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# AWARD OF EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

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PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS  
HARRISBURG, PA

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***APPLICANT INSTRUCTIONS***

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***I: Statement of Purpose and Process***

PASBO's Award of Excellence in School Transportation (AESTO) is designed to encourage and recognize Local Educational Agencies (LEA) that have met the highest standards of safety, efficiency, client service, legal compliance, and financial integrity.

***II: Application Fee***

A check payable to "Pennsylvania Association of Business Officials" for \$100 should be included with the application. The fee will help defray PASBO's administrative costs associated with the program.

***II: Qualifications***

1. Award recognition is open to any Pennsylvania LEA including school districts, intermediate units, career and technology centers, and charter schools.
2. The LEA must be represented by an employee-applicant with leadership authority over the transportation operation who is a PASBO member.
3. The applications must be complete and true, and attested to by the employee-applicant and the Chief School Administrator

***III: Application Submission***

For timely consideration leading to award at the PASBO annual conference of a given year, application packets must be mailed (or delivered) to the PASBO office at 2608 Market Place, Harrisburg PA 17110 by November 30. Submission will be on a CD or flash drive or one hard copy in a three-ring binder. The application packet must be organized in accordance with the structure, sequence, and detail presented in Appendix A of these instructions.

***IV: Administrative Process***

1. The PASBO Transportation Committee will identify candidates with proven expertise in transportation leadership and operations to serve as reviewers. The Association Executive Director, Committee Liaison, and PASBO staff will work with the Transportation Committee to handle the administrative details of publicity, submissions, notices, etc.

2. Upon application receipt, Applications will be subject to a preliminary review by a PASBO staff person. Applicants with a “minor deficiency” will be so notified with a filing extension of 14 calendar days from date of notification. A minor deficiency is defined as a technicality involving the application independent of substantive evidence of merit (e.g. missing signature).
3. Each proposal will be reviewed by a committee of three reviewers and graded with a common rubric to ensure uniformity. A reviewer’s LEA is prohibited from applying for the award during the year of the reviewer’s service.
4. Scoring tabulations will be submitted to Transportation Committee Chairperson and PASBO staff liaison for concurrence or reversal.
5. If the final determination is for the applicant to receive the Award of Excellence, the applicant will be so notified by February 15. If the award is denied, the applicant will receive a letter outlining the reasons for rejection and recommendations for correcting defects.

#### ***V: Scholarship Awards***

Award presentation will be made at the PASBO annual conference each year. LEAs will be notified by January 31 that they are to receive an award and should plan on attending the conference to receive it.

#### ***VI: Evaluative Criteria – Indicators of Excellence***

Because of varied service concepts resulting from a range contracted services, Pennsylvania school transportation systems are unique in their diversity. However, LEA leadership bears the ultimate responsibility for overall operation quality, regardless of contractor involvement. A system deserving an “Excellent” designation must be excellent in all phases – not only for the in-house components.

Therefore, LEAs will be evaluated consistently, regardless of their relationships with transportation contractors. For award consideration, LEAs should submit contractor information as if it were their own.

Following is a list of twelve Indicators of Excellence characteristic of high-quality transportation operations – those deserving of the Award of Excellence in School Transportation Operations.

##### ***Category 1: Departmental Organization***

A high-quality student transportation operation begins with its organizational design. Its departmental structure is clearly defined by a leadership, management, and supervision hierarchy that defines a clear reporting structure but also allows for interaction and communication with the “education side.” Where contracted transportation services are used, the relevant

organizational components must also be a part of the organizational structure (organization chart) so that there is the appearance and reality of one seamless organization under district control.

The roles and responsibilities of every position in the Transportation Department are supported by a comprehensive and ADA compliant job description regardless of status as “district operated” or “contracted service.” If relevant, job descriptions also clearly define the relationship between district and contracted personnel.

The LEA understands that it is responsible for **all** phases of transportation operations and maintains control over and requires accountability from its transportation contractor.

Required submissions are:

1. **Organization chart** that defines lines of authority throughout the transportation operation and integrates all contracted positions. The chart also includes the line of authority to the governing board. The chart defines the relationship with and authority over the transportation contractor (if applicable). The contractor’s organization chart (for its local operation) is also included (if applicable).
2. **Job descriptions** for all transportation department positions included in the organization chart, including those of the transportation contractor. The description must demonstrate ADA compliance, show the job title, to whom the position reports, date last updated, primary job duties, qualifications, education/certification requirements, special knowledge or skills, and necessary prior experience.
3. **Transportation Department organizational narrative:** An essay/narrative by the LEA applicant with two parts: (1) a narrative explaining the staff relationship with the organization’s education side; how the department resolves problems that call for interaction with instructional and non-instructional building personnel and (2) a narrative explaining the mechanisms used to manage its transportation contractor and hold it accountable. *(Targeted total memorandum size – approx. 350 words)*

### ***Category 2: Recruiting and Hiring Practices***

The most important component of a transportation operation is its staff, which – more than any other factor – defines the level of excellence it attains. High quality organizations maintain adequate staffing in all areas of operation including: administration, clerical, dispatch, communication, drivers, and mechanics. They effectively and efficiently recruit and retain drivers and ensure that all required documentation is in place and kept current in compliance with PA law. They recognize that recruiting drivers is particularly challenging and are pro-active in having an aggressive recruiting plan in place.

