

New Jersey Department of Education

Office of School Bus Safety

Legislative Annual Report

January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024

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Executive Summary

The Office of School Bus Safety (OSBS), was established by N.J.S.A. 18A:39-34 and is housed within the New Jersey Department of Education (Department). In its first full year of operation (2024), the OSBS made measurable progress towards improving safety, accountability, and operational efficiency across New Jersey's school transportation system. This report fulfills the initial reporting requirement under N.J.S.A. 18A:39-36 and outlines key accomplishments and goals for 2025.

Key Accomplishments in 2024

In 2024, the OSBS established a strong foundation for long-term safety, transparency, and accountability in school transportation. Through improved training, stronger enforcement, and strategic collaboration, the OSBS is positioned to advance its mission and further elevate safety standards in 2025 and beyond.

1. Direct Enforcement Authority

Created a formal charging document process to allow OSBS to independently pursue enforcement actions against non-compliant contractors, significantly expediting accountability and legal resolution.

2. Case Processing System

Launched a digital case management system to track investigations, complaints, and violations improving documentation, consistency, and resolution timelines.

3. New Contractor Training

Delivered 94 sessions of a new compliance training program for school bus contractors, covering certification, safety laws, and the transportation of students with special needs.

4. New Jersey Department of Education School Bus Safety Study

Initiated a statewide study partnering with Rutgers and Rowan Universities to assess crash data, transportation practices, and regulatory gaps. Results are expected in Summer 2025.

5. Strategic Partnerships Expanded

Strengthened collaboration with the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (NJMVC), Attorney General's Office, New Jersey School Bus Contractors Association, Student Transportation Supervisors Association, and the Coordinated Transportation Services Agency to support enforcement, training, and operational alignment.

6. Child Safety Seat Initiative

Partnered with Safe Kids New Jersey to deliver hands-on training and statewide guidance to improve compliance with child safety seat regulations.

7. OSBS Webpage

Introduced an official webpage offering centralized access to safety resources, compliance tools, and regulatory updates for contractors, school officials, and families.

Introduction

The Office of School Bus Safety 2024 Annual Report provides an overview of the work completed by the OSBS during the past year and outlines the office's priorities for the year ahead. This report is designed to assist the public in understanding how school transportation safety is overseen in New Jersey and the improvements made by the Department.

Established under N.J.S.A. 18A:39-34 et seq., the OSBS mission is to ensure students are transported safely by enforcing state laws, monitoring contractor and district compliance, and providing support and training to those responsible for student transportation. This report is organized around the OSBS's core focus areas:

- Education — Delivering accessible training and guidance for transportation professionals
- Compliance — Ensuring school transportation providers meet all legal and operational standards
- Enforcement — Addressing safety violations and non-compliance through timely and appropriate actions

This report provides insight into the systems and strategies in place to protect students, the actions taken to improve accountability, and the work underway to strengthen New Jersey's school transportation framework. The OSBS remains committed to making student transportation as safe, reliable, and well-managed as possible.

Education

1. New School Bus Contractor Training Program

The New School Bus Contractor Training Program was launched by the OSBS on February 4, 2024. This five-part training series is designed to educate both new and existing school bus companies on state requirements and best practices for operating safely and legally. The program focuses on regulatory compliance, operational readiness, and student safety. The key components of the training program include:

- **Part 1: Criminal History Record Checks:** This section explains the legal requirements for school bus drivers and aides to complete criminal history record checks and receive approval before transporting students, as outlined in N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 (aides) and N.J.S.A. 18A:39-19.1 (drivers).
- **Part 2: Annual Certification Process:** This section provides clear instructions on the documentation that school bus contractors and districts must submit each year to operate legally. Additional details are available in the Annual Certification section of this report.
- **Part 3: General Training Requirements:** This section introduces the safety and operational training requirements set forth in N.J.S.A. 18A:39-19.1, which apply to both drivers and aides.
- **Part 4: Special Needs Student Training:** This section outlines the required training for personnel transporting students with special needs. Attendees are directed to a video training module available on the Department of Education's Office of Student Transportation website.
- **Part 5: Best Practices for Student Safety:** This section emphasizes strong communication, emergency preparedness, and compliance with state transportation laws—especially when transporting students with special needs.

