

# Hispanic Children with Disabilities: Recommendations on School Transportation in the United States and Mexico



**Access Exchange International**



**Prepared and published by  
Access Exchange International  
San Francisco, California, USA  
<[www.globalride-sf.org](http://www.globalride-sf.org)>  
[tom@globalride-sf.org](mailto:tom@globalride-sf.org)  
telephone 1-415-661-6355**

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Front cover: The drawing below the title is an illustration of children, with and without disabilities, arriving at a school using different modes of transportation including walking, bicycle riding, and vehicular transport (ramp-equipped bus and taxi, and smaller vehicles sometimes used in many countries in Latin America). Pedestrian accessibility features include continuous level sidewalks, a zebra-striped raised crossing and a zebra-striped crossing using curb ramps. This image was contributed by Eli Noyes in San Francisco and also appeared on the cover of AEI's international guide titled *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*. Information on this and related AEI publications is found in Appendix 6 of this report.

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This work includes different practices and examples of numerous methods of transportation. Such practices, methods, or modes of transport vary from country to country and no endorsement is implied. Instructions on how to perform any specific procedure may not apply in every circumstance. Always follow all laws and regulations in your country, state, and municipality. Always follow manufacturer's instructions when using any equipment related to student transport.

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## Notes on vocabulary, abbreviations, and reviewers

### Some caveats about vocabulary . . .

- We use the term *Hispanic* in the English version of this report to align with the term used by many of our sources for persons with a Spanish-speaking heritage. *Latino* is less precise, and *Latinx* is not favored by colleagues in Mexico, who prefer to be known as *Mexicans*. We use the terms *Americans* and *United States* while being aware that the USA is *part* of the Americas, which includes most of the western hemisphere, while the formal name of Mexico is Estados Unidos Mexicanos, that is, the United States of Mexico. In this report we use the terms *children with special needs* and *children with disabilities* interchangeably.
- The term *school transportation* is typically used as a general category including travel by a dedicated school bus, by different modes of public or private transportation, by walking or rolling in a wheelchair, or through parent initiatives such as car pools.

### Abbreviations used in this report . . .

ADA	The Americans with Disabilities Act, including regulations specifying accessibility standards for transportation vehicles and facilities in the United States
CAM	Centro de Asistencia Múltiple (Center for Multiple Assistance) is the term used for special schools for children with disabilities in Mexico
ENADID	Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica 2018 (National Survey of Mexico's population dynamics taken in 2018)
IDEA	The USA's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, mandating free school transportation when required by children with disabilities
IEP	Individualized Education Program required for each student diagnosed with a disability in the USA by the IDEA legislation
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography) in Mexico
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education) in Mexico
USAER	Unidad de Servicio de Apoyo a la Educación Regular (Service unit to assist regular education) is the Mexican abbreviation for units within regular integrated schools which provide assistance for students with disabilities

### We thank the following reviewers for their valuable comments . . .

Appreciation is expressed to Sofía Alquicirez Tellez, Andrés Balcázar de la Cruz, Nicolas Finck, Manuel Hernández Sánchez, Olga Maldonado, Gerhard Menckhoff, Suzanne Moore, Jane Stahl, Annette Williams, and Susan Worts for their review and comments on all or parts of this report. The contents and recommendations in this report are the work of many hands and may not reflect the opinion of specific reviewers.

## Introduction

This report looks at factors impacting school transportation for Hispanic children and youth with disabilities in the United States and Mexico. Our goal is to suggest ways to improve school attendance through improvements to school transportation, walkability, different modes of public transportation, and parent initiatives. Our team has conducted personal interviews with practitioners in various locations in the United States and Mexico and also examined regional concerns such as shared geography, climate change, cultural differences, cross-border activities, and the dislocations that occur around the world when a frontier separates a wealthier country from a markedly less-wealthy country. All populations of students should enjoy similar opportunities and resources when it comes to getting to and from school, whether defined by a common ethnicity or, as is the case with Hispanic students, by a shared language or cultural heritage. May our observations on transportation for Hispanic children and youth in the United States and Mexico be helpful to students with special needs everywhere.

The World Bank issued a report four years ago concluding that "gaps in education outcomes between children with and without disabilities have been increasing over time" in less-wealthy countries.<sup>1</sup> Our research leads us to believe that in Mexico this gap largely results from a lack of school transportation. School transport concerns in low-income areas of the United States also contribute to a lack of attendance.

This report has been prepared by an international team headed up by three Americans and three Mexicans. In Mexico: Janett Jiménez Santos, an architect in Mexico City, is a consultant who works internationally and with Mexican federal and state governments on inclusive transportation. Javier Guerrero Aguirre has a research background in issues of special education at the University of Mexico and Mexico's Secretaría de Educación Pública. Daniela Briseño Arriaga has provided research as well as technical help in preparing this report. In the United States: Tom Rickert, the founder of Access Exchange International more than thirty years ago and coordinator of this report, has prepared public transport guides for the World Bank and once served as manager of accessible services for what is now the San Francisco, California, Municipal Transportation Agency. Pete Meslin served for twenty years as a school transport manager, most recently as Director of Transportation for the Newport-Mesa Unified School District in southern California. Rachel Carp provided research in Texas and currently continues to work with children at risk.

Go to [www.globalride-sf.org](http://www.globalride-sf.org) for more AEI materials on school transport including videos, posters, and our guide, *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*. These materials also include pandemic-related toolkits for education and transportation officials. All of our materials are in both English and Spanish.

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<sup>1</sup> Male, C., and Q. Wodon (2017). Disability Gaps in Educational Attainment and Literacy, The Price of Exclusion: Disability and Education Notes Series, Washington, DC: The World Bank.

# Key Recommendations

## to improve school transport for Hispanic children with special needs in the USA and Mexico

<b>Increase cooperation <u>between</u> USA and Mexican stakeholders</b>
<b><i>Governments, educators, transportation agencies and staff</i></b>
<b>Learning plans should cross borders:</b> Depending on circumstances, both documented and undocumented children and youth with special needs may relocate between the USA and Mexico for part or all of their education. Where possible, records of student education plans should either travel with the parents or otherwise be available to the former and future school districts. In the case of students leaving the USA to continue their schooling in Mexico, this could include a Spanish translation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) required by the USA's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The appropriate document for Mexican students moving to the USA could be the Propuesta Curricular Adaptada of the Secretaría de Educación Pública in English translation.
<b>Accessible pedestrian infrastructure</b> and travel to school should be assured for students with special needs who cross the border on a daily or frequent basis – from Mexico to the United States, or from the United States to Mexico – in order to attend school.
<b><i>Non-profit agencies and associations</i></b>
<b>NGOs and non-profit agencies</b> serving Hispanic children and youth should train their staffs in awareness of the special needs of children with disabilities and the resources available in their respective countries to meet these needs. The cross-border work of non-profit agencies which promote school transportation should be encouraged and other stakeholders should learn from their experiences in this field.
<b>School transport associations</b> should take the initiative in planning for cross-border cooperation while sharing knowledge and skills in the school transportation field.
<b><i>Advocates, parents, caretakers, and older students</i></b>
<b>Connecting with resources:</b> Parents, caregivers, and older students should be given information on how to connect with resources needed by younger students. They should be given the tools to be effective advocates.
<b>USA: A focus on the specific needs of Hispanic children with disabilities</b>
<b><i>Government agencies, school districts and their transportation departments</i></b>
<b>Immigrant children:</b> All jurisdictions should fully respect national legislation requiring all children living in the USA to receive an education. All Hispanic immigrant children with special needs should be included. Educators should not inquire about immigration status of parents or students. Educators should recognize that undocumented Hispanic parents may face difficult decisions about school transportation, fearing that use of transportation might bring their immigration status into question.
<b>Transportation is included:</b> Transportation solutions and attention to homeless students must be provided as part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with disabilities. Special attention should be paid to any parental language issues which might fail to inform them

of their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Parents may wish to identify a person to join them in IEP meetings if language barriers are a concern. The IEP meeting is also the time to carefully evaluate whether the student's school transport needs can be met by public transit or if the student will have to ride on a school bus.

**Assessment of children:** Hispanic parents should be encouraged to seek assessment of their children for special education, while avoiding false placement in special education due to English-learning difficulties. The cost of failure to assess these issues can be enormous over the lifetime of the child.

**Spanish-speaking staff:** School district transportation departments should address language and culture issues by adding Spanish-speaking staff when needed. Districts often need to improve recruitment of school transport personnel to address staffing shortages that have grown during the pandemic and were common even before the pandemic.

**Qualified drivers:** In some cases National Guard troops are being assigned to drive school buses without the important training that regular drivers receive. When and if this is done, they should not be assigned to buses carrying students with special needs. Transportation services for students with special needs are mandated by their IEP and untrained drivers, no matter how well-meaning, are not qualified to serve them.

**Performance indicators** based on measureable goals should be put into place to monitor the quality of school transportation for children with special needs. Examples include standards for on-time service or for response time to parent queries about school bus service.

**Real-time information for parents:** School districts should take full advantage of technical progress in providing real-time information in Spanish and other needed languages, while assuring full second-language capabilities in their in-house or contracted school bus services. These students need to be identified so that they can be served. (Note the concern of parents regarding communications in Spanish in the San Francisco case study on page 36.)

**Affordable public transportation:** School districts should work closely with city departments, public transit agencies and others serving low-income, homeless or migrant students in order to subsidize their public transportation fares when needed.

**Training** is essential due to the special needs of many Hispanic children and their families:

- **Recognize and respond:** Drivers and staff should be fully trained to recognize and respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The "Child Find" mandate within the federal IDEA legislation requires that all school districts identify and evaluate *all* children and youth with disabilities from birth through age 21.
- **Cross-training:** Transportation and special education departments should cross-train to reinforce the work of each in assisting students. Equality and equity in the treatment of students with special needs should be assured.
- **Bullying:** Drivers and aides should be trained to react to and prevent bullying.
- **Behavior support plans** should be used on buses and integrated into classroom instruction.
- **Travel training** should be provided to students with special needs to assure a more inclusive and integrated school travel experience. Travel training increases safety and confidence, while enabling many students to transition into a more independent adulthood by achieving greater mobility. Failure to provide training may doom students to the most restrictive setting and fail to prepare them for life beyond high school.

<b><i>Public transit agencies</i></b>
<b>Promote cooperative agreements</b> between school bus and public transport agencies in USA cities.
<b>Incorporate disability awareness</b> modules into the training, retraining, and cross-training of public transport drivers and staff.
<b>Educate passengers</b> to respond appropriately to children with disabilities and their caretakers.
<b>Affordability:</b> City departments should work with public transportation agencies and non-profit agencies to assure that low-income or homeless youth can afford public transportation to school.
<b><i>Advocates, parents and caretakers, and older students</i></b>
<b>Advocacy:</b> Parents should be assisted to advocate when it comes to their children with special needs. They should seek training on representing their children at required meetings prior to establishing an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each child with special needs. This especially applies to non-English speaking parents. (See also Appendix 4)
<b><i>Researchers</i></b>
<b>Research is needed when it comes to school transportation:</b> Education researchers have paid scant attention to school transportation. Examples of work needed include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establishing correlations</b> between school attendance and riding time</li> <li>• <b>Objective measurement</b> of the quality of contracted vs. school district operated buses (e.g. comparing the documented number of incidents on board school buses)</li> <li>• <b>Parent attitudes</b> concerning the length of bus rides need to be measured</li> <li>• <b>Comparisons</b> of percentages of Spanish-speaking personnel vs. the education experiences of Hispanic students</li> <li>• <b>The impact on student success</b> of decentralized (multiple) school sites vs. a more centralized school site(s) for students with specific disabilities needs to be measured. This research would clarify the need for students with specific disabilities to be bused to multiple schools vs. a single school, while taking into account factors such as the tradeoffs when transportation is required to multiple sites. If indicated by research, transportation costs could be offset by the benefits to students.</li> </ul>
<b>MEXICO: A focus on pilot projects and implementing concrete plans</b>
<b><i>Government agencies, school districts, and researchers</i></b>
<b>National legislation</b> is needed to mandate a process to create comprehensive school transportation for children and youth with disabilities in both urban and rural areas, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This legislation should require that <u>goals</u> be set with corresponding <u>performance indicators</u> at state and municipal levels. National guidelines need to be followed by <u>training</u> at state and municipal levels on how to phase in both dedicated school bus services as well as more inclusive public transportation. Legislation should encourage <u>capacity building</u> , including international cooperation through the exchange and sharing of information, experience, training programs, and best practices.
<b>Funding school transportation:</b> Seek new sources of revenue for school transportation from the private sector and from foundations to supplement existing sources.

**Accessible bus routes** need to be initiated with schedules available to students with disabilities, both in high-density urban areas and, where possible, in rural areas without available transportation. Parents should be able to contact a single agency to access information on travel by their children on public transport and/or dedicated school transport.

**School site selection:** Require that site selection for Centers for Multiple Assistance (CAMs) consider the long-term costs to parents or others of student transportation for the life of the facility. Site selection should take these transportation costs into consideration.

**Plan, implement, and evaluate current projects and create pilot projects** relevant to children with disabilities, with broad dissemination of findings concerning both benefits and challenges facing these projects. Examples follow:

- **Dedicated school buses:** Examine the benefits and challenges facing school districts which have implemented systems of dedicated school buses, assessing what has been learned from public and from private schools as well as from efforts sponsored by NGOs. Seek guidance from existing systems in Mexico and Latin America. See the case study from Curitiba, Brazil, in AEI's *Bridging the Gap* guide.
- **Informal means of transportation:** Examine existing projects utilizing three-wheeled motorcycle-taxis or other less formal means of providing lower-cost transportation, weighing the pros and cons of such approaches in terms of their safety, the use of additional safety features such as seat belts and safety panels on doorways, driver training, limitations of use to streets with slower moving traffic, and the ability to deliver year-after-year lower-cost school transportation. See page 42.
- **Use of aides on public transportation:** Requirements that parents accompany their children to, from, or during school hours create grievous obstacles for low-income parents. These parents often must care for other children or work to sustain their families and this often results in their children with special needs not attending school. Different approaches to training and funding aides, including the use of volunteers, need to be explored.
- **Pedestrian infrastructure:** Accessible features are needed for sidewalks and intersections between home and school for children walking to school, with a special emphasis on the use of curb ramps, marked intersections, traffic signs and lights, and other features on routes between public transportation stops and nearby or adjacent schools. A focus is needed on Centers for Multiple Assistance (CAM) and USAER (Service Units to Assist Regular Education) schools. See the case study of CAM 19 in Pachuca de Soto.
- **DIF:** State and municipal Systems for Integral Family Development (DIF) may wish to share their successes as well as the challenges facing their efforts to assist with school transport in an environment where multiple demands are made on their vehicles and staff. Their accumulated experience is valuable.
- **Funding:** Assess current approaches by individual schools and school districts to raise funds for school transportation from the business community, foundations, and other institutions. The emphasis should be on long-term funding sources that enable low-income parents to plan their children's education with confidence.
- **Carpools and subsidies:** Investigate approaches including promotion of carpools by parents of children with disabilities, as well as subsidies to assist low-income parents with the costs of school travel. See the case study on Costa Rica in AEI's guide, *Bridging the Gap*.
- **Learn from others:** Review experiences of other entities, such as internal transport and special transport for students with disabilities at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), as well as from sources in other countries.

