

THE RISK OBSERVER

CHARTER COACH SERVICES

The use of chartered bus coaches for special trips is an important adjunct to school provided transportation. These buses serve particularly well when standard school buses are either unavailable or considered too uncomfortable for long trips.

While accident frequency for this type of vehicle is very low, the accidents that do happen tend to be severe or catastrophic. These buses frequently use high speed highways and often the driver may be unfamiliar with the roads traveled.

Coupled with the potential for serious loss is the diminished control you have over the activity when you transfer part of your responsibility for the activity to an outside agency, the bus company.

You can effectively protect that transfer of responsibility by doing the best possible job of engaging a bus contractor that you feel confident will provide the highest quality services for you and your pupils. The following checklist should help you identify those elements of the service you want and determine the quality level the contractor is prepared to provide. The use of the checklist requires that you or the designated responsible staff member actively investigate the qualifications of the contractor by an on-site visit to the contractors' place of business, discussing your requirements with the contractors' management and doing some independent checking of references and authority granting agencies.

Once you have selected a contractor which meets your needs and standards, you should inform those on the school staff who will use the charter coaches of what you require and what the contractor has indicated it will deliver.

A system should be devised to resolve any significant problems before the trips starts. These trips often leave the designated location very early in the morning when administrative support is usually unavailable. The responsible staff member should know what to do and who to contact if the bus arrives and there is something evident that does not meet your agreed upon standards. If, for example, the bus arrives with a cracked windshield or bald tires, to whom does the teacher or principal turn to determine the course to be taken?

It is also very important in matters of this kind to be as conservative as possible. While it may be unpopular and even personally very uncomfortable to question the safety of the vehicle or the condition of the driver at the very last minute when everyone is ready to board the bus, it is the best course to be very reluctant to turn the safety of your pupils over to someone else at that moment.

A well planned, well managed charter coach trip can be a rewarding experience for both students and staff. You can help make sure it is as safe a trip as possible.



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CHARTER COACH CHECKLIST

The Contractor

1. In continuous operation for at least five years with coach charter service a significant part of the business.
2. Full time management and a regular full time operations and maintenance staff.
3. Place of business reflects an ability to carry out the contract in terms of organization, resources and appearance.
4. Provides at least three references of current customers who contract for the services you want, and provides you with the contractor's Interstate Commerce Commission authority number or the state authority number for his operation. Either or both should be checked with the appropriate authorities for validity.
5. Demonstrates an ability to handle emergencies with plans and available resources at maximum distance from the place of business.
6. Adequate insurance covers your exposure and lists the school district as an additional insured.
Note: You should confirm this coverage and receive written documentation of it from the insurance carrier - not the agent. It should not be on a "claims made basis".
7. Informs you in advance if the services of another subcontractor will be used to fulfill your contract and assumes full responsibility for the performance of the subcontractor.

The Vehicle

1. Maintained in accordance with all applicable, current State and Federal Department of Transportation motor carrier regulations.
2. Clean and attractive inside and out with no evidence of excessive wear and tear or unrepaired body and interior components.
3. All lighting and climate control systems are fully operational including individually operated reading lights available to each passenger and an illuminated aisle floor and entryway for walking safely.
4. Vehicle toilets are be clean, sanitary and operational.
5. Public address system is adequate to communicate effectively with all passengers and video equipment, if supplied, shall be in operable condition and available for use.
6. Storage space outside the passenger compartment is available for all large, bulky or other items not carried on by passengers. Such space shall be lockable and secure. Interior space shall be provided for carry-on items out of the way and secured in place to avoid loose items moving about in emergencies.



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The Driver

1. Fully qualified under all current applicable State and Federal Department of Transportation motor vehicle carrier regulations.
2. Shall be a regular employee of the contractor and carry documentation of that status, preferably in a photo I.D. format.
3. Appropriately dressed and groomed and presents a courteous, helpful and business-like demeanor at all times.
4. Exhibit adequate speech mental capacity to perform the responsibilities assigned.

The Passengers

1. Should be appropriately supervised by school staff at all times. While the driver has overall responsibility for the vehicle and the trip, he or she cannot supervise the passengers individually.
2. Should avoid behavior that will distract the driver. A moment of distraction on a crowded interstate in bad weather can be dangerous.
3. Should be courteous to one another and be prepared to occupy themselves quietly on the trip.

The Trip

1. Should be prepared to provide enough qualified supervision for the kind of trip and the passengers entrusted to its care.
2. Supervisors should be instructed to cooperate fully with the driver and meet all schedule requirements. Trips should be planned so that the driver is not put in the position of violating federal regulations which limit the on-duty time.
3. Should communicate with the contractor after each trip to review the performance in terms of both positive and negative actions or impressions.
4. Should assign one staff member to arrange all such trips after the approval process is completed.



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