

North River Collaborative

Parent/Guardian Transportation Handbook 2023-2024



North River Collaborative Transportation Office

**198 Spring Street
Rockland, MA 02370
(781)-878-6056 ext.4
Fax: 781-982-9787**

Approved by the NRC Board of Directors November 19, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

North River Collaborative has provided special education services in partnership with our school districts for the past forty years and special needs transportation to students with disabilities for well over ten years. Our goal is to provide the safest, most reliable, timely, and courteous transportation service possible for your child. We have developed this handbook to ensure clear communication and to provide pertinent information regarding your child's special education transportation services. Please use this handbook as a reference throughout the school year.

We are proud of our long-standing partnerships with the school districts we serve. This collaboration ensures that your child's transportation needs are being met using safe and properly maintained vehicles equipped with GPS, cameras, and two-way radios for prompt and efficient communication. All of our drivers are carefully screened, trained, and supervised. They have your child's safety and well-being as their primary concern.

We are committed to providing high-quality transportation services to our students, families, and districts. Please feel free to contact the North River Collaborative Transportation Office with any concern, questions, problems, or suggestions you may have regarding our services.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Paul Tzovolos

Eileen Millett

Paul Tzovolos
Executive Director

Eileen Millett
Transportation Director

Deborah Thompson

Deborah Thompson
Assistant Transportation Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Emergency Information Form	Page 1
Transportation Notification Procedure	Page 1
Reporting a Student's Absence	Page 1
Procedures for Morning Pickup	Page 1
Procedures for Morning Pickup and Afternoon Drop-off	Page 1
Additional Procedures for Afternoon Drop-off	Page 2
Changes in Pickup or Drop-Off Location	Page 3
Procedures for Pickup and Drop-Off at School	Page 3
Weather-related School Cancellations/Delays	Page 4
Early Release Due to Inclement Weather / Emergencies	Page 4
Responsibility of the School for Early Release for Discipline	Page 5
Transportation of Prescription or Over the Counter Medications	Page 5
Wheelchairs	Page 5
Residential Student Transportation	Page 5
Video Recording Policy	Page 6
Preservation of Equipment	Page 6
Van Rules for Students	Page 6
Incident / Discipline Policy	Page 6
Accidents	Page 7
Frequently Asked Questions	Page 7

EMERGENCY INFORMATION FORM

To protect the safety of your child and maintain effective communication, you must complete an Emergency Information Form yearly and return it to the North River Transportation Office. This form must be updated on a yearly basis. However, if you have already completed and returned the form for summer school transportation, then you do not need to complete it again.

Please notify North River Transportation in writing if your child is diagnosed with a new medical condition or if there are any changes to emergency contact numbers. In such cases, North River may need to work with your school district to convene the student's 504 or IEP Team.

TRANSPORTATION NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

At least the day before your child is scheduled to begin using North River's transportation services for the first time, you will receive a call from North River Transportation with the designated pick up time. If you do not receive a call, please contact the North River Transportation Office in Rockland (781-878-6056 extension 4)

REPORTING A STUDENT'S ABSENCE

If your child will not be attending school due to illness, vacations, or appointments, please call the North River Transportation Office in Rockland (781-878-6056 extension 4) as soon as possible prior to the pickup time.

Please speak loudly and clearly when leaving your message. Your message should include:

- **Date of Absence/Change**
- **Student's Name**
- **School Name and Town**

If you drive your child to school, and you would like North River Collaborative to transport him/her back home, please notify the transportation office so we can be sure to include your child on the route home.

If the student is dismissed for disciplinary reasons or sickness, it is the parent's responsibility to pick up the student at school. **Also, please contact the transportation office if you are picking up your child at school for any reason including illness.**

To ensure accuracy in routing, all communication must be reported directly to the North River Transportation Office in Rockland (781-878-6056 extension 4) Please do not leave messages with the driver, they have been instructed not to deliver messages to prevent any confusion.

PROCEDURES FOR MORNING PICKUP

- For prompt pickups, students should be ready for pickup at least **ten (10) minutes** before the vehicle is due to arrive. For unanticipated situations, the driver will wait up to **three (3) minutes** past the designated pickup time before continuing with their route.

PROCEDURES FOR MORNING PICKUP AND AFTERNOON DROP-OFF

- Drivers are not allowed to leave vehicles:
- If your child is less than 12 years old, he or she must have parental supervision to transition on the van in the morning and off the van in the afternoon. Exceptions to this

policy may occur on a case-by-case basis, if at a minimum, signed consent is provided by the parent/guardian and the district Special Education Director or his/her designee. Consent shall be obtained on a release form provided by the North River Collaborative. However, the North River Collaborative reserves the right to require parental supervision for transition on and off the van.

