UNIT A
THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER:
ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND REQUIREMENTS

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UNIT A
THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER:
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INTRODUCTION

Transporting students to and from school is a necessary part of a sound education program. For a safe, efficient, and economical transportation program, competent school bus drivers and standard bus operation are necessary. At present, there are approximately 24,000 school buses in operation within the Commonwealth.

Before you get behind the wheel of a school bus, you need to understand your role as a bus driver and your responsibilities to your passengers, your school system, and your fellow workers. These topics are covered in the first part of this unit. The second part describes the requirements for certified school bus drivers in Pennsylvania.

YOUR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The school bus driver plays an important role in the educational system. The role includes a number of responsibilities the driver must willingly accept.

YOUR ROLE AS A DRIVER

Learning to drive a vehicle the size of a school bus is a difficult task involving knowledge of laws, regulations, visual and mechanical skills, judgments, decisions, and accurate responses. Your performance as a school bus driver is dependent on your skills.

You are Important
You, the professional school bus driver, are a very important person with a responsible part to play in the educational system. In many instances, you are the first representative of the school system to meet the children in the morning and the last to see them at night. You are in a position to have a large influence on a child’s attitude toward school.

You are Responsible
Like the captain of a ship, the school bus driver is responsible for efficient and economical vehicle operation, passenger and vehicle safety, and order and discipline. The good school bus driver successfully accomplishes this assignment and is respected and appreciated as a person performing a difficult and necessary service. While children are on the bus, their safety is in your hands.

You are a Member of the Safety Team
Perhaps no other area of educational operations demands more responsibility for student welfare than the transportation of students in buses on public highways, streets, and roads. The driver is a very important member of the safety team, which includes students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and law enforcement officials. As a key member of this team, you must constantly strive to improve operational safety and efficiency. (See Figure A-1.)
YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A DRIVER

As a professional driver, you are expected to meet high standards of conduct. A school bus driver is more than a professional driver and is expected to meet standards of conduct higher than those of professional drivers. Student passengers and their parents place a great deal of confidence in you. You should act deserving of this confidence, including being:

- A dependable person who can be relied upon to carry out your duties in letter and spirit.
- Emotionally stable to work effectively and patiently with students, parents, and school officials under different weather conditions and mechanical difficulties.
- Mature enough to cope with unexpected and unusual situations.
- Interested in the welfare and needs of others.
- Willing to practice patience and understanding.
- Observant of all traffic laws, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (the Department) regulations, and local rules and regulations, which includes conducting two emergency evacuation drills on your bus every school year.
- Neat and clean, as a symbol of the entire school system.
- Careful to refrain from using profanity.
- Well rested, so that you are free from fatigue.

A school bus driver also has the following specific responsibilities:

Your Driving Technique

When you drive a bus load of children to school every day in all kinds of hazardous highway and weather conditions, you are charged with a serious responsibility. The vital links to safety—proper driver attitude, knowledge and skill—are developed through your interest in safe driving. Your ability to cope with a constantly changing driving environment demands both pre-employment preparation and continual in-service activity. You must constantly re-evaluate your driving technique. It is important that you honestly evaluate yourself to ensure that you are physically and mentally prepared for driving your bus.

Your Passengers

Try to establish a positive relationship with your passengers. Their conduct will depend a great deal on what you say and do. If possible, learn your students’ names and greet them in a personable and friendly manner. Your expression of interest in each child will help you to gain the confidence of your riders. Remember, an essential part of your job is to maintain discipline
according to procedures established by your local school system. Since students desire recognition of their good traits and abilities, compliment good conduct, habits, and deeds.

Under ordinary loading and unloading circumstances, communication between driver and passenger should be encouraged. You should help your passengers understand and follow what is considered normal and proper behavior on the school bus. Maintain a businesslike yet friendly relationship with all students.

Public Relations
Public relations is the opinion people have of both drivers and the school system. By the way drivers do their daily jobs, they contribute favorably or unfavorably to public relations. Careful, courteous drivers make good impressions; careless, thoughtless drivers create harmful impressions. For example, the school bus driver who weaves in and out of traffic attracts more unfavorable attention and more comment than one who observes proper lane usage. One discourteous, irresponsible act reflects poorly on all members of the student transportation team.

In many school districts, the school bus driver is the only contact parents have with school personnel. Good or bad impressions of the school are conveyed by the driver’s attitude toward both students and their parents. You will encounter students and parents with a wide range of attitudes toward you and the school system. You should be flexible and treat everyone in a courteous and professional manner.

Your reputation in the community, your courteous treatment of children and their parents, and your willingness to better prepare yourself for your position will help parents and children to have confidence in you.

