

From: Fern Desjardins
Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2026 11:06 PM
Subject: School Bus Safety

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Hello Megan,

I was interested in reading about the Maine School Transportation Safety Commission in the Maine DOE Update for March 6, 2026 and the follow up on the article with Deputy Commissioner Chuhta at the State Board of Education's workshop on March 12. The bus-related deaths of two young students in November and December 2025 were very troubling. I'm grateful there's an Executive Order that requires a review of current school transportation protocols in Maine.

I reviewed the regulations in Chapter 81 as I believe bus driver and student training are key to school bus safety. **How does Maine ensure that Chapter 81 is being followed in SAUs throughout Maine?** Chapter 81 may need a few tweaks but most importantly, **it needs to be put in practice.**

My daughter lives in New York and I was impressed with their bus safety protocol when I visited her in January. This is what I learned from her:

My daughter receives a note from the principal that informs her of the training that will take place (attached).

She shared the New York state school bus safety drill requirements (attached). It specifies when the three required drills must occur in the fall, winter, and spring.

See the Bus Safety Drills Guide for each of the seasons (attached).

Lastly, see an example of a follow up correspondence that occurs in New York (attached).

Maine does not need to adopt New York's school bus safety protocol, but it must have regulations in place that will be followed. My daughter drives her children to and from school. However, she receives notification of school bus safety drills, and she sees the

drills taking place when she drops off her kids. Her children are included in the drills as all students must participate.

Kindergarten students participate in four drills as they are all picked up with a parent and travel to and from school for a half-day orientation before the opening of school in the fall. They actually call that day, "Bus Day."

My grandkids will have their Spring Drill tomorrow. The letter in my first attachment below is the letter my daughter received today. 😊 They take school bus safety seriously in New York.

Thank you for serving on the Commission, thank you for serving as co-chair, and thank you for your consideration of this important issue. Losing two students in bus accidents this school year was two students too many.

With gratitude for your commitment to student safety,

Fern Desjardins

NYS Bus Safety Drill

FALL DRILL

- **INTRODUCE THE DRILL.** Introduce yourself to your students. Let them know you take pride in being a professional school bus driver and that you care about their safety. Explain why drills are conducted; stress the importance of following driver directions in an emergency; introduce your student helpers.—
- **RIDERSHIP RULES.** Read aloud and briefly discuss your school's or company's bus rules (stress the why's). Explain the disciplinary consequences for students who refuse to follow the bus rules.
- **MIDDLE LOADING.** Explain the importance of emptying the rearmost and front seats as soon as possible during a trip home and filling them last on a trip to school. These seats are the most dangerous in a collision.
- **SEAT BELTS.** Instruct students how to properly connect, adjust and release the seat belts, how to wear the belt properly (low and snug across the hips), times at which the seat safety belts should be fastened and released (before the bus moves and after it stops), and where to put the belts when not in use (on the seat, not on the floor).
- **SECURITY.** Explain that school buses and the children who ride them can be targets of terrorists or strangers who may want to hurt the bus or them. Ask them to tell you if they find anything on the bus like a package or if they see anyone following, watching or taking picture of the bus or children at bus stops.
- **BOARDING AT SCHOOL.** Remind students to board the bus promptly in the afternoon to reduce loading time.
- **EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND EXITS.** Have students point out the location of all emergency equipment - extinguisher, first aid kit, reflectors, etc. - and point out and open all exits. Don't forget the passenger door. Explain the danger of playing with emergency exits.
- **DISABLED DRIVER.** Demonstrate how to stop, secure, and shut off the bus; explain why students should know the bus number and route; demonstrate how to use the bus radio.
- **PRACTICE EVACUATION - REAR DOOR.** (Note: Shut off and secure the bus and activate red flashers during the evacuation practice.) To prevent injuries, insist on an orderly, "seat-by-seat" practice evacuation. Student helpers should serve as outside "spotters" during the evacuation practice, outside the rear door. Helpers should get off first. Require all students to "sit and slide" from the emergency door - never let students jump out the door or engage in horseplay during the practice. Students should leave bookbags and all other personal items on the bus. Point out a safe area for students to gather outside the bus; tell students to "buddy up." Younger students should hold hands as they move away from the bus.
- **SAFE LOADING AND UNLOADING DEMONSTRATION.** After the evacuation practice is over, gather students in front of your bus and demonstrate the Safe Crossing Rule; let students point out Danger Zones; review your operation's "Safe to Cross" and "Danger - Go Back!" signals; remind students to never try to retrieve something they've dropped near the bus, and never to run after a missed bus; explain the dangers of drawstrings or other dangling clothing.
- **CONCLUDE THE DRILL.** If your students paid attention and did a good job, remember to thank them! Thank any teachers or school officials who assisted or observed. Distribute the "Letter to Parents" for students to take home.

(see drill guidelines and compliance form on back)

Fall drill must be conducted during the first seven days of school in the fall.

