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1) Transportation training opportunities

OSBA is again offering professional development opportunities in the Master Transportation Administrator series. You are welcome to attend individual classes or sign up for the entire series.

The first class for this year will be on Wednesday, October 15, and will repeat on Tuesday, October 21. The class will focus on personnel management – including labor relations, discipline, managing changes in 'practice', the grievance process and arbitration. We finish the class with a review of driver qualifications and processes that need to take place when drivers are no longer qualified. You can sign up for the individual class by registering online or by contacting us via email at mta@ohioschoolboards.org

2) Preparing for your T1 data collection

The next big challenge for schools to manage is the T1 report. This has to be done the first full week of October. This year that will be October 6 – October 10. The purpose of the T1 is to report to ODE the average number of daily riders and miles that you travel for routine school transportation. You are required to collect the information for five days and then calculate a daily average for that period.

To start the process, each of your drivers must count their riders on each trip and keep track of their daily mileage. While this is not a difficult task, it can become confusing if the drivers do not report data correctly. Your best option is to design a very detailed data collection form that you have the drivers fill out, and review the form with them in advance so that they understand what they need to do.

There are two key pieces: 1) Keep track of the miles travelled on each trip for the entire day. Drivers need to record total daily miles and separate them by public, nonpublic, and community school miles. 2) Count riders on their way to school. This is simplest if you count students when they get off their bus to go into school – this allows you to accurately report students by the type of school that they attend. The distinction here is that when a student rides a high school bus first, and then transfers to a nonpublic shuttle bus, count them on the nonpublic shuttle bus so that they are listed correctly. If a student rides a high school bus and then transfers, do not count the students on their first bus – this will result in an inaccurate count. The same guidance works for half-day kindergarten students- count them when they get off the bus and go into their school. (Do not count them when the driver takes them home!)

The law and instructions are very clear – you may only count students that are actually on the bus – tell your drivers to count the children riding, NOT the names on their roster. You may also have different counts in the morning and afternoon, but again the law and instructions are clear, count them on their way TO school.

One good suggestion is to provide each driver a separate form for each day of the count. This reduces the tendency for drivers to fill out all five days at one time – which is incorrect!

Your job once the drivers finish their part is to calculate the daily average riders and miles for each bus, and to report that on ODE's T1 form online. These reports are to be completed and submitted to ODE before November 1.

This report becomes the basis for your state transportation funding.

3) Driver background checks – a quick review

Over the years the requirements for criminal background checks have changed several times. With all of those changes, it is easy to lose track of what the current requirements are! This article is offered as a refresher to help you stay on track. (Background checks are mandated through Ohio Revised Code 3327.10)

All candidates for school bus or school van driver must have a criminal records background check through BCI prior to employment. For new employees, this must include BOTH a state and federal records check. School bus and van drivers **may not be hired** until the district has received the results of the records check. Conditional hiring pending the results is not permitted.

Drivers who are recertifying, either for bus or van certificates, must have a new federal background check completed. If the driver is not an Ohio resident, they must also have a state background check completed. Again, the district must have received the results for these checks before they can process the certificate renewal.

In Ohio, the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) processes the state and federal background check. BCI background checks are the only ones that meet the requirements in Ohio law.

The last piece of the puzzle is to understand what criminal charges and convictions are acceptable, and which are disqualifying. For school transportation drivers, the reference for this is Ohio Administrative Code 3301-83-23. Candidates with a disqualifying charge or conviction may not be employed to operate a school bus or school van.

RAP-back is a separate but related process to the employer initiated criminal background checks. When you hire a driver and submit their initial record check, BCI adds the driver to the RAP back processing file. Once in this list, BCI staff match the driver list against their nightly processing of arrest records across the state. If a record they are processing matches an individual who is registered as a bus or van driver, a notification is generated and sent to the employer through ODE's Web services. The email notifies you of a 'hit', and requires you to contact BCI to obtain the details. If you receive one of these emails, it is important to contact BCI as well as ask your employee about the incident. Ohio's law requires immediate suspension of an employee that has been charged with a disqualifying offense.

4) Another resource for your use – the American School Bus Council

A number of years ago the leaders in the U.S. pupil transportation industry worked together to form the American School Bus Council (ASBC). While ASBC has some specific lobbying and advocacy purposes, it is also represented through an internet presence. Please look up Americanschoolbuscouncil.org when you have the opportunity. On this website you will find facts and figures about school buses and school transportation, safety facts, and other materials that pertain to operations and programs in school transportation.

5) School bus construction tidbits

Recently we have been receiving unsolicited marketing for various products that will 'enhance safety' on the school bus or 'save millions' in operating costs. Certainly your office is also receiving these on a regular basis. Whether you find these of value or not, it is important to remember that the design of a school bus is very carefully controlled. When buses are sold by any of the national manufacturers, they are certified as being compliant with all national and state specifications at the time of the build.

Bus owners in Ohio are required to maintain buses in compliance with federal and state specifications. That includes aftermarket add-ons. In the case of one product being mass-marketed right now (a student detection device mounted in the bus door), it is important for you to check to see if these products are approved for use on an Ohio bus before purchase. In the case of the product in question, it is not. If you were to install an unapproved device on your bus, the state patrol inspection team will be required to take your bus out-of-service at their next inspection.

Anything installed on an Ohio schoolbus must be approved. Ohio has a specific set of construction standards administered by the Ohio State Highway Patrol. These include not only construction specifications but also a list of approved optional equipment. Aftermarket equipment that is not included in the approved list may not be installed.

Another distinction for Ohio buses is that any equipment installed on a bus must be functional. If you install an optional approved device, and then later decide not to use it, you cannot disable the device and leave it on the bus—anything installed on the school bus must work appropriately. If you no longer want to use the device, it must be removed.

[Ohio School Boards Association](#)

8050 N. High Street, Suite 100

Columbus, OH 43235

(800) 589-OSBA

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