

Schools – A Guide to Hiring Charter Transportation

Schools often have to provide transportation for students, be it for a field trip, a recreational outing, an athletic event, or some other activity. Schools can reduce the risk to students through careful selection of the transportation company. The following information is important consider in the selection of a transportation company:

How safe is the bus company?

To hire a safe bus company, you need to have information. It is important to know if the drivers are qualified and drug- and alcohol-free. You also need to know if the buses have been properly maintained and are in good operating condition. Ask questions about safety. And, make sure any company you choose is willing to answer the following questions:

- Do drivers have a current Commercial Driver's License with a "passenger" endorsement?
- Does the company require that its drivers take physical examinations?
- Does the company have a drug- and alcohol testing program for drivers?
- Does the company consider driver fatigue in assigning work schedules?
- Will the driver be able to complete the planned trip within the legal limit of driving hours? If not, will a second driver or overnight rest stop be necessary to perform the trip legally?
- Are the buses inspected annually? By whom?
- Does the bus company have the required public liability insurance?
- What procedures exist for roadside emergencies and breakdowns?
- What's the company's accident history? Try to do a background check on the company through your local regulatory authority or the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT).
- Does the bus company subcontract for equipment and/or drivers? If so, they should provide you with the name of the second bus company so you can check its background as well.

Asking questions is a great start, but it's not enough. To help assure that the company you are selecting is well qualified, you may need to enlist the help of someone who understands the answers. Your insurance company's loss control department should be able to help.

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Not all bus companies are equally safe.

Whether you're relying on an existing vendor or choosing a new charter transportation company, it's a good idea to make sure their safety record is satisfactory. The U.S. DOT keeps records on every bus company that operates in more than one state. To access this information, all you need is the company's U.S. DOT number.

With the U.S. DOT number, you can use the "SAFER SYSTEM" at www.safersys.org. There, you'll find an up-to-date history on the company including: whether the company has authority to transport passengers in interstate commerce; the company's accident history, safety rating and insurance status; their performance during roadside inspections; and whether the company has been examined by a law enforcement or regulatory professional.

It is also important to know that there are many federal regulations in place for interstate operators and that states apply similar regulations for their intrastate operators – from the number of hours a driver can operate a bus to medical standards for bus drivers. If you experience an unsafe trip in which students are injured or, you believe, endangered by the actions of the bus company, call 1-888-DOT-SAFT (1-888-368-7238).

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