Instructions to driver/attendant: *use this checklist as a guide when conducting a bus safety drill.*

Tip: *strongly encourage active student participation in the drill - don't just lecture at them!*

Note: *before the drill, remind your selected student helpers that they will be assisting you in the practice evacuation as well as in any real evacuation.*

NYS Bus Safety Drill Guide and Compliance Form

(complies with New York State Education Department Regulations 156.3 f-h)

FALL DRILL COMPLIANCE FORM

Driver Name: _____

Attendant Name (if applicable): _____

Bus #: _____

Date/Time of Drill: _____

SCHOOL OBSERVER SIGNATURE (if applicable): _____

Comments:

(File this form with the Transportation Office when drill is completed)

NYS Bus Safety Drill

WINTER DRILL

- **INTRODUCE THE DRILL.** Remind students about why drills are conducted and the importance of following driver directions in an emergency; remind students who your appointed helpers are.
- **RIDERSHIP RULES.** Read aloud and discuss your school's or company's bus rules (focus on any rules that your riders have had trouble following). Remind students of the disciplinary consequences for those who refuse to follow the bus rules.
- **MIDDLE LOADING.** Explain the importance of emptying the rearmost and front seats as soon as possible during a trip home and filling them last on a trip to school. These seats are the most dangerous in a collision.
- **SEAT BELTS.** Instruct students how to properly connect, adjust and release the seat belts, how to wear the belt properly (low and snug across the hips), times at which the seat safety belts should be fastened and released (before the bus moves and after it stops), and where to put the belts when not in use (on the seat, not on the floor).
- **SECURITY.** Explain that school buses and the children who ride them can be targets of terrorists or strangers who may want to hurt the bus or them. Ask them to tell you if they find anything on the bus like a package or if they see anyone following, watching or taking picture of the bus or children at bus stops.
- **BOARDING AT SCHOOL.** Remind students to board the bus promptly in the afternoon to reduce loading time.
- **EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND EXITS.** Have students point out the location of all emergency equipment - extinguisher, first aid kit, reflectors, etc. - and point out and open all exits. Don't forget the passenger door. Remind them of the danger of playing with emergency exits.
- **DISABLED DRIVER.** Demonstrate how to stop, secure, and shut off the bus; explain why students should know the bus number and route; demonstrate how to use the bus radio.
- **PRACTICE EVACUATION - FRONT DOOR.** (Note: Shut off and secure the bus and activate red flashers during the evacuation practice.) Insist on an orderly "seat-by-seat" practice evacuation. Student helpers should get off first and wait on both sides of the front passenger door to keep students moving and prevent students from falling down the stairs. Students should leave bookbags and all other personal items on the bus. Point out a safe area for students to gather outside the bus; tell students to "buddy up." Younger students should hold hands as they move away from the bus.
- **SAFE LOADING AND UNLOADING DEMONSTRATION.** After the evacuation practice is over, gather students in front of your bus and demonstrate the Safe Crossing Rule; let students point out Danger Zones; review your operation's "Safe to Cross" and "Danger - Go Back!" signals; remind students to never try to retrieve something they've dropped near the bus, and never to run after a missed bus; remind students of the dangers of drawstrings or other dangling clothing. Discuss the special dangers at the bus stop in winter weather - remind students to wait far back from the roadway edge, in case another vehicle slides out of control toward them.
- **CONCLUDE THE DRILL.** If your students paid attention and did a good job, remember to thank them! Thank any teachers or school officials who assisted or observed. Distribute the "Letter to Parents" for students to take home.

(see drill guidelines and compliance form on back)

Winter Drill must be conducted between November 1 and December 31.

Instructions to driver/attendant: *use this checklist as a guide when conducting a bus safety drill.*

Tip: *strongly encourage active student participation in the drill - don't just lecture at them!*

Note: *before the drill, remind your selected student helpers that they will be assisting you in the practice evacuation as well as in any real evacuation.*

NYS Bus Safety Drill Guide and Compliance Form

(complies with New York State Education Department Regulations 156.3 f-h)

WINTER DRILL COMPLIANCE FORM

Driver Name: _____

Attendant Name (if applicable): _____

Bus #: _____

Date/Time of Drill: _____

SCHOOL OBSERVER SIGNATURE (if applicable): _____

Comments:

(File this form with the Transportation Office when drill is completed)