You should consider all enforcement officers in the community, including crossing guards and school patrols, as part of the safety team. Their job, as well as yours, is to ensure safety on the highways. You should strive to develop good working relations with them—their authority and experience may be invaluable to you.

Building desirable public relations is a continuous process, and depends on the attitude you bring to work each day. You can add to your system’s reputation by showing pride in your work. This sustains a good public opinion.

Good relations within your organization are essential. Public relations begins with fellow employees. An organization whose members have mutual friendliness, interest, and respect has met a major requirement of good public relations.

Your Supervisor and Fellow Employees
Someone in your school district or company is assigned the responsibility of supervising you as an employee. The person is another member of the safety team and is vitally interested in the safety of your riders. Cooperation with your supervisor and fellow employees is essential to transportation safety. The following are ways you can cooperate with them:

• Understand and support your written school policy.
• Communicate often with your immediate supervisor and accept his/her authority.
• Willingly accept your responsibilities and assignments.
• Don’t repeat personal or confidential information.
• Always inform your supervisor of discipline problems, bus conditions, highway conditions, and changing pick-up/discharge conditions.
• Submit required forms and reports on time.
• Report all crashes, whether or not damage is apparent, including crashes with property, pedestrians, vehicles, domestic animals, and passengers. Also report those crashes near, but not involving, your bus.
• Be helpful, assisting others in pre-trip inspections and school loading and unloading.
• Comply with your school district regulations regarding the number of chaperons that accompany students on various school activities.
• Help out with conditions such as routine overload, route adjustments, equipment repair, loading stop adjustments, and other areas of student safety.

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER ENDORSEMENT REQUIREMENTS

According to federal standards, each state must have regulations to insure that all school bus drivers are in good physical condition, of good character, and skilled in the operation of their vehicles. They should have morals above reproach, an even temperament, the ability to adjust to the varying conditions of their job, and a positive attitude toward safety. To become a certified school bus driver in Pennsylvania, a person must meet several initial requirements and then successfully complete the training requirements established by the Department.

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS—FIRST STEP

To become a certified school bus driver in Pennsylvania, you must obtain an appropriate Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) Knowledge Test Authorization/Learner’s Permit. To apply for a CDL Knowledge Test Authorization/Learner’s Permit:

• You must be eighteen (18) years of age or older.
• You must complete the Commercial Learner’s Permit Application (see Figures A-2a and A-2b, DL-31CD Appendix A-3 and A-4) and submit a check or money order payable to “PennDOT” for any applicable fee required with this form. The cost will be indicated on the form.
• You must submit a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania School Bus Driver’s Physical Examination Form (see Figure A-4, DL-704 Appendix A-7). It must be completed by a physician appointed or approved by the local school board. You can obtain this form from your employer. If you satisfactorily pass the physical examination, the examining physician will issue a Physical Examination Certificate. (See Figure A-11, Appendix A-12.) The Physical Examination Certificate is valid for one (1) year and should be kept by the driver. The completed School Bus Driver’s Physical Examination Form is sent along with the DL-31CD.

Once these forms are completed, the knowledge test authorization and school bus learner’s permit can be obtained either through mail or same-day service available at the Riverfront Office Center, Driver/Vehicle Customer Services. If the forms listed above and the fee are forwarded through the mail, the knowledge test authorization and school bus learner’s permit will be returned in approximately seven (7) days from receipt of the documents. If the knowledge test authorization and school bus learner’s permit are obtained through same-day service, the forms and fee are taken directly to the Driver/Vehicle Customer Services area, Riverfront Office Center in Harrisburg. Applications are processed on weekdays at the customer service windows.
KNOWLEDGE TEST AUTHORIZATION AND SCHOOL BUS LEARNER’S PERMIT-SECOND STEP

Upon receipt of these forms, the Department reviews your document for correctness, license suspension, and determination of medical competency. If you meet the physical requirements of the School Bus Driver Regulations (Title 67, Chapter 71 of the Pennsylvania Code), a CDL knowledge test authorization and school bus learner’s permit are issued.

You may not use the Knowledge Test Authorization for driving purposes! The School Bus Learner’s Permit may only be used to operate a school bus.

The Knowledge Test Authorization and School Bus Learner’s Permit are valid for one (1) year. During this one-year period, you will be required to complete all knowledge and skills testing. The knowledge examination will consist of:

- Vision Test
- Knowledge tests, including, but not limited to general knowledge, passenger endorsement, school bus endorsement, and if you are going to drive a bus with air brakes, removal of the air brake restriction.

If you do not meet the physical qualifications required of school bus drivers, your application will be denied.

TRAINING AND SKILLS TESTING REQUIREMENTS–THIRD STEP

Pennsylvania law requires certain commercial permit holders to wait at least 15-days before taking the examination to upgrade their driving privilege. You will need to check the bottom of your learner’s permit for your driver eligibility date. This date identifies the earliest date you are eligible to take your driving test.

