

## Transportation Safety

Moderator: Welcome. Good afternoon. We're very pleased that all of you are able to join the conversation about transportation safety with Ann Linehan, our Acting Director of the Office of Head Start. By way of some technical housekeeping, we want to ask that you put any questions in the Ask-A-Question box, and we will try to answer as many questions as possible, and questions not answered will be answered directly through email, and we will post all the questions for everyone to see at a later date. And now I'm going to turn it over to our presenters.

Ann Linehan: Good morning for those on the West Coast, and if we've got any folks from Alaska, really good early morning, and good afternoon to the rest of you. My name is Ann Linehan, as Marco said, and I'm the Acting Director of the Office of Head Start. And my esteemed colleague, Amanda Bryans, who is Director of the Education and Comprehensive Services Division in Office of Head Start, is joining me today. But I want to give a special thanks to Marco and Adrian who helped us put this presentation together, and without them we wouldn't be here today. I have to say I am unbelievably excited and relieved to finally be having this conversation with our programs across the country, because I think this is one of the most important issues.

With care and attention, we can make sure that there is never, ever, ever an incident where a child is left unsupervised or alone. And I think we particularly picked this time because we know many programs are starting up, and certainly you will be having pre-service training, and we think that this is a really important time to have a very deliberate conversation with all of your staff, and we think that, as we have said about many things, transportation is everybody's business. So, we're talking about the cooks, the bus drivers, the board of directors, everybody has got to understand how much safe transportation and systems matter to keeping our kids safe. And also talking with parents.

So, really today we're going to continue to -- the purpose of this webinar is to reiterate our priority, Office of Head Start's priority to keep children safe at all times. And, again, today we're focusing mostly on transportation, but I think the messages that we will be talking about and the systems that Amanda will be describing clearly are relevant not only to transportation but also to our classrooms, our playgrounds, our bathrooms, anywhere that our children are while in our care. And we certainly want to encourage program directors and transportation managers to really work together to develop plans and procedures.

And, again, the scope of the activities that surround keeping children safe are very broad. We want to start out by: Are the vehicles safe? Have they been inspected? We want to reduce the risk of a child being left alone on a program or parent -- on a program vehicle or on a parent vehicle. We want to be able to account for children during transitions between the bus and the classroom using active supervision techniques and ensuring that staff are aware of current policies that keep children safe. So often, programs have fantastic policies, but those policies are either not known or not implemented rigorously by the staff who actually are in close contact with the children.

We also know that you're going to challenge us today. We're going to have an opportunity to take your questions. I'm sure some of those questions where you're going to stump us, but we want to hear not only what are your successes, but I think if someone's brave enough to share the challenges that they have within their program, you're going to be helping other programs also in gaining insights to how they can strengthen their services. And, as I said, Amanda will be speaking shortly.

But one of the things that we know, that transportation really is one of the major barriers that our families face when they're trying to access community services. And the last message that we ever want to portray today is that you should do away with transportation. Transportation is, in many ways, we think that transportation has diminished in some ways because of cost, but we also know some programs are so nervous about this and keeping children safe that they'd rather not have transportation.

We are here to say, if a community need suggests that that's the way our poor parents, low-income parents are going to get their kids to school, then that's what we ought to be doing, is making provisions within our budgets to support safe transportation services. Last year, we had about 1,400 programs that transported almost 300,000 children to and from local programs and field trips. So, when you think about the numbers of little kids getting on big buses on a daily basis, it's a huge undertaking that carries with it a tremendous commitment from programs every day and every minute of the day. And just last year our programs purchased 200 buses, in order to continue to meet the needs of the families.

And, again, I think, as you know, I'm Acting Director, but I think every director who has been in this position has always said our first priority is keeping children safe, and that remains today. And we just want to share with you some of the incidences that we have experienced or have become aware of that have occurred at the local level.

You know, a child being left on a bus for the school day without supervision, food, water, or bathroom facilities. You can imagine thinking about that child. Is it 70 degrees out? Is it 50 degrees out? Is it 32 degrees out? A child being strapped in a chair alone, scared; maybe, they're lucky enough to fall asleep for a while, but that is a very traumatic incident for any child. It's traumatic for the child; it's traumatic for the program, and it's traumatic for the family. The child falls asleep on a bus; bus drops off the kids and doesn't see the child who's asleep on the seat.