This training program reflects the OSBS's commitment to supporting school bus contractors with clear, accessible guidance and practical tools to ensure student safety and regulatory compliance. In 2024, a total of 94 in-person sessions were delivered as part of the New School Bus Contractor Training Program, preparing transportation providers to meet the highest standards of safety and professionalism.

More importantly, the training also emphasized accountability and enforcement, reinforcing that regulatory compliance is not optional, it is a legal and operational expectation. During both the New School Bus Contractor Training Program and the Statewide Training Program for School Districts and Incumbent School Bus Contractors, participants received detailed information on violations and the corresponding penalties associated with non-compliance. These included:

- Assigning school bus drivers or aides who have not completed a criminal history record check
- Failing to perform end-of-route inspections

- Operating a school bus without a valid Commercial Driver's License (CDL) or required "S" endorsement
- Assigning unqualified drivers by school districts or contractors
- Failing to submit Annual Certification Documentation
- Broader penalties for overall non-compliance, including disqualification by a school district or debarment from submitting bids for up to five years

By integrating enforcement education into the training, the OSBS ensured that both new and current contractors understand the seriousness of their responsibilities and the consequences of failing to meet state requirements. This approach reflects a balanced commitment to education, compliance, and enforcement, core elements of the OSBS's mission to maintain a safe and accountable school transportation system.

2. Criminal History and OSBS Regional Training Sessions

To ensure ongoing compliance and reinforce safety awareness, the OSBS partnered with the Department's executive county superintendents to coordinate and deliver targeted training for the state's existing school bus contractors and school district human resource personnel. These sessions were held in March, April, and May 2024, covering the northern, western, central, and southern regions of the state. In total, seven sessions were conducted with 534 participants in attendance.

The training sessions covered a comprehensive range of topics, including:

- **Criminal History Record Checks:** Requirements and procedures to ensure all school transportation personnel undergo and pass background checks before working with students
- **Submission of Documentation to the Executive County Superintendent's Office:** Clear guidance on submitting the required paperwork accurately and on time
- **Training Requirements:** Overview of state-mandated training for school bus drivers and aides, including safety protocols, operational expectations, and frequency requirements
- **Notification to the Office of Student Protection:** Required procedures for reporting incidents or compliance concerns related to school bus drivers' eligibility, particularly regarding criminal history background checks and driver licensing status. In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:39-19.6, school districts and school bus contractors are required to notify the Office of Student Protection (OSP) if they are informed that one of their drivers has had a driver's license suspended or an "S" Endorsement downgraded
- **Penalties for Non-Compliance:** A summary of legal and financial consequences for failing to meet safety and regulatory requirements
- **School Bus Driver Presence:** Standards ensuring a properly certified and approved driver is on the bus at all times

- **End-of-Route Bus Inspections:** Protocols to ensure no students are left on the bus at the conclusion of a route, including thorough vehicle checks
- **Accident Reporting:** Steps for promptly reporting accidents, including required documentation and timelines
- **Disqualification and Debarment:** Explanation of the conditions and processes by which non-compliant contractors may be disqualified or permanently barred from operating in New Jersey

Each session concluded with a question-and-answer segment, giving participants an opportunity to address real time issues and challenges. This interactive format was designed to ensure that all attendees left with a clear grasp of the state’s transportation safety and compliance requirements.

3. School Bus Driver and Aide Training for Students with Special Needs

The OSBS provides specialized training for school bus drivers and aides who transport students with special needs, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:39-19.2. This training is designed to ensure transportation personnel are well-prepared to create a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for students with special needs. The training includes the following core components:

- Scenario-based presentations
- Instructional videos
- Behavioral management strategies
- Best practices for parent and caregiver communication

Scenario-Based Presentations

Real-life examples help drivers and aides understand how to apply safety protocols in diverse situations that may arise during student transport.

Instructional Videos

Visual demonstrations offer step-by-step guidance on handling techniques, emergency responses, and communicating clearly with students who have special needs.

Behavioral Management Strategies

Drivers and aides are introduced to practical approaches for supporting students with a wide range of behavioral and developmental needs, ensuring an inclusive and well-managed transportation experience.

