



# Crisis Planning for Students with Special Needs

# Presenters

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Bret Brooks, Chief Operating Officer, Gray Ram Tactical, LLC

Julie Jilek, former Educator, Special Education Program Supervisor & Assistant Superintendent of Business Services

# Why.....

- *Disaster preparedness and emergency response plans are typically designed for individuals without disabilities*
- *There is no one size fits all approach*
- *The midst of a crisis is not the time to figure out how to assist a student with special needs.*
- *Critical steps must be taken to plan for the safety of students with special needs*

# Outcomes of this session...

*Participants will have:*

- An increased understanding of ways to respond in a variety of emergency situations*
- An increased understanding of the impact of a disability in transportation emergency planning.*
- Useful tools and strategies to ensure the safety of students with special needs.*

# What is the percentage of students with disabilities in an average school district?

**15%**

**15 out of 100**

**150 out of 1,000**



[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgg.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp)







**HOW DO I  
PROVIDE  
TRANSPORTATION STAFF WITH  
THE  
KNOWLEDGE  
AND TOOLS  
THEY NEED FOR  
A SAFER BUS  
ROUTE?**

# Prevention through .....

- *Preparedness*
- *Professional Development/Training*
- *Practice/Drills*



# Preparedness

- *Understanding your Students Needs*
- *Understanding your Routes*

# Potential Impacts:

- Students may not comprehend the nature of the emergency and could become disoriented or confused about the proper way to react
- Students may have difficulty understanding directions for evacuation or response plans
- Students may not be able to hear emergency warnings
- Limited mobility may impair egress and access to locations
- Disaster debris may restrict evacuation
- Students with medical needs may need specialized care
- Many illnesses can be aggravated by stress. Medication may need to be administered to students with a healthcare plan
- Students may not be able to communicate their needs
- Students with Visual Impairments may have to depend on others to lead them to safety
- Some students ability to evacuate may be limited by physical limitations

# As we go through scenarios, think about....

- Your understanding of your students
  - Students in wheelchairs
  - Students with medical/health needs
  - Medically fragile students
  - Nonverbal students
  - Autistic students who may respond in a variety of unpredictable ways
  - Students with behavioral or emotional needs
  - Students who are deaf or blind

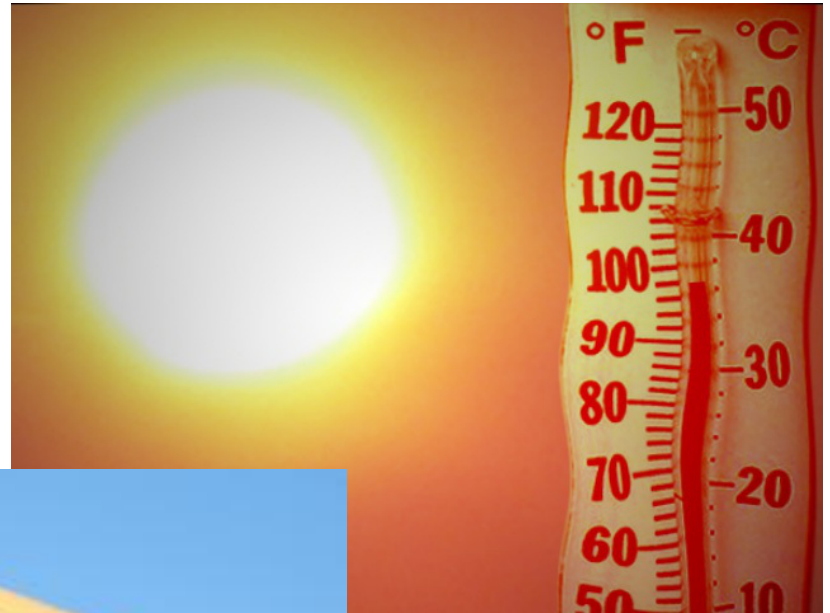
## As we go through scenarios, think about....

- Your understanding of your route.....
  - Are your buses adequately equipped with the things you may need in a crisis?
  - Are there alternate routes you can take?
  - Are there any safe locations along your route?