We had a situation, a parent asked for child restraints for a field trip, and she was told, "No, no, we only need that when we transport children daily, not for field trips." Seatbelts, easiest thing in the world, were used but not tightly fastened, and a child fell and was injured. And then we get to these things: The child was left alone at a bus stop or a child was given to a guardian that really wasn't the child's guardian. And getting back to the safety, buses were driven -- a bus was driven for two days before the driver noticed six of the eight lugs missing and the other two were loose. And, again, we have asked ourselves: Are we seeing more of this? Are we becoming more cognizant of it?

I think not only the Office of Head Start, but we see these national campaigns occurring all over the country targeting families, targeting caregivers, and we certainly want to have a very, very, very, very strong voice in this important issue. Amanda, let me turn it over to you, because you're really good helping us walk through the stats.

Amanda Bryans: Well, thank you, Ann, very much. And I want to say to you: Thank you for having this call. We really wanted to make sure -- we talk, we spend hours and hours talking about solutions, and we examine events, both events where something, a problem was avoided and incidents, trying to figure out what we can do, and at some point we said we need to be able to have our Acting Director talk directly to people in programs about the concern and to be able to also hear your questions, so that we can really, I think, signal how grave a situation this is, but also our absolute confidence that, as Ann said, this is truly a preventable problem.

So, you know, the first thing I wanted to just really emphasize is something that Ann said about: We really do not want anyone to take away the idea that providing transportation on school buses in Head Start is too risky for an agency to undertake, because in the big picture, school buses are the safest form of transportation on the road today. There is no safer -- if you have the opportunity to take a school bus instead of your private passenger vehicle, you should get on that school bus, and we would like children to be on those buses.

And we also, as Ann said, believe that in enrolling the highest need children in a community will in many cases require that a program have transportation services. Where the most tragic circumstances have occurred have not been on school buses. We think this is largely because buses are larger and take longer to heat up. The most frequent fatalities to children have occurred when a parent or other caregiver leaves a child in a private passenger vehicle unattended.

And the length of time can vary tremendously. I think what we want to say is, regardless of the amount of time, there is an impact on the child. Often in the kind of events that Ann just described, we'll get a report from a program and they'll say a child was left on the bus for either, you know, five minutes or in some cases hours, and they'll say, "But everything's okay -- the child's okay." In no circumstances, unless the child was asleep for the whole thing and found within three or four minutes, in no circumstances do we think the child is totally all right. It is an incredibly frightening experience for a child to realize that they are left unattended, and it's a failure of our most basic promise to children and their families.

So, I think that's a really important thing, and I think, you know, the other thing we have to say is that it can be fatal, that we are lucky that we have not had a fatality, given some of the events that have occurred. Children's temperatures rise much more quickly than adults. That's one thing people often don't realize. You know, there was a man in, I think, North Carolina recently who, in order to make a statement, locked himself in a vehicle for 10 or 15 minutes on a very hot day, and he got very hot and uncomfortable, but I think what many people wouldn't understand is that a child would have been many times hotter in the same situation because they're smaller. People often underestimate, you know, if it's 68/70 degrees out, it doesn't feel hot, right? That's pretty comfortable. People may think, well, they can leave a child in the car, but the temperature rises incredibly fast in that contained space. In most of the heatstroke deaths that occurred, many of them, half of them, it's because the parent actually has forgotten a child is with them, and the majority of those happen when a parent is dropping a child off at childcare.

So, they -- often there's been a change in routine or a change in who's doing the drop-off, or the parent has unusual stressors and they are going through a daily routine that doesn't usually include dropping the child at childcare and they have absolutely no memory that the child is still in the car, until the horrible moment when they are confronted with that reality.

Ann: And I think, Amanda, one interesting thing that I learned, because I was at that Lock and -- what was it?

Amanda: Look Before You Lock.

