

# School Bus Safety Project

## ***Recommendation 6***

It is recommended that Alberta Transportation work with industry to standardize hiring criteria for school bus drivers to ensure consistency and maintenance of high standards.

## ***Information and Deliverable***

### **1. Background**

A shortage of drivers has been one of the key challenges facing the school bus industry. The combination of an active job market and traditionally low hourly wages has resulted in hiring difficulties and high turnover rates. School boards, Alberta Education, and Alberta Transportation have identified the need to work together to find a solution to address this issue.

Recommendation five of *Ensuring the Safety of our Children: A Report on School Bus Safety in Alberta* proposes enhancements to the recruitment and retention of skilled drivers. Recommendation six seeks to propose guidelines for screening and hiring those potential drivers who are attracted to the school bus industry, ensuring they are adequately skilled and safe to transport children.

### **2. Potential best practices for hiring and screening**

Some carriers and school boards currently have formal, documented guidelines in place to hire drive applicants. This process may include pre-screening, a standardized interview script complete with scoring, in-class and in-vehicle training, drug and alcohol testing, and a review of the driver's abstract. It is proposed that these steps become the basis for a best practice approach to hiring. These steps do not necessarily need to be followed in this order.

#### *Pre-screening*

The pre-screening is a tool to identify applicants who meet certain minimum qualifications for advancement to the next stage the hiring process. This is likely to involve an application form that asks for at least the following information:

- Name and contact information
- A declaration that the applicant:
  - Is legally entitled to work in Canada,

- Has a satisfactory criminal record for the past five years, including no impaired driving convictions
- Has fewer than six demerit points on their driver abstract
- Has held, at minimum, a full Class 5 operator's licence for at least five years, and
- Has no medical conditions that may affect their ability to safely operate a school bus.
- For further screening purposes, the application could also ask for work and educational experience, in addition to employment and character references.

Provide job description, including projected hours of work and wages, as well as information about the timing and duration of training.

#### *Interview*

Having identified the most qualified applicants, a standardized interview (face-to-face or over the phone) should be conducted. Interview questions should be prepared in advance and the script followed consistently for all interviewees. For each question, preferred responses should be considered in advance and given a point value. The applicants' responses should be assigned points based on the degree to which it matches the ideal response. For example, if asking about driving experience, full points could be awarded for previous school bus driving, partial points for other professional driving, no points on this question for holding only a full Class 5. At the conclusion of the interview, points can be tallied and used to rank applicants or to ensure applicants pass a previously-established threshold for employment.

#### *Verification of information*

Consent must be given for a drug and alcohol test, to share a criminal record check, and for release of a driver abstract. The declarations made during the pre-screening should be verified for authenticity. The medical conditions will be verified by a government-mandated medical examination prior to receiving a Class 1, 2 or 4 operator's licence. More information on ensuring ongoing medical fitness to drive is provided below.

#### *Training*

Recommendation four of *Ensuring the Safety of our Children: A Report on School Bus Safety in Alberta* proposes that all school bus drivers receive the core components of the "S" endorsement training prior to operating a school bus. This training should be made available to applicants selected by the hirer, either internally or from a qualified delivery agent. Acceptance into the training should not guarantee employment; rather, successful completion of the training and receipt of a Class 1, 2 or 4 licence should still be required.

### **3. Ensuring ongoing medical fitness to drive**

#### *Alberta Transportation's Role*

Professional drivers who operate passenger-carrying vehicles, trucks and emergency vehicles spend many more hours at the wheel, often under far more adverse driving conditions, than do the drivers of non-commercial vehicles. They are usually unable to select their hours of work

and cannot readily abandon their passengers or cargo should they become unwell while on duty. When collisions occur, the consequences are much more likely to be serious, particularly when the driver is carrying passengers.

For these reasons, all professional drivers are routinely screened at regular intervals, even if there is no evidence that the driver has a known or possible medical condition. Unless a different reassessment interval is set because of a medical condition, Alberta Transportation routinely identifies professional drivers for a review of driver fitness at the time of licence application and then at the following intervals:

- up to age 45, every 5 years
- from age 45 to age 65, every 3 years, and
- from age 65, annually.

Drivers in Alberta only complete on-road driving examinations to reclassify their operator's licence. They are not subject to retesting based on age.

#### *Motor Carrier's Role*

Motor carriers (school bus contractors and school authorities) share in the responsibility to identify drivers who may not be fit to drive and who therefore pose a risk to public safety.

The motor carrier can review the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators' *Medical Standards for Drivers* for advice and guidance on how medically at-risk drivers are managed by provincial and territorial driver fitness authorities. For example, factors such as slowed reaction time, failing vision, slowed thought process, episodes of confusion, declining memory, loss of physical strength, arthritis, collision near misses, or failure to pick up or drop students at prescribed locations, may all be indicators of a medically at-risk driver. You can view the CCMTA *Medical Standards for Drivers* on the web at [http://www.ccmta.ca/english/pdf/medical\\_standards\\_march\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ccmta.ca/english/pdf/medical_standards_march_2009.pdf)

If a motor carrier has identified an individual driver who has demonstrated impairment or his or her functional ability to drive safely is in question, they should immediately raise the concern with Alberta Transportation. The department will use the following principles when reviewing individual driving privileges:

- use a risk management approach to administer driver fitness programs,
- make a determination based on the client's functional ability to drive, diagnosis and other relevant information, but not the presumed group characteristics and abilities of people with that medical condition, and
- review and consider the best information available when making driver fitness determinations

To report concerns about medically at risk drivers contact the department at:

Alberta Transportation,  
**Driver Fitness and Monitoring Section**  
Main Floor, Twin Atria Building  
4999 – 98 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T6B 2X3

Phone: 780-427-8230 (Toll-free from anywhere in Alberta by first dialling 310-0000)

Fax: 780-422-6612

e-mail: [driver.fitness@gov.ab.ca](mailto:driver.fitness@gov.ab.ca)

#### **4. Compliance with the Safety Fitness Certificate Program**

The *Commercial Vehicle Certificate and Insurance Regulation* details requirements with which all owners of commercial vehicles seating more than 10 passengers must comply. Every registered owner must obtain a safety fitness certificate and maintain driver records. This information is provided here as issues such as training and record-keeping begin during the hiring process.

