

A day in the life of a bus driver for those with special needs

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Driving a school bus is no easy task. Drivers must enjoy kids, like driving and have patience to spare. They must also have good driver “negotiating” skills to navigate the cul-de-sacs, intersections and driveways of the children’s homes and apartments. On top of good driving skills, school bus drivers need to have good interpersonal skills, as my colleague and I found out while riding along with Debbie Patterson, a school bus driver for special needs kids with the El Dorado Union High School District. For Debbie, driving a bus isn’t just a job, it’s a calling.

Debbie’s day begins in the bus yard at 6 a.m. sharp. In the dark and cold, she arrives at the yard office with a smile and a cheerful greeting. She picks up her schedule, reviews the number of stops, and checks which children she’ll be picking up that morning. Next up is the very important and detailed pre-trip bus inspection. She first starts the bus to turn on the heater, then refers to her detailed pre-trip inspection list and begins the process. Once the inspection is completed, she maneuvers her bus out of the bus yard and onto the road. For Debbie, a typical morning route consists of picking up and transporting eight to 15 kids. Often, there are more kids to transport in the afternoons, as some parents drop their kids off in the mornings, but have them ride the bus home in the afternoons.

It soon becomes apparent how early these kids have to get up in order to be ready for school and how long the bus ride is for those who are picked up first. As we arrive at each stop, Debbie explains that the drivers of special needs kids have to drive directly to the home or apartment of each child. There is no “group” bus stop. In Debbie’s case, this allows her an opportunity to create a special connection with each child who rides her bus. She appears to know each one’s disposition, and treats each with respect and kindness.



*School Bus Driver
Recognition Day
is April 25*

An example of this became apparent when one young rider took exception to Debbie’s “Good morning” greeting. She listened to what the young man had to say and now finds that just smiling and saying “Morning” to him seems to work better because his morning may not have started out “good.” Debbie’s ability to help her riders feel happy, calm and safe on her bus was also evident with another young man who was initially being disruptive. She found that by putting him to work, by giving him a job while riding the bus, helped keep him calm and the ride smooth. He now helps Debbie put the wheelchair lift cover on and take it off. A simple yet effective way to engage a student in a positive way.

Debbie’s knack for finding helpful solutions reaches far beyond her students. She has fixed mechanical problems on the fly (she has a mechanical background), helped re-route a bus route to make it more efficient when the district was short-handed, and will always cover shifts as needed. For

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- 10 ways to improve mental health
- Driving for special needs kids

10 ways to help improve your mental health

1. **Value yourself** – Treat yourself with kindness and respect and avoid self-criticism. Make time for the things you enjoy.
2. **Take care of your body** – Eat nutritious meals, drink plenty of water, exercise, get enough sleep.
3. **Surround yourself with good people** – People with strong family or social connections are generally healthier than those who lack support networks. Make plans with supportive family members or friends or seek out activities where you can meet new people.
4. **Give of yourself** – Volunteer your time to help someone else.
5. **Learn how to deal with stress** – Stress is a part of life. Practice good coping skills: Do Tai Chi, take nature walks, play with pets, write in a journal. Remember to smile and see the humor in life. Research shows that laughter can boost the immune system, ease pain, relax the body and reduce stress.
6. **Quiet your mind** – Meditation, mindfulness and prayer can improve your state of mind and outlook on life.
7. **Set realistic goals** – Determine your personal goals and write down the steps to achieve them. Aim high and be realistic. You can enjoy a tremendous sense of accomplishment and self-worth as you progress toward your goals.
8. **Break up the monotony** – Routines make us more efficient and enhance our feelings of security and safety, but a change of pace can perk us up. Alter your jogging route, plan a road trip, hang some new pictures, or try a new restaurant.
9. **Avoid alcohol and other drugs** – Sometimes people use alcohol and other drugs to “self-medicate,” but in reality, alcohol and other drugs only aggravate problems.
10. **Get help when you need it** – Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. People who get appropriate care can recover and lead full, rewarding lives. Check your EAP or health insurance for resources and assistance.

Source: University of Michigan Health Services



Driving those with special needs *(Continued from page 1)*

the other drivers, mechanics and supervisors, Debbie is their “go to” person for getting things done and she readily says she never says no when things need doing.

It’s now mid-morning and our bus trip is coming to a close. All of Debbie’s kids have been delivered to their school and the morning has gone well. We head back to the bus yard, check in and Debbie notifies the mechanic about an issue with the wheelchair lift. Once checked out, she turns her attention to the afternoon route.

Driving a school bus has many benefits, including paid CDL training, insurance, retirement, and both holidays and summers off. For those with school-age kids who prefer to be home in the evenings, the work schedules are typically ideal. For retirees who like flexibility, bus-driving is a great option.