Best Practices for Parent and Caregiver Communication

A key component of the training, especially when working with students with special needs is the importance of proactive communication with families. This section emphasizes the benefits of building trust and coordination with parents and caregivers and covers the following elements:

- Conducting introductory phone calls, virtual meetings, or in-person visits with families before transportation services begin
- Sharing essential contact information (phone numbers, emails, emergency contacts) with parents and additional caretakers
- Ensuring that service provider business phones are answered during all working hours
- Notifying families of delays in pick-up or drop-off times
- Providing advance notice of any changes in transportation personnel
- Promptly informing families if a student is injured during transport and filing a written report
- Calling EMS in the event of a medical emergency

4. Office of School Bus Safety Webpage

The [Office of School Bus Safety](#) launched an official webpage on the Department's website. The webpage is designed to serve as a comprehensive resource for school bus contractors, school officials, drivers, and parents. The website's primary goal is to enhance accessibility to valuable information and promote safety and compliance within the school transportation industry. Key features of the website include:

- **Regulatory Updates and Compliance Requirements:** A dedicated section providing the latest information on State and Federal regulations, compliance deadlines, and procedural guidelines
- **Industry Best Practices and Operational Guidance:** Resources and recommendations aimed at improving operational efficiency and ensuring the safety of students during transportation
- **Monthly "Did You Know?" Safety Tips:** A featured banner that highlights practical safety tips for drivers, parents, and students, covering a variety of topics each month
- **Direct Links to State and Federal Agencies:** Convenient access to relevant organizations such as the NJMVC and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for further information and resources

The OSBS webpage is reviewed and updated monthly to ensure that content is accurate, relevant, and user-friendly.

5. Child Safety Seat Education Initiative

The OSBS successfully launched the Child Safety Seat Education Initiative in September 2024, a key accomplishment aimed at improving compliance with child safety seat regulations and reducing the risk of injury for young students during transportation.

This initiative was developed in partnership with Safe Kids New Jersey, a nonprofit organization led by the Central Jersey Family Health Consortium. Together, they implemented a comprehensive education and training program tailored to the needs of school districts, transportation contractors, and parents.

A central component of the initiative was a series of hands-on training sessions that provided step-by-step instruction on the proper use and installation of child safety seats. These sessions were led by certified child passenger safety technicians and allowed participants to practice under expert supervision, ensuring accurate and consistent application of safety standards.

6. New Jersey Department of Education School Bus Safety Study

The OSBS initiated a school bus safety study in collaboration with Rutgers University, in partnership with Rowan University, with funding provided through the State budget. This project represents a significant accomplishment in the state's ongoing efforts to improve student transportation safety. The study is designed to provide data-driven insights and recommendations that will help strengthen school transportation policies, procedures, and regulations statewide.

The School Bus Safety Study is expected to conclude in Summer 2025 and will focus on key areas including a review of best practices, an analysis of bus accidents, and an assessment of existing statutes and regulations.

Compliance

1. Annual Certification Process

The OSBS enhanced the Annual Certification Process required under N.J.S.A. 18A:39-17, which mandates that school districts and bus contractors submit key compliance documents to the executive county superintendent each year.

To improve efficiency and accountability, the OSBS implemented targeted email notifications to non-compliant contractors and school districts, followed by direct outreach through phone calls, emails, and in-person visits. These efforts helped clarify requirements, resolve issues, and ensure timely submission of certification materials.

This initiative has strengthened communication between executive county superintendent offices and school bus vendors across the state. As a result, compliance has significantly improved, marking it as a key accomplishment for 2024.

2. Inactive Contractor's Process

The OSBS implemented a new Inactive Contractor Process to more effectively manage non-responsive or inactive school bus contractors. Using a clearly defined "Closing Criteria," the OSBS was able to identify and categorize contractors as either defunct (no longer in business) or inactive but operational (still in business but not currently providing transportation services).

This process has allowed the OSBS to maintain a more accurate contractor database, reduce unnecessary follow-up efforts, and focus resources on active contractors with compliance obligations. As a result, the certification and oversight process has become more efficient and targeted, making this a notable operational improvement and accomplishment in 2024.

3. Compliance Results and Outcomes

A key accomplishment for the OSBS in 2024 was achieving a 99% submission rate for annual certification documentation from school bus contractors and school districts by December 2024. This high rate reflects the success of enhanced communication and oversight strategies implemented during the year. The review of submitted documentation is ongoing and will continue into 2025. Corrective action notices will be issued to noncompliant contractors requiring immediate follow-up.