1. **Recruiting and retention plan narrative** that includes a description or other documentation explaining processes in place to ensure an adequate supply of drivers and substitutes. Recruiting brochures or job advertising examples could be included. The

narrative should also include a description of programs in place or philosophies applied that encourage driver retention. (*Targeted total narrative size – approx. 400 words*)

2. **New Employee Application Form** demonstrating good Human Resource practices, legal compliance, and awareness of pre-employment requirements for school transportation employment including instructions, explanations of hiring and interview processes, proficiency testing or other documentation that represents the school’s commitment to hiring highly qualified individuals. The submission requirements here are deliberately non-specific to allow for LEA flexibility in proving proficiency.

### ***Category 3: Staff Training***

LEAs should provide high-quality continuing education opportunities for all staff covering student safety, discipline, bus maintenance and safety, effective routing, fiscal and legal matters, and leadership, management, and supervision. They should have a commitment to continuing education, which is demonstrated by participation in continuing education programs. They encourage their staff to obtain professional certifications.

Required submissions are:

1. **Curriculum for Driver Safety Training Programs** offered internally or a narrative describing workshops or outside training programs are required to attend annually over and above their CDL requirements. (*If offered as a substitute for formal written curriculum, targeted size of narrative submission is approx. 300 words.*)
2. **Curriculum for School Bus Discipline Training Programs**, which is part of the annual Bus Driver in-service program. (*If offered as a substitute for formal written curriculum, targeted size of narrative submission is approx. 300 words.*)

### ***Category 4: Record Keeping for Subsidy Filings***

LEAs should plan and prepare to provide accurate and timely rider counts, bus mileage reports, and bus capacity information to PDE. In addition to accuracy, the LEA applies legitimate and lawful strategies that maximize transportation subsidy.

1. **Summary of record-keeping procedures** in the form of a narrative that addresses methods used to ensure accurate recording of all statistics used in the PA subsidy calculation. Also included in the narrative is a description of strategies used to ensure maximum subsidy payment. (*Targeted six of narrative submission – approx. 400 words*)
2. **A copy of most recent Auditor General Audit Report**, which will either demonstrate no transportation findings or audit citations. Findings will not preclude point assignment in this category provided that documentation is included (follow-up) that the problem areas have been corrected.

### ***Category 5: Student Safety***

Above all, student safety is a transportation department's greatest responsibility. LEAs should plan, prepare, review, and establish safe bus routes and stops as a prerequisite to providing cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify. Further, it should ensure that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus, at the bus stop, and while students are entering and exiting. Students creating unsafe situations for themselves or others should be held accountable for their actions.

- 1. Narrative of Student Safety Training program** or sample curriculum offerings, or brochures that show that there is an aggressive and comprehensive student safety training program in place. The program should address bus behavior, bus stop behavior, entering and exiting the bus, and evacuation. *(If there is an accompanying narrative, the suggested length is approx. 300 words.)*
- 2. Bus stop inspection form** with accompanying guidelines that will demonstrate the department's commitment to approving stops only after they have been inspected for traffic patterns, sightlines, local geography, and general safety. The guidelines must adequately explain the considerations applied when making decisions about adding a stop to a bus route or altering that route.

### ***Category 6: Vehicle Maintenance***

The LEA should provide timely and routine servicing for all buses and promptly respond to breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies. It should ensure that maintenance facilities are properly maintained, appropriately secure, and conveniently located. There should be an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balance the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.

- 1. Vehicle Service Schedule** that demonstrates a commitment to regularly scheduled vehicle maintenance. Also included should be narrative (or internal policy statement) that explains the driver's daily bus inspection routine and procedures followed that address driver trouble reports between services. *(If a narrative is used, the targeted total narrative size is approx. 300 words)*
- 2. Narrative explaining service facilities** or a floor plan and location of the bus depot and repair facility in relationship to the organization's education centers. *(Targeted total narrative size – approx. 300 words)*
- 3. Fleet schedule** lists all vehicles and their ages. Accompanying the schedule will be a brief statement (a paragraph or two) about the organization's vehicle replacement policy.