Ann: Look Before You Lock, and where a dad got up and spoke about he was the one that left his child in the car because he actually forgot. And you can say, "How could a bus driver ever forget? How could a parent ever forget?" And this man was -- and he said it cuts across every economic, every cultural, every ethnicity, every economic level, every edu -- you know, whether or not you have a high school diploma or not or a Ph.D., it cuts across everybody.

Amanda: And it's not because you didn't love a child or you don't care about a child or because you don't care if you keep your job. They say that anybody who's ever been driving down a highway and gotten from like Point A to Point B and can't specifically remember how they got there, you get into work and you think, "Wow, I don't really remember the last part of my drive this morning," that's the failing of human memory that could allow this to happen to you. And the first thing we want everybody to do is stop saying, "This would never happen to me; that only happens to people who don't love kids or care about their job," because the reality is this could happen to any of us. And the first thing you got to do is acknowledge that.

Ann: So, you're making me think about something that, you know, and I know you're going to talk about redundant systems, but when you're talking about with parents, it's says the risk increases immeasurably, when it's a different schedule. So, I'm thinking about: So, how do you say that -- how do you take that concept and apply it to local programs? How many have substitute bus drivers? How many have substitute teachers that may not recognize, may not know the children? So, I think all those are indicators for increased attention when there's a change.

Amanda: That's a really good example, Ann, because we do have some data suggesting particularly when there's a change in -- when there's a substitute teacher, there's an increased likelihood of leaving children unattended in either the play -- on the playground or in a bathroom. So, it's not to say that you can't have substitute teachers. It means that you ramp up your systems and you recognize that and you even tell the person who's the substitute, you know. And we're going to talk a little bit more about active supervision as we go on.

So, I think we're up to 38 children so far this year have died in heat -- of hyperthermia in vehicles. And, again, we want to stress that the toll is not just a physical toll, but there's an emotional toll on a child who survives being left alone in a vehicle. This issue has really grown greatly. A lot of people have said, "Well, is this happening more than it used to happen, or is it just that we have better, you know, social media and other ways of communicating?" It actually is happening a lot more. They think that the major reasons are rear facing car seats in private passenger vehicles and we're traveling more with younger children, right? We are more likely to have all the adults in the home working, and I think those things have contributed. And in Head Start we are transporting more younger children, right? And younger children are more likely to be asleep and to be quiet in the back of vehicles than older children are. That's just a fact.

So, we wanted to, again, emphasize that -- well, the good news is that bus transportation is extremely safe. It's seven times safer than being in a car, at least, and we wanted to talk about what you can do as program directors and transportation managers. And I think the first thing I want to say, it's not really in our slides, but we've had some success stories the last few years, too. One of them was related to a child being left on a bus, but the bus monitor counted 17 kids. The driver agreed, yup, 17. They took the children, and the teacher said, "I was expecting 18 today." And the bus was still parked in front, and there was an adult there outside the vehicle, and the teacher got on the bus and found her 18th child still asleep. In that case, there was no deficiency. That was an example of a redundant system that prevented a child being left alone on a vehicle.

Ann: But I think, so in that redundant system, let me point out, it's not having one backup. It's having two or three backups. So, when you think about -- I think a lot of people would say, "We're okay; we have monitors." I think even monitors -- we know that even having bus monitors is not fail-safe; so, there's got to be another system behind the bus monitor and another -- I mean, I don't know how deep we can go with redundant, but it's not just one backup.

Amanda: I think that's right, and I think the depth of your backup, it has to do a lot with the confidence that you have in your system. So, many programs now require that the children's attendance is taken; you know, they physically write each child's name as they come on the bus and that the driver or monitor initials that child's name, or better yet, the teacher initials next to that child's name when kind of custody of the child is turned over from the transportation staff to the classroom staff. That is a very good system, unless somebody just signs names or initials without actually counting, right? So, I think, you know, and --

Ann: Or if you have a Xerox of the children that are on that bus route, then you're just checking off, and that's not as deliberate as writing the child's name.