<p><b>Make information available</b>, by agency, following such practices as the federal "911 format" of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), with basic data including total students registered.</p>
<p><b>Indicators to measure progress:</b> Work at state and federal levels to measure the performance of special education programs, including the percentage of school days actually attended by students with disabilities registered for school in each municipality and state. Performance indicators are also needed to monitor improvements in school transport. This work should consider a common model that results in a reliable database, taking as a basis the social model and the experience of Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).</p>
<p><b>Review census information</b> by locality or municipality based on its area of competence. This could include a census of accessible school transport vehicles, routes, average use, and other transit indicators. In coordination with the Secretary of Public Education (SEP), it could also include the number of students with disability who attend an educational center and their attendance rate, educational lag, and graduation rates.</p>
<p><b>Investigate use of smaller vehicles:</b> Consider agreements with localities to provide low-cost accessible school transport using pedicabs, three-wheeled motorcycle taxis, and other small vehicles that can reduce transportation costs and link to main transport routes. Basic safety issues should be addressed, and safety concerns should be weighed against the alternative of children with special needs not attending school, for example the benefits and challenges of motor-taxis in Chimalhuacán.</p>
<p><b>Public transit agencies</b></p>
<p><b>Train drivers:</b> Require and monitor training and periodic retraining for the drivers and staff of public transport agencies in order to address school transportation for children with disabilities and their caregivers. Ideally, drivers and staff could be certified as especially trained in serving students with disabilities.</p>
<p><b>Improve public information</b> and visible and audible signage on board transit vehicles and at transit stops and stations, keeping in mind the needs of school children and youth as well as adults with disabilities and, indeed, all passengers. Municipalities should publicize contact information for a central point where parents can seek information. These activities can be linked with community awareness campaigns and public service announcements in the media.</p>
<p><b>Commend good drivers:</b> Consider approaches to commend outstanding drivers, based on parent compliments. This could be done at municipal, state, or even national levels.</p>
<p><b>Law enforcement, advocates, parents and caretakers</b></p>
<p><b>Prevent bullying:</b> Raise awareness and involve the community in the care of children and youth with disabilities so they do not suffer violence or discrimination on the way to or from school.</p>
<p><b>Children and youth with disabilities</b></p>
<p><b>Consultation with children and youth with disabilities:</b> Individuals with disabilities and their organizations should take the lead in promoting inclusive school transportation and inclusive public transportation. Transportation agencies should take the lead in reaching out to disability NGOs and to individual passengers with disabilities to learn, at first hand, about the needs of their customers with disability.</p>

## **Part 1: Regional Context**

**The larger forces impacting school transportation for Hispanic students with special needs in the United States and Mexico**

## Regional Context:

### The larger forces impacting school transportation for Hispanic students with special needs in the United States and Mexico

This section explores some of the school transportation concerns in and between American and Mexican border states as well as the countries as a whole. These concerns are impacted by larger environmental, social, and economic realities which must be acknowledged because of their impact on transportation issues.

For too long, discussions of equity for poor people, when it comes to education, have ignored issues of how children and youth are able (or not able) to get to and from school buildings. When it comes to children with disabilities, the focus around the world has been on making the school buildings accessible and has often ignored how children are expected to get from where they live to the school. Part of this is a natural reluctance to deal with problems that are clearly expensive to solve. Transportation costs money, either for parents and caregivers or for governments or school districts if they are charged with addressing this problem.

The problem becomes more acute in those portions of the Spanish-speaking world where Hispanic families often live in poverty, such as Mexico or the United States. Low-income parents (often the mother in a single-parent family) are thrown on the mercies of whatever public transportation may exist in Mexico, while in the United States access to the ubiquitous yellow school bus must overcome language issues and, for many, the unique barriers facing those who have fled north to the USA or to Mexico in order to escape poverty and violence elsewhere.



The Sonoran Desert region and its subdivisions appear in different colors.  
- Map from Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

Add to this a pandemic that never seems to stop and the politics of a chaotic world and we would do well to step back, pause, and look at some of the larger contexts within which we need to figure things out. One such approach is to look at *regions* before looking at political *borders*. We are choosing such a route by first looking at some of the forces that impact *both* Mexico *and* the southwestern United States.

#### 1. The entire region is under assault by forces unleashed by global warming

The region which is a focus of this study shares a hot climate several months a year. And it is getting hotter and drier due to global warming. This is especially true of the Sonoran Desert, a major geographical feature of the region which overlaps

portions of the states of California, Baja California, Arizona, and Sonora. The Sonoran Desert in both countries is showing some of the most profound increases in summer temperatures in the world, threatening the livability of portions of these areas for families which cannot afford air conditioning and do not have access to air conditioned vehicles. Transportation impacts flow from issues of extreme climate change, including the ability of children to walk or be carried to school in very hot weather, as well as the cost per trip of transportation if global warming causes much of the border region to become less habitable. Unless global warming is brought under control, drought conditions are expected to increase in future years as rainfall decreases.



Meanwhile, drought conditions to the south of Mexico in Central America are causing crop failures which are a key reason why desperate families are fleeing north with their children, ending up in Mexico or the United States.<sup>1</sup> Most Hispanic immigrants from outside of Mexico are from El

Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (in that order). As climate change increases northbound migration in years to come, the resulting increase in the number of Hispanic school children, including those with special needs, may in turn require additional school transportation to get these children and youth to and from school.

## **2. As with similar borders around the world which divide countries of disparate wealth, the sharp disparity in wealth between the USA and Mexico has driven migration to the north**

The challenges of global warming increase the problems brought about in both the United States and Mexico by sharp inequalities in distribution of wealth. In Mexico the top 1% of the population owns over 40% of the wealth and the top 1% in the USA owns at least 40% of the wealth.<sup>2</sup> However, 56 million Mexicans, or about 44% of the population, fall below the poverty line by Mexican standards, compared to only 10.5% in the USA by American standards. The poverty levels in adjacent Central American countries are also a major concern. For many years, the desperation of families living in poverty helped drive migration to the north, increasing the level of need of Hispanic

<sup>1</sup> Gotlieb, Y., Pérez-Briceño, P., Hidalgo, H. and Alfaro, E. (2019). The Central American Dry Corridor: a consensus statement and its background. *Revista Yu'am* 3(5): 42-51. The accompanying map, above, is based on digital cartography by Paula M. Pérez-Briceño and the source is noted as CIAT-World Bank-UNEP (1999).

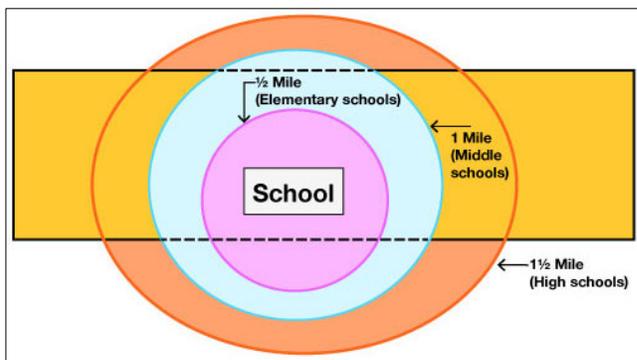
<sup>2</sup> Among the many sources of data, we point out USA data cited in the December 6, 2017 Washington Post, based on research by economist Edward M. Wolff, and Mexican data cited in Statista, *Latin America: wealth inequality based on income concentration by country 2019*, published by Teresa Romero, July 5, 2021. The 10.5% figure for Americans below the poverty line is from 2019 US Census Bureau data, while the 44% figure for Mexico is from Mexico's Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL). Definitions of poverty vary between countries.

children during their initial years in the USA. In more recent years, even before the pandemic, migration to the USA may have been overrated as a cause of population increase. During the past decade, the United States experienced the slowest population growth rate in eight decades because of plunging fertility rates and shrinking immigration.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Mexico and the USA have similar *structural* approaches to special education, but there is a big difference when it comes to transportation to school

Both countries support the *concepts* that education should be as integrated and inclusive as possible and that children with special needs should benefit from a policy of free public education for all children and youth, including those with disability. While Mexico falls short on implementation, both countries share a common commitment that different levels of government should fund most or all of school construction costs and of teachers salaries for children with special needs. *One of the most glaring differences is that Mexican policy frameworks do not include a commitment to school transportation for children with special needs, while the USA, at least in theory, fully funds this commitment. The lack of transport to school in Mexico has had a devastating impact on the ability of children with disabilities to attend school.* The USA has strongly enforced legislation requiring government funding of school transportation for children with special needs, while Mexico not only lacks such legislation but provides little assistance to most parents and caregivers to get their children to school. When it comes to school transportation, many problems remain in the USA (see Part 2 of this report) but the problem is far greater in Mexico (see Part 3).

### 4. A lack of school transportation in Mexico prevents many children with special needs from going to school, or permits only part-time attendance at school



Even children *without* disabilities living a distance of 1 mile (1.6 km) from a middle school would find it difficult to walk to school in the yellow area. - Source: "Example Enrollment Area that Creates a Prohibitively Long Walking/Biking Trip for Some Students," from the US EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection, *School Siting Guidelines*, Oct. 2011

If a child with a disability lives too far from school to walk, roll, or be carried, and parents lack the means to access a car or other alternative way of getting to school, then a lack of transportation will inhibit or prevent that child from attending classes. This situation is shown in the illustration at left, and is depicted in detail for an actual school in Mexico on page 50. The further the child lives from school, the harder the situation becomes. Our research has repeatedly

<sup>3</sup> Frey, W.F., "Just before COVID-19, American migration hit a 73-year low," Brookings Institute, December 15, 2020, citing US Census data from 2019-20. See also Jordan, M., "Decline in Immigration Threatens Growth of Regions on the Rise," NY Times, August 10, 2021.

suggested that the lack of safe, reliable, affordable, and accessible transport to school accounts for nearly 25% to over 40% of the lack of attendance by children with special needs in lower-income regions around the world. This situation is documented in our guide, *Bridging the Gap*.

## **5. Our common border is a dynamic place with people crossing in both directions for multiple purposes, including thousands of children and youth who cross daily in order to attend school**

The border separating Mexico and the United States is the most frequently crossed international boundary in the world, with approximately 350 million legal crossings every year in pre-pandemic times. There are 48 border crossing points between the USA and Mexico. Prior to the pandemic, the USA/Mexico land border at San Diego and Tijuana was arguably the busiest in the world, with 70,000 northbound vehicles and 20,000 other individuals crossing daily. Hundreds of thousands of US citizens cross into Mexico every year to seek less-expensive medical and dental care. Additionally hundreds of thousands of USA retirees have crossed the border to live less expensively in Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

Several thousand Mexican children and youth, many or most of whom are US citizens by birth, cross the border daily to attend public schools and universities in California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. Traffic is especially heavy into the San Diego and El Paso regions. Other hundreds are USA citizens who cross daily from the San Diego area into Mexico, mainly to attend the technical and business courses at the CETYS University campuses in Tijuana and Mexicali.<sup>5</sup> Yet others from Mexico cross into the USA to live there for the sake of their children with disabilities who need more advanced medical care. Issues of immigration from Mexico and Central America need to be seen in this larger context.

## **6. Cultural differences matter, especially for children with special needs who are newly introduced to schools in the USA or in Mexico**

Regardless of legal status, Hispanic families who have migrated to the USA from Latin America, as well as Hispanic families who have migrated to Mexico from the USA, experience the culture shock of being in a new environment.

**Parents with children with special needs newly arrived in the USA from Mexico** enter an environment which usually provides better-funded schools, more opportunities for special education for children with disabilities, and school transportation if needed for such students at no cost as required by law. However, parents may face the daunting issue of deciding if they should enroll their child in school,

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<sup>4</sup> Data on legal crossings per year come from "San Ysidro Port of Entry," Wikipedia, in turn citing data from the U.S. General Services Administration retrieved in 2018. Figures for medical visits and number of retirees are estimates only.

<sup>5</sup> Pre-pandemic reports in five newspapers from different US border areas totaled more than 6,000 students commuting daily to schools in the USA, but this represents a conservative estimate. The estimate of US students at CETYS is from the San Diego Union-Tribune of February 24, 2020.

and how to do so in the midst of cultural disorientation which may include a language barrier, lack of employment, and a society with different cultural values.

Attitudes toward disability in Mexico tend to differ from those in North America, with greater value being placed on disability being an internal problem to be dealt with by the family. There may be more of a sense of shame around disability on the part of the parents. These values may have been learned amid societal rejection, lack of proper diagnosis of disability, and a lack of social services and special education facilities. The "meaning" of disability may also have been formed amidst a lack of school transportation. Especially in rural areas with little in the way of public transportation, it may have been impossible to send their child to any school at all, let alone to a school prepared to provide the extra help they need. For such reasons, lower-income or rural immigrants from Mexico and Central America may not have *expectations* that specialized education is available in integrated regular schools or in special schools in their new surroundings in the USA. This concern is aggravated by a *language barrier* and *cultural barriers*, and, for those without documentation, by *fear* that students in special education might more readily expose parents to public view, *especially while children travel to and from school*.

**Hispanic parents newly arrived in Mexico from the USA or Central America** face their own serious issues. Many children in need of special education are among displaced students, already suffering culture shock and, in some cases, the more significant traumas of high-risk travel and family dislocation. Such children may have both diagnosed and undiagnosed disabilities made worse by their experiences as migrants or refugees.

Hispanic children from the United States may have lost their familiarity with Spanish, and especially with reading or writing Spanish in an environment where they are taught to read and write in English. For a variety of reasons their parents may decide to move back to Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America. The gamut of reasons includes reuniting families with relatives or seeking better employment. The reasons may also include deportation to Mexico of undocumented parents and children in the USA. Mexican schools seldom have "Spanish learner" programs, given that they have usually had less need to teach Spanish as a second language. This can prove challenging for Mexican school districts. For example, there was a crisis in Baja California's public school system in 2018 when an influx of children from the USA — many deported with their parents — reached some fifty thousand students, creating understandable strains and leading local authorities to quickly expand their Binational Program of Migrant Education. The newly arrived students suffer from dislocation which may be ongoing: "The migrant child never stops moving," commented the program's coordinator.<sup>6</sup> An even more severe problem may face the children of migrants from Central America trying to escape poverty especially in El Salvador,

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<sup>6</sup> *Alumnos extranjeros alcanzan los 52 mil en el estado*, from Noticias/Frontera, disseminated by COPASEBC (an NGO dedicated to improving education in Baja California), February 22, 2019. The quote is from the coordinator of PROBEM, Baja California's Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante (Binational program of migrant education).

Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as other migrants entering Mexico from Haiti and other countries in the Caribbean, Asia and Africa.

