

TO: TSTG GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
JUNE 6TH, 2025

FROM: GENERAL MANAGER

SUBJECT: **DRIVER TRAINING AND TRANSPORTATION AIDES**

Origin:
TCDSB Regular Board

Executive Summary

The Toronto Student Transportation Group requires, through the contract, that all drivers receive training in dealing with students with special needs. Several entities and organizations have also been employed to provide resources for our school bus operators to ensure drivers have the tools required so they can successfully transport students with special needs to and from school safely. The addition of an aide would substantially improve the safety, supervision, and well-being of students with special needs and alleviate the responsibilities placed on drivers.

Comment(s):

1. At the February 14th, 2025, TSTG Governance Committee meeting, the following recommended action was approved:

1. To communicate with the TCDSB committee to advise on actions taken as a result of the report recommendations.

The original TCDSB report was addressed at the January 30th, 2025, TCDSB Regular Board meeting and the report recommendations are highlighted below:

The Special Education Advisory Committee recommends to the TCDSB Board of Trustees that the following be approved:

1. Mandatory professional development for bus drivers that transport students with special needs and provide ongoing support for bus driving staff should they be experiencing challenges with special needs students;
 2. That the Minister of Education consider funding for special needs staff on school buses to assist with special needs students; and
 3. That items 1 and 2 above be sent to the Transportation Consortium and Minister of Education

Professional Development for School Bus Drivers

2. TSTG, as part of its contract with our school bus operators, requires the vendors to provide mandatory training on several topics including assisting students with special needs. Each operator is required to perform an initial 4 hours of training to discuss and train drivers in what to look for and how to address the needs of these students. The School Board Special Services Departments have also been extremely helpful in developing a training guide for the school bus operators to use. This guide is attached as *Appendix A*. As part of the ongoing best practices, we will continue to work with staff from special services to keep this resource updated and current for use with our transportation providers.
3. School bus operators have also reached out to other authorities to collect training resources, specifically working with Holland-Bloorview staff to create material to support their drivers. These training sessions occur at their safety meetings throughout the school year. School bus operators are also invited to TSTG sessions where our safety officers provide training on various special needs equipment and how to ensure the students are safely transported.
4. Other agencies have also provided training materials that employ a train the trainer approach to support transportation of students with special needs. The transportation subcommittee at the Ontario Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) periodically employs best practices sessions and tutorials on dealing with students with special needs and safety practices that school bus management teams can take back to their division to use in their safety workshops with their drivers. The Canadian and US student transportation associations also provide these types of training that allow management staff to take back resources for their drivers.
5. TSTG has also recently invested in hiring a second safety officer to be more proactive in regard to dealing with safety concerns on all buses including those delivering students with special needs. The second officer allows them to conduct more spot audits to ensure carriers are following protocols as well as provide support for parents and school staff when dealing with students on the school bus with special needs.

Special Needs Staff on School Buses

6. Working with the schools and the Special Education Departments, transportation can be configured to allow aides to accompany students with unique transportation challenges. In some cases, these aides stay with the students as they get on and off at the same location as the student. In other circumstances, we arrange to bring the aide back to the school in order for them to complete their workday. Currently the consortium is transporting 68 aides to accompany students to and from school each day. A breakdown is summarized below:

	Grade														
Board	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
TCDSB				1			1	1	1		1	1	1	1	8
TDSB	4	7	4	3	9	5	4	4	1	1	4	5	2	7	60
Grand Total	4	7	4	4	9	5	5	5	2	1	5	6	3	8	68

7. The core duty of a school bus driver is, however, to drive the bus so attempting to manage student behaviour while driving in Toronto traffic can be difficult. An aide on the bus would not only support the driver but support those students with special needs who may require assistance or direction to be transported safely.

Correspondence with Ministry of Education

8. Previous requests on a provincial basis to supply support staff on all buses have never materialized in associated funding. A specific request to address support staff on buses transporting students with special needs was received and approved by TSTG Governance committee at their May 9th, 2025, meeting and is attached as *Appendix B* for reference. The letter was sent to the Minister's office on May 23rd, 2025.