Amanda: So, I think any system can fail, right? I think the first message is to communicate this at an emotional level, so that people that -- get them to acknowledge this could happen to them and it's not something that just happens to bad people who don't love kids and don't care about their jobs. My best recommendation, Ann mentioned, hearing a parent talk. There's a group of parents in this country who I believe only stay alive today to try to prevent this from happening to another parent. Their child died under their care because they forgot them in a vehicle and they've dedicated the rest of their lives to trying to prevent it from happening to anyone else. And those parents tell their stories, and we're going to give you a website. If I were still a Head Start director, and probably, Ann, if you were still a Head Start director, I'd be showing those videos to my staff. It's very hard -- I'm not usually a sensationalist, but I think you've got to feel it yourself, what it would feel like if you were the one who was responsible for that happening. And then the next thing is, think about your systems: What ones you need and how you test your systems.

Ann: And I think the other thing, and I know you're going to talk more about that, but I think the thing that we worry about, just as we say, "Don't do away with transportation;" don't do away with the drivers, because often, I think, there's a kneejerk reaction when there is an incident; it's "fire the driver." And I think it's like the parent -- the parent organization needs to own: Did we do everything we could have done to ensure that that driver knew what he or she was to do, and did anyone ever check that they were doing it, and was there a system behind the driver and another system?

And I think when we see incidents like this, I think there becomes unintended victims when we're not looking -- because it does get emotional at that point and just want to eradicate the problem. But it's not just the driver. And I think people, we want -- and this is why I think boards and policy councils and management teams need to get together and talk about this, because to train one time is not enough; to give a list is not enough. And this gets back to the ongoing monitoring and the internal controls. If you're not ensuring that what you think people know, you've got to be ensuring that those redundant systems are, in fact, happening.

Amanda: I think that's right, and, in fact, there have been cases -- we've had cases where a child was left on a vehicle, the transportation staff was fired, and two or three weeks later another repeat.

And there have been also programs with many, many incidents of leaving a child unsupervised for the same -- with the same thing, firing staff, and the problems were much -- it's the source of the problems that you really have got to identify and then address in a very systematic way that often is beyond -- it's not just how you shouldn't -- programs have total authority to make personnel decisions, and there are cases where a staff member may be in flagrant violation of a personnel policy and that is absolutely the right to do, but there are other cases where it's a human error and there were not sufficient systems to protect a child from being at risk.

Ann: You know, I was at a conference in Region Five, and we were talking about transportation safety, and I'm just gonna deviate for a moment, but to me it was unbelievable what these programs were doing. And one person raised their hand and said, "Well, you know, we feel like one of our biggest issues is protecting children from drive-by shootings." And they had a system where the children practiced and everybody practiced what they would do in an event like that. So, when you're talking about -- this is almost like emergency preparedness. This is almost -- if a child is left unsupervised, it's an emergency. And it seems to me, again, the practice of what would you do, I think, taking people through the drills and practicing, actually, making as if the incident occurred, and then ensuring that the systems are working.

Amanda: That's another, I think, option for a kind of training that would also probably help convey the incredible seriousness of this whole issue. I think there was one other really positive example I wanted to talk about, and this one related to the issue of children being released to an adult who is not a guardian or doesn't have approval to take the child. And this was actually a case where a stranger attempted to abduct a child. Stranger abductions are the most rare and usually the most serious dangerous situations for children. And this person went into a center, insisted the child was theirs, and they had to take the child very aggressively, and the staff member absolutely said, "No, you cannot." The person kept insisting. The staff member said that she was going to get somebody else. The person left and they locked the door, and they were able later -- they were later able to arrest this would-be abductor who was a stranger and who would not have had a good outcome.

And I'd like to say that there are many, many cases, and we know there are thousands more than we ever hear about, right? We don't hear about all of the times when people prevented injury or risk to a child, but we want to say that we do know many programs have strong systems and that we would like to encourage those and tell you to share those. Where your program that has had successes and feel confident about your system, we really hope that you share that with other programs, because we think that is a very effective way of building our national capacity in this area, which is, you know, if you're part of Head Start, you are part of a national program.



And when there's something happens, a bad incident happens in one program, it really affects the whole fabric of our national identity. And most seriously, again, it can hurt a child.