## 7. The role of NGOs in promoting school transport for children with disabilities

There are many foundations, development banks, international aid organizations, and governments at all levels who should have an interest in promoting transportation for persons with disabilities. There are also large well-established non-governmental organizations doing excellent work in this field. All of these agencies need to avoid "silo thinking," failing to link education with transportation to school, or failing to cooperate with a range of smaller secular or faith-based agencies promoting social improvements in countries where many or most persons live in poverty.

Larger agencies often ignore the work of smaller non-profit agencies which are often able to advocate for school transportation and implement pilot projects with minimal budgets, less bureaucracy, and more flexibility. Governments and development agencies would do well to learn from such agencies, keeping in mind that a major part of the social service infrastructure in many countries was initiated by such faith-based or secular initiatives and larger organizations can learn from their experience.

There are many NGOs in Mexico itself which need support from local donors. The following are examples of a more regional approach by *cross-border* agencies, typically funded by a mix of grants and donations, that assist with school transport in Mexico or beyond. We have selected three of these agencies as representative of *different models* of support for school transportation.

Rancho Santa Marta, near San Vicente in Baja California, serves at-risk students with a special emphasis on mainstreaming children with learning disabilities into their larger



school serving 300 kindergarten through 9th grade students. This evangelical Christian school is supported by donations through a ministry based in southern California. With forty years of experience, they have refined their school bus operation to meet needs beyond San Vicente (photo at left, courtesy of Rancho Santa Marta), with transportation provided by their

fleet of six buses to several villages to the south of San Vicente in rural Baja California. Parents are asked to bring their children to pickup spots in these villages to shorten trip times.<sup>7</sup> Go to [ranchosantamarta.org](http://ranchosantamarta.org) for information.

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<sup>7</sup> Information from interview with Bill Lawrence of Rancho Santa Marta support staff, on August 28, 2021

Mobility Worldwide (<https://mobilityworldwide.org>) is a large project, formally secular but with deep roots in the United Methodist Church in various parts of the United States. Since 1994, this agency has assisted with personal mobility devices for children and adults with disabilities in Mexico and many other countries around the world. Three-wheeled personal hand-powered wheelchairs with capacity to carry goods or products are fabricated by volunteers in the USA and elsewhere and distributed through other agencies working in dozens of countries in the Americas, Africa, and Asia.<sup>8</sup> In late 2021 this agency sponsored a virtual conference bringing together leading manufacturers and promoters of wheelchairs and other personal mobility devices to improve dissemination of mobility aids in low-income countries.

The Benjamin Bus Project (<http://thebenjaminbusproject.com>) is an example of a small secular non-profit agency in the western USA which provides transportation for children with special needs. With work focused on Panajachel, Guatemala, the agency has adopted a school in a single town. With the local government supplying a building and two teachers, the Benjamin Bus Project supplies a school bus which, in non-pandemic times, brings children from nearby villages to the school. Wisely, such a small agency, funded by donors in the USA, rents the bus locally (photo at left, courtesy of The Benjamin Bus Project), leaving it up to the company to provide fuel, insurance, and maintenance for the vehicle.



the Benjamin Bus Project supplies a school bus which, in non-pandemic times, brings children from nearby villages to the school. Wisely, such a small agency, funded by donors in the USA, rents the bus locally (photo at left, courtesy of The Benjamin Bus Project), leaving it up to the company to provide fuel, insurance, and maintenance for

the vehicle. The Benjamin Bus Project pays a part-time teacher who also acts as an aide on the bus, thus freeing mothers from the burden of accompanying their child to and from school on a public bus (if it exists) while trying to care for their other children or work to put food on the table. This model represents the integration of a transportation component into available local resources.<sup>9</sup>

## 8. A comment concerning on-line learning

It is not within the scope of this report to examine the complex issues raised by the on-line learning which children with disabilities faced and still face during the Covid-19 pandemic. In general, with some exceptions, children with disabilities have done far better with in-school classes than with virtual learning. Much may have been learned during the pandemic, but what remains clear is that children with disabilities who grow up in low-income households, even assuming they have access to the internet and technology, have a harder time when it comes to on-line learning. On-line learning "solves" that portion of school transportation having to do with daily attendance at a

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<sup>8</sup> Information based on discussions with Scott Walters, Executive Director of Mobility Worldwide, April, 2021, and with Margot Newcomb, Chair of their Board of Directors, on September 29, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Information about The Benjamin Bus Project includes discussions with Charla Wistos in August, 2021.

physical school building. This would be important for children living in isolated circumstances which prevent them from attending any school. The larger need, clearly, is that children with disabilities be able to go to school, socialize with other children, have direct interactions with teachers, and, like the rest of us, "rejoin the world" after coping with the stresses of the global pandemic.

### **Actions are needed to address regional issues from a regional perspective**

The interconnected realities of climate and global warming, wealth and poverty, cultural differences, language spoken, and national health and education policies all affect special education programs in the United States and Mexico. Neither country is isolated from still wider global issues. Countries may stop at their borders, but entire regions and the entire world are impacted by pandemics, global warming, and worsening extremes of climate. Such factors in turn impact the extremes of wealth and poverty and the cultural attitudes resulting from such extremes. They impact education in general, special education in particular, and school transport for students with disabilities.

Prior to examining the specific situations within the USA (Part 2) or Mexico (Part 3), we offer these suggestions for mitigating some regional concerns.

- 1) Much of the territory to the north and south of the USA/Mexican border is subject to more serious global warming than other parts of the world. Unless global warming is arrested, the loss of habitat for human beings could become more significant and negatively impact education and school transport in the region.
- 2) Government agencies as well as non-profit and volunteer agencies should seek to identify children with special needs who arrive from another country. They should provide parents of children with disabilities with information on how to seek diagnosis or health care for their children as well as the availability of special education services, how to register for such services, and how to safely access transportation to and from such services and schools.
- 3) Where possible, the educational records of children with disabilities should either travel with the parents or otherwise be available to the former and future school districts. For example, Hispanic students with special needs, upon leaving the USA should have a translated version of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), while Mexican students leaving Mexico should have a translated version of the Propuesta Curricular Adaptada of Mexico's Secretariat of Public Education (SEP).
- 4) There are several volunteer agencies in the USA which foster school transportation in one or another area of Mexico or Central America. Their work, as well as the work of Mexican NGOs, should be encouraged while recognizing that scaling up long-term solutions to school transportation must include long-term funding by local governments or long-term investments by foundations and the private sector.

5) Trade associations, bus manufacturers, school districts, and non-profit agencies which support school transport in the USA should strengthen their relationships with peers in Mexico. Transport professionals in the USA should share their knowledge and skills in school transportation when requested by their colleagues in Mexico. Conferences in the school transportation field in the USA should be available to Mexican colleagues even as American colleagues attend conferences on bus rapid transit and other topics in Mexico.

## **Part 2: United States**

**A focus on the specific needs of Hispanic children with disabilities**

# Population, culture, and school attendance by Hispanic students with disabilities in four key states

This part of our report discusses school transportation concerns for Hispanic students with disabilities in the USA, including a discussion of issues impacting children's trips

to and from school, followed by sections on transportation by school bus and by local public transportation, and concluding with case studies from San Francisco, California, and Dallas, Texas.

Students in the United States typically go to school between the ages of 5 and 18, attending kindergarten and then grades 1 through 12. Primary, or elementary, education typically lasts until 5th grade, middle school or junior high school covers 6th through 8th grade, and secondary education covers 9th through 12th grade. Children with disabilities are eligible to receive free special education and related services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines a "child with a disability," and lists 13 different categories of disabilities under which children can be eligible to receive special education and related services including free transportation to and from school when needed.

**Data from the four USA states sharing the border of the USA and Mexico: California (CA), Arizona (AZ), New Mexico (NM), & Texas (TX)**

	CA	AZ	NM	TX
General population in <b>millions</b> Total: app. 80 million. (U.S. Census Bureau)	40	7.2	2.1	30
Hispanics in <b>millions</b> & as % of general population Total: app. 30 million (U.S. Census Bureau)	15.6 39%	2.2 31%	1.0 50%	11.4 38%
Public school children in <b>millions</b> (Hanson, Melanie, "K-12 School Enrollment & Student Population Stats" EducationData.org, Sept. 19, 2021)	6.2	1.1	.3	5.5
All students with disabilities ages 3-21 in <b>thousands</b> and as a % of <u>all</u> children in school. Total: approx. 1.5 million (Nat'l. Center for Education Statistics, 2018-19; EducationData.org; CA Dept. of Education Enrollment)	795 12.8%	135 12.3%	49 16.6%	540 9.8%
Hispanic children in public schools as % of <u>all</u> children in school*	55%	45%	62%	53%
Hispanic students with disabilities, in <b>thousands</b> ** Total: 822,000	451	65	34	272
Numbers above are rounded, approximate, and from different recent years. See data for Mexican border states at page 40.				

\* CA: Cal. Dept. of Ed., Fingertip Facts on Education in Calif., 2019-20 school year; AZ: extrapolated from Ballotpedia, Public education in Arizona; NM: NewMexicoKidScan, State of Education in New Mexico, 2018; TX: Texas Education Agency, 2019-20  
 \*\* Source: Exhibits A-3 & A-4 from the 42nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2020, pages 278-281.

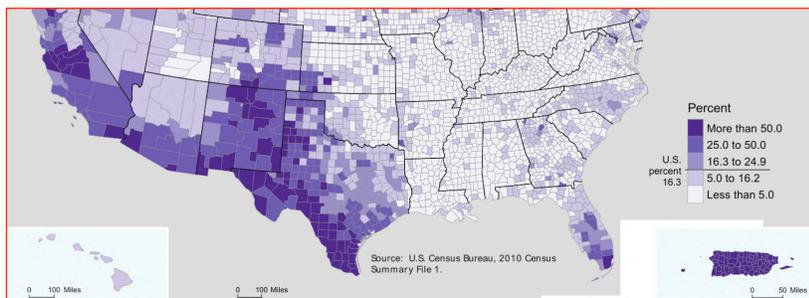
## 1. Population and school attendance trends

US Census Bureau data for 2020 reports that approximately 61 million Americans (18.5% of the population of the USA) identified themselves as of "Hispanic or Latino" origin.

**About half of all Hispanic residents –** approximately 30 million – live in the four USA states touching the common border of the USA and Mexico, as shown in the box above and the map on the following page.

The great majority of Hispanic people in the region are of Mexican heritage. However, around a million persons of Central American heritage live in California, supplementing around 11 million of Mexican heritage. At least 330,000 Central Americans are also reported as living in the Houston and Dallas metro areas in Texas. The numbers of Central Americans in Arizona and New Mexico are far lower<sup>1</sup> and of course even smaller numbers are present with a heritage extending to every country in the Spanish-speaking world. The overall *Hispanic* population of the four U.S. states on the border exceeds the *combined* populations of the adjacent six Mexican states on the other side of the border.

The majority of the 13 million public school students in the four USA states are Hispanic. Latino students are enrolled in special education classes at roughly the same rate as that of all students. More than 800,000 Hispanic students in the four states are assessed with a disability and qualify for special education services at some level.



**Hispanic Population as a Percent of Total Population by County**  
(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census)

Texas is an exception, having the lowest percentage of students in the USA who qualify for special education services under the IDEA act. In all four states, 13% to 15% of students with disabilities are classified as having speech or language impairments. But only four to

five percent are classified as having intellectual disabilities, except for Texas, which classifies 10% of qualifying students as having such disabilities. This could indicate that many Hispanic students in Texas are misclassified as having an intellectual disability due to a language barrier.

## 2. Immigration status and culture have an impact on school transportation

For decades, concerns have existed about low school attendance by children of migrant workers from Mexico who move from place to place with their parents. School attendance of children of parents without documentation is a related concern. In general, the number of undocumented immigrants in the USA has held steady or decreased in recent years. Most undocumented individuals from *all* countries live in twenty metropolitan areas in the United States. Approximately 1.7 million undocumented immigrants are estimated to live in five metro areas of California and 1.1 million in three metro areas in Texas. These two states between them have a total of around 2.8 million undocumented residents from outside of the United States in their largest urban areas. See below our case studies of two of these areas: San

<sup>1</sup> O'Connor, A., J. Batalova, and J. Bolter, "Central American Immigrants in the United States," August 15, 2019, Migration Policy Institute

Francisco, in the San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward metro area in California, and Dallas, in the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metro area in Texas.<sup>2</sup> The Pew Research Center cites data that 12.3% of K-12 students in California schools had an unauthorized immigrant parent.<sup>3</sup> For information on protecting undocumented and vulnerable students, see the recommendations from Stanford University in Appendix 7.

Research by Jesus M. Barajas in the San Francisco Bay Area, although focused on cycling as a transit mode, sheds light on the larger issues facing Hispanic parents in the greater San Francisco urban region. Based on his finding that USA-born Latinos may have very different travel patterns than foreign-born Latinos, Barajas discusses "the potentially large role that identity – in this case, immigrant identity – plays in travel behavior." Barajas states that "planners often miss the critical influence that social ties, culture, and experience also have on people's travel decisions . . . Cultural narratives, such as taboos and prohibitions for women around cycling, or travel habits from their home countries, may also inform immigrant views . . ." In a conclusion which speaks to the situation of often-undocumented parents of Hispanic children with disabilities, Barajas states that "The intersection of language ability and immigrant status could be particularly threatening for those without documentation to live in the United States and who lack understanding of traffic laws, rules, and norms. 'Whatever small error you commit will become a bigger complication for you and your family,' one interviewee explained. He was sensitive to giving police an excuse to stop undocumented immigrants like him for traffic infractions that could end in deportation."<sup>4</sup>

Various researchers have commented that Hispanic families may only passively participate in decision-making about their children due to cultural traditions that lead them to leave such decisions up to educators. Some of these cultural factors can be traced back to the situations faced by low-income persons in Hispanic cultures in Latin America, as noted in our earlier discussion of the regional context within states on both sides of the USA/Mexican border. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that the parents of Hispanic students have considerably less educational attainment than parents from other racial or ethnic groups. Cultural barriers can conspire against good communication when combined with language barriers and the educational gap many Hispanic parents may feel when talking with educators. As discussed in the following pages, this gives educators a special responsibility to encourage Hispanic parents to take an active role in decision making when discussing the needs of their children with disabilities at IEP planning sessions. Alternatively, parents could notify their case manager to include other participants to attend the IEP meeting and advocate on behalf of their child. Otherwise, it would be all too easy for parents to "go along" with whatever educators present to such parents.

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<sup>2</sup> Passel, J.S., and C. D'Vera, "20 metro areas are home to six-in-ten unauthorized immigrants in U.S.," Pew Research Center, March 11, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Passel, J.S., and C. D'Vera, "Children of unauthorized immigrants represent rising share of K-12 students," Pew Research Center, November 17, 2016, based on augmented 2014 American Community Survey

<sup>4</sup> Barajas, J., "Cycling Toward Mobility Justice in Latino Immigrant Communities," *Transfers Magazine*, Spring 2021, Pacific Southwest Region University Transportation Center.