The School Bus Driver Training Course

The Pennsylvania school bus driver training course is administered by local school districts or intermediate units under the supervision of the Department. This course is available to all public, private, and parochial school bus driver applicants. To obtain a Pennsylvania School Bus Endorsement, you must complete a minimum of twenty (20) hours of instruction including at least fourteen (14) hours of classroom instruction and six (6) hours of vehicle familiarity and driving instruction (in-bus training). The in-bus portion of the training must be one-on-one training with a certified instructor. This requirement (commonly known as the pre-service course) can be completed in two ways:

- Complete the full twenty (20) hours of instruction before attempting to pass the skills examination administered by the Department or a State-certified third party tester. This method is recommended by the Department.
- Complete ten (10) hours of instruction (seven [7] hours of classroom training and three [3] hours of in-bus training) and attempt to pass the skills examination administered by the Department or a State-certified third party tester. If successful, you have 120 days from the date the endorsement card is issued to complete the remaining ten (10) hours of instruction (seven [7] additional hours of classroom training and three [3] additional hours of in-bus training).

After completing the full twenty (20) hours of instruction or the first ten (10) hours of instruction, you are issued a Certificate of Completion Card. (See Figure A-9, Appendix A-12.) State law (Title 75, Section 1607) requires that a person hold the learner’s permit to add or upgrade the commercial class for 15-days before they are eligible to take the skills test administered by the Department or State-certified third party tester. This examination must be completed within twelve (12) months of the completion date of the training.

When taking the skills examination, bring the following documents to the test site:

- A valid driver’s license (if you are a licensed driver)
• A valid Pennsylvania CDL learner’s permit
• A valid Physical Examination Certificate (DL-742)
• A valid Certificate of Completion Card (DL-713)
• The current vehicle registration card for the bus being driven
• A valid insurance card or proof of financial responsibility for the bus being driven
• A valid driver’s license of the person accompanying you

You must be accompanied by a certified CDL driver to legally drive the bus to the testing point and back in case you fail the driving examination.

**The skills examination will be administered in three parts:**

• The safety inspection shall be the first part of the skills examination. Inability to correctly perform the air brake check will result in automatic failure of this portion.

• The basic skills test is the second part of the skills examination. The test will be comprised of a selection of maneuvers from the following exercises:
  
  (i) Simulated or actual student discharge
  (ii) Simulated or actual railroad crossing
  (iii) Forward Stop
  (iv) Straight line backing
  (v) Alley dock
  (vi) Parallel Park (driver side)
  (vii) Parallel Park (conventional)
  (viii) Right Turn
  (ix) Backward serpentine

• The on-road driving test is the third part of the skills examination. An automatic failure will occur if you commit any traffic offense, run over a curb or sidewalk, or cause a crash. (An accumulation of minor infractions will also cause a failure.)

You are permitted to take the driving examination three (3) times on a valid CDL learners permit. The examination may be taken only once during a given day. If you fail a portion of the test, you may return on another day and retake only that portion which you failed. If you fail the driving examination three (3) times, you must reapply for a CDL learner’s permit, pay the appropriate fee, and complete all training requirements again.

If you fail to successfully pass the skills examination within twelve (12) months, you will be required to repeat all twenty (20) hours of training.

If you successfully complete the examination, your passing test results will be credited to your driving record. Once your record reflects that all minimum requirements have been met, you will receive a CDL license displaying the “S” endorsement and a school bus endorsement card from the Department. If the full twenty (20) hours of the training course have been completed, the school bus endorsement card is valid for one (1) year. The school bus endorsement card is reissued annually by the Department if the requirement for the annual physical examination is met. If you successfully pass the driving examination after completing only ten (10) hours of instruction, you must complete the additional ten (10) hours of instruction (seven [7] hours of classroom and three [3] hours of in-bus instruction) within 120 days of the endorsement card issue date, or the Department will cancel your school bus endorsement card.

 PLEASE NOTE: School Bus Driver’s are required to carry three credentials when operating a school bus in Pennsylvania: a valid commercial driver’s license displaying the “S” endorsement, a valid school bus endorsement card, and a valid physician’s certificate.
HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS
You must be fit to drive a school bus with regard to the health and safety of the students being transported. To establish fitness you must:

- Comply with Pennsylvania Department of Health and any local school district regulations and policies regarding communicable diseases.
- Have a clean criminal history record. An applicant must complete a Request for Criminal Record Check. (See Figure A-5, SP4-164, Appendix A-8.)
- Have a clean child abuse history record. An applicant must complete a Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance. (See Figure A-6 and A-6a, CY-113, Appendix A-9 and A-10.)
- Have no record of motor vehicle crashes or traffic violations determined to be excessive in number by your employer.
- Be drug- and alcohol-free when driving, and you must not consume any alcoholic beverages within eight (8) hours prior to operating a school bus.

