



Northwest
Education
Services

2024 - 2025

Transportation Handbook

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Introduction

Students who attend Northwest Education Services (North Ed) Special Education programs travel from throughout the five-county region to Traverse City to receive their instruction at one of our North Ed program sites:

- Creekside School
- Bridgeway at Oak Park School, East Middle School or West Senior High School
- New Horizons at Traverse Heights Elementary, Courtade Elementary, East Middle School or Central High School
- Life Skills Center on Transition Campus
- Adult Community Experience at the downtown Traverse City and Transition Campus locations

Transportation to and from North Ed Special Education program sites is provided by students' resident school districts. Many of our local districts have formed a consortium that uses Dean Transportation to provide specialized transportation to and from North Ed Special Education programs. Leland, Glen Lake, Northport and Suttons Bay school districts provide transportation through their transportation departments. While some buses transport to and from just one building, most of our buses transport students to and from multiple sites.

Providing safe transportation for our students is our top priority!

To provide safe and efficient transportation for all students, effective communication and cooperation must be embraced by all involved: students, parents, teachers, teacher assistants, administrators and transportation staff. This handbook serves to improve communication between transportation departments, parents and school staff to increase common understanding and improve collaboration.

Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook!

Contacts

For changes to your pick-up or drop-off locations, please contact your child's school office:

Adult Community Experience (ACE): 231.922.6469

Bridgeway: 231.933.8596

Creekside School: 231.922.7882

Life Skills Center: 231.922.6357

New Horizons: 231.933.3561

If you need assistance with your student's transportation, please contact the appropriate transportation director:

Dean Transportation: Jade Ladicks, 231.922.5960

Glen Lake: Rebecca Chavalia, 231.334.3061 x533

Leland: Tim McNeil, 231.218.7511

Northport: Elizabeth Schwind, 231.386.5153

Suttons Bay: Mike Urbano, 231.631.6007

Marty Guiney, Transportation Liaison for all North Ed Special Education Programs, 231-922-6470.

Transportation Staff Responsibilities

Transportation staff are responsible for the safe transportation of students. To do this, transportation staff are trained in the following areas:

- Safety regulations for transportation of children on buses.
- Wheelchair securement.
- Proper use of specialized equipment.
- Responding to medical emergencies.
- Safe evacuation of vehicles in emergencies.
- Crisis prevention.
- Positive behavior supports.
- Trauma-informed practices.
- Disability awareness, including how challenges in communication, self-regulation, sensory processing, social-emotional skills, physical skills and cognitive processing impact behavior.

Transportation staff are responsible for communicating effectively. Staff will:

- Contact parents about pick-up and drop-off times.
- Communicate with parents and their supervisor and/or school staff if emergencies involving their student occur, and if concerns arise involving their student on the bus.
- Contact parents if the bus is expected to be late by 15 minutes or more, except in cases of inclement weather.

Transportation staff are responsible for participating in problem-solving with school staff and parents when students need extra support to safely access their transportation.

Drivers are not permitted to make address or route changes. Please contact the school office to initiate address changes.

Parent Responsibilities

Communication

- Parents should call the bus office if their student will be absent and leave a message with your student's name and the dates they will be absent.
 - Dean Transportation: 231.922.5960
 - Glen Lake: 231.334.3061 x533
 - Leland: 231.218.7511
 - Northport: 231.386.5153
 - Suttons Bay: 231.631.6007
- Parents should complete student information sheets within the first week of school and return to transportation staff. For Dean Transportation, these are the pink and blue sheets that the driver gives you.
- Parents should update phone numbers with the school and transportation offices when there are changes.

Pick-Up Procedures

- There is a three-minute window from a students' designated pick up time, or bus arrival time if the bus is running late, until the bus must continue on the route. If a bus arrives early, it will still wait three minutes past the designated pick-up time for the student. The bus will not return for pickup once the three-minute window has passed.
- Please watch and prepare for the bus' arrival.

Drop-Off Procedures

- Please keep in mind that ride times may be shorter at times because of light ridership and plan accordingly, if possible. However, the bus will wait until the designated drop-off time if it is early and no one is available to meet the student at drop-off.
- When a student is returned from school, a parent, guardian or adult designated on the transportation paperwork must be present unless you have a signed permission slip authorizing transportation staff to leave the student alone. The student must meet the age requirement applicable in their school district and be able to enter the residence safely.
- If a designated adult is not present at drop-off, the transportation office will make every effort to contact the parent(s), guardian or other provided emergency contacts. If a parent or emergency contact cannot be reached, the transportation staff will bring the student back to the transportation office and contact law enforcement and Child Protective Services.