# Transport by School Bus in the United States

by Pete Meslin, Retired Director of Transportation, Newport-Mesa Unified School District in California

## 1. Introduction

In the USA, children with disabilities must be provided with free and appropriate transportation if it is needed to get to and from school. This is a requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a national law which mandates that students with special needs are entitled to transportation when it is required to reach educational services until they are age 22. Each student has an Individualized

Prior to the pandemic, some 475,000 school buses transported 25 million children to and from schools and school activities in the United States. School buses are purchased or leased by some school districts, while other school districts contract with other agencies to perform this function. Approx. 40% of school districts in the United States use such contractors. The cost is high: an average of \$845 per student transported per year. A survey of more than 400 school bus fleets found that on average 15% of the students carried have disabilities. Of those with disabilities, 4% use wheelchairs. A portion of students with special needs are "mainstreamed," with other students using a school bus. Aides were used by most fleets on at least some of their buses, and 38% of the fleets used aides on all of their special needs buses.

(Pre-pandemic data from February 2016 *School Bus Fleet*, cited on page 60 of AEI's *Bridging the Gap* guide)

Educational Program (IEP). The IEP is updated yearly and has a thorough review every three years. If students with special needs move to another school district or a district in another state, an IEP is still required and may be modified. It is within this context that transportation is authorized if necessary to assure that the student can attend school. The goal of special education is to make the student as capable as possible to act as a responsible adult in the world beyond formal education. To that end, the law requires that the student receive service in the least restrictive environment.

For many parents, transportation by bus to/from school is a legally required necessity for their children with special needs. For others it is merely a matter of convenience and is not mandated by the IEP. In the United States, much energy and many hours are spent finding the distinction between the two. Although

students are not required to attend special education classes once diagnosed, they typically do. For such children, the challenge is multiplied if they are Hispanic and have special needs.

In more affluent districts, less than 15% of all students ride the school bus. In such districts, a higher percentage of special education students ride the bus. In the less affluent districts, students are more dependent on busing.

Hispanic parents of students with special needs who are not documented do not want their children to draw attention because that may bring awareness of their immigration status and lead to dire consequences. Therefore, many parents in this situation do not have their students assessed for special education, resulting in failure to properly place such children in special education classes. Other parents may proceed with the assessment, but, to avoid argument, do not advocate for their students if they disagree with the assessment.

In many cases districts may save money on school bus transportation by not following up with parents who fail to actively seek transportation when their children need the school bus to get to school. Nevertheless, school districts should ask every parent of a child with poor attendance if transportation would be helpful. Overcoming parent reluctance to ask for school bus transportation may be a key step to improved attendance, especially for Hispanic children.

The double standard involving many Hispanic children and their relatives is unfortunate and may be considered a blight on the educational landscape. These students tend to "disappear" if their parents fear that they are in danger of being exposed. This may take the form of the student withdrawing from school and moving to another school district. The whole family may move simply to be eligible for service in another district or they may arrange for the student to be transported to a nearby district and obtain a false residence address. They also may cease attending and have no formal education going forward. For the same reason, some Hispanic families may seek to



avoid conflict and not advocate for needed services such as occupational or physical therapy for their children with special needs.

Principals and other administrators should pay special attention to their Hispanic students whose attendance is an issue. Efforts need to be made to convince the parents that no consequences to either themselves or the student will occur because of the school's services. Similarly, no parent's complaints regarding another student's immigration status should be entertained. By law, all students deserve equal treatment, and school districts should not comment on or check immigration status. This is where leadership carries an extra amount of weight. Principals and the school leadership team should make it clear to staff that the district will not, in any way, assist a parent in processing a complaint regarding someone else's immigration status.

Transportation staff should follow up on poor or no attendance from students to see when they are going to resume attending school. Generally, three days of no

attendance should bring a phone call. That is, parents should provide a date they expect their student to return and a reason for the student's absence. Until then bus service will be discontinued. If a student is not planning to return, then transportation and special education staff need to collaborate on a plan for the student.

## **2. Equity in IEPs and transportation**

In the United States, all parents of students receiving special education should be alerted to advocate for their child. Not doing so can cause their child to be discriminated against. If parents are culturally led to be quiet, they are short-changing their student. Districts that do not have drivers who speak Spanish, or cannot answer the phone in Spanish, typically end up providing poorer service to Hispanic parents.

Many school districts have no idea that Hispanic students are faced with these biases. If the district contracts out bus service then special care is needed to make sure that a Spanish-speaking provision is in the contract. Also, transportation departments should make sure that IEPs are not simplified solely because no one speaks Spanish. It is illegal to not provide a needed translator and transportation staff should insist that a translator is present. This person should translate directly and not embellish or downplay what is said. The IEP meeting may take longer, but both students and parents have the right to a full IEP.

Transportation staff should be full members of the IEP team. As such they may have input on accommodations or how a student accesses education. To a lesser degree they might have a say in modifications of what a student is expected to learn (e.g., transportation vocabulary). Certainly, they should have input into travel training. Finally, they should be proactive in providing training for special education teachers and aides. This is essential to build a working relationship that benefits students.

Staff and drivers need proper training. Some good examples can be found in the appendices of this report. Teachers can often offer strategies for dealing with problems on the bus. However, good working relationships need to exist for this to be possible. Transportation staff can offer suggestions that may help in the classroom and should consider appropriate settings to offer suggestions to teachers who may not yet understand the important role of riding to school within the overall education process.

The IEP, though one possibility, is not the only place that transportation and special education staff should interact. Teachers could learn by watching videos of students on the bus. This would provide them with a context for seeing a student's behavior and the bus driver's responses. Teachers could then make suggestions, if applicable, to assist either the student, the driver, or both.

Most students with special needs benefit from attending a physical school. Remote learning for these students is often difficult or even impossible. They are often lost when forced to move from school to school and even more lost when called upon to attend classes online. Students who are significantly intellectually disabled especially

benefit from in-person learning where they can touch objects. It is particularly important, therefore, that attendance of Hispanic students, who may be overcoming language problems as well as their disability, be paid special attention by school administrators. Attendance problems can fundamentally impact their education.

### 3. Travel training

The goal of transportation is to make the student ready for life beyond school. However, students first need to learn *how* to ride the bus, as shown in the photo at



"Bus in the Classroom" class at Newport-Mesa, CA, Unified School District - photo by Tom Rickert

left. At first this is focused on the actual waiting for and riding the bus. However, as the student ages, and hopefully becomes more capable, (s)he can learn more advanced social skills and proceed towards riding the bus with non-disabled peers. Unfortunately, very few districts have a teaching program to emphasize these important life skills. Although a student may have the potential for independent bus riding, few students proceed to that level of independence without instruction. Also single parents are penalized by having to

meet their student at the bus because the student has not learned the necessary independence skills. Of course language issues further increase the need for travel training, including building up a transportation vocabulary. Readers are encouraged to turn to Appendix 3 for more information on travel training.

### 4. Riding times

It is often assumed that the maximum ride time for children with disabilities is an hour. However, the ride time should be comparable when there are separate routes for general education and special education. Unfortunately, in the USA, there are many students that are bused cross-town because of the uniqueness of their disability. These children frequently do not even meet the one-hour guideline and may not be ready to learn when they arrive at school. Students riding home in this situation are often very tired and have trouble doing their homework and participating in a full life.

### 5. Responsibilities of parents

Busing is a shared responsibility much as schooling is. It is the responsibility of local transportation departments to communicate the situations and behaviors that the district cannot or will not accept. That is, parents need to understand exactly what is and is not allowed. To that end, transportation departments need to provide parents with print, website, and social media that explain these critically important matters.

Many districts have this information available in the parent’s native language. If they do not, they should remedy this defect and parents need to insist upon it. Parents should know that, for the most part, these rules and consequences are non-negotiable.

Many parents are concerned with student misconduct. This is especially the case if misconduct leads to suspensions. With few exceptions, a maximum of 10 days of suspension for the entire school year should be observed for students with special needs. Parents should be made aware of a potential school or school transportation problem as soon as possible. An emergency IEP meeting should then be scheduled to address the problem as soon as the parties are available.

Parents seeking guidance can avail themselves of a great deal of information on the internet, supplemented if needed by local disability groups or legal services. Most districts have a citation policy and ideally should have support plans that tie a student’s conduct to consequences. Such plans may allow students to earn privileges or to have privileges removed due to their behavior. Parents often get involved in these plans. Behavior Support Plans are helpful in dealing with bullying or other behaviors on the bus.

## **6. Wheelchairs and other mobility devices**



Wheelchairs and other mobility devices need to be in safe operating condition. For the most part, transporters will refuse to transport if a wheelchair is not fully functional. Sometimes the district has a “loaner” wheelchair, but these should not be counted upon. Wheelchairs should be inspected at least every year and wheelchair maintenance is the parent’s responsibility. Progressive districts use slack periods, such as summer vacations, to inspect all wheelchairs and mark the specific securement spots on them. Specific concerns include brakes, wheelchair restraints, and passenger restraining belts. Power wheelchairs must have batteries secured and covered.

## **7. Roles of bus drivers**

In the USA, both drivers and vehicles must be licensed by the state to operate. It is illegal for a bus or a driver to operate without a special school bus certificate issued by the state. Requirements vary from state to state, but every state has laws that are largely the same.

Except for minor notifications to school bus drivers, parents need to contact the transportation or special education office to ensure proper notification of impending changes to the student’s use of school transportation.

In the United States some school districts choose to contract with private contractors for their bus service. This results in many operational matters being handled by the contractor. It can also result in all or almost all students with special needs receiving special transportation, just for students with disabilities, versus many of them being mainstreamed on school buses serving other students.

## **8. Personal information**

School district transportation offices must handle a variety of personal information. This includes medical information that is protected in the United States by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Students with special needs may have behavior support or intervention plans that include travel on the school bus. Such plans frequently help with extreme behaviors. Drivers and staff must be trained in the proper use and dissemination of student data, including medical and behavior support information. Frequently, transportation personnel have to insist on receiving this information, but even then only receive what parents want them to have. They must cross-check with health and special education departments. Transportation staff have a right to this information as it pertains to the safe riding and operation of the school bus. School districts should insist upon the receipt of this information before bus service begins.

## **9. Advice for NGOs**

NGOs may be helpful advocates for the parent and child. They should also establish good working relationships with school administrators and site personnel and demonstrate that they can be an asset for all personnel. Regarding Hispanic children newly arrived in the USA, NGO roles should include getting children to school so they can benefit from the many available resources. It is essential that Hispanic children with or without disabilities be at the school. Evidence shows that, with few exceptions, students who are significantly intellectually disabled will especially benefit from in-person learning. Many children benefit but those with certain disabilities are more apt to receive direct measurable benefits. While at the school they can touch objects and interact with students and staff. In addition, many Hispanic students have language difficulties that compound the already difficult challenge of overcoming the disability. NGOs need to take whatever actions are necessary to encourage school attendance. They need to push back against delays caused by personnel or logistics. Rather, they should encourage an interim placement for the student while problems are worked out. The key, with few exceptions, is to get the student into school as soon as possible.

# Using public transportation to travel to school

Up to one half of all students in the United States travel or are driven to and from school in a private car and the remainder either go by school bus, local public transit, or by walking or biking to school. About 60% of low-income students in the United States take either a school bus or public transportation if they live too far from school to walk or bike. For primary school students who live at too great a distance to walk or bike to school, about half take a bus and the other half use a private car.<sup>1</sup>

The California Education Code's guidelines for required transportation services for children who qualify for special education state that "Considering the identified needs of the pupil, transportation options may include, but not be limited to: walking, riding the regular school bus, utilizing available public transportation (any out-of-pocket costs to the pupil or parents are reimbursed by the local education agency), riding a special bus from a pick-up point, and portal-to-portal special education transportation via a school bus, taxi, reimbursed parent's driving with a parent's voluntary participation, or other mode as determined by the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team."<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Public transit



The use of standard public transit buses for transport to school is common in urban areas. For example, New York City provides yellow school bus service to select students based on grade level and their distance from the school but relies on the public New York City Transit bus system to transport students in grades 7-12 and younger students where dedicated school bus service is unavailable.

Free or half-price transit passes are provided by the school system for this purpose. Some public transit services may provide "tripper service" with routes designed to serve local schools. Such routes are regularly scheduled transit routes that are open to the public and, by law, cannot be used exclusively for school transportation. Such

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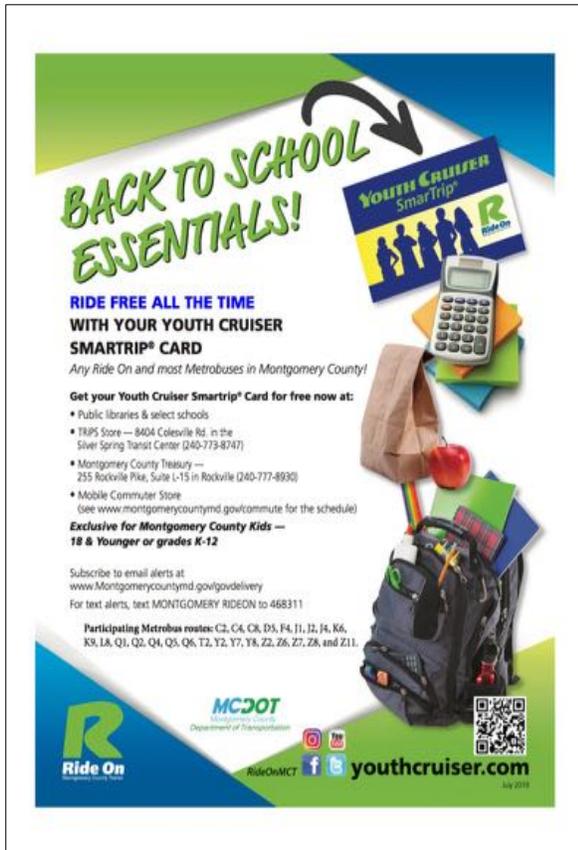
<sup>1</sup> National Travel Survey, 2017, US Department of Transportation

<sup>2</sup> "Transportation Options," from Special Education Guidelines of California Dept. of Education, downloaded October 27, 2021. The guidelines were last reviewed by the Dept. of Education on June 11, 2020.

routes are created to connect local schools to nearby communities and transit centers. Many students over the age of 16 drive to school.

Children and youth in Hispanic communities may face additional transportation inequities beyond those faced by other low-income persons. In any country, the cost of public transportation can bite into the income of those living in poverty, especially if affordable housing is not available near public transit routes. While this is especially true in Mexico, it remains a key concern in the United States as well. And transit service needs to be reliable, or students may not reach school on time and be late for classes.