Recommendation:

1. That the report be received.

K. Hodgkinson
General Manager

Tools and Strategies for Transporting Students with Special Needs



Wendy Roberts
Vice Principal,
Special Education Services,
TDSB

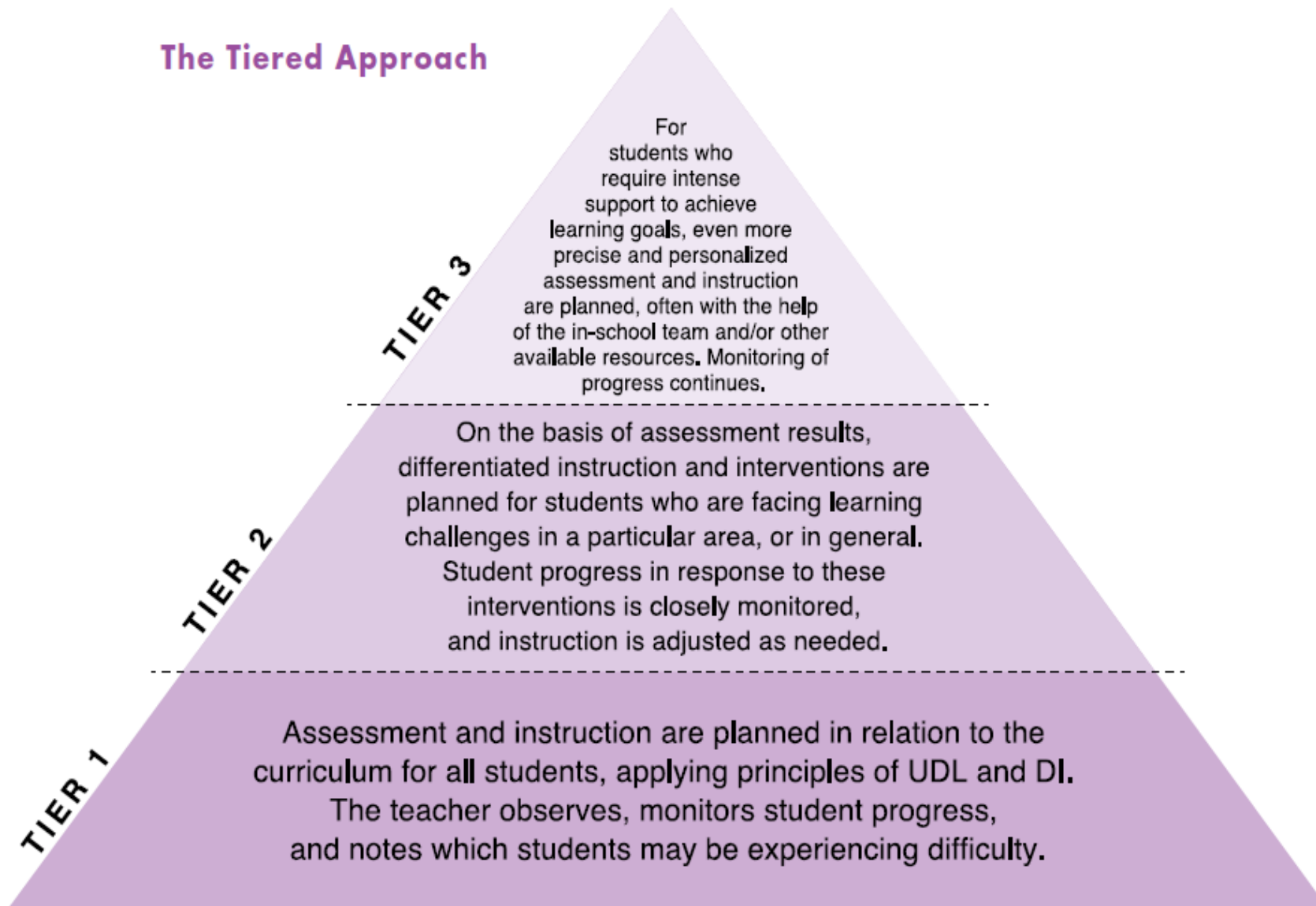
Cristina Fernandes
Superintendent of Special Services,
TCDSB

Overview

- Understand the legislation
- Understand yourself and your role
- Understanding student needs and responding to them
- Wheel Chair Securement, harness vest, oxygen tanks, service animals



The Tiered Approach



Tiered Intervention for Transporting Students

Tier 3: FEW

FEW
Students
with significant needs
that require specialized
equipment or
individualized
strategies

Tier 2: SOME

SOME Students needs that require
specific strategies, equipment and/or
procedures

Tier 1: ALL

Procedures for All Students
The majority of students fall into this category which means
that they are able to follow simple rules; they understand and
are able to participate fully in all activities; normal bussing
procedures would be appropriate.