- Students shall never approach the vehicle until it comes to a complete stop.
- If an object has fallen near the vehicle, please notify the driver before picking up the item.
- Seat belts must be worn at all times. Parents must buckle their child into the safety restraint system. *It is imperative that you work with us in explaining to your child that the safety restraint system must be worn at all times.*
- Students under the age of eight (8) shall be fastened and secured by a child passenger restraint, such as a car or booster seat, unless the student measures more than 57 inches in height according to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 90, Section 7AA. The child passenger restraint must meet the manufacturer's instructions and be approved by federal regulations 49 CFR 571.213. North River Collaborative will provide all car seats, boosters and safety vests that have a manufacturer's safety inspection label and meets all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards.
- Wheelchair van drivers and/or monitors will operate the liftgate for students in wheelchairs to ensure that the wheelchairs are secured, and all seat belts fastened. The parent/guardian is responsible for securing their child into the wheelchair in preparation for transit.
- Please label all personal items sent to school.
- All book bags, lunch boxes, and other items must be placed in the front seat of the vehicle near the driver.
- We are not allowed to transport animals (except for service animals) or any large objects due to safety concerns.
- North River Collaborative assumes no responsibility for lost articles.
- Pickup times are subject to change due to ridership and/or route reassignment.

ADDITIONAL PROCEDURES FOR AFTERNOON DROP-OFF

Student drop-off will only be made at the child's residence unless an alternate drop-off location has been approved (see the section titled "Changes in Pickup or Drop-Off Location").

If the parent/guardian of a student under age 12 is not able to be at home at the drop-off time, then he/she must contact the Transportation Office to provide the name of the person that will be authorized to take the student off the vehicle, unless a signed consent is on file (see the section "Procedures for Morning Pickup and Afternoon Drop-Off" above).

In the event that a responsible and authorized adult is unavailable to meet the student at the designated drop-off point and there is no authorization on file to drop the student off unattended, the following procedure will be utilized:

*The driver will notify the dispatcher by radio immediately that no one is home and, if other students are on board, continue the route. The dispatcher will make every attempt to reach the parent/guardian of the student and inform them that the student is still on board the van. At the completion of the route, if there is still no responsible adult present at the designated drop off location, the transportation office will notify the school district and follow the school district's instructions. **Consistent failure to meet the bus may result in a referral to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families.***

Please note that drop-off times are subject to change due to factors such as weather, ridership, route reassignment, traffic, etc. As a result, it is imperative that parents don't make time sensitive appointments at drop-off time.

CHANGES IN PICKUP OR DROP-OFF LOCATION

Students may not be picked up or dropped off anywhere except at their own home unless the school district has authorized a different arrangement. Only requests for permanent changes (e.g. an after-school program, relatives who are home and reside in the same town, moving to a new address, etc.) will be considered. Requests for changes should be made **in writing to your child's district special education office** for authorization at least three days prior to when the request would go into effect. If approved, the district special education office will notify North River of the change by either email or fax. North River Collaborative will attempt to accommodate these requests whenever possible.

Day-to-day changes will not be considered. Drivers cannot accept notes from parents/guardians; they are not responsible for any requests or changes from parents/guardians.

PROCEDURES FOR PICKUP AND DROP-OFF AT SCHOOL

School staff will be present when the students are dropped off and picked up at school. School staff will ensure that students are safely buckled into their seats. Drivers will verify that school staff have followed this requirement.

In the case of students who require a wheelchair, van drivers and/or monitors will operate the liftgate to ensure that the wheelchairs are secured, and all seat belts are securely fastened. School staff is responsible for securing the student into the wheelchair in preparation for transit.

School staff, along with the driver and/or monitor, are responsible for de-escalating behaviors in order to ensure students entering and exiting the van exhibit safe behaviors. School staff will work with NRC staff to identify possible solutions when behavioral problems occur on the vehicles.

School staff should contact the North River Transportation Office if any problems occur or there are inconsistent arrival and/or departure times.

WEATHER-RELATED SCHOOL CANCELLATIONS/DELAYS

Bad weather can create hazardous driving conditions and power outages due to downed

trees/power lines, which means the vehicles will be traveling at a slower speed than normal. We encourage parents/guardians to use discretion if concerned about sending students to school on snowy or icy days.

It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to ensure that the area where the student is picked up/dropped off is reasonably clear of all snow and ice. Transportation may be cancelled if the driver cannot safely maneuver the vehicle into the driveway or if they see the potential for getting stuck or damaging property.

Cancellation Procedure:

- If the town in which a student resides cancels school for weather-related reasons, then North River will not transport to or from that town.
- If the town where the student attends school cancels school for weather-related reasons, then North River will not transport to that town location.