The San Francisco and Dallas case studies in this report both note the important role of public transport for many school children. The role of public transportation may vary for children with special needs with varying degrees of disability. Public transportation has advantages for some parents and their children. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that public transit buses are accessible to passengers with disabilities. A missed school bus trip can create a crisis for a family, while missing a public transit bus may not if the time between buses is short. If a city has a dense network of public transit routes, the trip to school by regular bus may be faster than by school bus. And city transit agencies may have agreements in place with school districts to provide transportation at reduced rates or even without charge, as depicted in the poster at left from Montgomery County Metrobus, adjacent to Washington, DC.<sup>3</sup>



On the other hand, public transit may have disadvantages. School bus travel for students with an IEP is provided free of charge. School buses have been proven safe. Aides on school buses are often provided when required for special education students with certain disabilities, while public transit buses rarely provide aides and parents must travel with their student if an aide is needed. In addition, public transportation operators are less able to handle behavior problems specific to students with disabilities.

School buses have been proven safe. Aides on school buses are often provided when required for special education students with certain disabilities, while public transit buses rarely provide aides and parents must travel with their student if an aide is needed. In addition, public transportation operators are less able to handle behavior problems specific to students with disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Flyer is from Montgomery County, MD, Public Schools, circulated on August 30, 2019.

Also, the general public riding public transit bus or rail lines may have minimal understanding of the needs of students with disabilities, especially in cases where parents may not speak English or their children are English learners. This may be especially true of children with hidden disabilities. For example, focus groups with Spanish-speaking parents in San Francisco revealed that other passengers may not understand if a child with a disability must remain in a stroller if the strollers of children without a disability must be folded while on board. This situation would probably not occur if the child was in a wheelchair which alerted other passengers that the occupant had a disability.

It is important that children with disabilities (along with everyone else subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act) be provided with accessible pedestrian infrastructure, and this is especially true if the student must walk to a school which is far from the nearest public transit stop or station. Safe and accessible walkways to and from public transit stops are required, as well as between home and school bus stops unless curb-to-curb service is required. Sidewalks need to be of adequate width, free of obstacles, and with a continuous surface at a safe angle for wheelchair users. Curb ramps, crosswalks, and appropriate safety features at intersections are needed if the travel chain from home to transit stop to school is to be accessible.

## **2. Recommendations**

To maximize public transit accessibility to school for Hispanic and all other students with special needs, the following recommendations make sense:

- 1) Public transit agencies should assure that their services are provided to lower-income areas in a fair and equitable manner including those serving communities which may be further disadvantaged by language barriers.
- 2) Close liaison is needed between the public transit agency and the school district and its in-house or contracted yellow school bus provider.
- 3) High priority should be given to the training of public transit bus drivers and other personnel on the needs of children and youth with disabilities as well as adults with disabilities.
- 4) Public education campaigns are needed to increase passenger understanding of the needs of children and youth with disabilities.
- 5) Use of Spanish-speaking drivers and personnel is recommended where needed in Hispanic communities, and of course the same applies to any community facing language barriers.
- 6) Consideration should be given to commendations and awards to drivers showing exceptional courtesy to children and youth with disabilities.

## Case study

# San Francisco, California

Persons of Hispanic ancestry compose about 15% percent of San Francisco's 880,000 residents and around 33% of the nearly 60,000 students in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). About 17,000 SFUSD students are in the English Learners program and 9,300 (55%) of these students are Spanish speaking. These data point to the high percentage of Hispanic/Latino students who may be facing English-language barriers, and the presumably even higher percentage of their parents who face communication issues when dealing with registering their children in the SFUSD and its school bus program. This conclusion is reflected in the findings from our focus groups with Spanish-speaking parents on page 36.

Turning to special education data, the California education department reports a total of 7,400 students enrolled in special education classes in the SFUSD, which comes to about 12% of all students. (14% of all students in the United States qualify for special education courses.) 2,800 of the special education students in the SFUSD are reported as Hispanic, or about 38% of all special education students. This implies that Hispanic students are slightly over-represented when it comes to disability.

The data indicates that 45% of the Hispanic special education students have a "specific learning disability," which is higher than the percentage of other ethnicities in this category.<sup>1</sup> This could raise a concern that the issues of English Learners may move some Hispanic students into the Special Education category.

The data in San Francisco concerning special education, English Learners, and undocumented immigrants point to the language barriers which impact the education of Hispanic immigrants. This problem then spills over into the issue of use of transportation modes by Hispanic children and youth as they travel – or fail to travel – to and from school. Parent comments in our focus groups focused on their experiences during pre-pandemic school travel operated by the school district's former transportation provider, such as failure to receive good service when trying to contact school transport staff when the school bus was late. For some parents, these problems are exacerbated by cultural and documentation issues which influence fear of travel.

As it happens, the SFUSD changed their school transportation provider prior to reopening for the 2021-22 school year. The new company, Zum, states that it is using a multi-lingual app which provides parents with the location of their children's bus and estimated arrival time in real time. Parents may also cancel a trip in real time using the same app. All children are checked in and out of the bus at pickup and drop-off as an added safety feature. In theory, this should address a range of concerns on the part

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<sup>1</sup> All SFUSD data cited on this page was submitted by the SFUSD to the California Education Department for school year 2019-20, with the exception of special education data, which is for the 2018-19 school year.

of parents in general and parents with language barriers in particular. At the time this report is issued, it is premature to judge the performance of the new school bus system. Performance indicators will assist transport staff in evaluating whether their service is meeting stated objectives.



San Francisco has a history of aligning its public transportation services to include service to its public schools, as illustrated by the photo above from the website of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA), which operates the San Francisco Municipal Railway, a name reflecting the city's historic commitment to rail modes as well as bus modes of transport. The "Muni" currently offers free rides for all youth under the age of 19. San Francisco also operates light rail transport with access by elevator to all underground stations and by nearly a hundred raised platforms on surface portions of the system, such as seen in the photo at top right.<sup>2</sup> However, when it comes to Hispanic students with a disability, the language barrier can create problems, as noted by driver and passenger reactions to a parent seeking space for her child with a disability who needed to remain in a stroller rather than being carried by the parent on a crowded bus.



Issues of accompaniment of children who walk to school or to a bus stop have not been quantified in San Francisco. One approach is that taken by a group of largely Hispanic parents in San Francisco's low-income "Tenderloin" region, where parents banded together to help assure safe walking to school in a high-crime area (photo at left).<sup>3</sup> Since the Muni provides school trips for up to half of SFUSD students, it sponsors a

Muni Transit Assistance Program to train members of the community who ride on specific routes with the goal of diffusing any conflicts which may arise.

<sup>2</sup> Photo of bus is from Muni website in 2021. Photo of Metro light rail car is from January 2021 AEI Newsletter, illustrating boarding by a parent with children. Stroller would be folded once inside. No one has a disability in this photo illustrating access to Muni Metro street-level stops.

<sup>3</sup> Photo by Tom Rickert, from January 2016 AEI Newsletter

## Report from focus groups with Hispanic parents in San Francisco

Three focus groups\* were conducted in Spanish and held while schools offered only virtual education due to the pandemic. The purpose of the focus groups was to better understand parent perceptions of all modes of transportation to the city's public schools. Comments were made by twelve parents of children ages 5-16 who are enrolled in SFUSD special education classes. Discussion focused on school bus transport provided by the SFUSD's former contracted pre-pandemic school transportation provider and by the various transport modes operated by the city's public transportation agency. A summary of the major concerns of parents appears below:

Parent concern	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of real-time communication if bus is running late</li> </ul>	<p>These were the major concerns expressed about pre-pandemic yellow school bus transportation. The SFUSD contracted with a new bus provider for 2021-22, which currently provides an app for families to track their child and the location of the bus in real time, in Spanish as well as other languages. This may address many parent concerns.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delays in receiving service in Spanish when calling about the status of a late or missing bus for one's child</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bus drivers being changed when children have become familiar with the drivers on <i>their</i> route</li> </ul>	<p>School bus agencies need to clearly inform parents about the many reasons which require drivers to change from time to time.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for more adults, parents, or aides on bus</li> </ul>	<p>Reflects concerns about bullying on board buses. Aides are expensive and need training.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overly long school bus trips</li> </ul>	<p>Especially a concern for students with autism.</p>

Parents who speak mainly Spanish reported an especially difficult problem when their children used public transportation (the "Muni") to get to school: Unless their child's disability was *identifiable*, other passengers objected to a child being kept in a stroller while on board, although Muni helps address this concern by providing special decals for strollers used by children with disabilities. Strollers for children *without* disabilities must be folded on Muni buses, while bigger children using wheelchairs could remain in their wheelchairs if desired. Similarly, a child with arthritis might best use priority seating, but the need for this may not be *visible* to other passengers.

Overall, many bus drivers do a good job, but parents felt that more driver training was needed, and that drivers could be awarded when commended for good service by parents. Parents did comment on the high quality of Muni bus stops and the generally good condition of San Francisco's sidewalks and streets, with their greatest fears relating to the ability of their children to safely cross at intersections. Parents were ambivalent about forming parent carpools, due to reluctance to entrust their children with special needs to others unless they were well known to them. Too, some parents do not have cars, or have children with different needs.

\* Focus groups in Spanish were held on August 21, 2020; September 12, 2020; and March 23, 2021 in cooperation with Support for Families of Children with Disabilities (SFCD), a San Francisco non-profit agency. The groups were arranged by Olga Maldonado, Parent Mentor Coordinator of SFCD, and moderated by Janett Jiménez Santos in Mexico City on behalf of AEI.

## Case Study

# Dallas Independent School District

Rachel Carp, a Dallas resident at the time, carried out in-person interviews in December, 2019, with seven individuals in Dallas, four of whom were parents familiar with the DISD, plus other observers including an education reporter for a large Dallas newspaper and the CEO of a non-profit agency serving persons with disabilities in Texas.

Forty-two percent of Dallas' 1.3 million residents are Hispanic. However, 70% of the more than 150,000 students enrolled in the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) are Hispanic.<sup>1</sup>

Of 13,900 students in special education courses within the DISD in 2018-19, 8,800 were Hispanic, equivalent to 63% of all special education students: Hispanic students are thus somewhat under-represented. Thirty-seven percent of special education students are English learners and 88% are economically disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup>

One observer reported that there is a stigma associated with mental health within the Hispanic community. This stigma could lead parents to not seek out special needs service or to refuse services when offered. Parents might also pull their child out of school and keep them at home as opposed to signing them up for special needs programs. This same observer noted that most Hispanic parents in her community drive their children to school. On the other hand, another observer stated that most parents want to take advantage of the special education resources offered in public schools in the USA, as they are far greater than those offered in schools in Mexico. According to AEI's interviewer it seemed that the burden of advocating for children with special needs falls upon parents and this could be a challenge for many Hispanic parents due to the language barrier, racism, and fear of deportation.

The biggest issue for Hispanic students and parents is the lack of bilingual resources. The DISD struggles to find special education teachers who are fluent in Spanish. There is often reliance on a translator to assist such teachers. Only 32% of all teachers within the DISD were Hispanic as of the 2019-20 school year, yet English learners, a great many of whom are Hispanic, comprise around half of the student body.<sup>3</sup>

The DISD states it currently operates its own fleet of one thousand school buses for those students who are eligible for transportation.<sup>4</sup> Three of the Hispanic mothers of students who were interviewed reported varied experiences with school transportation. One mother with a daughter with special needs reported excellent transportation on a special needs school bus over a period of many years. A second

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<sup>1</sup> The Texas Tribune Public Schools Explorer, 2018-19 school year data from DISD

<sup>2</sup> Mejan, M.C. "2018-19 Evaluation of the Special Education Program," Dallas Independent School District

<sup>3</sup> The Texas Tribune Public Schools Explorer, 2019-20 school year data from DISD

<sup>4</sup> Glaze, T. "Dallas ISD Revamps Bus Fleet", August 22, 2018 PeopleNewspapers

mother stated that no special needs school bus was available for the school her daughter was attending and so she always drove her daughter to and from school. A third mother stated her son is having a good experience in classes. However, she had not realized there are buses for special needs children and her son is currently getting into fights on the regular school bus.

Public transit operated by Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) can supplement school bus service. In many cases, DART service reductions due to the pandemic have reduced available transportation for Hispanic and low-income persons. There is concern that service adjustments in 2022 could further decrease neighborhood service to better serve high-demand areas.

The DISD serves 3,300 homeless students.<sup>5</sup> Promise House, a Dallas agency, has assisted some of these students with around 10,000 bus rides in a recent year, enabling them to ride on DART to the same school even when circumstances cause them to frequently move to different locations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rowles, S. "2018-19 Evaluation of the Homeless Education Program," Dallas Independent School District.

<sup>6</sup> Telephone interview with Promise House staff person on January 26, 2021

## **Part 3: Mexico**

**A focus on pilot projects and implementing concrete plans**

## School transportation is a missing link

In Mexico, basic education is normally divided into three steps: primary school (*primaria*), comprising grades 1-6; junior high school (*secundaria*), grades 7-9; and high school (*preparatoria*), grades 10-12. Throughout all three levels of schooling, attendance is in theory compulsory. Public schools in Mexico are free of charge, *but student transportation costs, where transportation exists, is usually paid by parents who use different modes of formal public transportation (such as most urban bus routes), or less-regulated "informal" public transportation, often found in rural areas.*

To provide special education services for students with disabilities, the Mexican federal Public Education Secretariat (SEP in Spanish) developed two major systems: (1) Support service units for regular schools are designed to provide adaptations to curricula and must be located in schools focusing on inclusive classes and on eliminating or minimizing barriers to learning. Such services are provided by "service units to assist regular education," known as USAER for the initials of the Spanish term. (2) Multiple attention centers (known as CAMs) focus on students who have a harder time being integrated into regular classrooms. The centers focus on children with visual, auditory, physical, and intellectual disabilities and provide specialized resources that are unavailable in regular schools. In addition to offering primary, middle, and high school levels of education, the centers provide vocational education

for students ages 15-22 who have higher levels of physical or mental disabilities.

**Data from the six Mexican states sharing the border of the USA and Mexico: Baja California Norte (BC), Sonora (SO), Chihuahua (CH), Coahuila (CO), Nuevo Leon (NL), and Tamaulipas (TM)**

(Numbers are rounded and approximate)

	BC	SO	CH	CO	NL	TM
General population in <b>millions</b> . Total 22.6 million (ENADID, 2018)	3.6	3.1	3.8	3.1	5.3	3.7
General population with a disability in <b>thousands</b> . Total 1.2 million (ENADID, 2018)	219	177	229	175	245	194
All school students in <b>thousands</b> (primary, secondary, & media superior). Total: 4.4 million (ENADID, 2018)	732	580	760	622	1,041	695
Students with disabilities ages approx. 3-21 in <b>thousands</b> (both CAM & USAER) and as % of <u>all</u> children in school. Total: 195,000. (SEP, 2019-20)	25 3.4%	32 5.5%	17 2.2%	41 6.6%	56 5.4%	24 3.5%

### 1. Population and school attendance

Of Mexico's population of 128 million, approximately 22.6 million live in the six Mexican states touching the common border of the USA and Mexico, as depicted in the box at left. This compares with 30.2 million Hispanic residents in the four USA states touching the same border. The great majority of Mexicans speak Spanish as their first language, but the indigenous

populations of these border states (2.5% in Sonora and 3.5% in Chihuahua) continue to use their own languages as well. Around 4.4 million students attend the public

schools of the six Mexican border states, compared to 7 million Hispanic students in the four USA border states. However, only about 195,000 of the students in the Mexican states were in special education classes prior to the pandemic, compared to more than 800,000 Hispanic students in the four USA states. The fact that four times more Hispanic children and youth are in special education in the USA states than Mexican children and youth in the Mexican states is disturbing. Only a part of this discrepancy is explained by the presence of 37% more Hispanic students in the USA states than Mexican students in the Mexican states. Also, a lower percentage of Mexican students are diagnosed with a disability than in the USA. The Mexican government (INEGI) estimated in 2019 that only 47% of Mexican children and youth ages 5-29 are in classes, but the extended age range makes it difficult to interpret this finding.