Understanding Yourself And Your Role

- Respect
 - Want to be respected
 - Want to be valued
 - Want to be understood
- Responsibilities of the driver
 - Operate the bus safely
 - Driving without distractions
 - Protect students on bus from harm



Understanding Your Clients

- Students want To be Valued
 - Knowing each student's name and get to know something about the student needs (may not be formalized but may be related to their exceptionality/diagnosis/behaviour)
 - Greet students: smiling; high-five; "good to go"; calling a child by name; good morning; good afternoon
 - Patience from adults including drivers
 - Demonstrate respect, interest and honesty
 - Avoid intimidation or threatening communications
 - Defuse problems immediately to prevent escalation



Understanding your clients

- Students want To be Understood
 - Knowing when a child is having a bad day
 - Using humor to diffuse a situation at the appropriate level
 - Not using sarcasm to change behaviour



Understanding your clients

- Students want To be Respected
 - Introduce yourself; make it personable
 - e.g.: Tell them something about yourself or your experiences
 - Post a picture of yourself on the bus for all to see – they need to know who they are talking to
 - Introduce the other kids on the bus to each other – e.g.: make it a game- I am Mike and my favourite thing is to play Nintendo/PSP₄/Gameboy; I am Wendy and I have a cat named
 - Include students when talking about them to others
 - Do not tolerate teasing/bullying



Understanding Your Clients

- Students want Consistency and Predictability
 - Select 3 to 5 rules maximum
 - Rules are posted on the bus and explained as often as necessary
 - Repeating and Explaining Rules is an ongoing process
 - Rules should be shared with families and schools
 - Rules should be short, clear, doable, positive and easy to monitor
 - e.g.: Instead of “don’t statements, use “action” words with the desired behaviour
 - Be respectful (take the time to explain/teach what this looks like and feels like and sounds like)



Understanding Your Clients

- Students want Consistency and Predictability (continued)
 - When reinforcing rules, provide student with two choices of desired outcomes and allow them the opportunity to choose- student owns the choice and feels in control
 - Use praise to acknowledge the desired behaviour rather than the person
E.g.: I really liked the way you sat in your seat and you were quiet.



*“The number one problem on buses is not discipline.
It is lack of procedures and routines”*

Teach rules, routines and
procedures systematically with the
following steps:

Explanation

Demonstration

Rehearsal

Feedback



Understanding Bus Routines

- Routines should include the following:
 - Seating Processes
 - Acceptable Noise levels to support safety
 - Evacuation plans that are well thought out and planned based on children's cognitive emotional and physical disabilities
 - Expectations should take into account student's functional abilities
 - Plan sufficient time for boarding and exiting the bus
 - Assistance should be based on student's age and their level of independence



Rules vs Expectations

Ask yourself what is an appropriate level of tolerance?

- How often can a rule be 'broken'?
- How have you taught the children what the desired norms/behaviours are?
- What does tolerance look like in light of the Tiered Intervention?
- How have you depersonalized the behaviour?
- Does the behaviour really impact on bus safety or is it just irritating?



Why children demonstrate certain behaviours?

1. Seeking Attention

- student wants an adult response to achieve their desired goal
 - e.g.: yell at driver – purpose may be that they want to go home
 - hit another student- Purpose may be they want to change seats because they had an argument with the child

2. Escape a Demand

- student has had a demand put on them but they do not want to do it
 - e.g.: the driver has asked the student to sit in their seat and the student pushes the driver in order to avoid the requested behaviour

3. Sensory

- student needs some sensory input (touch, smell, sound, taste, sight)
 - e.g.: Student who pushes the window up and down may want to regulate their temperature(touch) or wants to look out the window (sight, sound and smell)



Five Types of Exceptionalities

Behaviour

Communication

Intellectual

Physical

Multiple Exceptionalities



Exceptionalities: Behaviour

- A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance, and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following:
 - an inability to build or to maintain interpersonal relationships
 - excessive fears or anxieties
 - a tendency to compulsive reaction
 - an inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory or other health factors, or any combination thereof



What do I do if I see these behaviours?

Presenting Behaviours	Possible Student Needs/Identifications	Strategies
Impulsivity; distractibility; difficulty with self-regulation	Attention Deficit Disorder Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder Oppositional Defiant Disorder Mild Intellectual Disability Developmental Disability	<u>Short term Response:</u> Address the behaviour not the person Intervene early and often Redirect Refrain from threatening Give simple instructions Handle with humor



What do I do if I see these behaviours?