The Regulation is available online at

[http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=2002\\_314.cfm&leg\\_type=Regs&isbncln=9780779738755](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=2002_314.cfm&leg_type=Regs&isbncln=9780779738755)

##### *Safety Fitness Certificates*

Sections 19-20 of the Regulation states the requirement for a safety fitness certificate and what information is required to obtain one. These requirements include confirmation of:

- comprehensive knowledge of safety laws in Alberta
- a written ongoing inspection, maintenance, and repair program
- a written safety program
- the names of the individuals responsible both the inspection, maintenance, and repair program, and the safety program

##### *Safety Program*

Section 40 of the Regulation states the requirements for the safety program. All registered owners must establish, maintain, and follow a written safety program. They must also designate a person responsible for maintaining and implementing the program and ensuring compliance with safety laws. The program must contain information relating to the safe use and operation of the vehicle, including:

- speed limits, drug and alcohol use, and defensive driving
- policies that drivers are expected to comply with the law, policies and procedures related to driver training, responsibilities, conduct, and discipline.
- policies for ensuring that drivers are properly qualified for the vehicle they operate

### *Driver Records*

Section 41 states the registered owner's responsibilities to maintain driver records for each of their drivers. Each file must contain:

- a copy of the completed application form
- a copy of the driver's abstract from when the driver was hired. It must be updated annually.
- the driver's employment history for three years immediately preceding hiring.
- a record of all collisions in any motor vehicle operated by the driver that are required to be reported to a peace officer
- a record of all training undertaken by the driver in relation to commercial vehicles
- a copy of any training certificates
- a copy of a current medical certificate

# Appendix

## ***Sample Interview Questions***

1. What about the position that interests you?
2. What do you think are the most important issues a school bus driver faces?
3. What strengths would you bring to the position? What areas do you think you could improve?
4. Give me an example of a time when you've had to deal with an upset or angry customer or co-worker. What did you say and how did you handle the situation?
5. Alberta is home to people from all over the world. Students you take to and from school will have different ethnic backgrounds, religions, and cultures. How can you make sure that all students feel accepted?
6. What are some of the biggest distractions you might expect on the bus? How would you deal with distractions while you are driving?
7. Not all drivers on the road are courteous or fully aware of all other vehicles. How do you react when other drivers act in an angry or unsafe manner around you?
8. All drivers of commercial vehicles are required to pass periodic medical inspections indicating they are fit to drive, as well as notify Alberta Transportation if their medical condition changes. Some medical conditions, such as diabetes, epilepsy, or heart conditions, have been shown to affect driving. Do you feel you could provide a satisfactory medical report?
9. How comfortable are you driving in winter conditions? How is driving in winter conditions different than other seasons?
10. What are your expectations for taking time off?
11. Is there anything you would like to ask us?

## ***Sample Scoring Sheet***

Scoring could be done either as part of the interview or through questions asked on the application form. In some circumstances, there may be other criteria not listed below, such as ability to provide a school bus, familiarity with pre-determined route, or result on map reading exercises.

Criteria	Allocation	Max Points	Score
Years driving a school bus	0 pts – 0 years 5 pts – 1-5 years 7 pts – 6-10 years 10 pts – 10+ years	10	
Driven a bus in last 5 years	0 pts – no 10 pts - yes	10	
Valid driver's licence	5 pts – Class 5 10 pts – Class 1 or 2	10	
Qualifications	0 pts – none 3 pts – registered for next available “S” endorsement course 5 pts – has “S” endorsement 3 pts – registered for next first aid course 5 pts – has first aid certificate 5 pts – satisfactory medical certificate 5 pts – satisfactory criminal record check 5 pts – satisfactory drug/alcohol check	25	
Driver's abstract	0 pts – 6+ demerit points 5 pts – 1-5 demerit points 10 pts – 0 demerit points	10	
Reference checks	0 pts – poor 5 pts – fair/good 10 pts – good/excellent	10	

### ***Sample Work Reference Questions***

1. Could you confirm how you know the applicant?
2. What was the applicant's work position and duties? Were you satisfied with their performance?
3. Do you know why they stopped working for you?
4. Are you aware of any issues related to attendance, punctuality, or their relationships with clients, co-workers, or supervisors?
5. In what area would the applicant need improvement?
6. The applicant is applying to become a school bus driver, where they would be responsible for the safe transportation of students. Do you think they would be a good fit for the position?
7. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

## ***Sample Personal Reference Questions***

1. How do you know the applicant? How long have you known them?
2. The applicant is applying to become a school bus driver, where they would be responsible for the safe transportation of students. Do you think they would be a good fit for the position?
3. How well does the applicant get along with others?
4. How would you describe the applicant's attitude in general?
5. Is there anything else you would like us to know?