### ***Category 7: Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability***

Transportation department financial operations should be coordinated within the context of LEA and community budgeting and long-term planning. There should be a process in place that ensures sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and that an adequate number of buses are

available to meet the organization's current and future needs. The department leader should monitor the fiscal condition of all transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against specific transportation budgets. The department should periodically review the advantages and disadvantages of privatizing its school transportation functions in whole or part. There should be a periodic review of performance benchmarks with appropriate reporting to the public.

- 1. Copy of Department Budget Report** for a current operating period demonstrating the ability to compare actual expenditures with budget.
- 2. A Narrative describing the department's financial practices** in three specific areas: (1) budget development, (2) long-term planning for bus replacement and fleet upgrades including a statement of replacement and age-of-fleet guidelines and a description of financing methodology, and (3) financial justification for current approach to contracted services. (*Targeted total narrative size – approx. 500 words*)
- 3. PASBO Benchmarking Study** that compares LEA statistics to PASBO's transportation benchmark studies in a minimum of five key areas of operation. The report should include an interpretation and response actions if appropriate.

#### ***Category 8: Environmental Responsibility***

LEA transportation departments recognize that they are part of a governmental entity, which has a responsibility to be a steward of the environment in addition to being a good fiscal steward. They must incorporate a concern for the environment in their planning and oversight. Sometimes a decision with the environment in mind is not the cheapest decision, but can be justified in the context of environmental impact. The LEA should ensure that fuel usage is monitored and fuel type is selected to ensure efficiency and emission control with an awareness on the environment.

- 1. Narrative describing departments efforts** to conserve fuel and monitor emissions. If natural gas is a fuel source, that program and its success should be described. The narrative should also include a description of methods used to dispose of used oil and tires. (*A guideline for narrative submission is approx. 400 words.*)
- 2. Copy of Tank records** (example period) and associated procedure descriptions or instructions that demonstrate the LEA's compliance with Underground Storage Tank (UST) guidelines for leakage.

#### ***Category 9: Routing Efficiency and Technology Support***

The LEA should ensure that route development – whether manually created or computer assisted – strikes a balance between efficiency and convenience for students, parents and staff. Maps are created (either manually or with computer assistance) that can be used as references and display for staff and parents. Drivers and appropriate staff are provided with detail routing instructions, stop designations, student assignments, emergency contact numbers, and relevant medical emergency information.

1. **Driver route documentation** (for one bus only) that demonstrates detailed driving instructions, stop designations, student assignments, emergency contact numbers, and relevant medication information (*Confidential medical information must be redacted*)
2. **A narrative that explains how routes are developed** each year and how technology is integrated into the process. The narrative should include a summary of software package capabilities and which of its features are applied in the LEA's route development. (*Targeted total narrative size – approx. 300 words*)

### ***Category 10: Legal Compliance and Policy***

The LEA should provide efficient transportation services for all students in accordance with applicable state and federal law including: walk guidelines; charter students; private and parochial students; and students requiring special education services. The LEA's commitment should be recorded – at a minimum – in a board policy and ideally in an internal transportation procedures manual.

Required submittals are:

1. **LEA governing board approved *Transportation Policy*** that addresses at a minimum the following issues:
  - a. Elementary and secondary student walk guidelines (24 P.S. 13-1362)
  - b. Hazardous walking routes (24 P.S. 13-1362; 67 Pa. Code 4-447.1 et seq.)
  - c. Transportation for non-public students (24 P.S. 13-1361(1))
  - d. Transportation under a special education services plan under IDEA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
  - e. Transportation to approved private schools (24 P.S. 13-1374)
  - f. “Like Kind” transportation for private, parochial, and charter schools
  - g. Transportation for custodial parent situations
  - h. Stops at day care centers
  - i. Security cameras and recordings
  - j. Processing transportation requests and changes
  - k. Target and maximum ride times
2. A narrative, form, or procedure statement that addresses the transportation department's response to transportation requirements of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). (*If the narrative option is used, the guideline length is approx. 300 words.*)

### **Category 11: Emergency Response**

LEA transportation operations should have an emergency response plan in place – one that allows for all foreseen and unforeseen deviations from established norms including: accident; major discipline incident; armed intruder; bus hijacking; weather emergency; missing child; or general school emergency. The emergency response plan should be created with inter-departmental and inter-agency cooperation. The time for creating such a plan is **before** the emergency happens. Staff training and awareness is in place, with training scheduled periodically. The combination of planning and training will ensure that emergency situations are handled promptly and effectively.

Required submissions are:

1. **Transportation Emergency Response Plan** that addresses the LEA organization’s response to **transportation** emergencies including: accident; major discipline incidents, missing child situations, and the transportation operation’s role in a general school emergency. This document is far more than a narrative; it is an organizational document with the standing of a “procedures manual.”
2. **A narrative explaining the training program** in place to ensure that drivers, transportation staff, support staff, building administration and central office administration are familiar with the emergency response plan. (approx. 300 words.).