Enforcement

1. Case Processing System Development

The OSBS successfully launched a new Case Processing System. This was a major step forward in improving the way school transportation investigations and compliance issues are managed. This internal system was developed to increase efficiency, enhance accountability, and support the timely resolution of concerns involving school districts and bus contractors.

The system allows OSBS personnel to search for individual transportation providers and access detailed information, including location, contact details, ownership, and unique identification codes. Each investigation is assigned a case number, enabling OSBS staff to document, track, and review cases in an organized and consistent manner.

By centralizing case data and automating tracking, the Case Processing System has significantly strengthened the OSBS's ability to respond to complaints, enforce regulations, and maintain a complete record of school transportation safety incidents. This accomplishment reflects the OSBS's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in oversight and enforcement.

2. Direct Enforcement Authority

Another key accomplishment in 2024 was the OSBS's successful launch of its Direct Enforcement Authority using formal charging documents. Authorized under N.J.S.A. 18A:39-34, a charging document is an official notice issued by the OSBS to initiate legal action against school bus contractors for violations involving school bus drivers. This process has significantly streamlined enforcement, allowing for faster resolution of non-compliance cases.

3. Investigations

The OSBS conducted investigations in response to complaints related to school transportation safety and compliance. Each case was reviewed thoroughly to ensure all state regulations were being followed.

When violations were found, the OSBS required school districts or contractors to implement corrective action plans. In more serious cases, the OSBS referred matters to other agencies, such as the NJMVC or the New Jersey Department of Transportation, for further action.

Investigative Analysis

The OSBS processed over 300 investigations related to school transportation safety and compliance, which were categorized by source and type of concern to better target enforcement and corrective actions. Most cases were compliance investigations, indicating a significant focus on ensuring that school bus contractors and school districts adhered to certification standards and requirements.