However, a major cause of this marked divergence appears to be a lack of school attendance by students who would otherwise qualify, largely due to the lack of affordable transportation to get to and from school in Mexico compared to the far more favorable situation in the USA. Statements by colleagues in different parts of Mexico tend to confirm estimates that only a portion of children with disabilities attend school on a given day. "If we had the transportation we needed, average daily attendance would be 50% higher," noted a social worker at CAM 7 in Valle de Bravo in the State of Mexico. "I think its about 40% of the students who have to stay home due to a lack of funds for transport, especially from outlying areas," stated the supervisor of a CAM in Huejutla, State of Hidalgo, in a video posted on AEI's website.<sup>1</sup>



## 2. Transport by school bus

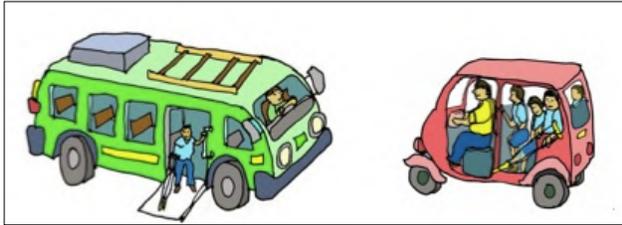
As in most of the world, wealthier parents of children with disability can afford private schools providing special education classes. Children, with or without disabilities, get to school by private car, or by transportation provided by the school. Mexico City has a system of school bus transportation to private schools in that city, designed to prevent traffic jams caused by parents who queue up at the schools, and to improve air quality by replacing the congestion of private cars bringing children to schools. Urban centers in Mexico are more likely to have school bus transportation than rural areas. For example, the municipality of Querétero reported a fleet of 57 school buses, including accessible vehicles. The school buses in Querétero – one of which is shown in the photo above – are used by students with disabilities in both public and private schools.<sup>2</sup> Dedicated school bus transport scarcely exists in rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from CAM 7 in Valle de Bravo, State of Mexico, is from social worker Sayde Guzmán Duran, during a visit to this school in March 2015, as cited in AEI's June 2015 Newsletter. The quote in an AEI video is from a CAM in Huejutla, State of Hidalgo, in June, 2017. This is a common observation, e.g. "53.5% of children and youth with disability do not go to school," headlined a Dec. 3, 2015 edition of *Milenio*, a major newspaper in Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Photo of school bus in Querétero is by Annette Williams, from the January 2018 AEI Newsletter. This program currently continues, according to an interview on October 5, 2021, with Alberto Morales Silvera who is actively promoting this project in private and public schools in Querétero.

# Taking Public Transportation to School in Mexico



**Public buses and moto-taxis may, or may not, be available for parents of children with disabilities.** - Images by Eli Noyes

About half of people in Mexico have access to a personal vehicle, and poorer people are dependent on walking or taking public transportation. The six Mexican states that border the United States have poverty rates in the 20-30% range as defined by the Mexican government in 2018, compared to a national poverty rate of approximately 44% in 2020.



Public transportation is far more available in Mexico City and other large Mexican cities than in rural areas where there may be no transportation at all. Indeed, Mexico's modern urban bus rapid transit systems offer an accessible option for some children with special needs to get to school, as illustrated in a video in English and Spanish versions on AEI's website at [www.globalride-sf.org](http://www.globalride-sf.org). Other bus systems generally lack access features.



A motorcycle pulling a passenger cabin (top) is sometimes used in Mexico to transport school children and others. The pointers in Spanish from top left are "smaller vehicles equal lower fares," "low-cost cell phones call vehicles to the door," "drivers need training to provide courteous and safe service," and "seat belts are needed for a safer trip." The photo at bottom (not from Mexico) shows a small vehicle with a solid passenger door to provide safer transport for children with disabilities. - Photo at top by Tom Rickert

One approach to keeping fares low while providing a degree of accessibility is to opt for smaller vehicles such as three-wheeled or four-wheeled moto-taxis (a passenger cabin pulled by a motorcycle, in top photo of box at left) which are found in some rural areas and small towns in Mexico as well as in several suburbs of Mexico City, such as Chimalhuacán.

But the poorest parents cannot afford even these lower fares. Our guide, *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*, includes a cost scenario for Mexicans living in extreme poverty. After meeting needs for food, only about 10% of family income is available for public transportation,

typically by bus.<sup>1</sup> This does not go far enough to cover the cost of sending a student to and from school. While using a moto-taxi does indeed lower fares, parents living in extreme poverty could only cover about one third of the trips needed to get their child to and from school even with this low-cost type of transport. Such parents, often the mother, must balance the difficult decision of whether or not to send her child to school with having time and money to care for her other children or to pay for her own transportation if she must work outside her home in order to feed her family. (A large portion of families with a disabled child are headed by the mother.)

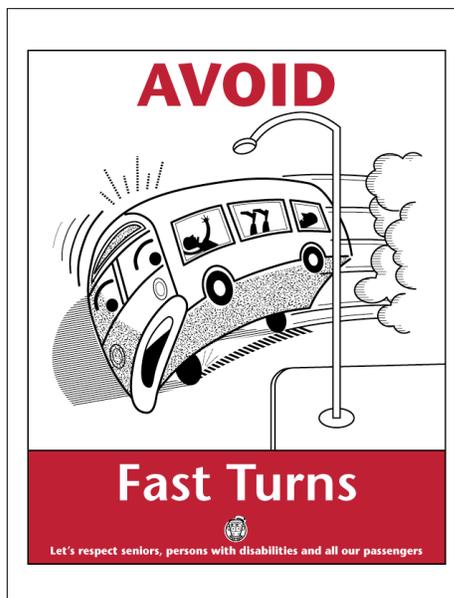
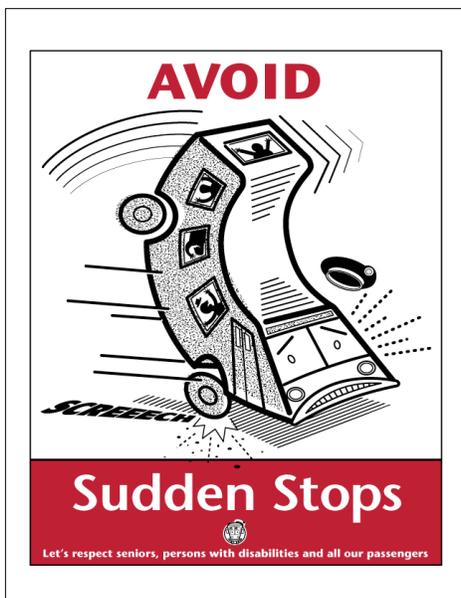
**Parents and children with disabilities need your help**

- **Always pick up passengers with disabilities.**
- **Drive safely and allow time for passengers with disabilities to sit down or hold on.**
- **Avoid sudden starts and stops, slow down before curves, and stop as close to the curb as you can.**
- **Call out major stops and requested stops for blind passengers.**

**Tips for parents with children with disabilities**

- **Have your exact fare ready.**
- **Take a seat as soon as you can.**
- **Stow any transfer or pass after you sit down.**
- **Use a seat near the driver if possible.**
- **Hold on if you must stand.**
- **Do not change seats while the bus is moving.**

This analysis illustrates the importance of disability awareness training for public transportation drivers. It also puts a focus on monetary or other disincentives which currently keep many drivers from serving intending passengers with disabilities. The *Transit Access Training Toolkit* of the World Bank is available in English and Spanish to assist with needed resources for both public transportation drivers and for parents, especially in smaller town or rural areas where regular training resources may be lacking. See the images at left of a pocket card (top) or motivational signage (bottom) for bus drivers, adapted from this publication.<sup>2</sup> Be-



beyond issues of vehicle design and driver training, the more fundamental issues of low incomes for public transport drivers as well as many passengers remain to be addressed.

<sup>1</sup> Data extrapolated from poverty statistics in Mexico published by the Wilson Center, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Images adapted from Rickert, T., *Transit Access Training Toolkit*, World Bank, 2009.

## Case study

# Tijuana, Baja California

Baja California reported more than 25,000 children and youth receiving special education services during the 2018-19 school year. Most of these students were in regular schools with supplemental USAER programs for special education services. Approximately 10-15% were in 60 specialized centers for multiple assistance (CAM).<sup>1</sup>

Tijuana is the largest city in Baja California, with a population of around two million. It is part of the greater San Diego-Tijuana metropolitan area of about five million people. The diverse population of Tijuana includes migrants from the United States due to its proximity to San Diego and the lower cost of living compared to the United States, as well as migrants from elsewhere in Mexico and from Central and South America.

Using various sources of data, 63,000 children and youth in Tijuana are reported to have a disability. Within this group, the largest numbers of reported disabilities relate to vision, the ability to walk or move, intellectual disability and the ability to speak or communicate, with each disability challenging at least one fifth of children and youth with special needs. Of those with disabilities in Tijuana, about 45% have completed primary education, 18% having completed secondary education and 15% having completed post-basic education. Overall, the data indicates that only a very low percentage completed a university education. Those with visual impairments have the highest level of educational attainment, followed by those with motor or physical disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

In May of 2019, three Mexican and American members of the team preparing this



report visited Tijuana for pre-planned meetings with officials and others with an interest in school transportation for children and youth with disabilities (photo at left).<sup>3</sup> Those interviewed by the team welcomed our visit, and meetings were held with educators, teachers, a large bus

company, and a planning official, as well as with parents and persons with disabilities. During 2020, one of our team in Mexico reviewed government and private sector websites in Tijuana to better understand the issues facing students and parents trying to get to school. This research confirmed the lack of accessible pedestrian environ-

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<sup>1</sup> Data gathered by Daniela Briseño Arriaga as part of her research for this case study, citing Principales Cifras Estadísticas 2019, Secretaría de Educación de Baja California. See <http://www.educacionbc.edu.mx/publicaciones/estadisticas/2019/>

<sup>2</sup> Persons with disabilities ages 5-29 years in the Municipality of Tijuana by 2020. Censo de Población y Vivienda. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2020/#Tabulados>

<sup>3</sup> Photo this page is by Tom Rickert in May, 2019, taken at a meeting with staff of a "CAED" unit: An open system for highly motivated students with disabilities of any age.

ments for persons with disabilities, finding that the problem was recognized by planning documents for Tijuana. However, specific plans for implementing greater accessibility were not found. Documents also discuss the problem of inaccessible public transit and the need to adapt transit vehicles for persons with disabilities. However, discussion of a strategy for carrying out projects to address this issue was not found.

Public transit remains generally inaccessible. No single source of information in Tijuana was found for persons with disabilities to consult regarding fares, service hours, or access to vehicles or transit stops. Some documents treat school transportation as a tool to combat road congestion or to reduce overall school dropouts, although the actual provision of school transportation for children and youth with disabilities is not discussed. The major government social service agency, DIF, provides limited transport for persons with disabilities, who must contact this agency for information or service.

It is clear that officials in Tijuana are aware of many of the problems facing persons with disabilities. But funding and/or the will to address these problems is lacking.



Beginnings have been made in providing some curb ramps with tactile surfaces and safer intersections, but signage is usually not provided to assist pedestrians and public transit users in their way-finding from one point to another. Generally, such improvements are lacking for those living in lower-income areas, where a lack of sidewalks is a major concern (top photo). There is evidence of improvements of pedestrian infrastructure adjacent to some of the ten Centers for Multiple Assistance (CAMs) found in Tijuana (bottom photo).<sup>4</sup> In others, however, there is a complete lack of access features to assist parents or caretakers with their children. There is a lack of planning to create accessible "trip chains" which connect up each stage of a journey from a residence to a bus stop, to being

able to board the bus, find a preferred seat, alight at a bus stop, and walk or roll to a destination. One observer noted that it is like running a marathon for a mother to enroll her children in a CAM and get them there every day, especially if the school insists that the mother serve as an aide to care for the child while the school is in session. These demands on the time of parents, and the time and money to get children to and from schools, are a major concern.

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<sup>4</sup> Photos from Google Maps gathered by Daniela Briseño Arriaga.

## Takeaways from four school transport surveys

Here are key results from four surveys, taken at different times and places in five Mexican states. These provide deeper insights into issues of school transportation for children with special needs in Mexico and beyond.

**Survey # 1:** A survey of parents of children with disabilities at CAM 7, a Center for Multiple Assistance in Valle de Bravo in the State of Mexico, taken in 2015. Valle de Bravo is an urban town with around 60,000 inhabitants. The State of Mexico surrounds much of Mexico City. Survey coordinator: Janett Jiménez Santos

**Survey # 2:** A survey of 28 different Centers for Multiple Assistance in the State of Hidalgo, taken in 2016. Survey coordinator: María Santa Perez Herrera

**Survey # 3:** A survey of CAM 19 in Pachuca de Soto, the largest city in the State of Hidalgo with around 300,000 population, taken in 2021. Survey coordinator: Manuel Hernández Sánchez

**Survey # 4:** Responses of five individuals who work as managers or advisors of different Centers for the Attention of Students with Disabilities (CAED). This is a program to prepare highly motivated students with disabilities to further their individual studies for periods of their own choosing, perhaps leading to more advanced education upon completion of their *bachillerato* degree. These interviews took place in 2021 with CAED staff at two schools in the state of Sonora, two in Chihuahua, and one school in Tamaulipas. Survey coordinator: Javier Guerrero Aguirre

	Survey # 1 CAM 7 Valle de Bravo	Survey # 2 28 CAMs State of Hidalgo	Survey # 3 CAM 19 Pachuca de Soto	Survey # 4 5 CAED programs in 3 states
# Responses	39 parent responses	105 parent responses	73 parent responses	5 interviews with staff or advisors
Main types of disability	multiple - 38% intellectual - 36%	multiple - 35% intellectual - 40%		intellectual, then auditory or visual
Use public transportation?	74% 'taxi' (alone or shared), 13% DIF or other unit, 5% private car	55% public transit 17% private car 10% walking	52% private car 40% public combi, then motorcycle	56% public bus 24% private car 12% walking 8% taxi
Days/week at school (most frequent replies)	30% 1 day 29% 2 days 18% 5 days	62% 5 days 16% 4 days 11% 3 days		students average attendance is 3 days/week
Length of trips	74% have trip length of 20-60 <i>minutes</i>	51% report trip length of 15 <i>kilo-meters</i> or less		30-60 <i>minutes</i> travel time for most students
Role of transport	38% state that transport problems are the main reason for	41% see transport as the main factor in their mobility to school, but	73% state that transport by combi is regular and constant in	3 out of 5 state that better roads and public transport would

	CAM 7	28 CAMs	CAM 19	5 CAED programs
(continued)	low attendance, and 69% cite transport as main mobility problem	transport problems are not seen as a leading factor in low attendance at school.	this heavily urban area with short headways between vehicles.	greatly increase attendance. Poor location of CAEDs is also a concern.