Ann: So let me -- you know, just one example, because I think this is challenging for programs in some ways, but what happens when the bus driver and you're dropping the children off, and all of a sudden one day this person says, "Oh, the mother wasn't available, but I'm here." So, what is it that a program can have on the bus that can verify that's an okay person?

Amanda: Yeah, if you don't have specific instructions as the driver that that person is picking up that child on that day, if it's not the regular person receiving the child, then you bring the child back to the center, because there are too many incidents. And it could make people upset, but it's -- every parent will tell you they would rather that you're keeping their child safe than risking.

Ann: And, of course, that means the center's got to be open for a period of time to receive the child coming back.

Amanda: Most programs that I know realize that it is the case that children aren't always met by the person who is supposed to meet them, and you absolutely, as a program, should have a plan for if children cannot be dropped off for whatever reason, whether it's a guardian or an adult you don't have permission for or just there's no adult there, there always needs to be a plan for that. I think that's a good point. Because the driver is kind of left with -- it's 5:00, they got to maybe pick up their own kids; they have a child; there's no place for the -- it's easier just to give the child to another adult, and a neighbor says, "Oh, I'll take him," right? So, part of that programmatic, systematic safety net is that drivers know what to do when they have a child and there's no appropriate adult to receive the child.

Ann: You know, and I think that there probably are some programs listening that might say, "You know what, we have never had an incident. Our systems must be working." And I think that's probably a wrong conclusion to make. I don't think one can assume the systems are working unless they are testing those systems.

Amanda: I think that's right. And I think that also people may say, "Well, you're telling us human memories are fallible; therefore, this happens to everybody and it's going to happen." And I say that's wrong. And, again, we expect you -- it will happen, but we expect --

Ann: But three people's memories are not all going to fail at the same time on the same day.

Amanda: It's the backup system that provides safety for children. We wanted to mention to you the "Look Before You Lock" campaign. This is a large effort that was launched by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Transportation have worked together to really publicize and implement "Look Before You Lock." It is largely geared at private passenger vehicles and reminding parents and caregivers to always check car seats in the back, before they exit the vehicle. There are many strategies people are being encouraged to use. People have been told, you know, to keep a teddy bear in the seat, of the car seat in the back, and when the child's in the seat, put the teddy bear in the front, so that you have to get it. Another very effective strategy for people is to put a briefcase or a purse in the backseat with the child. Something you need that's part of that ingrained part of your memory. I don't get out of my car to go to work unless my briefcase is in my hand. It doesn't matter if you're conscious of it or not. And then you reach back, "Oh, my God, the baby. I was supposed to drop the baby off."

Ann: I vote the taking one of your shoes off and putting one of your shoes in the back because certainly you could forget the pocketbook, but you're not going to get out of the car walking with one shoe.

Amanda: You might, but you'd realize it really quick. So, I think doing those kinds of things, frightening yourself in a way into doing something fairly dramatic and that will absolutely prevent you... I have to tell you that when I first started to read about this, I had a young baby, and I got very scared, and my husband and I got in the habit of every day -- we had a very erratic routine due to the rigors of our lives, but after drop-off, one of us would call and say to the other, "How did drop off go?" Now, we didn't say, "Did you leave the baby in the car, you dummy," but that was kind of the tone. But, you know, it was okay because it worked. And I think even the level of consciousness about making the call helped us prevent that from happening.

So, it's important that programs, again, are redundant, that you really train your staff in the systems, and I encourage you to include this kind of compelling emotional aspect, which I think will help them engage in a different way than they do in other kinds of required training, and we want to talk to you --

Ann: Well, Amanda, you know, I think you might have talked about this before, but there was that -- and maybe you're going to direct people to that one video that I think you ought to share with people, because this is a very emotional issue, and I think if you cannot connect to the trauma, to the child, to the family, to the staff, but we're talking about mostly trauma to the child, and I think what you said

in the beginning, it doesn't matter if it's ten minutes or an hour, it's traumatic being strapped and having no one around. But I think -- can you talk a little bit about that video of the child and what happened to the child?

Amanda: Which one? The one that died?

Ann: Yeah.

Amanda: Oh, boy -- this makes me cry usually.