NYS Bus Safety Drill

SPRING DRILL

- **INTRODUCE THE DRILL.** Remind students about why drills are conducted and the importance of following driver directions in an emergency; remind students who your appointed helpers are.
- **RIDERSHIP RULES.** Read aloud and discuss your school's or company's bus rules (focus on any rules that your riders have had trouble following). Remind students of the disciplinary consequences for those who refuse to follow the bus rules. Stress that the school year is almost over, and students need to keep up their focus on safe ridership until the end of the year.
- **MIDDLE LOADING.** Explain the importance of emptying the rearmost and front seats as soon as possible during a trip home and filling them last on a trip to school. These seats are the most dangerous in a collision.
- **SEAT BELTS.** Instruct students how to properly connect, adjust and release the seat belts, how to wear the belt properly (low and snug across the hips), times at which the seat safety belts should be fastened and released (before the bus moves and after it stops), and where to put the belts when not in use (on the seat, not on the floor).
- **BOARDING AT SCHOOL.** Remind students to board the bus promptly in the afternoon to reduce loading time.
- **EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND EXITS.** Have students point out the location of all emergency equipment - extinguisher, first aid kit, reflectors, etc. - and point out and open all exits. Don't forget the passenger door. Remind them of the danger of playing with emergency exits.
- **DISABLED DRIVER.** Demonstrate how to stop, secure, and shut off the bus; explain why students should know the bus number and route; demonstrate how to use the bus radio.
- **PRACTICE EVACUATION - SPLIT EVACUATION.** (Note: Shut off and secure the bus and activate red flashers during the evacuation practice.) Divide your students in half, front to rear. Those in the front half of the bus go out the front door, and those in the back half go out the rear door - make sure students know where they are to evacuate before the evacuation starts. Insist on an orderly, seat-by-seat, practice evacuation. Student helpers should go out the rear door before other students and should "spot" for other students exiting the rear door. Remind students to leave bookbags and all other personal items on the bus. Point out a safe area for students to gather outside the bus, tell students to "buddy up." Younger students should hold hands as they move away from the bus.
- **SAFE LOADING AND UNLOADING DEMONSTRATION.** After the evacuation practice is over, gather students in front of your bus and demonstrate the Safe Crossing Rule; let students point out Danger Zones; review your operation's "Safe to Cross" and "Danger - Go Back!" signals; remind students to never try to retrieve something they've dropped near the bus, and never to run after a missed bus; remind students of the dangers of drawstrings or other dangling clothing. Discuss the fact that the end of the school year can be a dangerous time, because students sometimes get excited about summer and forget the importance of following safety procedures.
- **CONCLUDE THE DRILL.** Thank your students for their cooperation in the drills this year. Thank any teachers or school officials who assisted or observed. Distribute the "Letter to Parents" for students to take home.

(see drill guidelines and compliance form on back)

- *Spring Drill must be conducted between March 1 and April 30.*

Instructions to driver/attendant: *use this checklist as a guide when conducting a bus safety drill.*

Tip: *strongly encourage active student participation in the drill - don't just lecture at them!*

Note: *before the drill, remind your selected student helpers that they will be assisting you in the practice evacuation as well as in any real evacuation.*

NYS Bus Safety Drill Guide and Compliance Form

(complies with New York State Education Department Regulations 156.3 f-h)

SPRING DRILL COMPLIANCE FORM

Driver Name: _____

Attendant Name (if applicable): _____

Bus #: _____

Date/Time of Drill: _____

SCHOOL OBSERVER SIGNATURE (if applicable): _____

Comments:

(File this form with the Transportation Office when drill is completed)

NYS Bus Safety Drill

SUMMER DRILL

- **INTRODUCE THE DRILL.** Introduce yourself to your students and explain why drills are conducted. Explain the importance of following driver directions in an emergency; remind students who your appointed helpers are.
- **RIDERSHIP RULES.** Read aloud and discuss your school's or company's bus rules (focus on any rules that your riders have had trouble following). Remind students of the disciplinary consequences for those who refuse to follow the bus rules.
- **MIDDLE LOADING.** Explain the importance of emptying the rearmost and front seats as soon as possible during a trip home and filling them last on a trip to school. These seats are the most dangerous in a collision.
- **SEAT BELTS.** Instruct students how to properly connect, adjust and release the seat belts, how to wear the belt properly (low and snug across the hips), times at which the seat safety belts should be fastened and released (before the bus moves and after it stops), and where to put the belts when not in use (on the seat, not on the floor).
- **BOARDING AT SCHOOL.** Remind students to board the bus promptly in the afternoon to reduce loading time.
- **SECURITY.** Explain that school buses and the children who ride them can be targets of terrorists or strangers who may want to hurt the bus or them. Ask them to tell you if they find anything on the bus like a package or if they see anyone following, watching or taking picture of the bus or children at bus stops.
- **EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND EXITS.** Have students point out the location of all emergency equipment - extinguisher, first aid kit, reflectors, etc. - and point out and open all exits. Don't forget the passenger door. Remind them of the danger of playing with emergency exits.
- **DISABLED DRIVER.** Demonstrate how to stop, secure, and shut off the bus; explain why students should know the bus number and route; demonstrate how to use the bus radio.
- **PRACTICE EVACUATION - FRONT DOOR.** (Note: Shut off and secure the bus and activate red flashers during the evacuation practice.) Insist on an orderly practice evacuation. Student helpers should get off first and wait on both sides of the front passenger door to keep students moving and prevent students from falling down the stairs. Students should leave bookbags and all other personal items on the bus. Point out a safe area for students to gather outside the bus; tell students to "buddy up." Younger students should hold hands as they move away from the bus.
- **SAFE LOADING AND UNLOADING DEMONSTRATION.** After the evacuation practice is over, gather students in front of your bus and demonstrate the Safe Crossing Rule; let students point out Danger Zones; review your operation's "Safe to Cross" and "Danger - Go Back!" signals; remind students to never try to retrieve something they've dropped near the bus, and never to run after a missed bus; remind students of the dangers of drawstrings or other dangling clothing.
- **CONCLUDE THE DRILL.** If your students paid attention and did a good job, remember to thank them! Thank any teachers or school officials who assisted or observed. Distribute the "Letter to Parents" for students to take home.

