



School Bus Driver

**PRE-  
SERVICE  
COURSE**

Trainee Manual

Unit 13  
Preschool

Watch Your Step

© NYSED 2010

This page intentionally left blank.

## Acknowledgements

*We could not have prepared this curriculum without the ideas, enthusiasm, and guidance of the following people:*

Marion Edick, *State Director of Pupil Transportation*

NYSED SBDI Advisory Committee: *Jim Brown, Robert Brown, Jason Burrick, Jorge DeJesus, Lorraine Misciagno, Susan Soudant, Faye Stevens, Peter Brockmann, Betty Hughes, Patricia Martell, Paul Mori, Chuck Paquette, Joseph Van Aken, Patricia Bailey, Lenny Bernstein (chair), Ted Finlayson-Schueler, Kathy Furneaux, Peter Lawrence, Peter Montalvo, James Rogan, and Maureen Ryan*

**Safety Rules!** Curriculum Advisory Committee: *Lance Frieberger, Cliff Berchtold, Joe Van Aken, Paul Mori, Mike Dello Ioio, Faye Waxman, Robin Parks, Teena Fitzroy, Deanna Adams, Peter Lawrence, Deb Stevens, Greg Jenne, and Judy Clarke*

Moravia CSD School Bus Drivers, Attendants, and Mechanics

Attendees at Syracuse focus group: *Tyronne Worrell, Luther Everson, Cindy Raulli, Deb Lilley, Deb Stevens, Tammy Payne, Chuck Paquette, Barb Biddlecome, Terri Kuss, Shelly O'Riley, and Pat Bailey*

Attendees at Rochester focus group: *Peter Lawrence, Michael Proukou, and Kitty Rhow*

Lee Comeau, *retired, author of the original (1989) Pre-Service Course*

*- JE & TFS, June, 2010*

Title: School Bus Driver Pre-Service Course – Trainee Manual Unit 13

Authors: Jim Ellis and Ted Finlayson-Schueler

Copyright June 30, 2010

The University of the State of New York

The New York State Education Department

Office of Pupil Transportation Unit

EBA, Room 876

Albany, NY 12234-0001

Phone: (518) 474-6541 • Fax: (518) 474-1983

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome, new New York State school bus driver!

The *School Bus Driver Pre-Service Course* has one goal: to prepare you to safely transport children on a school bus.

You are entering a proud profession. New York State's school bus drivers have established an admirable safety record over the past generation. Statistically, New York's school buses represent the safest form of ground transportation ever devised. Children riding in school buses are approximately 24 times safer than when they're riding in the family car!

However, student safety is never assured. Your responsibility for safety will be serious from the first day you drive a bus with children on board. What you learn in this course can save a child's life.

This *Trainee Manual* will prepare you for the course. Read it carefully before the course begins. Complete the review questions at the end of each Unit before you come to class. Write down any questions you have for your instructor. If you don't understand something, say so. Asking questions is one sign of a professional.

Again, welcome to our New York State school bus safety community!

Marion Edick  
New York State Education Department  
State Director of Pupil Transportation

# OPTIONAL UNIT

## 13:

### TRANSPORTING PRESCHOOL STUDENTS

---

#### Unit 13 Topics

- 13.1 Understanding the Preschool Child
- 13.2 Restraints for Preschool Children on School Buses
- 13.3 Loading and Unloading Preschool Children
- 13.4 Evacuation Concerns
- 13.5 Unit 12 Review

---

#### Introduction

Transporting preschoolers on a school bus can be delightful, but it can also be challenging. Their impulsiveness and their limited mental development, combined with their small stature, make safety at the bus stop and during the bus ride a real test of adult skills and patience.

---

#### 13.1 Understanding the Preschool Child

##### 13.1.1 Characteristics and challenges.

Some of the reasons preschool-aged children are challenging to transport on a school bus include:

A preschooler might climb into the rear wheelwell because he thought it would be fun to ride down the block on top of the tire. It's happened.