Ann: But I think these are the things that we need. I think you've got to drive home the seriousness. And not that every -- everybody on the phone cares about the kid. There's no question. They wouldn't be on the phone with us; they wouldn't be signing up today if they didn't care, but I think when the extreme, when a child gets to the point where --

Amanda: So, there was a Washington Post magazine a number of years ago that -- this is the one that got me very worked up, dedicated to the subject of leaving -- of kids dying of hyperthermia in cars, and it was very thoughtful and it was where I first understood that this is not a mistake that's just made by people who don't really love their kids. And there's a video link in it to a father talking about him leaving his beloved child in the car and the child dying. And then there's a description of a coroner who conducted an autopsy on a child who pulled her hair out while she was --

Ann: You got to say that louder because --

Amanda: They heard me. The child pulled her hair out while she was in the car before she died. She was a little bit older. She was a toddler. So there you go. But nobody, you know, that's just -- can you imagine? Imagine being the parent or the staff person and knowing that you left that baby there. Okay, so we talked a lot about redundant safety systems. Again, it's a series of two or more actions that you use systematically to ensure that kids are safe. And we've given you some examples. The bus walk through is a great example.

We know that often at the beginning of the year the staff walks through and bend down at the last seat and look under and look forward to make sure there are no little legs or any little bodies anywhere that they shouldn't be. We know that by not far into the school year, maybe as little as eight or twelve weeks, people are making it three-quarters of the way down the aisle and walking back, and maybe by mid-point in the year we're lucky if they're getting midway down the aisle, and it becomes so perfunctory. We know that people have tried to counter that with things like Velcro signs at the back that they have to flip around. We also know that people stop flipping those signs around. I've always thought it might be good to have something that you have to bring in, again, to a center director or transportation director that's at the back of the bus that you bring in kind of after you've finished the route and you put back when you start a new route. But, again, it's all fallible, but it also can all work, if there's enough redundancy and if people are clear enough about the expectations.

We also know that random checks can help by transportation supervisors, center directors, or teachers to make sure that those safety practices are in place. We wanted to just mention the six steps of active supervision. This is, I think, an idea that is really about helping people not fall into that place where you're acting automatically without intentional conscious thinking. So, active supervision is about being very tuned in to the here and now and being conscious of what you're doing so that you're not acting sort of perfunctorily or just going through the routine as you always do. You make sure that the environment is set up so that children or everyone can be seen. You make sure that staff have assigned positions often that ensure that the area is totally visible to adults. We do still have cases of staff sitting on a bench in a play area while children are using equipment and running around. This is the active part, that you work with teachers around standing and counting and listening, so that they are, again, very present while the children are there, that they are anticipating children's behavior, and that they're constantly engaging and redirecting children.

When you do these kinds of things, you don't get in that kind of routine memory thing that can cause you to lose track so easily of a child. Again, it's not just one person's job. It's what you want to see everybody doing. If the center director steps out on the playground and there are kids there, she should count the kids and talk to the -- I count 50 children on this playground; is that the number there should be? And they ought to be able to reconcile that. Strategies for parents, and again, we want to say that there are two transportation-related deaths we know of in the last couple of years from hyperthermia, and they both happened in Head Start parking lots when a parent left a sibling in the car who was asleep.

In both cases, I think the parent had forgotten the sibling was in the car. There was a change in routine. They drive into the Head Start; they get out; they go in to volunteer or do whatever as they would normally do when they didn't have the sibling, but the sibling was in the car and died.

Ann: And those are known deaths, and I think that just tells me sort of how far out the Head Start program needs to push this, because parents, when they are driving and they get into the classroom and maybe the teacher says, "Hey, can you stay for a while," they totally get into it and forget. So, I think what we're saying here is absolutely applicable to the parent community, and I think every one of us sitting at this table feel the impact and the reach of the Head Start program in helping the community and the parents also keep their kids safe.

Amanda: I think that's right, and I think that when teachers and family workers know that a parent has younger children or other children and the parent is in, "Hey, where is little" -- you know, it won't hurt. The middle of this page you see Ray Ray's pledge. Take the pledge. This is one of the most effective things in terms of redundancy, safety systems. The pledge is an agreement that if a child doesn't arrive at school, a child is transported by the parent usually, and that the school hasn't heard why the child isn't there, they agree to call the parent. So, you're expecting all your kids, you haven't had notice that anyone was going to be out, a child doesn't show up, you call the parent and say, "We're just checking on him." And the parent agrees that when they know the child -- when they are deciding to keep the child at home for any reason, that they will notify the school.