Absenteeism From Bus

If your student has three days in a row of non-ridership without notifying us, the transportation office will attempt to contact you and transportation will be placed on hold. Transportation will be reinstated after you have contacted the transportation office with 24 hours advance notice.

Wheelchairs and Other Equipment

- Wheelchairs must meet the safety compliance requirements. Students must be secured in their wheelchairs before entering the bus. Transportation staff are not allowed to adjust wheelchair positions. Buses that transport students who use wheelchairs are outfitted with the required tie-downs and safety straps.
- Occupant Positioning Device (OPD) vests must be worn before entering the bus if they are included in a student's plan. Due to safety concerns, transportation staff cannot transport students who have an OPD in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) or bus plan without the vest on.
- A Star Seat is a booster seat with a five-point harness and is used with all preschool-age students that meet the size and weight requirements to increase safety within the seat compartment. They are also sometimes used with older children who still meet the size and weight requirements.

Calendar

Students attending North Ed Special Education programs follow the North Ed calendar. That calendar can be found at

https://www.northwested.org/downloads/admin_files/calendar2425.pdf

School Closure Procedures

As student safety is of utmost importance, we have procedures in place to ensure safety during inclement weather. Please check your local radio, television stations or school websites for school closings.

- Transportation will not be provided if North Ed Special Education programs are closed due to inclement weather or other reasons.
- Transportation will not be provided if your resident district is closed due to inclement weather as it has been determined that it is not safe for buses to travel through that region.
- If there is a closure in your resident district due to other reasons besides inclement weather, transportation will still be provided.
- Transportation will not be provided if the bus must travel through a district that is closed due to inclement weather to get to your home. Dean Transportation staff will be reaching out to parents in early October to discuss how your route may be affected in these circumstances.
- If your student is brought to school on a bus and closures occur after pick-up, transportation home will be provided. If the student has already arrived at their school and it is open, they will be provided transportation back home at the end of the school day, even if their resident district has been closed.

Routing and Scheduling

Routes are established based on information provided through Transportation Request Forms that are completed by your student's school. At the beginning of the year and until a route is completely established, pick-up and drop-off times may vary. Please keep in mind that students enter and exit the transportation system throughout the school year. Because we transport students from their homes instead of fixed bus stops, changes in the number of students on a route can affect the pick-up and drop-off times. Your patience and understanding are appreciated when these changes occur.

Students are picked up and dropped off at the address(es) indicated on the Transportation Request Form. While your student can be transported to/from more than one address, there must be a consistent weekly schedule. For example, your student may be dropped off at home on Tuesdays and Thursdays but dropped off at their daycare provider on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. If you want your student to have a pick-up or drop-off location that is different from your home address, please reach out to your student's school.

Please note that the driver cannot pick up or drop off your student at an address that is different from what is on the Transportation Request Form as this would change the route and alter the times of all of the other students. If you need to make a permanent change to the pick-up or drop-off locations, please contact your school's office.

Because we transport students from eight different school locations to and from their homes across five counties, keeping ride times short is a challenge. Dean Transportation continues to try to increase staff so we can add routes and decrease ride times.

Behavior

While students are expected to follow school conduct rules when riding the bus, we understand that many students attending North Ed Special Education programs may need additional support to achieve this expectation. A student's failure to comply with Board Policy, applicable codes of conduct, and any other applicable rules or behavioral expectations while using district-provided transportation may result in disciplinary action. However, our transportation staff work to implement strategies that help to both prevent negative behaviors and support students who are having difficulty. When a student's behavior becomes a safety concern, the transportation team, school team and parents may meet to develop a Transportation Behavior Support Plan. Video cameras are placed on buses to monitor student behavior on the bus.

Bus-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

We have developed a bus-wide PBIS system to support students in following expectations on the bus. This system is meant to:

- Increase understanding of expectations.
- Provide common language about behavior expectations for staff and students.
- Provide teaching tools for students.
- Provide a system for positively reinforcing student behavior.

Bus Behavior Expectations:

Be Safe

- Stay seated in your compartment.
- Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself and safe inside your compartment and the bus.
- Use a quiet voice (Level 2).

Be Respectful

- Use kind words and actions.
- Respect other people's space and belongings.
- Be thoughtful of others.
- Follow the directions given by transportation staff staff.

Be Responsible

- Follow bus expectations.
- Keep the bus clean.
- Take care of your personal belongings.

Positive Behavior Supports:

Transportation staff are trained in using positive behavior supports, including the following:

- Building positive relationships.
- Engaging students in activities (we have activity bags on buses).
- Using communication strategies and supports.
- Giving time and space.
- Using visual cues and limiting verbal instructions.
- Calmly providing the expectations.
- Giving choices.
- Providing a cognitive shift.
- Pre-teaching changes or expectations.
- Giving frequent positive feedback for desired behaviors.
- Using sensory strategies or tools.