(see drill guidelines and compliance form on back)

Summer Drill should be conducted at the beginning of a summer route

Instructions to driver/attendant: *use this checklist as a guide when conducting a bus safety drill.*

Tip: *strongly encourage active student participation in the drill - don't just lecture at them!*

Note: *before the drill, remind your selected student helpers that they will be assisting you in the practice evacuation as well as in any real evacuation.*

NYS Bus Safety Drill Guide and Compliance Form

(complies with New York State Education Department Regulations 156.3 f-h)

SUMMER DRILL COMPLIANCE FORM

Driver Name: _____

Attendant Name (if applicable): _____

Bus #: _____

Date/Time of Drill: _____

SCHOOL OBSERVER SIGNATURE (if applicable): _____

Comments:

(File this form with the Transportation Office when drill is completed)

NYS Bus Safety Drill

ACTIVITY TRIP MINI-DRILL

(Conduct a mini-drill at the start of each field trip, sports trip, charter trip, or other type of school activity trip.)

• **Instructions:** use this checklist as a guide when conducting a mini-drill.

- **Tip:** some of your passengers may not be seasoned bus riders. Don't assume everyone knows safety procedures and the location of emergency exits and equipment!
- **In Advance:** before the drill, talk with the coach, teacher, or chaperone on board. Show students you're all working as a team when it comes to student behavior during the trip.

- **INTRODUCE THE DRILL.** Introduce yourself professionally to the students (students who are not regular bus riders might not know you). Explain that before you begin the trip you want to go over a few important safety procedures. Make it clear that the mini-drill will be short – students are often understandably excited to get going on a trip. Explain that the purpose of the mini-drill is to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip, and to be prepared for any emergency that arises.
- **RIDERSHIP RULES.** Review your school's or company's bus rules for the trip. Establish reasonable expectations for student behavior on the trip, and explain the "why's." Ask students for their cooperation. Ask the coach, teacher, or chaperone to say a few words about appropriate behavior too.
- **SEAT BELTS:** Explain your school district's policy regarding the use of seat belts on activity trips; explain how seat belts should be worn (low on the hips, and snug); show students how to buckle, unbuckle, and adjust belts; stress the importance of not playing with or misusing seat belts. (Note: seat belts might not be present on a charter bus.)
- **MIDDLE LOADING.** Explain the importance of not using the rearmost and front seats if possible. These seats are the most dangerous in a collision.
- **EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND EXITS.** Point out the location of all emergency equipment - fire extinguisher, first aid kit, reflectors, etc. Have students point out and open all emergency exits, including the passenger door. Remind students to not play with emergency exits at any time.
- **DISABLED DRIVER.** Demonstrate how to stop, secure, and shut off the bus; demonstrate how to use the bus radio. On long trips out of radio range, discuss other methods of calling for help in emergency, such as cell phones. Describe the route you plan to follow to your destination.
- **BREAKS AND LAYOVERS.** Discuss any plans for breaks during the trip. Explain what you'll be doing during the layover at your destination point. Answer any other concerns about the trip schedule before you leave.
- **CONCLUDE THE DRILL.** Thank your students for their time and encourage them to let you know if they have any concerns during the trip.

(see drill compliance form on back)

NYS Bus Safety Drill Guide and Compliance Form

(complies with New York State Education Department Regulations 156.3 f-g)

ACTIVITY TRIP DRILL COMPLIANCE FORM

Driver Name: _____

Attendant Name (if applicable): _____

Bus #: _____

Date/Time of Drill: _____

SCHOOL OBSERVER SIGNATURE (if applicable): _____

Comments:

(File this form with the Transportation Office when drill is completed)



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August 2018

Mr. Neal S. Miller, Superintendent of Schools
Members of the Board of the Cornwall Central School District
Cornwall Central School District
24 Idlewild Avenue
Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY 12520

Report Number: S9-18-5

Dear Superintendent Miller and Members of the Board of Education:

We conducted an audit of seven school districts throughout New York State. The objective of our audit was to determine whether school districts are providing adequate oversight to ensure students' safe transportation. We included the Cornwall Central School District (District) in this audit. Within the scope of this audit, we examined the District's school bus transportation records for the period July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017.¹ This audit was conducted pursuant to Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article 3 of the New York State General Municipal Law.

This draft report of examination letter contains our findings and recommendations specific to the District. We discussed the findings and recommendations with District officials and considered their comments, which appear in Appendix B, in preparing this report. District officials agree with our findings and indicated they intend to initiate corrective action. At the completion of our audit of the seven school districts, we prepared a global report that summarizes the significant issues we identified at all of the school districts audited.

Summary of Findings

The District contracts with a third-party transportation vendor and relies on them to comply with training, drug testing, safety inspections and safety drill requirements set forth by the various oversight agencies.² The District does not take an active role in monitoring compliance with statutes. It does not require vendors to submit reports showing compliance with specific requirements and does not review the vendors' records to ensure that they are in compliance. The District also does not have a process in place for receiving, documenting or following up on complaints regarding drivers, attendants or buses.

¹ We observed vendor activities, including conducting observations of drivers and pre-trip inspections, on December 22, 2017.

² The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles oversees driver requirements to be in compliance with 19-A driver certifications. The New York State Department of Transportation schedules and performs periodic bus inspections.

During our testing of vendor records,³ we noted discrepancies that present risks that unqualified drivers transported students. The vendor could not support that one bus driver met the minimum training requirements or another driver completed a required annual refresher course. Had District officials implemented monitoring procedures over the District's transportation vendor, they may have detected these discrepancies. The District also relies on the vendor to conduct and review bus inspections and does not take an active role in monitoring them to ensure that they are being conducted as required or that buses used to transport students have passed the safety inspections.