We think this is an incredibly important strategy to take, because, again, kids are at most risk in private passenger vehicles. So, that can help with that. It can also help with school buses, in the event that a child was on the bus and the safety systems didn't work. It could help curtail the amount of time the child's left alone on that bus.

Ann: So, I think, before we get into this, we've got several questions that have come in. We hope to have our I.M., our information memorandum on transportation safety out before this call. It's probably going to trickle out next week. So, we hope that that will, again, remind you, as you begin up school, the importance, and I think it's going to echo a lot of what we are talking about today. Could you talk about the other things, Amanda, in the Office -- I was going to say in the Head Start bureau. Boy, am I dating myself. In the Office of Head Start that we're doing to support programs in this awareness and the networks.

Amanda: One important thing is we're going to try to revive a transportation staff network. So, we are going to try to get a Listserv together, and we're asking for your help. We would like to begin receiving email contacts and names for transportation supervisors or other staff, maybe directors in some cases, who would be interested in a forum for sharing information and communicating about transportation issues. So, we will be getting you more information about that. Adrian, do you have any?

Adrian: Yes, actually, the directors and transportation staff that are on the call, if you could send your email address to the MCHAAP email address that you received to submit questions, we will start that network.

Amanda: That's terrific. We're going to be continuing to review and update the transportation Web page on the ECLKC. We encourage you to use that. It's a tremendous resource. It contains links to most of what we've been talking about today. We are also, as I mentioned, we are constantly reviewing data here and becoming increasingly data-driven. We are going to look at some of the stories that have come in and develop case studies. We will, of course, make them anonymous and there will be no way to trace anything, but we want to be able to talk about both the positive cases where an incident was prevented, because of redundant systems and the cases where we can kind of dissect them and see where something was missed, something that could have prevented an incident didn't occur and sharing that with you as an effective support to help programs kind of identify their own weaknesses and remediate those. And we've done bus webinar safety -- bus safety webinars which are available on the ECLKC.

So, I think, Ann, we want to have a little discussion and talk about some of the questions that have come in?

Ann: Yeah, and, you know, just one other thing. And, again, I think we've always felt passionately about this, but I think when you look at the science and the other literature, you even get more acutely aware of what you can do every day as an individual. And I have trained myself, if I'm in a parking lot, I look, as I go by every car, I look inside the car to see if there's a child or an animal.

Amanda: Yeah, I do that, too.

Ann: And one of the things, when I was at the Look and Lock -- Look and Lock? -- event, they actually said, you know, if you ever -- I mean, you should have that sort of vigilance when you're out there in parking lots, but if you ever come across it, don't ever leave the vehicle.

Stay with it and call 911 immediately. And I just thought that was really helpful information. Don't leave the child. As an animal-lover, don't leave the animal, but don't leave the child.

Amanda: And there have been cases of a bystander breaking a window when it looked like things were --

Ann: So, actually, the 911 call, because when we went to this event, we listened to the 911 call and what was -- it was a -- she happened to be a pediatric nurse, but on the call she was so -- you never would have known she was a nurse because at that moment there was a baby in the car and this was, you know, she was looking in, and when she called 911, it was an eight-minute call. It took eight minutes for a vehicle, emergency vehicle to get there. And she said, "Don't leave, but where is the baby?" And it was a van. And he said, "Find the nearest rock and break open that window." So, obviously, in a safe place where the glass was not going to shatter. But it was an incredibly emotional call, and tried as she did, she couldn't break it. But as soon -- the first thing that the emergency folks did was obviously break that window, and that child survived.

Amanda: Because a bystander saw --

Ann: Yeah, so I think, I mean, I think Head Start teachers have so many lessons that we can take to other parts of our lives, and I think it's just incredibly important to keep in mind in people. What we learn in Head Start we take in other places of our lives. So, I think we have some questions, and I know the first one -- and people may not know, but when we did the transportation regulations, Amanda, you were really the writer of those regulations. Am I accurate in saying that?