**What types of crisis situations do I need to be prepared for?**



# Severe Weather



# “Snow Causes Bus Rollover in Ionia County, Michigan”



# “Atlanta Children Stranded Overnight on School Buses After Snow Storm Paralyzes The South”





# Severe Weather

## Heavy Snow

- Heavy snow and strong winds can leave roads nearly impassable

## Ice Storms

- Freezing rain can make travel nearly impossible. In addition, heavy accumulations of ice can bring down trees and utility lines, creating additional hazards.

## Extreme Cold

- Extreme cold can result in stalled buses and frozen lifts
- Extreme cold and wind chills can be dangerous in a very short period of time
- Wearing proper layered clothing including hats, boots, and mittens can reduce the risk substantially even at very cold wind chills.
- Drivers and aides should familiarize themselves of signs frostbite and hypothermia.

# Severe Weather

## Extreme Heat

- At extreme high temperatures, heat disorders such as cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke are possible.
- Students should be kept out of the sun and strenuous activities should be eliminated.
- Encourage students to drink plenty of water and wear light-colored, lightweight clothing.
- Drivers and Aides should familiarize themselves with the symptoms of heat disorders and first aid procedures.

## High Winds/Dust Storms

- High winds can blow over a bus resulting in various injuries
- Dust storms can reduce visibility, but also cause respiratory injuries



# Severe Weather

## **School bus drivers should:**

- Remain alert for downed trees, utility lines, and other road hazards.
- Be familiar with alternate routes.
- Stay up to date on the latest forecast.
- Maintain communication with base and school officials.
- Call for a backup bus
- Use blankets on bus if available
- Seek shelter in a warm place

# Discussion

# Tornados



# “School bus dumped on top of high school in Caledonia, Mississippi”



# Tornado Hero: School Bus Driver Saves Kids





# **Bus Driver Shelters Kids from Tornado**

Bus Driver Shelters Kids from Tornado

# Tornados

**Never attempt to outrun tornadoes**

**School bus drivers should:**

- Delay bus departures and
- Divert buses on routes
- Identify protective areas along each part of your routes (such as a store, another school or recreation center).
- Do not stay in the school bus
- Do not seek protection under an overpass or bridge.
- Take cover in ditches or other places below ground level.

# Discussion

# Floods



# “Driver in School Bus Flood Drama Removed from Driving Duties”





# Dashcam Shows Bus Swept Away by Texas Flood





# **“School bus caught in raging floodwaters in Waco, Texas”**



# Floods

## Turn Around Don't Drown

- 6 inches of fast-moving flood water can knock over an adult, 12 inches of rushing water can carry away a small car, and 2 feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles including a bus.

### **School bus drivers should:**

- NEVER drive or walk into flood waters.
- If the bus stalls, and water is rising, abandon the bus and seek higher ground before the situation worsens if possible..

# Discussion

# Fire Emergencies



# Fire

- Always conduct pre and post-trip inspections, check for any leaking fluids
- Pay attention to bus engine warning indicators
- Assist students in exiting the bus quickly
- Know the location of the fire extinguisher
- Understand student needs - location of seat-belt cutter for quick release of students

When conducting fire drills on buses, do you practice with those in wheelchair securements?

# Behavior Incidents on Bus

- Pull over bus
- Call base for support
- Have an understanding of strategies to de-escalate behavior
- When responding to a behavior incident, take into account all of the needs of the students on the bus
  - You may need to transfer the other students to another bus, while supporting the student in crisis.
  - You may need to request assistance from school staff to assist in managing behavior
  - You may need to contact first responders for assistance

Note: Emergency situations and crisis circumstances can cause those without any disability to act in strange and unusual ways.



# Active Shooter



# Recent Headlines

September 2024 - Pennsylvania Teen Charged as Adult for Stabbing Student on Bus

September 2024 - Kentucky I75 Shooting: Semi Trailers shielded school Buses

September 2024 - Shot Fired during Robbery at School Bus Stop, Prince George's County, Maryland

October 2024 - Teen Charged in Pennsylvania School Bus Shooting, 3 Others Wanted— October 2024

October 2024 - 15-year-old Shot and Killed While Getting Off School Bus in Georgia

# “Heroic Bus Driver Stops Gunmen”



# Scenarios

- Unarmed Response to a School Bus Active Shooter Event - Scenarios 1 & 2
- Unarmed Response to a School Bus Active Shooter - Scenarios 3, 4 & 5

# Discussion

# Active Shooter Situation

All types of situations

- Shooter in the area (Report any unusual behavior)
- Vehicles being targeted by shooters
- Shooter on the vehicle

Based on the situation, school bus driver should:

- Run or escape – If you have a safe path to a secure location
- Lockdown or Hide – If the threat is outside of the bus
- Fight – If you have no other options



# Run or Escape

- Escaping is one of your best options. IF you have a safe path to a secure location!
- Do not attempt to evacuate if you do not know where the threat is located.
- Leave your possessions
- As you evacuate, try to conceal yourself
- Quickly check the area before you move into or through it.