Further, the Superintendent is required to annually approve all District bus drivers. He did not approve any of the 90 drivers transporting children. District officials also should document they observed mandatory bus safety drills being conducted. However, one of 15 bus safety drills was not conducted and two were not conducted within the prescribed time frames. Lack of District monitoring and oversight of bus safety drills makes it difficult to ensure that they were conducted and that each drill met all requirements.

Background and Methodology

The District is located in Orange County, covers approximately 37 square miles and serves approximately 3,200 students. The District's 2016-17 budgeted appropriations totaled approximately \$67.8 million. These costs are funded primarily through real property taxes. The District's total transportation budget for 2016-17 was approximately \$3.4 million. The District transports 3,243 students per year, with 61 contractual buses, traveling approximately 778,500 miles per year.

The District is governed by a nine-member Board of Education (Board). The District's primary function is to provide educational services to its residents. The Assistant Superintendent for Business is responsible for managing the District's day-to-day student transportation activities.

To complete our audit objective, we reviewed student transportation records relative to bus driver qualifications, driver training and bus safety drills. We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). More information on the standards and the methodology used in performing this audit are included in Appendix C of this report. Unless otherwise indicated in this report, samples for testing were selected based on professional judgment, as it was not the intent to project the results onto the entire population. Where applicable, information is presented concerning the value and/or size of the relevant population and the sample selected for examination.

Audit Results

The District contracts with a private bus company to provide transportation to its students. The District included in its contract that the vendor comply with applicable regulations. The drivers are vendor employees, rather than District employees. As such, the District does not participate in hiring and monitoring drivers. Rather, it relies on the controls established by the vendor and various State agencies to ensure compliance. Further, the District does not have a formal process in place to ensure they are receiving, documenting or following up on complaints regarding drivers, attendants or buses.

The District is ultimately responsible for ensuring students' safe transportation and that transportation is in compliance with required standards. This should include monitoring contracts for student transportation to ensure that students are transported to and from school and activities by contracted vendors that comply with all regulations regarding driver qualifications, bus safety requirements, student safety drills and periodic training. While there are oversight agencies which evaluate certain aspects of the

³ These include driver files (both personal and 19-A files), 19-A rosters and drug testing rosters.

requirements, these are not all inclusive. The reliance on the vendor and oversight agencies can result in areas being overlooked if they are not detected by either party. District involvement could provide added assurance that all areas are being addressed, including those that are not directly overseen by an outside agency.

Driver Qualifications

To operate a school bus to transport students in New York State, a driver must meet all of the State's laws. School bus driver regulations are established by the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), State Education Department (SED) and the Federal Department of Transportation (DOT). The requirements encompass both pre-employment and ongoing requirements. The District Superintendent (Superintendent) is responsible for approving, in writing, all school bus drivers, both District and contractor, regular and substitute.⁴ This provides an opportunity for an annual review of individuals prior to the start of the school year and addressing any known issues.

Bus driver employers, either school districts or transportation contractors, are expected to arrange for the medical examination and driver tests, and ensure they comply with all requirements contained in Article 19 of the Vehicle and Traffic Law before they are allowed to drive.⁵ DMV requires that each school bus driver possess a valid commercial driver license⁶ in the class appropriate for the type of vehicle that the driver will operate. Bus drivers must comply with Article 19-A requirements including: completion of pre-employment and annual medical examinations and any required follow-ups, submission of pre-employment and annual driver license abstracts, submission of fingerprints for a New York State Department of Criminal Justice System and Federal Bureau of Investigations criminal history review, completion of annual defensive driving observations, completion of biennial road tests and completion of biennial oral/written tests.⁷

The driver is also responsible for reporting accidents and convictions for traffic infractions to employers within five working days. A driver license suspension, revocation or withdrawal or misdemeanor/felony conviction must be reported to the employer by the end of the business day following the day the driver received it. Further, there are requirements for bus drivers for passing drug and alcohol tests through pre-employment testing, random testing and post-accident testing. Drug and alcohol training must be provided prior to transporting students.

The District has 90 drivers employed by the vendor assigned to its routes. Although the Superintendent is required to annually approve the bus drivers that transport the District's students, he did not approve any of the drivers who transported children to and from school and school activities. District officials told us they were not aware of this requirement. Failure to annually approve drivers creates a risk that any known issues regarding a driver may not be considered in evaluating the driver's fitness.

Drug and alcohol testing was conducted on a random basis by a third-party entity.⁸ We reviewed random drug/alcohol testing conducted on 69 drivers and found negative results for all of them. Further, we reviewed lists provided to drug testing companies to determine whether 75 drivers were included in the population for random testing. All drivers appeared on these lists.

⁴ SED Pupil Transportation Safety Guidance Manual. This includes bus drivers hired during the school year.

⁵ Details of requirements for bus drivers are outlined in Appendix A.

⁶ This must also include an "S" endorsement to qualify to drive a school bus.

⁷ The Behind the Wheel road test and written/oral exam must be conducted by an Article 19-A Certified Examiner.

⁸ Federal guidelines establish random sample selection methodology. Independent companies apply these guidelines to generate driver testing selections.