### Comments



**In the survey of 28 CAM schools noted above, 55% of children with special needs used public transportation to get to and from school. In rural areas, much of this transportation is on trucks converted to serve as public transportation with bench seats mounted on the sides of the passenger area. Mothers are expected to accompany their children to school, as documented in June 2017 by a student video crew from San Francisco State University in films prepared for Access Exchange International, posted on YouTube, and linked from the website of AEI at [www.globalride-sf.org](http://www.globalride-sf.org). Safety features, let alone accessibility features, are lacking.**

- Permissions by participants in videos are on file at BECA, SFSU, in San Francisco

- 1) Unfortunately, of the more than 200 respondents to these surveys or interviews, no one mentioned the current use of a dedicated school bus going to any of the 34 schools discussed above, nor were dedicated school buses mentioned in the inputs into our case study of Tijuana with its 10 Centers for Multiple Assistance (CAMs). Except for CAM 19 in Pachuca, which is a heavily urbanized area, lower-income families mainly use public transportation to access special education for their children with disabilities. Even in CAM 19, 40% use public transportation to access the CAM.
- 2) As in the United States, intellectual disabilities are the most frequent challenge facing students with special needs. This underlines the importance of travel training to enable students to use public transportation.

- 3) Although not included in the chart above, wheelchairs were used by around one in five children or youth at CAM 7 in Valle de Bravo and at the many CAMs in the State of Hidalgo. This does not imply that public transit is accessible with lifts or ramps. As in most developing countries, children and youth using wheelchairs may be secured in a seat during travel. Wheelchairs may be folded within the vehicle, or the school may supply a wheelchair upon arrival at the school.
- 4) Walking or rolling to school from one's home is unlikely as the location of schools offering special education components tend to be far from most homes. Only 10% of students at the 28 CAMs in Hidalgo and only 3% of CAM 7 students in Valle de Bravo walked to school. Only 12% of CAED students walked to school. No one was reported as rolling to school in their wheelchair, although of course this does occur when possible. *When prioritizing accessible pedestrian infrastructure for special education at regular or specialized schools, the main need is between the home and the bus stop, and between the bus stop and the school.* As discussed in our case study of CAM 19 in Pachuca, it is just as important to make pedestrian infrastructure accessible at bus and private car stops in the vicinity of schools as it is at the school itself.<sup>1</sup>
- 5) The lack of safe, convenient, economical, and accessible school transportation is one of the main reasons why students miss school. This situation is aggravated by not having a dedicated school bus option with aides provided on board the bus when necessary. This forces parents – mainly mothers – to stay with their child at school or face two round trips a day on public transport and pay for all four of the one-way trips. If necessary, the use of trained aides on high-use public bus routes should be prioritized to enable parents to send their children to school. Ideally, transportation by dedicated school buses with safety and accessibility features should be put in place to enable parents to send their children to school. For good practices in Latin America, readers are referred to case studies of Curitiba, Brazil's, accessible school bus fleet, and to the use of transportation subsidies for parents in Costa Rica. Both studies appear in AEI's guide, *Bridging the Gap, Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries*, posted on our website.

The four surveys in this section need to be supplemented by further studies to quantify transportation impacts on school attendance by children with disabilities. Recommendations at the front of this report also indicate areas where further research is needed.

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<sup>1</sup> This finding does not imply that accessible walkways, street crossings, and other pedestrian features should not also be prioritized in other areas. The closer to any school, the more such infrastructure tends to be used by students and staff, both with and without disabilities, who learn or teach at that school. And, of course, all persons with disabilities living in neighborhoods without accessible sidewalks or intersections need these improvements every time they leave their homes for any purpose. The goal, over time, is that all pedestrian infrastructure become increasingly accessible to everyone.

## Case study

# CAM 19 in Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo

The state of Hidalgo has a population of around three million. Pachuca de Soto is Hidalgo's largest city, with a population of around 300,000. The Center for Multiple Assistance (CAM) #19 in Pachuca is clearly led by a committed principal and staff. CAM 19 is popular with parents, most of whom are middle class with more mobility than the often poverty-stricken residents of rural areas. Most of the more than one hundred students at CAM 19 attend school regularly.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The current access issues facing CAM 19

While in many ways an exemplary school, CAM 19 is faced with an all-too-typical range of accessibility issues, including an inaccessible building, lack of dedicated school bus service, and inaccessible pedestrian infrastructure.

1) PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: The public transportation to CAM 19 lacks accessibility features and requires many parents to make one or even two transfers to get to the transit stops nearest the school. Despite this, 40% of students arrive via public transit at stops near CAM 19 while 52% arrive via private car.

The map on the following page depicts the approximate location of most of CAM 19's

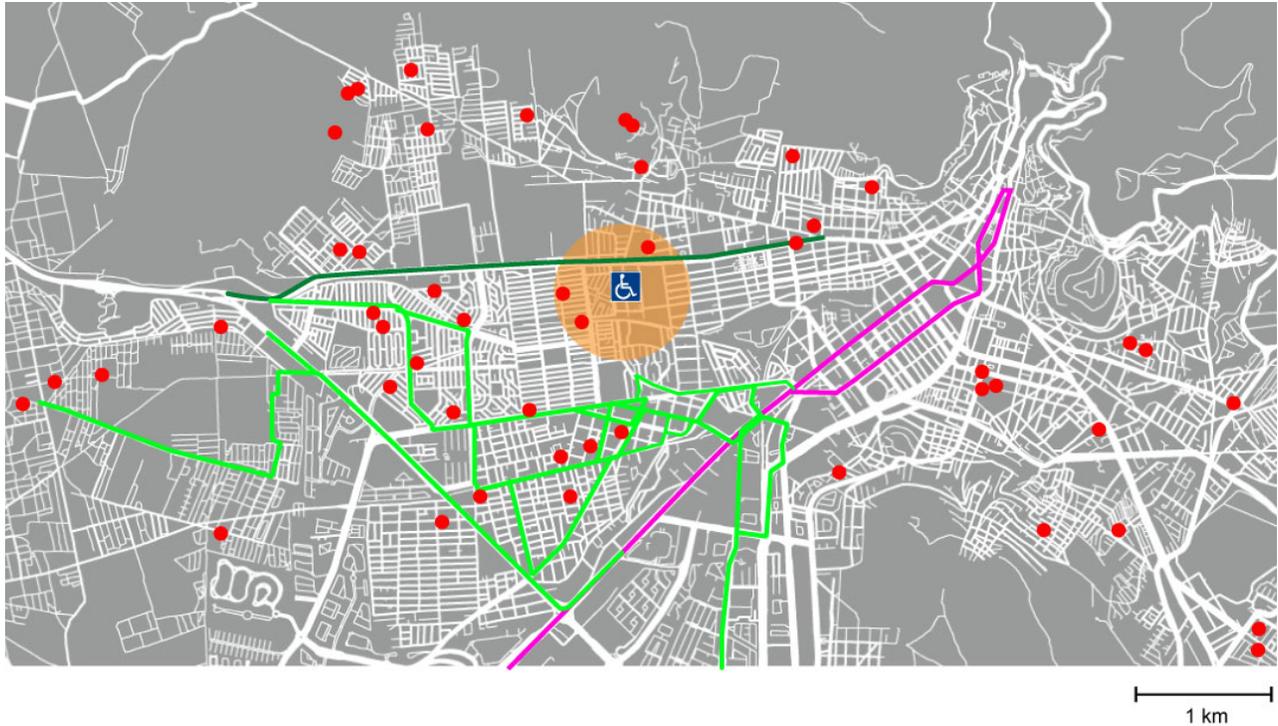


students, along with the major bus line and feeder routes. Some students live beyond the area covered by the map. Student privacy is protected by the scale of the map which covers an area of 45 square kilometers (17 square miles). There are private operators that run vans, locally known as 'combis' or 'colectivos' (photo at left). The major transport routes in Pachuca are run by the government Tuzobús. Tuzobús

provides a bus rapid transit line and feeder service with vans. Routes 17 and 19 are highly used by CAM 19 students to provide feeder service to and from the trunk line. Once caretakers and children arrive at the closest public transportation stops near CAM 19, they are faced with walking or rolling several blocks in order to reach the school.

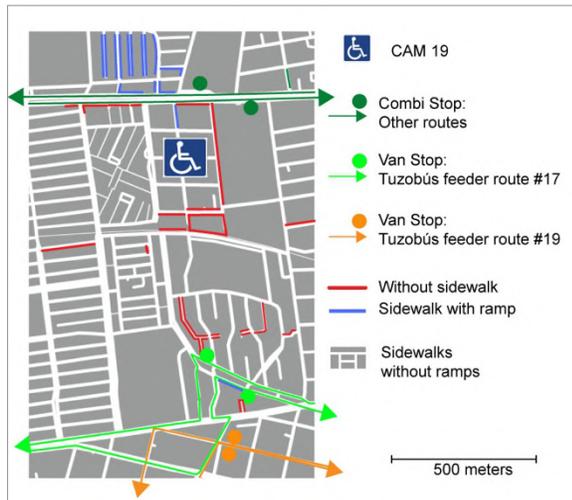
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<sup>1</sup> This case study is a cooperative project between Janett Jiménez Santos in Mexico City, Tom Rickert of AEI, and State of Hidalgo representatives María Santa Perez Herrera (SEP), Sofía Alquicirez Tellez (DIF), Manuel Hernández Sánchez (the principal of CAM 19), Oscar Granados Ordaz (INEGI), María Mejía Ortiz (INEGI), and Alberto Ramírez Bracho (Secretaría de Movilidad y Transporte) including two interviews between Tom Rickert and Manuel Hernández Sánchez in September 2021. This team presented a case study on CAM 19 and other matters at a Congress of State Academics in Hidalgo held via Zoom on September 27, 2021. Follow up meetings have discussed various projects resulting from this collaboration.



- CAM 19
- 500 meters radius
- Student neighbor
- Other routes (combis)
- Tuzobús feeder routes (vans)
- Tuzobús bus rapid transit line

The map, prepared by INEGI, shows that over 90% of CAM 19's students do not live within walking distance of the school, the more so given the inability of caregivers to walk with or carry students with different disabilities over distances that would be walkable by students *without* disabilities. Much the same situation faces parents and caretakers of students with special needs who attend integrated (USAER) schools. This is true around the world: Without vehicular transportation, most students with disabilities are unable to get to school.



2) PEDESTRIAN PATHS: **Parents and children must alight at stops depicted on the map at left.** This map depicts the streets in the immediate vicinity of CAM 19 and the location of the two most-used van stops serving CAM 19. The map also depicts the location of streets without sidewalks (red) and sidewalks with curb ramps (blue). The existing curb ramps do not provide an accessible travel chain to CAM 19. Using Google photos, barriers along the existing pedestrian path were identified. Photos are provided on the next page illustrating barriers along this pathway. (INEGI map modified by Daniela Briseño Arriaga)

**Pedestrian access from transit stops to CAM 19 is depicted on the map below.** Even those sidewalks which have adequate width for a wheelchair are interrupted by utility poles, signs, driveways, and other barriers. (INEGI map modified by Daniela Briseño)



Currently, the pedestrian path from the Tuzobús van stop (bottom right) to CAM 19 includes barriers for caretakers and children with disabilities as they navigate their way to the school. For some, it is easier to walk in the street (center left).



3) THE SCHOOL BUILDING ITSELF: This is a three-story building which would require an expensive elevator to provide access for those students with disabilities who find it difficult or impossible to climb stairs. In the absence of an elevator, CAM 19 must arrange classes on the ground floor for students using wheelchairs, in spite of issues of classroom size and equipment that change for wheelchair users and other students over the years. As a result, CAM 19 has enrolled only three wheelchair users in their current 2021-22 school year class,

which is a lower rate than for many other CAMs in our surveys.

## 2. A way forward for CAM 19

CAM 19 is seeking both short-term and longer-term solutions to the problems of accessible transportation and pedestrian paths as well as accessibility to the school building itself. Elements of such a plan include:

**Seek bus service directly to the school.** Some alternatives include

- 1) The *ideal* solution is to establish dedicated school bus service in Pachuca, prioritized for students with disabilities at CAM schools and for "USAER" schools which integrate students with disabilities into their program.
- 2) Establish van routes that take into consideration the longer-term needs of CAM students. This could be another long-term though not ideal solution. One solution would prioritize the use of vans with a floor height similar to the height of the van stops, combined with a short ramp operated by the driver along with other needed access features.
- 3) Another solution would be to provide a part-time vehicle link between the van stops and the CAM during the key periods when students arrive or depart from school. CAM 19 had some success with this approach in the past, using volunteer drivers or others in a position to learn safe driving skills to operate a vehicle to make the short round trips from the transit stops to the school for the hour before and the hour following regular school hours. However, this turned out to be only a short-term solution when funding ceased for even a part-time driver and the vehicle was no longer available.
- 4) If needed, relocate CAM 19 to a better site served by immediately adjacent transit stops, as well as an adequate off-street location for parents or caregivers to safely park adjacent to or on school property. This touches on the basic issue that the government agencies in charge of procuring property and buildings for special education schools may be different from the department which operates such schools. It is all too easy to end up denying parents their ability to send their

children with special needs to school, due to the time and money needed to provide transportation to poorly located schools without access features.

In addition, transport subsidies could be considered for lower-income parents, providing print (script) or electronic fares to enable the government to directly pay the transport provider. With any of the above solutions, the use of aides on board the vehicle should be considered when appropriate.

**Prioritize access features along the sidewalks connecting transit stops with the school,** including

- 1) Sidewalk availability: Adding sidewalks where needed
- 2) Sidewalk width: Increasing width in cases where sidewalks are not usable by a wheelchair user
- 3) Sidewalk obstacles: Route sidewalks around utility poles and signs which block pedestrians and establish policies to eliminate such obstacles when new construction occurs
- 4) Sidewalk surface: Repair damaged sidewalks and create a continuous surface not blocked by driveways and at a safe angle for persons using wheelchairs
- 5) Pedestrian crossings: Most pedestrian crossings lack curb ramps or pedestrian-level crosswalks and they are needed along the entire travel path to the school
- 6) Safety at intersections: Add crosswalks plus signage and traffic control devices at intersections where indicated
- 7) Local transit stops: Identify the transit lines with route numbers or other designations
- 8) Local transit stops: Depending on level of usage, provide shelters against the weather, along with seating or supports for use when waiting for a van or combi stop

These measures could then become pilot projects and encourage inclusion of these features in other areas. Keep in mind that it is far less expensive to build in accessibility at the beginning of a project, compared to making it accessible once already built.

