Turner's Special-Needs Manual (Special Needs Transportation Best Practice

By Ted Finlayson-Schueler

“Special-Needs Transportation Best Practice” is designed to educate the transportation professional, but the underlying message that permeates its 806 pages is the need for transportation professionals to educate others as well — the non-disabled children who might be quick to stigmatize children with disabilities (CWD) or the school building personnel who don’t understand safety before schedule. The text includes best practice for the IEP committee that doesn’t understand the impact of distance on program success or the simple logic that least restrictive environment applies to the bus as well as the classroom.

This manual is an encyclopedia of Dr. Ray Turner’s experience as a special educator that started 40 years ago and has included professional roles of special-education teacher, administrator, professor and transportation administrator.

Decades of knowledge on display

Building on “Transporting Handicapped Students: A Reference Manual” in 1980, “Special-Needs Transportation Handbook” in 1998 and “Transporting Medically Fragile or Technology-Assisted Students” in 2000, this reference work incorporates Dr. Turner’s writing and experience of the past four decades in special education: Where else can you find 19 strategies for transporting children with autism or consider 27 types of school bus accidents that should be considered for crutch users?

Turner’s text starts with a Special-Needs Transportation Student’s Bill of Rights that makes explicit that transportation as a related service must be provided professionally, sensitively, expeditiously, reliably and appropriately.

The manual has the feel of WebMD, only without the handy search features. [Editor’s note: A searchable CD version of the text is now available for purchase (without shipping or handling charges) at **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**.]

This voluminous text includes a table of contents that runs 37 pages and includes 41 tables of specific best-practice information for everyone involved in the transportation of CWD. Different sections of this text will be most useful depending on whether you’re a driver, attendant, special-education administrator or teacher, or transportation manager.

Turner starts with a disclaimer, as does every book in our litigious society, and it is important to take this one seriously. The author writes very definitively: “The driver will do this” or “Best practice policy must include this.” In fact, very little regarding the transportation of CWD is established in civil or statutory law. The reader is offered the author’s perspective of best practice even when professional opinions may differ widely.

This book is a useful starting place to understand transportation issues, and it outlines scenarios you should well consider, but your policy decisions should be made from a wide variety of sources to assure that they are current and appropriate for your situation.

Plenty of good ideas

Spending a few days immersed in “Special-Needs Transportation Best Practice” will surely give you good ideas for tweaking your transportation of CWD. After reading the Bill of Rights, I called Ray and suggested that he add one more right, that “All students have a right to be transported together.” The manual refers to inclusive transportation as the prediction of “futurists,” but the future is now and this book will give you many tools to better understand your “special” students as simply students and

your “special-needs” buses simply as buses.

Ted Finlayson-Schueler is the president of Safety Rules! — a nonprofit organization dedicated to the safe travel of students to and from school.