

## SECTION VI: TRANSPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

### H. LOADING/UNLOADING PROCEDURES FOR WHEELCHAIR PASSENGERS

In most situations, the Driver's responsibility is the operation of the bus and the loading / unloading of the lift at ground level. The Bus Attendant is usually responsible for the children on the bus, restraining the wheelchair and taking the student(s) on / off the lift at bus level. However, each bus team may choose to reverse roles or slightly alter procedures due to specific circumstances. Regardless of how duties are assigned, the Driver is still responsible for the safety of everyone on the bus; therefore, the Driver should make the final safety check before leaving a student's pick up location. Remember, when there is an accident, the Driver is ultimately responsible for all passengers. An Attendant should never feel insulted when the Driver makes his/her required final safety checks including the post-trip inspection. This is only done for the safety of the children.

During the loading and unloading of any student, both the Ground Person and the Bus Person should observe and communicate to be sure that all of the following procedures are followed. The bus team must be on guard against distractions that may shift focus away from the loading process. This system of double checks is designed to ensure that no step is forgotten. Safety is the top priority! Text in ( ) indicates verbal confirmations that must be made by the Bus Person and or Ground Person as each part of the loading/or unloading process is completed.

1. Shift to Park or Neutral and set the parking brake. Leave the engine running if it is required to operate the lift.
2. The Driver is to participate with the attendant in the loading and unloading of lift dependent students both at home and the school. The Ground Person exits the bus and opens the door for the lift. The lift door is secured in the open position.
3. The Ground Person monitors the area where the lift descends to ensure the lift will clear the student and any surrounding objects. If the area is clear, the Ground Person gives the O.K. to lower the lift (Lift Open/Lift Down) to the Bus Person or lowers the lift himself/herself using the hand control from outside the bus. Except in an emergency, never leave children alone on the bus or outside the bus unattended.
4. Bus Person/Ground Person confirms and repeats the signal (Lift Open/Lift Down) before lowering the lift. If confirmation is not received, both staff members will assume that a safety concern needs to be addressed such as a distracted team member or danger in the lift zone. Once the concern is addressed, the procedure is repeated.
5. The Ground Person verifies that the parent or school staff has secured the student with the wheelchair's lap belt or other applicable safety restraints. Once the student is secured in the wheelchair, the parent or school staff member will give control of

the chair to the Ground Person. Once the Ground Person has control of the chair, all bystanders should step back.

6. The Ground Person backs students into lift, then secures the wheelchair wheel locks and engages or verifies that the "roll stop" on the front edge of the lift is in the up position. On motorized chairs, the power supply should be switched off and remain off while the child is riding the bus or using the lift to prevent accidental engagement of power to the wheels. In addition, the wheels must remain in "lock mode" while the student is raised or lowered in order to prevent the motorized wheels from turning freely. When the wheelchair is at bus level, the wheelchair may be switched to "neutral" so that the wheelchair can be rolled to the riding location. Power may be restored once the chair returns to ground level as required. Power should not be used inside the bus without the approval of the Transportation Department.
7. The Ground Person / Bus Person raises the lift (Lift Up) after verbally confirming (Lift Up) that the child is ready to be lifted while the ground person keeps one hand on wheelchair for stability during the lift operation. The ground person must face the chair at all times and should maintain eye contact with the student and the area around the lift. Both team members are to be on the lookout for any movement of the chair on the lift as well as keeping themselves and the student from being pinched or grabbed by the lift.
8. When the lift is fully elevated, the ground person confirms (Ready to Load) while the bus staff releases the wheel locks and brings the student into the bus after confirming (Loading Now). When loading powered wheelchairs, when the wheelchair is at bus level, the wheelchair shall be switched to "neutral" so that the wheelchair can be rolled into the bus without use of the motor. When loading more than one wheelchair at a school stop, the lift operator should confirm that the lift is to be lowered (Ready Down) after the first wheelchair has been backed away from the door to reduce the time spent at the stop. However, the Bus person should remain between the wheelchair and the lift door opening in order to prevent a wheelchair passenger from accidentally rolling out of the open lift door while the lift platform is in the open or down position.
9. The bus person backs the student into the bus and closes the lift after confirming that all passengers are clear of the lift (Ready to fold) and the last wheelchair passenger is loaded. The Bus Person straps the wheelchair(s) into the wheelchair tracks. Always use the tie down system provided by the Transportation Department to secure the wheelchair and its passenger. Whenever in doubt, consult the Transportation Coordinator responsible for lift buses. They will work with the child's physical therapist, special education specialist, school and parents to address any problems that may prevent the use of the approved wheelchair tie down. The Transportation Department must be notified immediately if any situation exists that may prevent the immobilization of the wheelchair. A properly secured wheelchair will only have a small amount of movement after being properly secured.

10. The Ground Person secures the lift door and boards the bus by the steps while the Bus Person is securing the student. The Ground Person will check to see that the Bus Person has secured all straps and safety devices correctly before the bus leaves the stop. The Ground Person shall offer assistance as needed.

(**Warning:** Students may not ride the bus with a lap tray on the wheelchair. Seatbelts must be free from any obstruction that would prevent their proper use. Lap trays, assistive devices or equipment must be removed and stored securely on the bus in a manner that prevents that equipment from movement in the event of an accident.)

- 11) The Bus Person and Ground Person agree that the student is secure before the Driver pulls off from the stop. The Bus Attendant or other passengers could be seriously injured by an unsecured passenger if the Driver does not allow time for passengers to be properly situated.

**NOTE:** The school bus parking/emergency brake should be tested by the driver on a regular basis to ensure holding power. The holding power of the brake can be tested on an inclined surface or by placing the bus in gear and lightly accelerating. If the brake does not have sufficient holding power, the bus must be serviced immediately.

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<sup>i</sup> Revised Date July 1, 2008.