Driver requirements also include training upon hiring and annual refresher training courses, which are typically held at the bus vendor location. Two of the District's 90 drivers (2 percent) were missing one or more pieces of required training. Any oversight in training could result in drivers being unaware of requirements, safety details and/or best practices. These trainings are conducted and retained by the vendor, with no oversight from the District. District oversight may have detected these missing trainings.

Inspections

Buses used to transport District students are subject to New York State DOT (NYSDOT) inspection and should pass inspection at any time.⁹ Each bus is required to be inspected by NYSDOT every six months. The inspection program is in place to verify that the vehicle is maintained in a safe operating condition. A NYSDOT inspector maintains an inventory of buses operated by all student transportation providers and schedules inspections in advance based on inspection due dates associated with each bus in the inventory. While these inspections are scheduled and conducted by NYSDOT, the District should be ensuring that they are completed as required as part of the contractual obligations and that buses used to transport District students are in compliance with safety requirements.

We reviewed the inspections completed for all of the vendor buses. All required six-month inspections were scheduled and conducted by NYSDOT. However, there were no periodic reports provided to the District regarding the fleet's safety status. The District's lack of oversight could result in inspections being overlooked and not occurring, posing a potential safety risk to the students being transported.

Buses should also have daily pre-trip inspections conducted prior to each run, whereby the driver indicates that they have observed various aspects of the bus and that all is in proper working order. These inspections should be documented and retained for review. According to guidance from SED, the inspections should be reviewed by the head mechanic or designated individual on a daily basis. The vendor uses a manual vehicle condition reporting system (VCR) to record pre-trip inspections for its 61 buses. The vendor's procedures require the driver to submit a duplicate copy of all VCRs noting defects to the head mechanic for follow-up action. We reviewed the VCRs for six buses and found that noted issues were typically followed up within one day. If no defects are noted, no report is filed with the head mechanic and both copies of the VCR are retained in the book. There is no documentation to indicate that the head mechanic or anyone else employed at the vendor reviews the daily inspection records.

The manual records rely on the drivers notifying the head mechanic, and there is no daily review to ensure all defects have been reported. The District relies on the vendor to conduct and review inspections and does not take an active role in monitoring them to ensure that they are being conducted as required. The District's lack of monitoring could potentially result in the required inspections not being conducted, which could result in hazardous issues not being identified on the buses in a timely manner.

Bus Safety Drills

New York State Education Law requires that students participate in safety drills on buses a minimum of three times a year. The specifics to be addressed during each drill vary throughout the year.¹⁰ District officials are required to annually certify to SED that these bus safety drills are occurring. Some districts and motor carriers conduct these drills during the course of the school day to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to participate, including walkers and parent drop-off students. This ensures that they

⁹ NYSDOT Motor Carrier Safety Bureau Bus Safety Section, NYSDOT Standard School Bus Safety Inspection (Includes Revisions through October 28, 2002), developed and written by the Bus Safety Program Advisory Committee. See Appendix A for additional details.

¹⁰ See Appendix A for details regarding drills.

have been educated on the proper procedures in the event that they are riding the bus for a field trip or a sports activity.

The District and the vendor cooperate to complete the required drills, which are conducted at each school, for all students. District officials informed us that they oversee the safety drills. We reviewed the transportation vendor's records and found that of the 15¹¹ drills that should have occurred during the school year, two were not completed during the required timeframe and one was not completed at all. In addition, four were not signed by District officials indicating they had observed the drill being conducted. District officials could not explain these discrepancies.

These drills are essential to educate students on the safety aspects of buses and emergency procedures. Lack of District monitoring and oversight of bus safety drills makes it difficult to ensure that they have occurred and met all requirements.

Complaint Logs

SED guidance¹² identifies best practice measures pertaining to the logging, investigation and following up of complaints made by citizens, parents and employees with regard to drivers, monitors, attendants, bus stops or any other safety concerns. These complaints and the investigation and follow-up should all be documented in writing. Complaint logs can help identify potential safety issues, training needs or disciplinary problems among both staff and students.

The District has not implemented formal practices to ensure that all complaints received by the District and/or the vendor are recorded, researched and appropriately remedied. Such a practice can assist District administrators in identifying potential safety issues among staff, vendors, equipment and students.

Recommendations

1. The Superintendent should annually approve all drivers that transport District students, including contracted transportation vendor drivers.
2. District officials should take an active role in overseeing the contracted vendor's activities and their compliance with requirements. This should include ensuring that:
 - a. All drivers meet the minimum training requirements to transport District students.
 - b. All buses have been properly inspected by NYSDOT and that pre-trip bus inspections are conducted, reviewed timely and adequately documented.
 - c. All bus safety drills are conducted by actively observing such drills and signing all safety drill forms.
3. District officials and the vendor should establish procedures for the intake, documentation and resolution of complaints.

The Board has the responsibility to initiate corrective action. Pursuant to Section 35 of General Municipal Law, Section 2116-a (3)(c) of the New York State Education Law and Section 170.12 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, a written corrective action plan (CAP) that addresses the findings and recommendations in this report must be prepared and forwarded to our office within 90 days. To the extent practicable, implementation of the CAP must begin by the end of the next fiscal year. For more information on preparing and filing your CAP, please refer to our brochure, *Responding to an OSC Audit*

¹¹ The District conducts and documents drills by building. All students in each of the District's buildings participate in the bus safety drills. There are three safety drills required during the year for each of the District's five buildings totaling 15 required bus safety drills per year for the District.

