Child Transportation Plan

Philosophy:

The Head Start/Early Head Start program is committed to providing a safe and healthy learning environment for children, parents and staff. Safety precautions that staff takes to protect children are not limited to centers, but begin when a child boards a bus, continues throughout the day, and ends only when the child is released to his or her parent. Therefore, the program’s effort to provide high level services to children and families encompass transportation.

Child Transportation

The program serves predominately rural, sparsely populated counties that are without public transportation. In these counties providing bus transportation is often essential to maintaining funded enrollment.

Parents in centers where bus service is not available are offered assistance with obtaining transportation for their child. These options include parents or other adults transporting their child, car pooling, partnerships with day care centers, public transportation in the city of Jackson and other parent initiated arrangements. Parents are responsible for selecting the option best suited to their needs. The program does not pay the cost of transporting children and is not liable for their safety though any of these options. Family advocates explain these options at recruitment and during initial home visits. This information is also included in the parent handbook. Centers without transportation can obtain buses for field trips or other child, parent and staff activities by contacting the center coordinator with child transportation.

Bus Requirements

The program does not purchase child transportation services from outside vendors. Both the Department of Human Services Licensure Rules for Child Care Centers and Head Start Transportation Performance Standards provide clear and specific requirements for child transportation. Public, human resource agency or school system transportation does not meet these regulations. Each Head Start bus is equipped with 1) cellular telephone, 2) charged fire extinguisher, 3) fully stocked first aid and bloodborne pathogen kits, 4) seat belt cutter, 5) factory installed seat belts, federally approved infant and toddler car seats and child restraint harnesses, 6) waste can and (7) containers for children’s belongings. The location of all required equipment is marked by a sign. The passenger capacity of each bus is posted inside the bus and is used to determine the number of occupants that can be transported. Bus drivers have a Fuelman card specifically assigned to their bus and a PIN number to buy fuel. Drivers record their daily beginning and ending mileage and the amount of fuel purchased on a Bus Mileage Log. Fuelman tickets are reconciled with the log and Fuelman statement weekly. A liability insurance card is kept on each bus. All equipment is marked by a sign. Auxiliary seating
is not used on program buses. Buses are inspected annually and periodically to ensure all required equipment is on board and operating properly. Drivers are responsible for reporting malfunctioning equipment or items that need to be replaced or replenished.

Bus accidents are reported promptly in compliance with state laws and according to a program transportation procedure. If an accident occurs, the monitor immediately calls 911. If necessary the monitor and driver evacuate the children and escort them to a safe place away from traffic. The monitor takes attendance to assure each child is accounted for. The monitor then calls the center coordinator who notifies the central office. If injuries occur, the driver is transported either by ambulance, by a supervisor, or transportation staff to the nearest hospital, where attention will be given to injury and drug test performed by hospital or the American Safety Management Systems (ASMS) (a program consultant company). In the event of a non-injury accident a drug test will be performed by the ASMS. Family advocates and teachers notify parents immediately of the accident. The center coordinator goes to the scene of the accident or hospital to ensure children and staff has received medical care. The driver and monitor complete and submit a Bus Accident Report to the center coordinator who attaches a police or sheriff department statement to the report and forwards the documents to the central office. Each bus has adequate ability insurance coverage and an accident claim is reported and processed in a timely manner. The bus is towed from the scene and repaired or declared a totaled vehicle. Accident reports that include the results of drug and alcohol tests and the person liable for the accident are kept on file in the Agency’s Human Resource Department. The regional office is notified of serious accidents that involved injuries or major damage to the bus.

During child find application process parents are asked to provide the name, address and telephone number of at least three and up to six emergency contact persons who are authorized to bring or receive their child. A current copy of ChildPlus Report 1520 that contains these names is given to a bus driver according to his or her route. Children are only released to an authorized adult who must sign the Transportation Log when a child boards and exits the bus. A parent or other authorized adult is required to sign in non-bus riding children in the morning and sign them out in the afternoon. Center staff and parents receive a copy and are trained on the Release of Child Policy. Parents must sign a Release of Child Policy. The policy explains child custody issues, request for picture identification, steps to follow if a person who appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol attempts to receive a child from a bus stop or center. The Release of Child Policy ensures the parents and staff hand delivers and receives each child.

**Child Restraint System; Operation of Vehicles**

Head Start buses are clearly marked yellow school buses that are equipped with strobe lights, reverse beepers, automatic stop arms, a child reminder, flashing stop lights and front door, ceiling, back door and window exits. Factory installed seat belts, state and federally approved restraint harnesses and infant and toddler seats are used on all buses.
Items transported on a bus are securely stored, aisles are clear and doors and emergency exits can easily be reached. A trained monitor is on the bus before a route begins and remains on board in the afternoon until the last child is released. Children and adults except the monitor are fully seated and seat belts, restraint harnesses and infant and toddler seats are properly fastened before a bus leaves a stop.

**Maintenance of Buses**

Buses are inspected annually by the Tennessee Department of Safety and a certified mechanic. Buses are inspected and serviced every 4,000 miles or according to manufacturer’s instructions. Drivers perform a pre-trip inspection or a walk around inspection before each trip. Drivers clean the inside of their bus daily and wash the bus at least monthly. A mechanical problem or unsafe bus condition is reported to the center coordinator, who reports the deficiency to the facilities administration and program administrative assistant. The program has agreements with four certified vendors who are located near centers where transportation is provided to inspect, service and repairs buses. Buses are repaired in a timely manner and spare buses are available until the repairs are completed.

