlik ele alınmıştır. Taşıma aracının bazı özellikleri, sürücülere uygulanacak testler, öğrencilerin uyması gereken kurallar ve güvenliği artırıcı eğitim programlarının içeriği üzerinde durulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğrenci taşımacılığı, taşımacılık güvenliği, okul işletmeciliği

Safety of student transportation is one of the hottest issues that school business managers have to deal with. Every day schools deal with complaints and demands related to student transportation. Student transportation requires continuing communication with parents, drivers, students, and school administrators. Transportation personnel must explain parents, drivers, and students why students have to remain in their seats all the time, why eating is not permitted on the vehicle, why some vehicles are more crowded than others, etc. (Dirr, 1993). Transportation personnel have to be trained in issues of safety and public relations.

Statistics show that school bus accidents are among the most rare of traffic accidents however they make more noise than other accidents (Malone, 1991). School administrators at the local level need to design and implement comprehensive safety programs regarding responsibilities of drivers, riders, parents, and school transportation staff (Peterson, 1994).

Safety of student transportation basically depends on two factors: (1) the quality of transportation vehicle, and (2) the quality of procedures related

* Yrd. Doç. Dr. Cemil YÜCEL, A.K.Ü. Uşak Eğitim Fakültesi Eğitim Bil. Böl. Başkanı.

to transportation operation (Carnahan, 1994). The inadequate or outdated manufactural features of vehicle are the one of the most important factor regarding safety of student transportation. Special standards for certain safety features such as the fuel tank protected by a metal cage and some kinds and models that should be impermissible for student transportation must be regulated by law.

Physical features of transportation vehicle

A typical vehicle must carry following features: (Jones, 1994)

- model should be no older than 20 years for busses
- a metal cage designed to protect the fuel tank
- diesel fuel must be a priority because of flammability concerns
- fuel tank located between the frame rails behind the rear axle, protected by a couple of bars that hang down from the rear bumper
- wide enough aisle
- seats and seat covers with resistance of flammability
- multiple emergency exits based on the seating capacity
- window retention to keep students from being thrown from the vehicle during an accident (This may be controversial. Instead, some call for pop-out windows that let children escape)
- no front hood
- hydraulic breaks
- wheelchair lift
- seat belts in each seat.
- hand rails to get on and off the vehicle.
- painted danger zones

Testing drivers for drugs and alcohol

Drivers must be tested for drug and alcohol usage. The tests are necessary to prevent drivers perform their work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs. School business managers must be knowledgeable of what kind of test will be administered and how the processes of testing will work. In order to comply with adequate testing procedure a plan or policy must be formed, types of tests must be identified and posted, collection sites must be organized, a certified lab must be determined, a medical review officer must be appointed and trained, records must be kept adequately, and employee education and supervisor training must be

completed (Baker, 1994). Transportation staff and contractors must be aware of legal issues that may influence the operations. Vehicles and operations must be appropriate and continuously updated in order to improve safety.

Every school district must have a drug testing policy and plan. Administrators should determine the employees who have to be tested and who are not necessarily have to be tested. A policy must be formed according to laws governing individual rights. Policy writing should involve staff and contractors (Wright, 1993).

Type of tests includes pre-employment, random, post-accident, return to duty, reasonable suspicion. The substance to be tested for includes marijuana, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, PCP, and alcohol (Wright, 1993). Pre-employment tests will be administered period to the first time a driver performs any safety sensitive functions. Random tests will be administered every year. It will be scientifically valid and reliable and will be done at least four times in a year. Computer programs such as the Lotus Software Program provide help for random test design. Post accident will be administered as soon as possible after a driver is involved in an accident. Return to duty tests will be administered after a rehabilitation of a driver who was tested positive. Reasonable suspicion test is the toughest test because accusing somebody is not easy. Supervisors must be careful and well trained (Wright, 1993).

Collection sites are very important. Most mistakes are done in collection sites. Collection sites must have proper equipment, supplies and trained personnel. It can be useful to arrange multiple collection sites.

Any test must be run in a certified lab. Results obtained from labs that do not certified to run a specific test would be legally objectionable.