Delayed Opening Procedure:

- If the town in which a student resides has a delayed opening for weather-related reasons, then North River will follow that delay.
- If the town where the student attends school has a delayed opening for weather-related reasons, then North River will follow that delay.
- Out of an abundance of caution, the longest delay will be followed in cases where there is variation in the amount of time.

Please note that North River Collaborative may also cancel transportation if the above conditions are met but the Transportation Director and Executive Director believe that it is not safe to drive students. In this case, school districts and parents will be notified through the use of the call alert system and notification will be posted on the North River Collaborative Website (northrivercollaborative.org) and/or on the North River Collaborative Twitter Page which can be accessed by clicking the Twitter icon at the top of the NRC Website.

During hazardous weather conditions, safety is our priority. Your patience and anticipated cooperation are greatly appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible transportation for your student.

Parents/guardians should watch/listen to the Boston television and radio stations or check online for no school announcements, delayed openings, and early dismissals. Each school district has its own protocol for making these announcements; however, most use the Boston television stations. To find out the communication mediums that districts use to make announcements related to inclement weather and other emergencies, parents/guardians should access a student handbook on the school district's website or call the North River Collaborative Transportation Office.

EARLY RELEASE DUE TO INCLEMENT WEATHER / EMERGENCIES

On occasion, weather conditions or school emergencies dictate that students be released before the normal dismissal time. Please arrange to be home or have another person at home to receive your child in case of early dismissal in bad weather. It is the responsibility of your child's school to contact you about an early release. The school will also contact the North River Collaborative Office.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL FOR EARLY RELEASE FOR DISCIPLINE

If a school needs to send a student home for disciplinary reasons, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to pick up the student at school. The school must notify the North River Collaborative Transportation Office that the student will not need a ride home that day and, in the case of suspension, the date of return.

TRANSPORTATION OF PRESCRIPTION OR OVER THE COUNTER MEDICATIONS

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Regulation 105 CMR 210.008 states that "a parent, guardian or parent/guardian-designated responsible adult shall deliver all prescription medications to be administered by school personnel or to be taken by self-medicating students, if required by the self-administration agreement, to the school nurse or other responsible person designated by the school nurse." Therefore, should your child require medication during the school day, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to deliver it directly to the school nurse. To the extent your child may require medication to be administered to him or her or to self-administer medication on the vans, the school nurse where the student attends school and North River will determine a plan for transporting the medication after receiving the medication directly from the parent/guardian. Without explicit written authorization from North River, neither the North River driver nor the student will carry any medication on the van for transport to school. North River drivers have been instructed to refuse any requests from a parent/guardian to transport medication to and from school without written authorization.

WHEELCHAIRS

Wheelchairs shall be equipped with brakes and a seat belt properly maintained by the owner of the chair. All wheel chair brakes must be maintained to prevent the wheels from moving when the brakes are applied, and Velcro fasteners must not be used as the sole source of seat restraint because they do not meet minimum state requirements.

Electric wheelchairs transported on school buses shall be capable of being locked in gear when placed in a school bus or shall have an independent braking system capable of holding the wheelchair in place. Wheelchair power shall be turned off prior to being transported in a school bus. Batteries used to propel electric wheelchairs shall be both leak-resistant and spill-resistant or shall be placed in a leak-resistant container. Batteries shall be secured to the wheelchair in such a manner as to prevent separation in the event of an accident.

It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to ensure that their child's wheelchair meets the minimum state safety requirements. If there are any changes made to your child's wheelchair, please notify the transportation office immediately.

RESIDENTIAL STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

North River will work with your district's special education office concerning Friday afternoon pickup times from the school and the Sunday or Monday return times of residential students. Any changes to the established time will have to be requested in advance and approved through the district's special education office. The pickup times will be based on factors such as but not limited to traffic concerns, weather conditions, cost factors, disruption of other students' pickup times, or availability of vehicles/drivers.

If the forecast calls for inclement weather, North River reserves the right to transport home a day early. When the North River Transportation Office informs you of the decision to transport early and, if you decline, you will be responsible to transport your child home.

VIDEO RECORDING POLICY

North River Collaborative has a responsibility to maintain discipline and protect the safety,

security, and welfare of our students and staff, while at the same time safeguarding NRC facilities, vehicles, and equipment.

As part of fulfilling this responsibility, North River Collaborative authorizes the use of video/digital surveillance cameras in NRC vehicles and in the program and common areas of NRC buildings. Digital or video recorder placements shall be based on the presumption and belief that students and staff have no reasonable expectation of privacy in public areas that occur in plain view of other students, staff, or bystanders.

Signs shall be posted on North River Collaborative vehicles and property to notify students, staff, and visitors that video or digital cameras may be in use. Parents and students shall also be notified that cameras may be in school vehicles. Students and others will be held responsible for any violations of school rules, North River Collaborative Personnel Policies and Procedures, or law recorded by the cameras.