### ***Category 12: Communication Plan***

Effective transportation operations partner effectively within the organization’s communication plan, a plan that keeps parents informed about planning, routing, bus assignment, safety and discipline policy, and emergency situations. Technology is in place that keeps parents and staff informed immediately of school closings, delayed openings, and early dismissals.

**Required submittals** in this area are necessarily non-specific, but they should demonstrate a pro-active approach to parent communication in the form of well-written pamphlets, brochures, narratives, newsletter articles, calendar inserts, or letters. Here are some examples of submissions the applicant could use to how the LEA establishes excellent communications.

1. Parent letter describing first-day bus assignment
2. Safety brochures distributed to parents
3. Examples of announcements in newsletters or calendars
4. Form letters that respond to parent inquiries of bus-stop or route changes
5. Procedures used to inform staff and parents of school delays, early dismissals, or cancellations
6. Narrative describing innovations used to keep parents informed of bus activity, e.g. phone apps; text messaging systems, or GPS tracking software.
7. Website Posting

## **Appendix A: File Structure for Electronic submission**

**Main Folder** – District Name PASBO(s)AESPO(s) mm-dd-yyyy

e.g. *Any School District PASBO AESTO 12-16-2019*

Subfolders include:

1. Departmental Organization
  - a. Organization Chart
  - b. Job Description
  - c. Organizational Narrative
2. Recruiting and Hiring Practices
  - a. Plan Narrative
  - b. Application Process
3. Staff Training
  - a. Professional Certificates
  - b. Driver Training Program
  - c. Discipline Training Program
4. Record Keeping
  - a. Record Keeping Procedures
  - b. Auditor General Report
5. Student Safety
  - a. Student Safety Training
  - b. Stop-Route Inspections
6. Vehicle Maintenance
  - a. Vehicle Service Schedule
  - b. Facilities Narrative
  - c. Fleet Schedule
7. Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability
  - a. Departmental Budget Report
  - b. Financial Practices Narrative
  - c. Benchmarking Study
8. Environmental Responsibility
  - a. Departmental Practices Narrative
  - b. Tank Record Keeping
9. Routing Efficiency and Technology
  - a. Route Documentation
  - b. Route Development Narrative
10. Legal Compliance and Policy
  - a. Board Transportation Policy
  - b. IEP Procedures
11. Emergency Response
  - a. Response Plan
  - b. Emergency Training Narrative
12. Communication
  - a. Plan submission listed documents

**APPENDIX B: SAMPLE APPLICATION COVER**

| <b>Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials</b>   |                          |  |               |  |
|--|--------------------------|--|---------------|--|
| <b>Award of Excellence in School Transportation Operations</b> |                          |  |               |  |
| <b>APPLICATION</b>   |                          |  |               |  |
| Name of Entity   |                          |  |               |  |
| Address  |                          |  |               |  |
| Contact Person:  |                          |  |               |  |
| E-mail   |                          |  |               |  |
| Name of Chief Financial Officer                                |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |
| Name of Chief Transportation Official                          |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |
| Transportation Staff Member (Supervisory or Assistant)         |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |
| Transportation Staff Member (Supervisory or Assistant)         |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |
| Transportation Staff Member (Supervisory or Assistant)         |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |
| Transportation Staff Member (Supervisory or Assistant)         |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |
| Transportation Staff Member (Supervisory or Assistant)         |                          |  |               |  |
|  | PASBO Member (Yes or No) |  | Certification |  |

| DISTRICT PROFILE  |  |   |      |
|---|--|---|------|
| Annual LEA Budget – Current Year  |  |   | \$   |
| Annual Transportation Budget – Current Year   |  |   | \$   |
| Number of Students  |  | Number of Schools                         |      |
| Number of Busses  |  | Full Day K (Yes/No)                       |      |
| Number of Drivers   |  | Number of Private,<br>Parochial, Charters |      |
| Are you district -owned or contracted?  |  |   |      |
| Describe what contracted services are provided.   |  |   |      |
|   |  |   |      |
|   |  |   |      |
|   |  |   |      |
| How many transportation contractors do you use?   |  |   |      |
| <b>Certification</b>  |  |   |      |
| The undersigned attest that the information included in this application<br>and all submittals are true and accurate. |  |   |      |
| Signature   |  |   | Date |
| Chief School Administrator  |  |   |      |
|   |  |   |      |
| Signature   |  |   | Date |
| Chief School Business Official  |  |   |      |
|   |  |   |      |
| Signature   |  |   | Date |
| Transportation Department Leader  |  |   |      |