# Lockdown or Hide

- Quickly lock and secure the door.
- If possible, put any items against the doorway to create a secure barricade.
- Stay out of the line of sight/fire.
- Silence your cell phone and/or pager, but leave an open line to 911 if possible.
- Turn off any source of noise and remain quiet, i.e., radios
- Remember that ‘cover’ is your goal.

# Fight – If you have no other options

- Fight is a last resort if you cannot evacuate or hide safely and only when your life is in imminent danger, take action.
- Attempt to incapacitate or disrupt the actions of the shooter.
- Act with physical aggression toward the shooter.
- Use items in your area such as fire extinguishers or chairs.
- Throw items at the shooter if possible.

# Things to Remember in any Crisis Situation

Heightened Awareness will assist you in:

- Recognizing the presence of threats
- Avoiding the threat if possible – **Prevention is the best solution!**
- Analyzing the threat
- Taking the necessary action to secure your safety

**The bus driver should remember to:**

- Call Base and/or 911
- Stay calm
- Keep students together if possible
- Make decisions based on the situation

# The Added Impact of Transportation Routes with Students with Special Needs

- Transportation routes may include:
  - Several students in wheelchairs
  - Students with medical/health needs
  - Medically fragile students
  - Nonverbal students
  - Autistic students who may respond in a variety of unpredictable ways
  - Students with behavioral or emotional needs

# Strategies to Consider

## Autism Spectrum Disorders:

- Social Stories
- Comfort Kits
- Use of visuals
  
- High pain tolerances might conceal real injuries



# Strategies to Consider

## Visual Impairments: (Blind-Visually Impaired/Deaf-Blind)

- Braille signage or audible directions
- Need for physical assistance
- Preparedness kits might include: extra folding white cane, heavy gloves for feeling the way over glass or debris, colored poncho worn for visibility, comfort items

# Strategies to Consider

## Hearing Impairments: (Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Deaf-Blind)

- Knowledge of basic emergency sign language terms
- Alerting devices
- Preparedness kits might include: pen and paper and flashlight to communicate in the dark

# Strategies to Consider

## Speech or Language Impairments:

- Understanding of students communications methods (communication books, assistive devices)
- Preparedness kits might include: note paper and pen

# Strategies to Consider

## Mobility Impairment:

(May include students who are physically impaired, students on crutches or in a wheelchair)

- A possible need for transfer equipment
- Consideration of how many people may be needed to evacuate students in wheelchairs
- Preparedness kits that might include calming items, social stories, etc.

# Strategies to Consider

## Developmental Cognitive

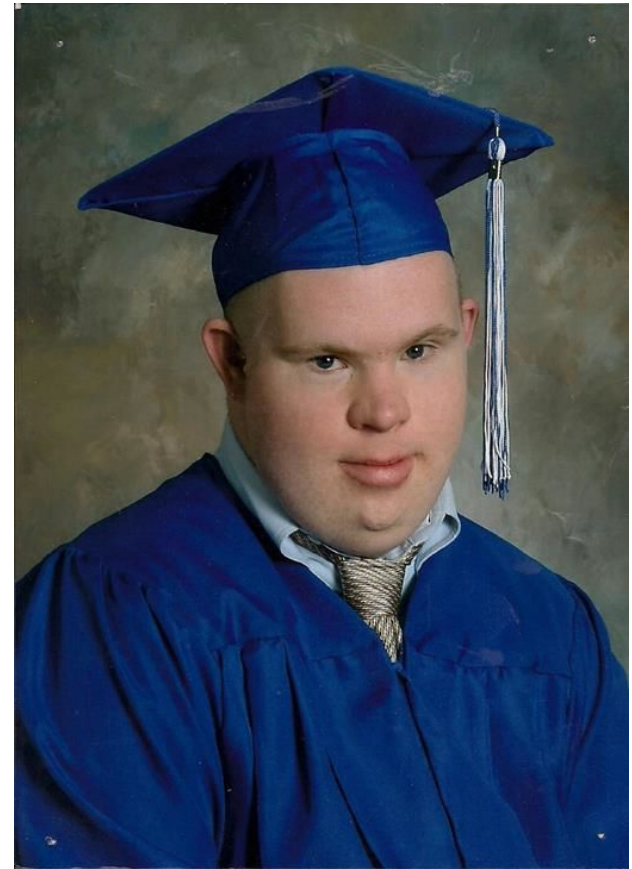
### Disabilities/Developmental Delay:

- Simple evacuation diagrams or pictures
- Evacuation social stories
- Preparedness kits might include: comfort items and visual communication instructions

# Strategies to Consider

## Downs Syndrome:

- Medical issues intersecting with emergencies and crises:
- Respiratory problems
- Heart problems
- Musculoskeletal problems



# Strategies to Consider

## Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS):

- Complex genetic condition that affects many parts of the body
- Main characteristic – insatiable appetite, inability to cease eating
- Mild to moderate intellectual impairment and learning disabilities
- Behavioral problems are common: temper outbursts, stubbornness, and compulsive behavior such as picking at the skin
- Many people with PWS have a high pain tolerance



# Strategies to Consider

## Other Health Disabilities

- Knowledge of Emergency Medical Plans (ex. Seizure plans, medication administration)
- Training on needed medical procedures
- Oxygen on bus
- Medical kits with health plans, medication, protocols

# Strategies to Consider

## Strategies to consider for all special needs students:

- Develop plans that take into consideration the needs of the students on the bus
- Practice/conduct drills
- Consider having a bag of comfort/sensory items
- Teach to the different types of emergencies (i.e. fire, severe weather, active/violent intruder, evacuation, environmental emergencies)
- Review or create Emergency Plans yearly
- Provide preparedness kits for each bus
- Train staff on how to de-escalate students in a time of crises
- Review behavior management strategies with bus staff (i.e student expectations)
- Keep directions simple and clear
- Remain with the special needs student after the evacuation
- Recognize that the fine details are unique to each student

# Proactive measures .....

- Seating Charts,
- Emergency Plans/Student Information Sheets
- Social Stories
- Professional Development and Training
  - Drills
  - Quarterly Transportation Meetings - Tabletop Scenarios
  - Summer Transportation Inservice
  - Training/Meetings with Bus Drivers/Paraprofessionals as Needed

# Seating Chart



# Proactive Measures .....

Bus Cameras



Calming Kits



Safety Vests



Blankets



# Issues to Consider in Establishing an Emergency Plan

## Emergency plans and students with disabilities .....

- **Transportation staff should establish, maintain, and review emergency plans which considers:**
  - the individual capabilities and needs of each student,
  - the type of behavior which might be exhibited during an emergency evacuation,
  - the type of supports and equipment being used by students.
  - Medical needs of students

# Transportation Information Sheet

## Example

### **Brian**

#### General Bus Information

- Wears a safety vest
- Has a 1:1 paraprofessional; please refer to aide for guidance and advice
- Follow the assigned route
- Brian should not be encouraged to talk to driver while on route (except when at red lights)
- Redirection should be done with questions (i.e., Where should your hands be?)
- Reminder of reinforcements at home
- Seat Arrangement
- Harness should be in correct spot (right side of bus, second row back, aisle seat)
- Sensory Tools
- Squish balls and pinwheels in calming kit
- Candle breathing prompt with modeling (Brian knows how to do) /deep breathing (done with a staff member)

#### Medical Considerations

- None

#### Miscellaneous

- Windows should be closed prior to Brian getting on
- Do not use police as positive/negative reinforcement
- Driver honks horn if has successful/safe bus ride at home
- Likes to greet bus driver by name
- Allowed to depart bus early at school with aide



# Social Story Example

I take the bus to school every morning. I will sit in the front seat by the window on the bus. My bus driver is Ms. Hazel and she makes sure I get to school safely. My bus aide is Ms. Gabby and she makes sure I have safe hands and a safe body while on the bus. It is very important to keep my hands quiet. If I need to keep my hands busy on the bus, I can use a squish ball instead! If I have quiet hands on the bus, I can watch 5 minutes of a cop video when I arrive at school! It is very important to have safe hands on the bus. I know I can follow the rules and have a good bus ride. Mr. Mark Stone will be big happy if I am safe on the bus. Mama will be big happy if I am safe on the bus. Mrs. Olson will be big happy if I am safe on the bus. The whole school will be big happy if I am safe on the bus.