¹² See Appendix A for details on SED guidance regarding complaint logs.

Report, which you received with the draft audit report. The Board should make the CAP available for public review in the District Clerk's office.

We thank the officials and staff of the Cornwall Central School District for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this audit.

Sincerely,

Gabriel F. Deyo
Deputy Comptroller

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY AUDIT CRITERIA

Minimum standards for school bus safety promulgated by law and regulations established by New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, New York State Department of Transportation and New York State Department of Education are provided, in part, as follows: (Note: laws and regulations are cited following each criteria listed.)

Criteria Regarding General Requirements

- Responsibility for the transportation program rests with the school district and the superintendent of schools. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b1; Education Law 3624**
- All drivers (including contract drivers, substitutes and drivers who begin employment during the course of the year) are approved in writing by the superintendent of schools or designee/agent. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b1; Education Law 3624**
- The annual 19A Affidavit of Compliance (school district and contractors) was filed with DMV by July 1 last year. **DMV Regulation 15 NYCRR 6.9**
- A trained supervisor is present to monitor drivers for possible drug or alcohol use as they go on duty in the morning and afternoon. **49 CFR 382.307**

Criteria Regarding Driver Requirements

- Only drivers who have the appropriate license for the vehicle being operated and who have complied with DMV and SED Regulations are permitted to drive students to and from home on regularly scheduled routes. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b4**
- All school bus drivers are at least 21 years old. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3b2 and c2**
- All new drivers pass a drug test prior to transporting students. The final test result is received before the driver transports students. **49 CFR 382.301**
- All drivers, including substitutes and part-time drivers, are in a random drug and alcohol testing pool. **49 CFR 382.305**
- All school bus drivers receive a physical exam within each 13-month period. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b3ii**
- Defensive driving performance reviews are conducted while drivers are operating the bus with passengers. **DMV Regulation 15 NYCRR 6.8c**
- Defensive driving performance reviews are discussed with drivers. **DMV Form DS-873**
- All drivers in the fleet have passed the SED physical performance test within the past two years. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b3iii**
- Three personal references are checked for all prospective drivers and are maintained in the driver files. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b6**

- All school bus drivers in the fleet (including substitutes, part-time drivers, and mechanics and office staff who drive occasionally) receive at least two two-hour school bus safety refresher programs annually. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b3iii**
- All school bus drivers have completed SED’s Basic Course within their first 365 days of employment as a school bus driver in New York State. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 b5ii**

Criteria Regarding Vehicles and Vehicle Maintenance

- All vehicles used to transport students to and from school, except for vehicles owned by parents contracted to transport their own children, are approved and inspected by NYS DOT. **DOT Regulation 17 NYCRR 721.3; see Education Law 3623**
- Drivers conduct thorough post-trip inspections for children, items left on board or mechanical defects at the end of each route. **SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 e4; DOT Regulation 17 NYCRR 721.3E**
- Drivers conduct thorough pre-trip inspections on each bus they drive every day. **17 NYCRR 721.3D; 49 CFR 392.7-8)**

Criteria Regarding School Bus Safety Drills

- A minimum of three bus drills are held each year, with the first conducted during the first seven days. All students, not just those who ride buses daily, receive the drills. Students attending non-public schools also receive the drills. Drills cover all required topics, including emergency evacuation, safe boarding and exiting, weather hazards, bus behavior and bus rules, and seat belts. **Education Law 3623; SED Regulation 8 NYCRR 156.3 f-g:**
 - (1) The drills on school buses required by section 3623 of Education Law shall include practice and instruction in the location, use and operation of the emergency door, fire extinguishers, first-aid equipment and windows as a means of escape in case of fire or accident. Drills shall also include instruction in safe boarding and exiting procedures with specific emphasis on when and how to approach, board, disembark and move away from the bus after disembarking. Each drill shall include specific instructions for pupils to advance at least 10 feet in front of the bus before crossing the highway after disembarking. Each drill shall emphasize specific hazards encountered by children during snow, ice, rain and other inclement weather, including but not necessarily limited to poor driver visibility, reduced vehicular control and reduced hearing. All such drills shall include instruction in the importance of orderly conduct by all school bus passengers with specific emphasis given to student discipline rules and regulations promulgated by each board of education. Such instruction and the conduct of the drills shall be given by a member or members of the teaching or pupil transportation staff. Pupils attending public and nonpublic schools who do not participate in the drills held pursuant to this paragraph shall also be provided drills on school buses, or as an alternative, shall be provided classroom instruction covering the content of such drills.(2) A minimum of three such drills shall be held on each school bus during the school year, the first to be conducted during the first seven days of school, the second between November 1 and December 31 and the third between March 1 and April 30. (3) No drills shall be conducted when buses are on routes. (4) The school authorities shall certify on the annual report to the State Education Department that their district has complied with this subdivision.

Criteria Regarding Complaint Logs

- New York State Education Department 2006 Edition/Round Two Guidance Manual

I.F.12. Complaints - investigation. All citizen, parent, or employee complaints about a driver, monitor, attendant, bus stop, or any other safety concern should be objectively and professionally investigated. (Best practice)

I.F.13. Complaints - log. All complaints are logged and the results of the investigations are documented in writing. (Best practice)

I.F.14. Complaints - follow-up. The Transportation Supervisor, Terminal Manager, or Head Mechanic will explain the results of all complaint investigations with the employees involved, and follow up with the individuals who complained. Prompt follow-up to all complaints is a sign of professional management.