- Young children are extremely unpredictable. They are easily distracted and their attention spans are fleeting. A four-year-old could suddenly bolt toward your bus as she sees it approaching her stop. A young child might crawl underneath your stopped bus to retrieve a treasured item, chase a family pet, or see how the bus works. A preschooler might even climb into the rear wheelwell because he thought it would be fun to ride down the block on top of the tire. Each of these hair-curling examples actually happened in our state. Given the chance, preschool children will do just about anything.
- Without close supervision by an adult or a responsible older child, preschoolers will wander off as soon as they get off your bus. They cannot be relied upon to go into their houses on their own. Children under five need to be escorted on and off the bus. This includes on school grounds and in bus loading areas.

- Preschoolers are expert nappers. A bus ride at the end of a long school day is like a rocking cradle for a young child. Without the careful post-check required by law, it's easy to leave a sleeping preschooler on your bus. It's happened many times in our state.
- A young child's ability to gauge traffic dangers is very limited. Skills adults take for granted – assessing how far away an approaching car is, or how fast it's traveling – are impossible for preschoolers. This limitation is based in cognitive development and cannot be overcome through training and reinforcement. Preschoolers are not ready to cross the road on their own. Their brain's auditory processing has not developed to the point that they can accurately pinpoint the origin of a sound. Their brain's visual processing cannot yet comprehend perspective. For a young child, a distant vehicle that's gradually growing larger is just growing larger, not getting closer.

## Preschoolers are not ready to cross the road on their own.

**13.1.2 Behavior management tips with young children.** Working with preschoolers can be an energizing, even hilarious, experience. Many school bus drivers who do it every day love it. But managing young children's behavior is not always easy – ask a daycare provider. Ask a parent.

Time-tested behavior management tips for preschool bus runs include:

- *Activity bag.* Small children are often too short to see out the bus window, contributing to boredom, restlessness,

and mischief during the ride. Age-appropriate picture books, children's magazines, coloring books and crayons, or simple handheld electronic games can help keep them occupied during the bus ride.

- *Games.* Young children love to play games. Simple "find it" games are usually a hit: "Count the red cars," "Who do we pick up next?", "Spot the cows," etc. Of course, many children get sillier and louder the longer they play a game. Know when to transition to a quieter activity before things get out of hand. "Who can keep quiet the longest?" is always worth a try.
- *Music.* Most young children love music. Sing-alongs such as "The wheels on the bus" are usually a big hit. You might attract a few startled looks from other motorists as you sing along, but so long as you maintain focus on driving, who cares? A CD of young children's music – media stores and large bookstores have a children's music section – can often keep children occupied for much of the ride. If your bus doesn't have one, a basic CD player that runs on batteries can usually be purchased for a few dollars. (Be sure the CD player is secured appropriately.)
- *Helpers.* Most young children love being a helper. Give them simple, safe tasks, like straightening seat belts before getting off the bus at school. Like Tom Sawyer, you might even be able to use simple bus chores as a "reward" for a child's good behavior during the ride.
- *Restraints.* Section 12.2, below, explains the laws covering the use of child restraints for preschoolers on a bus. But beyond legal requirements,

the fact is that young children behave better when restrained. If young children are free to move from seat to seat, they will. Sooner or later, mischief will ensue. Preschoolers who have “aged out” and are no longer required by state law to use a child restraint still behave more safely when using a lap belt or a lap-shoulder belt. Seat belt use for school-age children is not *required* on school buses in New York State. It’s up to local school policy.

Check with your supervisor about your school’s policy regarding seat belt use for preschoolers who no longer require a car seat.

If you work consistently with young children day after day, you will be surprised how much they learn about school bus safety over the course of the year.

- Safety. Teaching preschoolers safety rules is important. Most preschoolers want to learn. “Lessons” should be simple, short, and fun. Make a game of it. Ask simple questions while waiting to discharge children at school in the morning: “Who can point to the closest emergency exit?”, “Who can tell me why you should stay in your seat?” Remind children to raise their hands so you can pick one at a time to answer. If you work consistently with young children day after day, you will be surprised how much they learn about school bus safety over the course

of the year. As the end of the year approaches, prepare “I’m ready for the kindergarten bus” certificates for your preschoolers who are about to graduate into kindergarten. (Create one of your own!)



