

TEENAGE DRIVER EDUCATION

Driver Education in Texas—Students with Disabilities

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School districts and education service centers offering any phase of a driver education program during the school day, outside the school day, or in the summer must provide every student in the district including students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in the program to ensure every student appropriate public education. If a school district does not offer a driver education program then there are no obligations for the district to provide driver education training to students including those with disabilities.

The following guidelines are provided to help school districts with driver education programs meet the needs of students with disabilities.

1. The term “student with a disability” means a child as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.
2. The school should identify students with disabilities preferably before they enroll or as soon as they enroll in the driver education program. The process to meet the student’s needs may take months to complete before training can begin.
3. A certified driver education teacher can train students with disabilities in the traditional driver education program. However, in many cases the teachers require professional assistance from licensed physical therapists and special education teachers to accommodate the program to the student’s needs.
4. Certified driver education teachers are not qualified to determine if it is necessary to accommodate and how to accommodate the program to meet the student’s mental or physical needs.
5. The driver education staff must collaborate with the special education (SPED) department. SPED will conduct the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings to establish the student Individualized Education Program (IEP) for driver education. The ARD process must include review and implementation of the recommendations outlined in an age appropriate *Medical Mobility Evaluation* when one is necessary to determine the student’s ability to drive (See # 7 below.) The ARD is conducted by SPED, and the driver education teacher participates as one of the team members. SPED and driver education staff collaborate to ensure that the IEP and recommendations outlined in a recent *Medical Mobility Evaluation* are implemented.

6. The district makes the necessary accommodations to meet the student's needs for both classroom and behind the wheel. The driver education teacher utilizes SPED as a resource and support to provide the necessary physical and educational accommodations.
7. Teachers must realize that the minimum time allotted for driver education instruction may not meet the student's needs, so tutoring, etc. may be required. Tutoring, etc. can be done by teachers, parents, SPED staff, or anyone willing to work extra time with the student. Tutoring is not counted for driver education instruction but is utilized to ensure that the student is successful.
8. Prior to instruction, students with physical disabilities and some with mental disabilities will require a *Medical Mobility Evaluation*. Instruction cannot begin until the Medical Mobility Evaluation is performed by a licensed physical therapist and the district implements all accommodations described for the student in the evaluation.

A *Medical Mobility Evaluation* must be performed by a licensed physical therapist. The mobility evaluation is necessary to determine, for example, what, if any, accommodations must be made to the classroom, car or to determine if the student can comprehend and/or make decisions well enough to drive. The driver education teacher and special education staff do not have the license or credentials to perform the *Medical Mobility Evaluation* unless they are also a licensed physical therapist.

Rehabilitation hospitals and physical therapist clinics have staff certified to perform *Medical Mobility Evaluations*. Also, and probably the first step, is to contact the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). The website is <http://www.dars.state.tx.us>. The DARS offers several programs for students with disabilities that may pay for medical mobility evaluations, adaptive equipment, driver education training, etc. In some cases the DARS will pay for the driver education to be conducted by a licensed physical therapist. The student's health insurance sometimes pays for the *Medical mobility Evaluation*. However, in all cases the student with disabilities cannot be denied the opportunity to participate and receive driver education training because they are not financially able to pay. A school district will be responsible financially for the *Medical Mobility Evaluation* and all other costs associated with training a student with disabilities if the DARS or the student's health insurance does not pay the costs.

9. School districts can purchase or lease the adaptive equipment that is required to teach the students. Also, the school district can ask the parents to purchase or lease the adaptive equipment and loan it to the school for instruction then take it back and have it installed on the family vehicle when the student begins driving. If a parent denies the request for any reason, the school district must provide the adaptive equipment for instructional purposes. A school district is not required to provide the adaptive equipment to the student for personal use.