(Recommendation - see SED Safe Routes/Safe Stops, 1992, p. 23)

APPENDIX B

RESPONSE FROM DISTRICT OFFICIALS

The District officials' response to this audit can be found on the following page.



Cornwall Central School District

Neal S. Miller
Superintendent of Schools

Harvey Sotland
Assistant Superintendent for Business

Gail Duffy
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

July 17, 2018

Ann C. Singer, Chief Examiner
Statewide Audit
State Office Building, Suite 1702
44 Hawley Street
Binghamton, NY 13901-4417

Dear Ms. Singer:

We are in receipt of your audit report (S9-18-5) dated June 2018 on various components of the District's transportation operations. While we agree with your audit findings, we do not believe them to be as potential a safety risk as the report indicates, rather areas needing some subtle changes to complement our strong transportation procedures, safety record and relationship with our transportation vendor.

In the coming weeks, we will be submitting our Corrective Action Plan, which will thoroughly address each of your findings and corresponding recommendations.

We appreciate your audit team's initiative in reviewing aspects of our transportation operations, and look forward strengthening them as we implement the forthcoming Corrective Action Plan.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Neal S. Miller
Superintendent of Schools

APPENDIX C

AUDIT METHODOLOGY AND STANDARDS


To achieve our audit objective and obtain valid evidence, our audit procedures included the following:

- We interviewed District officials to gain an understanding of the District's policies and procedures relating to student transportation.
- We reviewed District contracts awarded to the vendor charged with providing student transportation in compliance with New York State Department of Transportation (DOT), New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and New York State Department of Education (SED) regulations.
- We interviewed the District transportation vendor's staff to gain an understanding of their procedures implemented to document compliance with DOT, DMV and SED regulations.
- We reviewed the following District transportation vendor's records to verify compliance with regulations:
 - Article 19-A Bus Driver Application
 - Final Qualification Notice
 - Abstract of Driving Record
 - Carrier's Annual Review of Employee's Driving Record under Article 19-A
 - Report on Annual Defensive Driving Performance under Article 19-A
 - Medical Examination Report Form
 - SED School Bus Driver Physical Performance Test
 - Bus Driver Character Reference
 - Carrier's Driver Refresher Course Training Sign-in Sheets
 - Random Drug Test and results
 - Certificate of School Bus Driver Training
 - Medical Examination Report of Driver under Article 19-A
 - Article 19-A Biennial Behind the Wheel Road Test
 - Article 19-A Oral/Written Examination Results
 - Report of Article 19-A Record Review
 - School Bus Safety Drill Compliance Forms
 - DOT Passenger and Freight Safety Division Bus Safety Inspection Program
 - Article 19-A Motor Carrier Annual Statistical Report
 - Article 19-A Annual Affidavit of Compliance
 - DOT Bus Inspection System Operator Profile.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with GAGAS. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

new york state school bus safety drill requirements

3 hours ago

New York State law requires school districts to conduct **at least three school bus safety drills per school year**, focusing on emergency evacuation,, [Pupil Transportation Safety Institute](#). These mandatory drills must occur within the first seven days of school, between November 1 and December 31, and between March 1 and April 30, with all students (including walkers) participating.  Pupil Transportation Safety Institute +3

Key Requirements & Topics Covered

- **Drill Scheduling:** Three drills minimum (Fall, Winter, Spring).
- **Evacuation Procedures:** Practice for front and rear door evacuations.
- **Safety Equipment:** Instruction on using emergency doors, windows, fire extinguishers, and first-aid equipment.
- **Safe Loading/Unloading:** Instruction on the "Safe Crossing Rule," identifying "Danger Zones," and never chasing a bus.

Ask anything

+




 9 sites




N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. Tit. 8 § 156.3 - Safety regulations for school bus ...

(g) Drills on school buses. * (1) The drills on school buses required by section 3623 of the Education...

 LII | Legal Information Institute


NYS Bus Safety Drill FALL DRILL

DISABLED DRIVER. Demonstrate how to stop, secure, and shut off the bus; explain why students...

 Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

Fall School Bus Safety Drill

CONCLUDE THE DRILL. If your students paid attention and did a good job, remember to thank...

 Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

Show all



Hello everyone,
Ensuring our students are prepared and safe is a top priority. We are planning to conduct bus safety drills tomorrow morning immediately upon arrival; however, please note that this activity is weather dependent. If there is inclement weather, we will postpone the drills to a later date.

What to Expect:

- Arrival: Upon arrival, students will participate in a brief safety walkthrough on a bus.
- Drop-off Students: If you typically drop your student off, we will have an extra bus stationed at the school so they can also participate and learn these vital safety skills.
- The Drill: Students will board the bus to learn emergency procedures. The bus will remain parked in the drive and will not leave the school premises.

Once the drill is complete, students will enter the building and begin their school day as usual.

How You Can Help:

Please let your student know this evening that they may be going onto a bus briefly tomorrow morning, but it will stay right here at the school. A little heads-up goes a long way in making sure they feel comfortable and ready to learn.

Thank you for your support in keeping our school community safe!

JoAnna Schmeling
Principal