**Bids and Inspection of a New Bus**

The bid process for a new bus follows the guidelines outlined in the Grantee Financial Management Plan. Bids are based on a specific and detailed list of requirements. The transportation staff takes delivery of a new bus and thoroughly inspects the vehicle to determine if bid specifications are met and the manufacturer’s certification of compliance is provided. License plates are purchased for a new bus, a Fuelman card is obtained and the vehicle is added to the liability insurance policy. A new bus is then assigned to a center with the most need. The driver and center coordinator where a new bus is located are given written and verbal operation instructions before the bus is placed on a route.

**Driver Qualifications**

Every effort is made to hire transportation staff who already have meet the qualifications for the position. In the event there is not an applicant meeting the requirements established by Department of Human Services (DHS)/Department of Transportation (DOT) Head Start will provide funds for newly hired drivers for the following:

- Commercial Driver’s License General Knowledge Test
- Commercial Driver’s License Driving Skill Test
- “S” Endorsement – School Bus
- “P” Endorsement – Passenger
- CPR/First Aid

Drivers are required to have 1) current Tennessee Commercial Driver License with passenger/school bus endorsements (PS), 2) Tennessee Department of Transportation Physical Examination (TDOT card), 3) drug and alcohol screenings, 4) criminal and vehicle background checks, 5) a current School Bus Operator Certification of Training.
Award card and 6) current first aid and CPR cards. Center coordinator completes a Childcare Driver Checklist for each driver to ensure all required documents are on file. Bus monitors are required to have a background check and current first aid and CPR cards.

Applications to fill a bus driver vacancy are obtained though internal and external advertisements which state a background check will be required. All applications are screened using the requirements listed on the job description. An applicant without the minimum requirements for the job is eliminated through the screening process. Applicants who meet the screening requirements are interviewed by staff and a Policy Council member and the most qualified candidate is recommended for hire to the Policy Council.

**Driver and Bus Monitor Training**

All employees with Commercial Drivers License (CDL) are required to participate in the Tennessee Department of Safety School Bus Recertification’s annual workshop. New drivers receive training and behind the wheel instruction prior to transporting children. The Department of Human Services trains bus monitors before they begin their duties. Drivers and monitors participate in two Department of Human Services' transportation workshops each year. Local certified vendors provide hands-on instructions to drivers on how to perform pre-trip inspections, detect problems, when a bus should be taken out of service and the danger of backing up or making U turns. During this training drivers also participant in behind-the-wheel safety exercises with the vendor. Drivers and bus monitors are routinely observed and assessed by the center coordinator and area specialist as they load and unload children, conduct emergency evacuation drills, complete pre-trip inspections and drive their regular route.

Other in-house training for drivers and bus monitors include pre-service and on-site workshops and new hire orientation. Center coordinators evaluate drivers and bus monitors annually based on observations of their on-board job performance. Training is monitored through Child Transportation Training Agendas, sign-in sheet, copies of hand-outs, Department of Human Services' agendas and notices.

**Scheduling Bus Routes**

Fixed bus routes are developed before centers open and are amended when changes occur, i.e. children are added and dropped. Drivers cannot change a route without prior approval from the center coordinator. Bus stops are in locations where children do not need to cross a street to board or exit the bus. Bus routes meet the Tennessee Child Care Center Licensure Rules that state a child cannot be on a bus for more than 45 minutes one way. Weather conditions are closely monitored and steps are in place for transporting children during inclement weather. An alternative route is designated for each regular route. Parents are notified that the bus route has begun and the monitor calls the center at regular intervals to report road conditions or delays. The center coordinator remains available to receive calls from parents and monitors. Copies of bus routes, amended
routes and hazard weather routes are submitted to the content area manager for review and monitoring.

**Safety Education**

Vehicle and pedestrian safety education is provided to both children and parents within 30 days of children being on site at center. Safety practices are included in lesson plans and taught both in the classroom and during outside activities. Both children and parents participate in a “bus tour” during orientation/open house and are informed of bus safety rules verbally and through written materials. Bus evacuation drills are conducted at all centers within 30 days of centers opening. Drills are conducted monthly at centers with bus transpiration. Safety training is monitored through review of lesson plans, copies of hand-outs, training and bus tour sign-in sheets and copies of Emergency Bus Evacuation Drill forms.

**Children with Disabilities**

The program has a bus available equipped with a lift, wide door and other items necessary to safely transport a child with a disability that prevents him or her from riding a regular bus. Tennessee Early Intervention Service staff (Part-C) or a local school system special education supervisor (LEA) take the lead in developing Individual Education Plans (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP). Transportation needs are often included in these plans. At two Pre-Kindergarten/Head Start centers the local school system transports children with disabilities. Drivers and monitors have been trained on how to operate special bus equipment.

**Coordinating Transportation**

The program has a partnership agreement in place with a community agency to provide certain types of child and parent transportation. At two Pre-Kindergarten/Head Start sites local school systems transport children with a disability to and from the centers. Public transportation is available in one urban county. Stringent Department of Human Services Licensure rules and federal regulations prohibit Head Start or Early Head Start children from being transported on local school buses and makes it difficult to coordinate child transportation with childcare centers or other vendors.