It is necessary to determine the number of drivers who are tested, the number of drivers with negative or positive results, the number of specimens collected, the number of people who denied a position as driver, the number of drivers who returned to duty, the numbers of drivers who refused substance testing and actions taken and so on.

Operation and training programs

Setting up an effective monitor system will help improving quality of operation of transportation. Monitors can help maintaining discipline on the vehicle and provide safe operations to drivers. Monitors are also helpful for transporting special-need students. Monitors can be trained for medical emergencies or first aid.

Supervisors and related staff should be trained related to effects of drug and alcohol use on individuals and on work environment. Documentation of behavioral changes, determining types of assistance, and

communicating with people who have alcohol or drug problems can be the topics of training.

Training programs for staff, students and parents will improve safety. Programs are to teach and reinforce safety as well as to develop responsibility of riders (Vaglia, 1991). In order to accomplish safety programs: interviews with subject matter experts such as police and highway departments' personnel should be conducted before hand. Legal requirements must be included in training materials. Objectives of programs must be developed clearly. The goals for each target groups should be determined separately. Educational materials and teaching methodologies must be chosen adequately. Programs must be motivational, exciting and even funny.

Transportation safety rules to be taught at the grade levels can include following (Vaglia, 1991):

- At the bus stop: arrive at your bus stop on time; wait in line on the curb until the doors are open; if you miss the vehicle, do not run after it; do not carry big and clumsy objects on the vehicle; use the hand rail to get on and off the vehicle.

- On the vehicle: remain seated at all times facing the front of the vehicle; keep aisles clear of arms, legs, and carry-on items; keep arms, hands, head, and feet inside the vehicle; get the driver's or monitor's permission to open or close the windows; keep food and drinks in your rucksack or lunch bags; do not throw objects; avoid disturbing drivers; keep your hands and feet to yourself; talk quietly; do not use radios or other audio equipment; Turn off cell phones and electronic equipments.

- Getting off the vehicle: beware of the danger zones; when approaching or leaving the vehicle, always cross in front of the vehicle where the driver can see you; do not walk along side of the vehicle so close; wait for the signal from the driver or monitor before crossing the street; if you drop something during crossing the street do not ever get it yourself ask an adult to get it for you.

The rules can be taught in each grade level in accordance with each grade level's capacity to understand; for instance kindergarten students can learn their vehicle number by drawing the vehicle. Upper grade students can be assigned to some responsibilities for assisting lower grades in getting on and off.

In staff training programs, accidents can be reviewed and prevention strategies for accidents can be used as training topic (Petersen, 1994). For drivers, safe-driving techniques can be taught. The business manager can publish transportation safety bulletin that includes various magazine articles,

news, and different implementations of safety programs. Discipline procedures on the vehicle and proper interactions with kids can be explained to drivers and to monitors. Drivers can attend school activities to meet parents in order to reinforce the programs; parents should be involved in programs.

School administrators should establish new policies regarding safe transportation. Vehicle standards should be revised. Driver selection and supervision seems to be neglected in our school system. Schools must start training programs to improve safety. Such programs should involve contractors, drivers, parents and students. Safety issues can be incorporated into school curriculum.

REFERENCES

- Baker, J. G. (1994). Putting Drivers to the Test. *School Business Affairs*; 60 (12), 37-42.
- Carnahan, D. M. (1994). Setting the Standards. *School Business Affairs*; 60 (4), 20-23.
- Dirr, J. (1993). Transporting Students. *School Business Affairs*; 59 (4), 20-21.
- Jones, R. (1994). How Safe is Big Yellow? *The American School Board Journal*; 181 (11), 37-40.
- Malone, R. (1991). Safe Journey. *The American School Board Journal*; 178 (11), 37-39.
- Peterson, P. J. (1994). School and Community transportation Safety Awareness. *School Business Affairs*; 60 (4), 24-26.
- Vaglia, J. (1991). School Bus Safety education. *School Business Affairs*; 57 (10), 38-40.
- Wright, J. (1993). Federally Mandated Testing of Bus Drivers. *School Business Affairs*; 59 (4), 4-10.