**Integrate transportation and pedestrian accessibility into school building accessibility**

A school doesn't mean much to children and youth with disabilities who cannot reach that school. The entire travel chain by vehicle should be accessible: home to transit stop to vehicle to transit stop, then into the school building and within the school building. And it should also be accessible by walking or rolling in a wheelchair: pedestrian path to school, then into and within the school building. Upon reflection, we all know this is true. It is part of the larger story of mobility for all people everywhere. And that is part of the larger story of empathizing with others. This story is ongoing. It crosses every border. It only deepens as time goes by.

## Part 4: Appendices

## Appendix 1: Sample Driver Training Curriculum

### Covid-related training

- Preparing and cleaning the vehicle
- Guidelines for students riding to school
- Special driver requirements

### Student-related content

- Specific service requirements of the student(s) being transported
- Specific emergency medical procedures (may including CPR, seizure response, and other procedures required by the student's needs and appropriate laws)
- Specific student emergency evacuation plans

### Driving skills

- Safe operation of the vehicle for the traffic setting and conditions
- Safe pickup and delivery practices (including proper passing of custody at stops and school sites)
- Map and route document reading
- Proper use of vehicle controls (brakes, lights, steering, etc)
- Vehicle-related emergencies

### Vehicle/Equipment-related content

- Daily pre-trip inspection
- Maintenance requirements
- Vehicle status and requirements for reporting problems
- Correct use of accessibility features (including any lifts, ramps, car seats, or tie-downs)
- Safe storage of equipment and belongings during transport

### Disability-related content

- Types of disabilities and their characteristics
- General disability awareness and sensitivity
- Student behavior management
- Safety rules including noise limits, food restrictions, and proper seating
- Dealing with blood-borne pathogens and other bodily fluids
- General first aid procedures

### Policy/Law compliance content

- Reporting evidence of child abuse
- Reporting an incident on the vehicle
- Child-care and custody requirements
- Attendance, time-keeping, and other related procedures
- Communications procedures (with parents, school staff, and transportation office staff)
- Testing for drugs and alcohol use
- Self-reporting of health condition impacting safe driving
- Distracted and inattentive driving
- Customer service
- Traffic laws
- Equipment-related laws, for example about seatbelts and other child safety restraints
- Driver and vehicle licensing requirements

## Appendix 2: Student information for drivers and schools

School \_\_\_\_\_  
 New Student  
 Discontinue Transportation  
 Update Information

This information on each student with a disability can be modified according to the situation

### TRANSPORTATION REQUEST

**Updated** \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: First \_\_\_\_\_ Last \_\_\_\_\_ Nickname \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_  
Student ID # \_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Addresses or vehicle stop locations

Pick-up address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_  
Drop-off address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE MARK APPROPRIATE BOXES AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL DETAIL IN THE NOTES SECTION

#### Special Equipment

Wheelchair  
 Walker / cane  
 Car seat  
 Safety vest  
 Oxygen transported

#### Medical Factors

Hearing impaired  
 Visually impaired  
 Tracheotomy  
 Medical assistant required  
 Suctioning required  
 Seizures (type/frequency/duration) \_\_\_\_\_

Monitor airway  
 Insulin dependent  
 Severe allergies (describe)

#### Safety Factors

Walks to bus unassisted  
 Walks to bus but needs assistance  
 Preferential seating (describe)  
 Requires assistance walking  
 Aggressive or dangerous behavior  
 May run away  
 Must be secured in vehicle  
 Unable to communicate  
 Difficulty following directions  
 Medication to be transported  
 Must be met by \_\_\_\_\_

#### Notes and other descriptions

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Information on this form supersedes all prior forms.

Authorized by \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Travel Training

Training is necessary for all aspects of life. This is especially the case for children with special needs. Training for transportation-related activities can roughly be grouped into four categories:

- How to wait for the bus,
- How to board the bus,
- How to ride the bus, and
- How to exit the bus.

Although there is a great deal of overlap between skill areas, there is also overlap with skills learned in school. These areas of overlap can be leveraged to ease the learning process. For example, presenting the bus pass is an essential skill for riding the bus. It overlaps with presenting the bus pass on public transit. However, it also overlaps with presenting the library card to the librarian when checking out a book. So, in teaching the skill, the teacher would start with the area the student should know, like the library card. Then the teacher would teach about the connection to the bus pass, and finally how public transit is like riding the school bus.

Transportation training teaches many transportation-related life skills which are intended to be used for the remainder of the individual's life. Therefore, it is important to teach them properly and to refresh the training periodically. The skills taught can improve the safety of students immediately, but also on an ongoing basis. They train the students to behave properly in and around buses and other types of public transportation. Beyond that, they build self-esteem and help the student's value in the eyes of others. In the process of reinforcing learned behaviors and skills they build the ability of the student to be a more productive citizen.

Students need to acquire many skills while waiting safely at a transit stop. Chief amongst them is waiting out of the danger zone. However, saying goodbye to parents, standing in line properly, and recognizing the bus and driver are also very important. Many of these skills also benefit life inside and out of school. For example, a life skill that carries over in many aspects of life is waiting in line. If students can master this skill, it will provide lifetime benefits.

There is much to be learned about entering the bus. Children with disabilities tend to not wait for the bus to stop, so it is important for them to wait for the door to open before nearing the bus. Then the student must learn to hold the handrail, show the bus pass, and secure the seat-belt. These skills are essential for safe riding on both the school bus and public transit.

There are several skills involved in riding the bus properly. If students are to be allowed to eventually ride a public bus they must learn to stay seated, use a quiet voice, and listen to the driver's instructions. Learning to ask for help when needed is important. Students with special needs need to learn how and when to seek help from the driver and other riders.

Knowing what to do to get off the bus properly is also very important. Therefore, learning to listen to the driver's instructions, gather belongings, and locate a person meeting them is vital. Also it is important to know how to disembark by descending any steps properly and holding on to the handrail. Finally, it is important to say goodbye to the driver.

## Appendix 4: Seeking transportation for your child with special needs

Frequently, parents of children with special needs do not receive assistance in transporting their child to school. This lack of help may result in the child missing out on education altogether. This unfortunate situation might be overcome with the help of various public agencies, charities, religious organizations and private donors. Oftentimes, opportunities are missed because parents are not familiar with how to share their needs/concerns. The following pointers explain the various parts of a communication with an agency or a potential supporter regardless of the mode of communication (via phone call, letter, or email).

Suggestion	Example
<p><b>Introduce yourself politely</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dear Minister Garces</li> <li>2. Dear Principal Gloria</li> </ol>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am a single parent of a seven-year-old who cannot get to school because his wheelchair is broken.</li> <li>2. My child has trouble walking. During the rainy season the walking path becomes so slippery and full of puddles that she cannot safely get to school.</li> <li>3. The school bus at _____ School is no longer operational. We need a replacement vehicle so that my child can get to school.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Explain why you contacted this person</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Since you are in charge of the department of public roads, I am hoping you can help me.</li> <li>2. Since you are known to provide wheelchairs for low-income parents whose children require them, I am hoping you can help me.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Be very specific about what you are asking for</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My child needs a larger car seat. He is 122 cm. (4 feet) tall and weighs 35 kg. (77 lbs.)</li> <li>2. My child needs a safety belt to keep him from falling out of the moto-taxi.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Discuss future communications</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How may I contact you next week by telephone?</li> <li>2. You may contact me any day after 3 p.m. My cell phone # is _____.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Ask for a referral</b></p> <p>If you are not able to solve this problem, could you please refer me to someone who might help me?</p>	

## Appendix 5: Encouraging parent initiatives: Car pools, cooperatives, and mobility management

Especially in countries where school bus services are lacking, parents can sometimes take the initiative to pool their resources or organize a car pool to carry each other's children to school. Parents could organize themselves and publicize efforts to form car pools on a web site, in a local newspaper, or through posters at the local city hall or marketplace. School districts could refer other parents interested in forming their own car pools to such an organization. This could make it easier for school districts to cooperate without taking on the risk of being legally responsible for the safe operation of the car pool or having to involve themselves in the details of carpool arrangements. Or a government agency could promote car pools of various kinds, including car pools to assist with transportation to school.



Even in some areas where poverty issues rule out car pools, government agencies in Mexico could consider assisting parents with some or all of the funds to purchase or rent a used or new vehicle and thus encourage parent cooperatives to operate their own school transportation when the government fails to do so. The poster at left is available at AEI's website at [www.globalride-sf.org](http://www.globalride-sf.org). Car pools or parent cooperatives require good leadership when it comes to making sure parents are responsible and have no criminal record. Only parents who drive safely and are reliable should participate.

Parents could also work together to create an agreement with a commercial taxi or other transportation service to get their children to school in a reliable way. It might be possible to get a lower-cost agreement by making sure the transportation to school is not during the peak hour when there is a lot of competing demand for transportation. Schools should keep this in mind when they plan their school hours.

When multiple parents in a neighborhood must use public transportation to get their children to school, they might consider an agreement for parents from different families to divide up the work of accompanying their children to and from school when this is required. Or perhaps a cooperating school could provide transportation only *to the school* for some students, and just the *ride back home* for others, thus reducing costs of both parents and the school while making it possible for parents to divide up the remaining work.

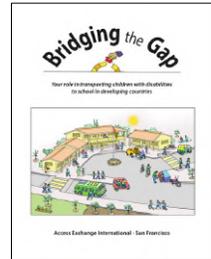
Sometimes local NGOs or communities of faith may be able to assist, perhaps when their own vehicles, if any, are not in use for other purposes.

Readers are referred to our guide, *Bridging the Gap*, for a longer discussion of resource sharing and mobility management which includes the approaches discussed on this page.

## Appendix 6: More information on school transportation from Access Exchange International

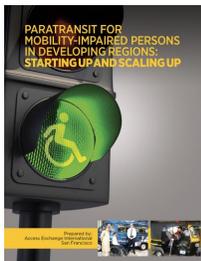
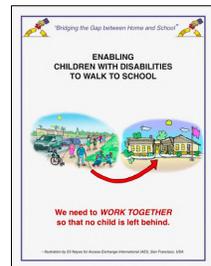
Go to our website at [www.globalride-sf.org](http://www.globalride-sf.org) for the following publications, videos, posters, & flyers. **All are available in both English and Spanish versions.**

- *Bridging the Gap: Your role in transporting children with disabilities to school in developing countries.* Also available in Hindi, Japanese, and both traditional and simplified Chinese versions. (Approx. 150 pages)



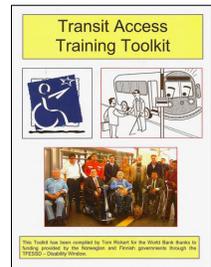
- A toolkit titled, *Let's get children with disabilities to school: Education and transportation officials need to work together* (11 pages)

- A toolkit promoting good practices in assisting children to walk or roll to school (10 pages)

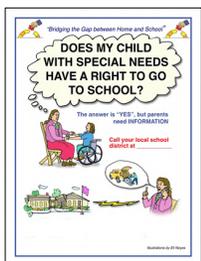


- *Paratransit for mobility-impaired persons in developing countries: Starting up and scaling up* (88 pages). The focus is on smaller vehicles.

- *Transit Access Training Toolkit* (prepared by AEI staff for the World Bank, 31 pages). The focus is on public transportation.



- Three bilingual videos, filmed in the Mexican state of Hidalgo and in Mexico City, titled "A Missing Link: Transporting children with disabilities to school," "Promoting volunteerism around the world," and "Bus rapid transit helps children get to school."



- A series of posters and flyers promoting good practices to assist children with disabilities to ride, walk or roll to school.

## Appendix 7: Sources for further information

Go to a search engine such as Google if a website does not open.

Title or subject	Location
American School Bus Council	<a href="http://www.americanschoolbuscouncil.org/">http://www.americanschoolbuscouncil.org/</a>
Atención de los Alumnos con Discapacidad . .	<a href="https://subeducacionbasica.edomex.gob.mx">https://subeducacionbasica.edomex.gob.mx</a>
Building and Maintaining a Partnership with Special Educators (Special Needs Transportation, School Bus Fleet)	<a href="http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/10047395/building-and-maintaining-a-partnership-with-special-educators">http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/10047395/building-and-maintaining-a-partnership-with-special-educators</a>
California's Special Education Transportation Guidelines	<a href="https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/lr/trnsprtgdlns.asp">https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/lr/trnsprtgdlns.asp</a>
Entornos Escolares Seguros en Escuelas de Educación Básica	<a href="https://www.educacionbc.edu.mx/departamentos/partsocial/archivos2020/convivencia%20escolar/Entornos_Ecolares_Seguros_vf.pdf">https://www.educacionbc.edu.mx/departamentos/partsocial/archivos2020/convivencia%20escolar/Entornos_Ecolares_Seguros_vf.pdf</a>
Guidelines for Safe Transportation of Pre-school Age Children in Buses	<a href="https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/buses/Guide1999/prekfinal.htm">https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/buses/Guide1999/prekfinal.htm</a>
Manual de operadores de transporte (Unidad No. 4: Atención a la or el pasajero)	<a href="http://icathi.hidalgo.gob.mx">http://icathi.hidalgo.gob.mx</a>
Normas Específicas de Control Escolar Relativas a la Inscripción, Reinscripción, Acreditación, Promoción, Regularización y Certificación en la Educación Básica, 2019	<a href="https://www.planyprogramasdestudio.sep.gob.mx/descargables/doctos/dof/NORMAS-CONTROL-ESCOLAR-BASICA.pdf">https://www.planyprogramasdestudio.sep.gob.mx/descargables/doctos/dof/NORMAS-CONTROL-ESCOLAR-BASICA.pdf</a>
Pautas sobre el Diseño Universal para el Aprendizaje (DUA) Texto Completo (Versión 2.0)	<a href="https://educadua.es/doc/dua/dua_pautas_2_0.pdf">https://educadua.es/doc/dua/dua_pautas_2_0.pdf</a>
Protecting Undocumented and Vulnerable Students, Stanford Law School, 2017	<a href="https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CCSA-YELP-SLS-Policy-Lab-Protecting-Undocumented-Students.pdf">https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CCSA-YELP-SLS-Policy-Lab-Protecting-Undocumented-Students.pdf</a>
Safe Routes to School	<a href="http://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs">http://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs</a>
Understanding, Managing Difficult Special Needs Student Behavior	<a href="http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/10009723/understanding-managing-difficult-special-needs-student-behavior">http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/10009723/understanding-managing-difficult-special-needs-student-behavior</a>
Van Provider Safety Tips	<a href="https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&amp;pid=sites&amp;srcid=dW1pY2guZWR1fHdjLXRyYW5zcG9ydGF0aW9uLXNhZmV0eXxneDo0YmY3YjhmNmFmZDBkNWVi">https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&amp;pid=sites&amp;srcid=dW1pY2guZWR1fHdjLXRyYW5zcG9ydGF0aW9uLXNhZmV0eXxneDo0YmY3YjhmNmFmZDBkNWVi</a>