Your patient efforts to train preschoolers in safety fundamentals will be appreciated by their new bus drivers next fall. The safety training you provide at an early stage in a child’s school career could one day save that child’s life.

---

## 13.2 Child Safety Restraints for Preschool Children on School Buses

**13.2.1 Legal requirements.** In New York State, all children under four years old **must** be seated in an appropriate Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) when riding on a yellow school bus. A seat belt alone is not adequate for preschoolers on school buses.

The CSRS must be the right size for the child. Height and weight limits are indicated on a label on the restraint.

A seat belt alone is not adequate for preschoolers on school buses.

The law is different for small school vehicles (vans and cars). In a small school vehicle, children under the age of eight must use a CSRS.

**13.2.2 Types of child restraints.** There are many types of child safety restraints. Designs continually change and evolve.

Typical child safety restraints include:

- *Rear-facing infant seats.* Children less than one year old, or weighing less than 20 pounds, **must** ride in a rear facing infant seat on a school bus. Children should stay rear-facing as long as the seat height and weight limits allow. Some newer seats go up to 35 pounds or more.
- *Forward-facing restraints.* Children at least more than one year old and weighing more than 20 pounds can ride in a forward-facing car seat or other type of safety restraint.
- *Integrated safety seats.* Some types of school bus seats have harnesses specifically designed for young children. No other type of restraint is needed when transporting children in integrated safety seats.
- *Safety vests.* Safety vests are available for all children of all ages, not just preschoolers. (Safety vests are sometimes used when transporting older children who cannot stay in their seats.) Safety vests are usually attached to the bus seat with a “cam-wrap” that goes around the seat back. Safety vests on school buses must include a crotch strap to prevent a child from sliding down and choking.
- *Booster seats with built-in harness.* The only booster seats that can be used on school buses are those that

come with a built-in “five-point” harness. Older types of booster seats that are secured with only a lap belt (“belt-positioning boosters”) are not permitted on school buses.

**13.2.3 Placement of safety restraints on the bus.** It’s usually best to place children riding in safety restraints near the front of the bus. You can keep a closer eye on them in the first few rows. In an emergency, you have quicker access to them.

Keep in mind two important “**nevers**” when deciding where to place safety restraints:



1. Safety restraints should **never** be placed in a seat row adjacent to an emergency window or door. The restraint could slow down an emergency evacuation.
2. Unrestrained passengers – other children, or the attendant – should **never** ride in the row behind a child in a safety restraint. It is dangerous.



**13.2.4 Proper securement of safety restraints.** Properly securing car seats and other types of safety restraints is extremely important, but it's not easy in a school bus. Bus seats are closely spaced, leaving little room to work as you secure the restraint.

**Attach the safety restraint to the bus seat first, and then secure the child in the restraint – thinking of it as a two-step process is less confusing.**

Utilize the following procedures when securing child a safety restraint in your bus:

- Take the time to familiarize yourself with a restraint before trying to secure it in your bus. Each type of restraint must be secured according to its particular design. Always read the manufacturer's instructions before trying to secure an unfamiliar restraint. Instructions should be provided with every restraint. Instructions are often stored in a plastic sleeve attached to the base of the restraint.
  - Attach the restraint to the bus seat first, then secure the child in the restraint. Thinking of it as a two-step process is less confusing.
  - Car seats are usually secured in a bus seat by the bus lap belt. The lap belt must be routed through the back of the car seat exactly as directed by the manufacturer. Follow instructions carefully.
  - Kneel on the car seat when tightening the lap belt. Use your weight to press the car seat into the seat cushion as you pull on the lap belt. This is the best way to get a restraint tight enough in the bus seat. It should be so tight against the bus seat that it won't move.
  - If the "stalk" of the bus lap belt – the shorter, non-adjustable portion of the belt with the female buckle at the end – is too long, it can be difficult to access it behind the car seat. Long belt stalks make it harder to tighten the car seat.
- The large buckle can also be uncomfortable for the child sitting in the seat. It may help to twist the belt. To shorten the belt slightly, you may twist the stalk up to three times. Do not alter a belt in any other way. Never knot a belt to shorten it. Do not connect two different belts.
- Booster seats with built-in harnesses are usually attached to a bus seat with securement belts that wrap around the seat back. The lower cushion of the bus seat usually must be unfastened and lifted up to do this. School bus cushions are often held in place by metal clips under the seat. Clips can be difficult to access or release. Don't be embarrassed to ask a supervisor, an SBDI, or a mechanic for help. It's essential that the restraint is properly secured.
  - Before placing a child in the restraint, double-check to make sure it's properly secured in the bus seat. If you have a bus attendant, work as a team. Two sets of eyes are better than. Make sure it's tight enough and correctly attached to the bus seat.
  - Once you are confident the restraint is tight enough in the bus seat, secure the child in the restraint with the 5-point harness.
  - Harness straps on most restraints are adaptable to different sizes of children. Often there are two or more sets of slots through which the harness straps can be

threaded. Make sure the harness straps are coming out of the right slots for that particular child. On forward-facing car seats, the upper slots should be at or above the child's shoulders and should be in a reinforced slot. On a rear-facing seat, the straps should be at or below the shoulders.

- The harness retaining clip should be positioned at the child's armpit level – adjust it if necessary.
- Harness straps should be snug but not tight against the child. Straps are adjustable, but it can be tricky to figure out just how to do it. Harness straps on older models might have to be adjusted from behind the restraint, which can be highly inconvenient. Newer restraints usually have a single adjuster strap located on the front base of the unit.
- Harness straps must lie flat against the child – they shouldn't be twisted. If you can pinch a loop of the belt between your fingers, it is too loose. In a crash or even a sudden stop, a twisted strap could hurt a child.
- There is no way to secure a young child in a car seat or booster with built-in harness without touching the child. Be as brief and as sensitive as you can. Whenever possible, keep the back of your hand against the child's body rather than your palm – it's a little less intrusive.

Like anything else young children are in close contact with, safety restraints need regular cleaning.

**13.2.5 Cleaning restraints.** Like anything else young children are in close contact with, safety restraints need regular cleaning. Frequent wiping down with a non-allergenic disinfectant or a mild detergent and warm water is a good practice.

If a restraint is very soiled, it should be taken out of the bus and thoroughly cleaned. Some models allow the fabric seat material to be removed and washed. Read the instructions carefully to avoid damaging the restraint.

**13.2.6 Replacing restraints.** Child safety restraints do not last forever. Federal law requires manufacturers to define a mandatory retirement date for each restraint. A sticker with the retirement date should be attached to the restraint (usually the back or base).

Restraints with any visible damage – cracks in the shell or base, tears or cuts in the belts – should be replaced immediately. Restraints that were on board a bus involved in a significant crash should also be retired.

---

## 13.3 Loading and Unloading Preschool Children

**13.3.1 Challenges.** Preschoolers are short. It's hard to spot them when they are near your bus.

As noted above, preschoolers are naturally impulsive. They are incapable of fully grasping traffic dangers. You **must** expect the unexpected every time you pick up or drop off a preschooler at a bus stop.

Preschool children often have a hard time getting up and down bus steps. The first step up into the bus is especially tough. Trips and falls are common. Teach them to hold the handrail. Remind them every day.

**13.3.2 Custody.** It's not safe to release preschool children from your bus unless a responsible adult or older child is present to receive them. Anything could happen.

If no one meets the bus at a preschooler's house, keep the child on board. Radio base to report the situation. Often, you will be directed to keep the child on board while your office tries to contact a parent. Reassure the child that everything's okay.