Presenting Behaviours	Possible Student Needs/Identifications	Strategies
Student angers quickly; Manipulative; lies about events; does not take responsibility for their actions	Behavioural Oppositional Defiant Disorder	Do not lose control; speak in a firm but respectful tone of voice; Show you care; smile Use student's name when talking to him/her Provide 2-3 positive choices and allow child to control that choice (e.g.: Would you like to sit in your seat or would you like me to choose a seat?); repeat choices as often as necessary Be patient Speak to school or parent for strategies that work with the student



Exceptionalities: Communication

Autism:

A severe learning disorder that is characterized by:

- Disturbances in the rate of educational development; ability to relate to the environment; mobility; perception, speech and language
- Lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language
- Characteristics can include:
 - Difficulty communicating and socializing
 - May be verbal or non-verbal
 - Engaged in repetitive activities
 - Likes routines and is upset if a routine changes
 - Demonstrates difficulty with transitions
 - Can present frequent emotional outbursts
 - Sensitive to sounds
 - Abnormal responses to objects or certain people

Deaf and Hard of Hearing:

An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound.



What do I do if I see these behaviours?

Presenting Behaviours	Possible Student Needs/Identifications	Strategies
Communication and Socialization; Difficulty with Transitions; Difficulty with self-regulation; Impulsivity Difficulty with changes to routines	Autism Spectrum Disorder	<u>Short Term Response:</u> Speak slowly in quiet and gentle voice, Use repetition, Be consistent Provide warnings of upcoming events (e.g. we are getting close to school; pack up your things) Use pictures or gestures to convey messages along with words Ignore behaviours that do not impact on school bus safety Consult with the school for strategies that work well with this student
Not following oral directions; Ignoring	Hearing Impaired Student speaks a different language	Demonstrate the desired behaviour Ensure student can see you when you give a direction; if possible use gestures



Exceptionalities: Communication

Speech Impairment:

A disorder in language formulation that may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors;

- that involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages; and
- that may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress



Exceptionalities: Communication

Language Impairment:

A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system or communication, which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:

- Involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication **and**
- Including one or more of the follow: language delay, dysfluency, voice and articulation development, which may or may not be organically or functionally based.



Exceptionalities: Communication

Learning Disability:

A learning disorder evident in both academic and social situations that involves one or more of the processes necessary for the proper use of spoken language or the symbols of communications, and that is characterized by a condition that:

- May include difficulties in receptive language (listening, reading); language processing (thinking, conceptualizing, integrating); expressive language (talking, spelling, writing); mathematical computations;
- May be associated with one or more conditions diagnosed as a perceptual handicap; a brain injury; minimal brain dysfunction; dyslexia; developmental aphasia.



Exceptionalities: Intellectual

Mild Intellectual Disability: A learning disorder characterized by:

- An ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service
- An inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development
- A potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment and economic self-support



Exceptionalities: Intellectual

Developmental Disability:

A severe learning disorder characterized by:

- An inability to profit from a special education program for students with mild intellectual disabilities because of slow intellectual development
- An ability to profit from a special education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development

A limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment and economic self support



What do I do if I see these behaviours?

Presenting Behaviours	Possible Student Needs/Identifications	Strategies
<p>Difficulty following directions</p> <p>Misinterprets the intentions of others</p> <p>Does not respond when asked open ended questions such as 'What happened?'</p> <p>Demonstrates frustration; crying</p>	<p>Language Impairment</p> <p>Developmental Disability</p> <p>Mild Intellectual Disability</p> <p>Multiple Disabilities</p> <p>Learning Disability</p>	<p>Provide instructions one at a time; students have difficulty remembering more than one or two steps at a time;</p> <p>Ask the student</p> <p>Make rules short and simple; repeat often</p> <p>Speak slowly and clearly;</p> <p>Provide student with lots of time to explain things to you; do not assume the child is responsible for an action</p>



Exceptionalities: Physical

Physical Disability:

A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance

Blind and Low Vision:

A condition of partial or total impairment of sight or vision that even with correction affects learning adversely.



What do I do if I see these behaviours?

Presenting Behaviours	Possible Student Needs/Identifications	Strategies
Requires assistance with Mobility Requires medical assistance (may be accompanied by an adult) Requires physical supports (canes, wheel chairs, lifts, crutches, walkers)	Physical Disability Blind and Low Vision	Provide the student the opportunity for independence; Ask if students wants help Ensure supplementary aids accompany student Special understanding of child handling and equipment management; Speak to student when moving them; explain what you are doing; ask questions and listen to child; Always follow correct loading/unloading procedures for children in specialized equipment



Exceptionalities: ^{Appendix A}Multiple Exceptionalities

- **Multiple Exceptionalities:**

A combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities,



Short Term vs Long Term Response

- Listen carefully
- Communicate in a clear and understandable manner for all children
- Ask Why?
- Provide wait time for response
- Apply consequence(s) to the individual vs the group
- Consult with families and school staff



Some Parting Words...