Figure 1: Compliance/Investigations

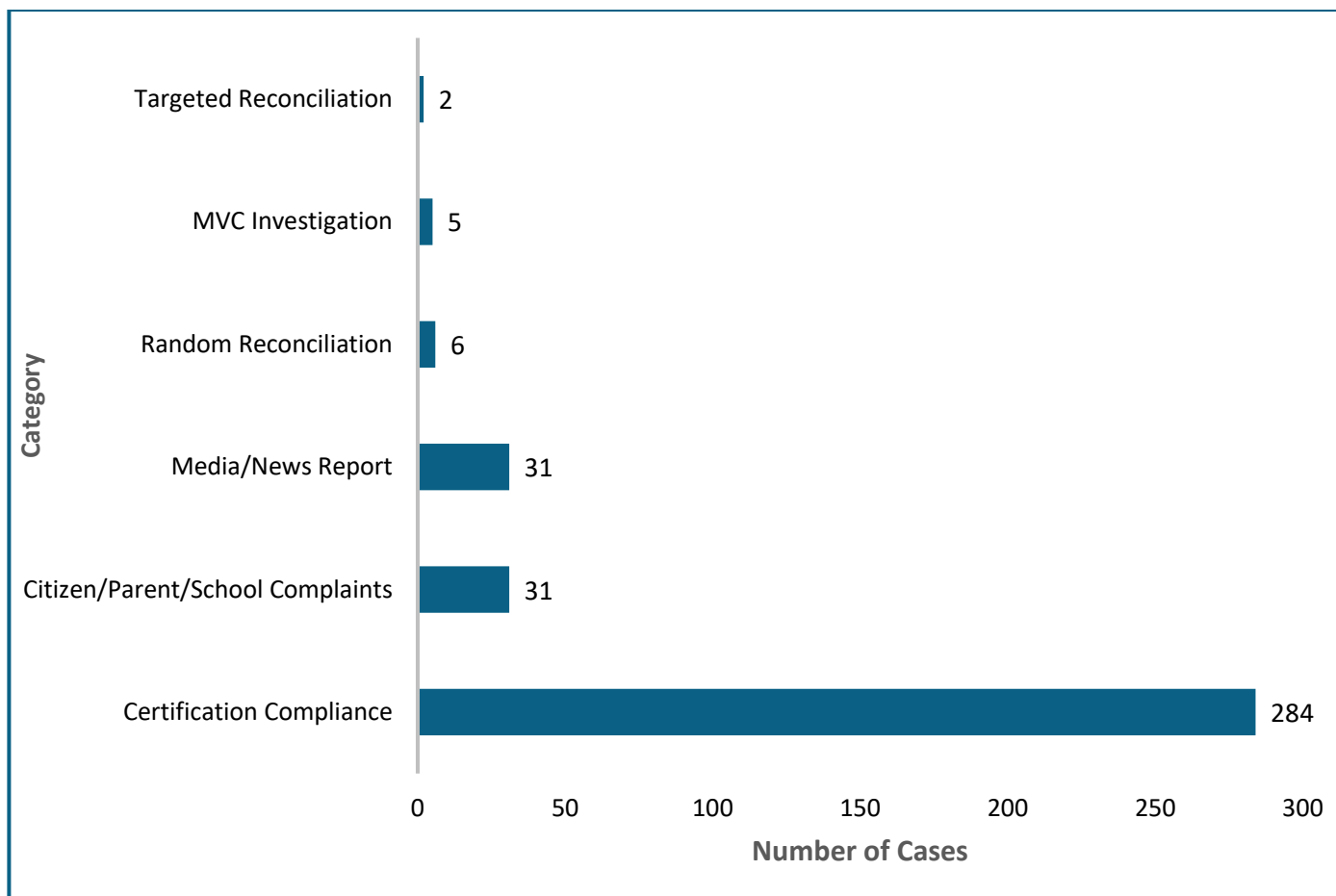


Table 1: Data for Figure 1 — Compliance/Investigations

Category	Number of Cases
Certification Compliance	284
Citizen/Parent/School Complaints	31
Media/News Report	31
Random Reconciliation	6
MVC Investigation	5
Targeted Reconciliation	2

Citizen, parent, and school complaints accounted for 31 cases, reflecting ongoing community engagement and the importance of addressing public concerns directly. Similarly, media/news report (accidents) inquiries also constituted 31 cases, highlighting the public and media's focus on transportation safety incidents. Further, the OSBS received referrals from the NJMVC to investigate five cases, reinforcing the importance of transparent and accountable processes within the OSBS and collaboration with other state agencies.

The relatively low numbers of investigations relating to random reconciliation (six cases) and targeted reconciliation (two cases) suggest these were highly focused, specialized reviews conducted on a limited scale. In the context of OSBS operations, random reconciliations refer to unannounced "spot checks" performed on school bus contractors to assess general compliance, while targeted reconciliations are coordinated audits directed at specific contractors based on prior concerns, risk indicators, or patterns of non-compliance. These methods are used strategically to verify adherence to state regulations and identify potential issues before they escalate.

Moving forward, the OSBS is positioned to continue refining its compliance strategies and expanding its oversight capabilities to address emerging challenges effectively.

4. External Partnerships

The OSBS formed a strategic partnership with the NJMVC Bus Inspection Unit. This collaboration was established to strengthen investigative efforts, accelerate enforcement actions, and maintain a high standard of safety in student transportation.

As part of this partnership, the OSBS implemented enhanced information-sharing protocols with the NJMVC Bus Inspection Unit, allowing for quicker access to inspection reports, compliance records, and safety violation findings. This coordinated approach enables the OSBS to more effectively identify non-compliant school bus contractors or districts and take prompt corrective action when needed.

Conclusion

The OSBS has made meaningful progress in its first year of operation, achieving key milestones that help improve safety, strengthen compliance, and enhance the overall efficiency of New Jersey's school transportation system. This report highlights accomplishments such as the launch of the Case Processing System, the rollout of contractor and special needs training programs, the implementation of direct enforcement authority, and expanded strategic partnerships, all of which contribute to a more accountable and responsive framework to address student transportation challenges.

These efforts have laid a strong foundation. Looking ahead, the OSBS will focus on enhancing compliance tracking systems, expanding training resources for school bus drivers and aides, and reinforcing enforcement procedures to address violations more swiftly and effectively.

As it moves into 2025, the OSBS remains fully committed to protecting student safety, supporting school districts and transportation providers, and upholding public confidence in New Jersey's school transportation system.