Local requirements may be more stringent than those listed above.

DRIVER RECERTIFICATION
State law requires you to renew your school bus certification every four (4) years, completing a minimum of ten (10) hours of instruction and the “S” endorsement knowledge and skills examinations. The instruction must include seven (7) hours of classroom training and three (3) hours of in-bus training. This ten (10) hour course (commonly known as the in-service course) may be completed at any time during the twelve (12) months immediately preceding the recertification date on your school bus endorsement card. The Department notifies you of this requirement through a notice mailed one year before your endorsement expires. (See Figure A-7, Appendix A-11.) Issuance of a new school bus certificate of completion card for recertifying drivers is optional.

Upon successful completion of the training and testing requirements, a new school bus endorsement card is issued to you forty-five (45) days prior to the expiration of your current “S” endorsement. If you fail the skills examination three (3) times, your current school bus endorsement card must be surrendered to the examiner. You must then reapply for the “S” endorsement learner’s permit and complete all training requirements for new drivers outlined in the previous sections. Any training taken as a requirement for the first permit or for recertification cannot be counted toward new permit training requirements.

If the recertification requirements are not completed before the recertification date of the school bus endorsement, you have one (1) year from that date to complete the training and testing requirements. If the requirements are not completed within this additional year, you must reapply for an “S” endorsement permit and repeat all training and testing procedures.

After completing the recertification course, a new school bus endorsement card will be mailed to you. (See Figure A-10, Appendix A-12.) If your old school bus endorsement card expired before, or shortly after, the completion of recertification training, you are not permitted to operate a school bus until receiving the new school bus endorsement from the Department.
When taking the examination for recertification, you must bring the following documents to the testing site:

- A valid driver’s license
- A school bus recertification notice
- A valid Physical Examination Certificate
- The current vehicle registration card for the bus being driven
- A valid insurance card or proof of financial responsibility for the bus being driven

The safety of school children is the main concern of the Department of Transportation. Compliance with every aspect of the School Bus Driver Training Program is essential to the safety of school children.

You, the school bus driver, will be asked to initial and sign the School Bus Driver’s Training Report Form (DL-714) verifying that the minimum training requirements have been met. (see Figure A-12a and A-12b, Appendix A-13 and Appendix A-14)

**PLEASE NOTE:** Your signature on the Training Report Form certifies under penalty of law that the information contained on the form is true and correct.

**WARNING:** Falsification to authorities is a misdemeanor of the third degree and is punishable by a fine of up to $2,500 and/or imprisonment up to 1 year.

If you are not given the minimum number of training hours, do not sign the Training Report Form. You may contact PennDOT’s Special Driver Programs Unit at (717) 787-6453 if you have any concerns associated with your school bus driver training.

**ANNUAL PHYSICAL EXAMINATION**

To maintain a valid school bus endorsement, you must pass an annual physical examination given by a physician appointed or approved by the local school board. A Pennsylvania School Bus Driver’s Physical Examination form (see Figure A-4, DL-704, Appendix A-7) must contain the signatures of both you, the driver, and the physician before sending it to the Department.

A letter is mailed to you approximately ninety (90) days prior to the expiration of your school bus physical. The purpose of this letter is to remind you that your physical is about to expire. Your school bus endorsement card will not be renewed unless the Department has a current physical on file. You must pass the minimum requirements listed on the physical examination form. Additional medical information may be required to further determine physical competency. If the Department determines that you are not physically competent to operate a school bus, your school bus endorsement will be recalled. You may request a re-examination.

Upon passing the physical examination, the examining school transportation physician will issue a Physical Examination Certificate (see Figure A-11 Appendix A-12) valid for one (1) year. This certificate must be carried whenever operating a school bus.

**CHANGE OF INFORMATION ON LICENSE**

A new camera card or photo license will be issued whenever you are adding or deleting an endorsement, removing a restriction, or upgrading your class of license.

If you are changing your name or address on your CDL license or “S” endorsement, you must complete form DL-80CD (see Figures A-3a and A-3b, Appendix A-5 and A-6) and forward it to the Department with the appropriate fees.

**Documents Carried While Operating a School Bus**

The following current and valid documents must be carried by you at all times while operating a school bus:

- CDL license (see Figure A-8, Appendix A-12)
- Pennsylvania School Bus Endorsement Card (see Figure A-10, Appendix A-12)
- Physical Examination Certificate (see Figure A-11, Appendix A-12)
- Vehicle registration card for the bus being driven
- A valid insurance card or proof of financial responsibility for the bus being driven