Safety

Relationships

Consultation

Documentation



10 Tips to Better Bus Behaviour

1. Be Respectful – Greet students with a smile and by name
2. Show interest in student's likes and hobbies
3. Honour Personal Space
4. Post Bus Rules- be consistent
5. Pay attention and recognize students who are doing the right thing
6. Ignore the Minor Behaviours
7. Be Calm – show self-control and don't take it personally
8. Communicate with your student's family everyday
9. Positive comments should be made 5 times more often than reprimands
10. Take care of yourself! – Practice stress reduction activities (e.g. deep breathing, inside talk)



Wheel-Chair Securement

Safe, secure transportation for physically impaired passengers, vest and cam-strap demonstration.

Albert Arsenault,
Manager of Safety & Training
Stock Transportation

Loading, use of ramp

- Back mobility device onto ramp.
- Keep one hand on chair when raising or lowering.
- Give passenger verbal cue that ramp will be raised or lowered to allow preparation.



Securing Wheel-chair To Bus Floor

- Remove loose, hanging items as they are potential projectiles (back-pack).
- Check passengers hands before moving chair to securement location.
- Avoid entering personal space/ dignity.
- If oxygen tank is present it must be removed and tethered.
- Be aware of hazards that may cause chair to tip.



Securing to floor (tie-down) 1

- Centre chair within footprint; front tie-downs are wider spaced for lateral securement (turns).
- Front tie downs responsible for acceleration.
- Rear tie-downs responsible for braking.
- Set brakes until 4 points secured.



Securing to floor (tie-down) 2

- Utilize welded points for optimum strength.
- Secure at 45 degrees for maximum “pull.”
- Once secured, release brake to test tightness then re-set brake.



Lap and shoulder belts

- Lap belt is installed first, be aware of passenger personal space (touching).
- Shoulder belt must be adjusted correctly based on passenger size, height.



Safety vest/harness strap

- Passenger should be measured for correct size vest for safest fit and comfort.
- Cam strap should be secure and adjusted according to passenger's height.
- Harness strap does not replace seatbelt where belts are mandated by local laws.
- Styles differ according to passengers needs.



45 degree angle, rear.



45 degree angle, front.



Summary...

- Proper use of equipment
 - Apply training procedures
 - Focus on task
 - Dignity
-
- SAFE AND SECURE TRANSPORTATION!!



A Case Study

A student enters your bus but is having difficulty taking their seat. School staff assist in putting the student into his seat. During the ride, the student becomes more agitated and shouts out to you “it hurts!” and uses profanity.

What would you do?



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May 23rd, 2025

The Honourable Paul Calandra
Minister of Education
438 University Avenue
5th floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2A5

Dear Minister Calandra

The Toronto Student Transportation Group (TSTG) at their February 14th, 2025, meeting received and approved the following report from the TCDSB. At the January 30th meeting of the TCDSB Special Education Advisory committee a recommendation was approved as follows:

1. The Ministry of Education consider funding for special needs staff on school buses to assist with special needs students.
2. That a letter be sent to the Minister of Education based on the above.

TSTG transports upwards to 10,000 students with special needs every day. Each of these students have unique and specific needs that requires a variety of transportation solutions to meet those needs. While safety equipment such as, safety vests, child seat belt buckle locks, and vehicle partitions for students with violent tendencies are currently used, significant challenges remain.

Ongoing concerns include:

- Students escaping their safety vests and running through the bus endangering themselves and others;
- Students smashing windows assaulting peers and, in some cases, disrobing and jumping out of exits requiring police involvement at times;
- Drivers struggling to focus on the road due to extreme student behaviours.

A school bus driver's primary responsibility is to operate the vehicle safely, yet these ongoing issues make their job increasingly difficult. While previous efforts to secure Ministry funding for bus monitors have been unsuccessful, we urge the Ministry to reconsider funding for trained special needs staff on buses transporting students with extreme behavioral challenges. This investment would not only enhance student safety but also improve school bus driver recruitment and retention, a well-documented challenge in the sector.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you and your team. Please let us know a convenient time to meet.



Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maria Rizzo".

Maria Rizzo
Co Chair - TSTG

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Zakir Patel".

Zakir Patel
Co Chair – TSTG

CC. Stacey Zucker – Associate Director TDSB
Dereck Boyce – Associate Director TCDSB