Although school bus driving can be hectic and sometimes even stressful, it’s a rewarding pursuit. Bus drivers are in high demand and interested individuals can contact school districts directly and/or visit their websites for more information.



**Did you know that you can access our newsletters on our website?
Visit www.sia-jpa.org.**

March is Poison Prevention Month •
Take safe neighborhood walks •



wellness
& safety



Kids and poisons don't mix

Store classroom chemicals out of reach, out of sight

All schools have some cleaning materials, pesticides, science chemicals, art supplies and other such items on campus that must be handled appropriately and with caution. Note the following:

- **Chemicals left within reach of students are among the most common hazards found during SIA site inspections.** Especially problematic are those found in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.
- **Cleaning chemicals should never be left within reach of students.** Return them to safe or locked storage immediately after use.
- **Only district-approved chemicals should be on site.** Site administration should be consulted before any other chemicals are purchased.
- **Each chemical must be properly labeled, especially the contents in secondary containers.** Simply writing "cleaner" is not sufficient.
- **Try to keep products in the original containers** and never put them into food or beverage containers.



March is Poison Prevention Month

- **Store food away from all potentially poisonous products.**
- **Know the names of all your plants and which ones are poisonous.**
- **Materials used for art projects can be dangerous.** Visit www.oehha.org/education/art for guidelines and the most current list of hazardous arts and crafts materials.
- **In the event of a possible poisoning, call 1-800-876-4766 or 1-800-222-1222.**

For additional information on poison prevention visit www.calpoison.org

Heads up to walk safely in your neighborhood

Walking is great exercise that requires only a good pair of shoes and your effort. To make the most of each outing, heed the following:

- **Walk facing traffic.** If there's no sidewalk and you must walk on the side of the road, walk so you're facing traffic. This will give you the best chance to see traffic approaching you and allow you an opportunity to take evasive action.
- **Cross safely.** At controlled intersections, cross only when you have the pedestrian crossing light. Even then, a driver may have a green light to turn and might not expect you to be in the crosswalk. Or you may be in his or her blind spot. Make eye contact with the driver and wave while proceeding. And always look both ways.



- **Walk single file.** Unless you're on a sidewalk separated from the road, walk in single file. Although it's fun to walk next to your family and friends, drivers may have limited space or not see you at all if they come around curves.
- **Stay aware of bikers and runners.** Bike riders approaching from behind should alert you with either a bell or a call out to you. Listen for them and walk in single file to allow them to safely pass. Bike/runner/walker collisions can result in broken bones or head injuries.
- **Be visible.** Wear bright colors when walking in the daytime. At night, wear light-colored and reflective clothing or a reflective vest to be visible. Drivers have limited visibility, so you need to make yourself stand out as much as possible. Be just as cautious at dawn or twilight, as drivers still have limited visibility or may even have the setting or rising sun shining directly in their eyes.

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- Be safe on neighborhood walks
- WeTip protects schools' assets

Walk safely in your neighborhood

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- **Be predictable.** Make it a practice to stay on one side of the path while walking rather than weaving randomly from one side to the other.
- **Keep the volume down.** Don't drown out your environment with your phone or iPod. Keep the volume at a level where you can still hear bike bells and warnings from other walkers and runners.
- **Hang up and eyes up.** Chatting or texting on a mobile device while walking is as dangerous as doing these things while driving. You're distracted and not as aware of your environment, and you're less likely to recognize traffic dangers, passing joggers or tripping hazards. Also, potential criminals see you as a preoccupied, easy target.
- **Walk dogs on short leashes.** A shorter leash will prevent your dog from running into traffic. Don't trip other walkers or bikers with poor control of your pet.
- **Know when to stop walking.** Heat sickness, dehydration, heart attack or stroke can strike walkers at any age. Learn the symptoms of medical emergencies and carry a cell phone to dial 911.
- **Be aware of stranger danger.** Choose walking paths frequented by other walkers, runners and bikers. If you see someone suspicious, be prepared to alter your route or go into a store or public building. Acting alert and aware can convince bad guys to choose an easier target.



Choose walking paths frequented by other walkers, runners and bikers.

Source: www.verywell.com

Protect your school's assets with WeTip

Property damage and theft at your school are costly. With limited budgets and time, it's even more important to protect your assets. WeTip is a tool you can use to help protect your school.

By promoting WeTip on your campus and in your neighborhood, you remind your community that someone is watching. A potential criminal may think twice about vandalizing if he thinks he may be observed or tracked down.

For information, posters, wallet cards, magnets and other promotional WeTip materials, contact Teresa Franco at tfranco@sia-jpa.org or 916-364-1281, ext. 1256.



The material in this newsletter should be part of your Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP).

Keep a copy of this newsletter in your IIPP binder and be sure all employees receive a copy.

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