# Professional Development and Training

- Training in collaboration with school district staff, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, and transportation carrier staff
- Evacuation Drills
- Quarterly Bus Driver Meetings - TableTop Exercises
- Summer Transportation Inservice
- Ongoing training as needed for specific route concerns

# Quarterly Bus Driver Meetings

- Share success
- Review weather related emergencies procedures
  - Fall - flooding
  - Winter - Severe weather
  - Spring - Tornados
- Review their routes and understanding of safe evacuation locations
- Discuss Scenarios (from real situations)
- Address challenges issues a driver may be facing

# Sample Tabletop Scenarios

## Scenario #1

It is winter and there has been a steady snowfall that started an hour before dismissal. You just left the school and have started on your route. The roads are becoming increasingly more slick and icy. What would you do?

## Scenario #2

It is winter and temperatures are below zero. You notice one of your students is not dressed appropriately for the severe cold weather. What would you do?

## Scenario #3

You are dropping off a student at his/her home and you notice the non-custodial parent walking out to greet the bus. You open the door to explain to the parent that you cannot release the child to him/her. The parent then attempts to board the bus to remove his child from the bus. What should you do?

# Sample Tabletop Scenarios

## Scenario #1

It is springtime and there has been a heavy rain all day. You are on your route and you notice the amount of standing water is increasing as you make your way on your route, the amount of water on the roadway is increasing and there appears to be about 4 inches of standing water on the road. What would you do?

## Scenario #2

You have a student on your bus who continually swears and taunts the bus aide and is being verbally disruptive. When the bus aide asks him to stop, he becomes more verbally aggressive. What strategies might you use in this situation?

## Scenario #3

You are dropping off a student, you arrive at the house and no one is home. What do you do?

# Summer Transportation Inservice

## Purpose:

- Increase understanding of medical, behavioral, and physical needs of students.
- Improve sensitivity towards individuals with special needs
- To provide bus drivers and aides with positive behavior supports and de-escalation techniques
- To provide strategies for problem solving potential transportation safety concerns through dialogue

# Summer Workshop Agenda

## Inservice Agenda

7:45 – 8:15 am	Breakfast
8:15 – 8:30 am	Welcome
8:30 - 8:45 am	Parent Presentation
8:55 - 11:05 am	Morning Breakout Sessions
11:05 - 11:55 am	Lunch
12:00 – 2:10 pm	Afternoon Breakout Sessions
2:15 – 2:30 pm	Wrap up, Questions, Evaluation, Raffle Drawing for 5 - \$50 gift cards!

## Breakout Session Topics:

- Understanding Students with Autism
- Understanding the Medical Needs of Students
- Understanding the Behavioral Needs of Students / Scenarios
- Teamwork / Policies and Procedures / Incident reports
- Crisis Planning / Scenarios
- Transporting Students with Vision/Hearing Needs



# The Role of First Responders in Transportation Crisis Situations

Collaborate with school district and transportation staff to assist them in:

- Recognizing the presence of threats
- Analyzing the threat
- Avoiding the threat if possible – **Prevention is the best solution!**
- Taking the necessary action to secure safety

Train bus drivers and para professionals to:

- Call 911
- Stay calm
- Keep students together if possible
- Make decisions based on the situation

# Resources

[Individuals with Disabilities - US Department of Education](#)

[Transportation as a Related Service - US Department of Education](#)

[School Transportation News](#)

[Transportation for Students with Disabilities and Special Health Care Needs - Illinois State Board of Education](#)

[Safe and Sound Schools](#)

[Safe and Sound Schools - Especially Safe Program](#)

# QUESTIONS

Bret E. Brooks

Gray Ram Tactical, LLC

816-769-7088

[bretbrooks@grayramtacticaltraining.com](mailto:bretbrooks@grayramtacticaltraining.com)

Julie Jilek

Jilek Consulting

[jajilek23@gmail.com](mailto:jajilek23@gmail.com)