Incident Reports

When an incident occurs on the bus that involves out-of-the-ordinary or concerning behavior, transportation staff may complete an incident report. These reports are meant to be a communication tool between transportation staff and school staff to increase effective collaboration to support positive behavior on the bus.

Transportation Behavior Support Plans

Sometimes students need more individualized support to be safe on the bus. In these cases, the transportation team and school team will meet to develop a behavior support plan. Parents are encouraged to be a part of this process as well so they can assist the team in determining the function of the behavior and strategies that may prevent the behavior and/or support the student when behaviors occur.

More Restrictive Supports

Sometimes students require more restrictive interventions to maintain safety on the bus. OPDs and Buckle Buddies are examples of more restrictive interventions. As these interventions often restrict the student's movement, they must be written into a plan and be recommended by a physician or therapist who is familiar with the student.

Student Refusal

If a student refuses to board a bus at the end of the school day, staff will not carry the student onto the bus. Positive behavior interventions will be used to try to encourage the student to board the bus. While some wait time will be provided, if the student continues to avoid getting on the bus, parents will be called for pick-up. If this becomes a repeated problem, the team will develop a Transportation Behavior Support Plan to assist the student with successfully boarding the bus.

Health

The health and safety of our students is our number one priority. To support safe delegation of health-related duties to transportation staff, we have a North Ed Transportation Support Nurse available to assist all transportation departments that provide transportation for students attending North Ed Special Education programs. When a student has a health concern that requires a transportation health plan, the School Nurse will work with the Transportation Support Nurse to develop a plan based on information obtained from the student's physician and parents. The Transportation Support Nurse is responsible for training transportation staff on procedures found within transportation health care plans, is available during busing times for health-related questions or concerns that arise, and coordinates collaboration between transportation staff and school nurses.

School buses are confined spaces where germs can easily spread. Please help us keep all students healthy by keeping your students home when they are ill. See the school handbook for additional information related to expectations when your student is ill.

Food:

Student allergies and choking hazards require transportation staff to restrict food and drink on the bus. Food and drink (other than water) is only permitted when included in a student's positive behavior support plan or individualized health plan. If access to food or drink is needed to meet a student's needs as outlined within an individualized plan, the school will work with the school nurses to determine the safety of approving food and drink for that particular bus.

Medication:

Student's health conditions sometimes make it necessary for them to receive medication during school hours. The school is able to assist in administering medication following the policies and guidelines found within the student handbook. Medication may only be delivered to school by a parent or the bus driver using the district-approved medication envelope which is properly completed. Medication may not be sent in the student's lunch box, pocket or backpack, unless it is an emergency medication kept within the provided red pouch.

Routine medications are generally not administered by transportation staff. However, transportation staff may be trained to administer emergency medications as outlined in a student's transportation health plan for emergency situations, such as seizure activity or an allergic reaction. We ask that you keep emergency medications in the provided red pouch so transportation staff can easily locate them when needed during emergencies. Transportation staff should be checking for emergency medication each day when students get on the bus and may ask the parent or school staff to retrieve the medication if it is missing from the red pouch. Students will not be denied transportation if they do not have their emergency medication. However, if an emergency occurs and the student does not have their emergency medication or the emergency medication is expired and cannot be used, 911 will be called.

Safety

To ensure safety on buses, transportation staff participate in regular safety drills, including how to secure the bus, how to use safety equipment, and how and when to evacuate the bus.

Attendants on Buses

Most buses have an attendant on the bus to support student needs. Students will only be placed on buses without attendants if the school has identified that the student is safe to ride without an attendant.

Applicable Law

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its implementing regulations address the transportation needs of children with disabilities. Transportation is a related service as defined by 34 CFR §300.34(c)(16) of the IDEA regulations and can include travel to and from school and between schools; travel in and around school buildings; and specialized equipment such as special or adapted buses, lifts, and ramps. A child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines the need for special transportation and how transportation should be implemented based on student data. The unique needs of individual students drive these decisions.

Privacy (FERPA): What is Shared Between School Staff and Transportation Staff

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) provides students and their families with protections from the public disclosure of many educational records and student information. As transportation staff provide an important service that is part of our students' IEP's, they have a legal right to student-specific information that is needed for them to effectively and safely transport students, including applicable health information. Transportation staff are trained in the rights of students related to confidentiality.

McKinney-Vento and Transportation

Students who are experiencing instability with housing and qualify under McKinney-Vento may continue to attend their school of origin if it is in the best interest of the student to do so. Transportation from their new location will be set up as quickly as possible to ensure continuity of school attendance.