If no one meets the bus at a preschooler's house, keep the child on board — radio base to report the situation.

---

## 13.4 Evacuation Concerns

**13.4.1 Evacuation planning.** Having a plan for getting everyone off the bus quickly is essential when transporting young children. A fire on a bus filled with preschoolers in safety restraints is a frightening prospect. Such incidents have occurred in our state and across the country.

Buses can burn quickly under some conditions. Heat and smoke can make the passenger compartment unsurvivable in two minutes or less.

**13.4.2 Preparing for two evacuation scenarios.** Most school bus fires are caused by either of two scenarios:

1. An engine fire at the front of the bus.
2. A fire at the rear of the bus caused by another vehicle crashing into it.

Factors to consider when creating an evacuation plan for a preschool run include:

- Is an attendant assigned to the run? The attendant's role in an emergency evacuation of preschool children should be defined. In most cases, it makes sense for the attendant to exit

the bus first to receive the children as the driver removes them from their restraints. However, on preschool runs with more than six children on board, the attendant might need to help remove them from their restraints too. Work this out ahead of time with your attendant.

- In most cases, the quickest way to get a young child out of the bus in an emergency is to remove the child from the restraint. This can be accomplished by unbuckling the restraint or by cutting the straps with a seat belt cutter. Decide ahead of time what's best for each particular child and each restraint.
- For a very young or small child, it may be faster to leave the child in the car seat and remove the child and car seat together. This can be accomplished by cutting the belts that secure the car seat to the bus. Decide ahead of time what's quickest for each child on your run.
- How many exits are there on your bus, what types of exits are they, and where are they located? Think carefully about which exit(s) would be best for each scenario.  
Can you find and open each exit with your eyes closed? (Thick smoke could make it impossible to see.) Don't forget the passenger door, which in a rear fire might be the quickest and safest way off the bus.
- What's the best sequence for getting children out of the bus in each scenario? It's best to get children closest to the fire out of their seats first and away from the smoke and heat. However, be careful about creating a bottleneck in the aisle as you shepherd children toward the best exit.

- How will you keep children from wandering off once they're outside your bus? Teach preschoolers ahead of time, during bus drills and reinforced with periodic reminders, to use a buddy system or to make a "safety chain" by holding hands as soon as they exit the bus. You can practice this every day as children get off your bus to go into school. Some preschool bus drivers carry a safety rope on the bus for young children to hang onto as they move away from the bus. Placing the fire blanket on the ground in a safe area at a safe distance (at least 3 bus lengths) from the bus gives children a visible reference point. Tell them to stay on the blanket.

Teach preschoolers to use a buddy system or to make a "safety chain" by holding hands as soon as they exit the bus in an emergency – you can practice this every day as children get off your bus to go into school.

Discuss these important evacuation questions with your supervisor, an SBDI, or a veteran preschool driver when thinking about an evacuation plan for your bus.

Use the Evacuation Plan form on the next page to write down your completed plan. Keep it on your bus. If new preschoolers are placed your route during the year, revise your plan as necessary.

# PRESCHOOL RUN EVACUATION PLAN

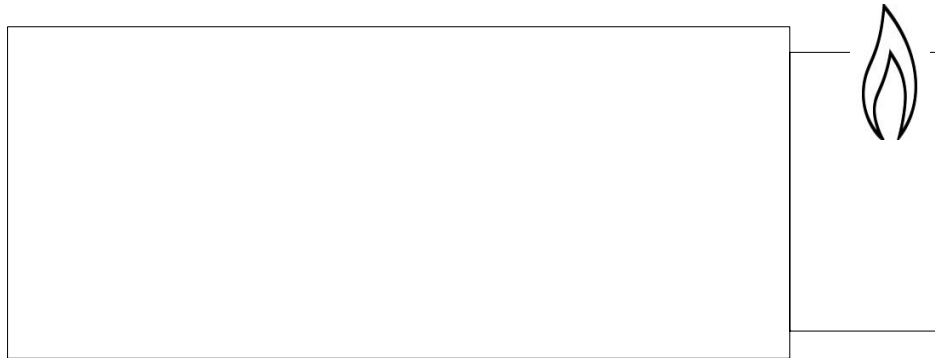
Bus #: \_\_\_\_\_ Route #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Driver: \_\_\_\_\_