PRESERVATION OF EQUIPMENT

Students who vandalize, damage, disable, or render inoperable surveillance cameras and equipment shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action and referral to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

VAN RULES FOR STUDENTS

Appropriate behavior is expected at all times to ensure the safety of students. The following rules along with your child's school code of conduct must be adhered to:

1. Students must wear a correctly fastened seat belt and shall not attempt to enter or disembark until the vehicle has come to a complete stop.
2. Students are required to be courteous and respectful at all times (e.g. profane and abusive language is not allowed).
3. Students must not distract the driver so as to not endanger the safety of others.
4. Students will cooperate with the driver regarding noise level and behavior in the vehicle; (for example, students are expected to keep their hands to themselves, use indoor voices, and appropriate language).
5. Students must remain in their assigned seats at all times when the bus is in motion.
6. No eating, drinking, smoking, vaping, or drug use is permitted on any North River Collaborative vehicle.
7. Electronic devices (cell phones, video games, personal music devices, etc.) are permitted in the van if used appropriately. Please see the frequently asked questions section at the end of this handbook for more information.
8. The decision to use the van AM/FM radio is the driver's.
9. Students shall not open the windows without permission. Students shall not throw anything out of the window.
10. Sharp objects, weapons, loose toys, or other large items are not allowed on the van.

INCIDENT / DISCIPLINE POLICY

Serious or recurring incidents will be reported to the school district and placement program, special education administrators, and the Executive Director of North River Collaborative and/or his/her designee. If discipline issues arise on the vehicle, the following procedures will be followed:

1. The driver will contact the North River Transportation Coordinator and/or his/her designee immediately. If the incident requires a police or fire response, 911 will be called.

2. The driver or monitor in collaboration with the Transportation Coordinator or his/her designee will write up the problem on an Incident Report Form. The district special education administrator will be notified of the incident by the Transportation Coordinator or his/her designee (not the driver). A copy of the incident report will be faxed to the district's special education office.
3. If the incident on the bus presented a danger to the student or others on the van, North River Collaborative may terminate or refuse to provide transportation. If additional action is warranted, all decisions will be made in collaboration with the school district liaison, the director of the child's school program, the student, and/or the parent/guardian. A plan may need to be developed to ensure that North River Collaborative can safely provide transportation for the student. The plan may include such action(s) as a risk assessment, a behavior plan, and/or the addition of a monitor to be assigned to the student.
4. In the event of intentional damage caused to seats or other parts of the vehicle by a student, the student and/or the parent/guardian must reimburse the cost of repair to North River Collaborative.
5. We encourage parents/guardians to notify North River transportation if your child reports an incident on the bus to you.
6. If appropriate, the incident will be reported to the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

ACCIDENTS

If an accident occurs, the driver will immediately contact the North River Transportation Office. The police may also be immediately notified. The driver will not leave the students unattended in the vehicle until the proper authorities have arrived. The driver will complete an accident form as required by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles. The parents/guardians and school district will be notified of the incident on the day of the accident.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q:** My child has a long ride in the morning. Can my child have breakfast in the vehicle?
A: No. Students, drivers, and monitors may not eat or drink while in the vehicle at any time. Food is a potential choking hazard and allergies to food may cause a life-threatening reaction to your child or others riding in the vehicle.
- Q:** Can I give the driver some money to stop for snacks at a drive-thru?
A: No. Unscheduled stops are not allowed.
- Q:** Can my child play video games, use his/her cell phone, or listen to music device in the van?
A: Students may use electronic devices (cell phones, video games, personal music devices, etc.) if the electronic device is used appropriately. Please note that students may not make personal phone calls and earphones must be worn when listening to music or when playing video games. Students must not transmit any material that might be construed as threatening, obscene, inappropriate, or harassing when using electronic devices. If these devices are used inappropriately, become a distraction to the driver, or cause a problem with other students, the privilege will be revoked, and disciplinary action may be taken.

Appropriate law enforcement personnel will be notified if it is believed that a student has broken any local, state, or federal laws. North River is not responsible for personal items left in the vehicles.

Q: Can I call the driver in the vehicle to speak with him/her directly?

A: No. If communication is necessary, please call the North River Transportation Office in Rockland (781-878-6056 extension 4).

Q: What do I do if I have a transportation service-related question, or I have a problem with a driver or want to make a general complaint?

A: Please contact the Transportation Department as soon as possible at 781-878-6056, extension 4. If the issue is not resolved, please contact Eileen Millett the Transportation Director, and she can be reach at 781-878-6056 extension 126.

Q: What happens if the vehicle breaks down while my child is on the van?

A: The driver will contact the North River Transportation Office and remain with the student(s) at all times. If necessary, a replacement vehicle will be provided in a timely manner. Programs and parents/guardians will be notified.