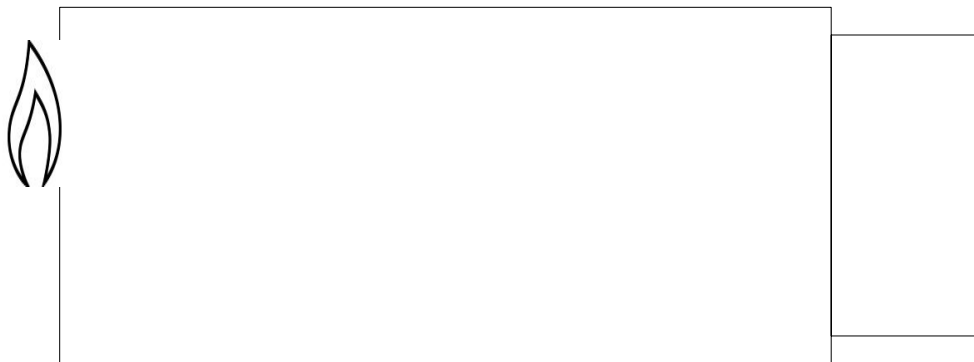
Attendant: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*

*Instructions: For each of the two evacuation scenarios below, sketch in the exits of the bus and where each child is seated. Indicate children using wheelchairs by WC. Next, draw an arrow to the best exit for each scenario. Finally, number the children according to the sequence you will use to get them out of the bus.*



Front Engine Fire



Fire at Rear of Bus

**13.4.3 Seat belt cutters.** Sometimes the quickest way to get a child out of a safety restraint is to cut the straps.

Seat belt cutters work most best when drawn at an angle across a tight belt. Practice this with a discarded belt.

A seat belt cutter should be located near the driver's seat so you can reach it quickly in an emergency. In a rollover, you might need it to free yourself from your own seat belt before you can rescue the students.

Seat belt cutters are inexpensive. Some bus drivers carry one of their own too – “just in case”. On a run with many preschoolers on board, an additional cutter near the rear door is a good idea.



---

## 13.5 Unit 13 Review

**1. TRUE or FALSE?** *“The vision and hearing of preschool children is so good they can usually get out of the way of an approaching vehicle before an adult can.”*

**2. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Children under five need to be escorted on and off the bus.”*

**3. What type of booster seat may be used on a school bus?**

---

**4. TRUE or FALSE?** *“Sit unrestrained passengers in the row behind children in safety vests.”*

**5. Where should the harness retaining clip be located?**

- a. *At the child’s navel level.*
- b. *At the child’s armpit level.*
- c. *At the child’s chin level.*
- d. *Retaining clips are not required on harnesses.*

**6. If you need to shorten the lap belt slightly to better secure a car seat, which method is acceptable?**

- a. *Tie one or more knots in the belt.*
- b. *Twist the belt as much as necessary.*
- c. *Twist the belt no more than three times.*
- d. *Use a large safety pin to shorten the belt.*

**7. TRUE or FALSE?** *“On forward-facing car seats, the upper harness slots should be below the child’s shoulders.”*

**8. TRUE or FALSE?** *“If no one meets the bus at a preschooler’s house, tell the child to wait on the porch until someone gets home.”*

**9. What’s a seat belt “stalk”?**

- a. *Longer, adjustable, male portion of the lap belt.*
- b. *Shorter, non-adjustable, female portion of the lap belt.*
- c. *Metal clip holding the seat cushion on.*
- d. *Retractable portion of the belt.*

**10. TRUE or FALSE?** *“In most cases, the quickest way to get a young child out of the bus in an emergency is to remove the child from the restraint.”*

---

## UNIT 13 NOTES & QUESTIONS

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---