Amanda: Well, the final one was.

Ann: So, then, tell us about clarification on child restraints. This is a question that a person says, in the performance standards, must children be in restraints?

Amanda: Yes, the performance standards very clearly state that when children are getting Head Start transportation they must be in age-

and weight-appropriate child safety restraints. Some programs have gotten waivers, if they are working with school districts who are providing transportation; but there's no waiver for children birth to three, and the waiver for preschool-age children is limited to cases where a school district is providing transportation.

Ann: So, this is an interesting question because it gets back to when you were saying in September people are really vigilant and then kind of -- they kind of get lackadaisical. So, this is a good question: Do you recommend to use the same bus monitor every day or different bus monitors?

Amanda: You know, that's such an interesting question, because historically in Head Start a lot of bus monitors were parent volunteers, and when programs have used volunteers, it's very hard to get the same volunteers. I think you can lapse into inattention, whether you're somebody who's not familiar, and maybe you're not lapsing, but you're just -- it's hard to keep up with everything, or you're very familiar and you're so kind of lackadaisical, you've been doing it every day, you're not really that attentive. I think the key is to think about how you make sure that people are doing that active supervision, how much you've made it clear that their job is to be constantly listening, looking, counting children, you know, the kinds of systems that say, look, you've got to write every kid's name as they get on that bus and have somebody who's receiving the child initial that they took the child. Things like that I think will help, will transcend the problem of, you know, we have to change bus monitors frequently or our bus monitors do the exact same job every day and it gets boring, so they're not as tuned in.

Ann: This is also another interesting question. How far must a child live from the school to qualify for transportation? I'll tell you, there's no -- we don't have a rule. Again, it's: What are the needs? If a parent lives five blocks away and that parent has no ability to get the child to the Head Start center, then that seems to me to be a need for transportation, and I think we're not talking about -- this is not an issue of distance; it's an issue of access, having access to the center. And I can remember being in a local program once, and they had made a decision that if you lived -- any family that lived within I think it was a quarter of a mile to the center, they didn't get transportation. And I remember going to the center early that morning, and what I saw -- and it was a center -- it was an area of extraordinarily poor folks. Many did not have any vehicles themselves. And the sidewalks, there were no sidewalks. And what I witnessed were moms pushing a stroller. Some had an infant on a hip with their preschooler trying to get to school. And I thought at some point that parent's -- first of all, it's dangerous they're in the street, but there was this crazy rule; you know, and it didn't address the parents' needs.



So, it's not -- you know, there is discretion. Programs get to make their own policies and procedures, but it should be based on the needs of the family. And if the family is five blocks away, and let's say that mother's not mobile --

Amanda: Or it's not safe. It's dangerous.

Ann: So, I think it's more an issue with need, not distance.

Amanda: I think that's right, and I think that something programs have struggled with the last years have not -- until recently, the funding situation has improved, but there were a number of years of flat funding, and we recognize the challenges that poses, but our mission at the core is to enroll the highest need families in the community and to assess what the barriers are and how we can help mitigate those so those high-need families can participate.

Ann: Here's another really good question. The person's talking about the teacher-child ratios that are required in the classroom. And I think they're using the Head Start ratio, but you could also say the Early Head Start ratio which is obviously much lower. So, does it apply to the bus?

Amanda: So, Head Start does not require that you meet the same ratio, because the children are all in child safety restraints and you're doing a kind of limited activity. Some states require, the licensing requires that you meet the ratio. It is a big burden for programs when they do that, but what the Head Start rule says is you have to have at least one bus monitor, and then if there are children with exceptional needs, that you would provide additional staffing as necessary.

Ann: And I think this is an easy one to answer, but I want to honor the person who asked the question. Does the child need an IEP to take the bus to school? And I think probably in some communities they're saying the only kids that get transported are children that have learning disabilities or on IEPs, and we're saying there's no rule that says --

Amanda: There's no Head Start rule. My guess is they might be working with a local school district. Many local education agencies will only transport preschool-age children if they have an IEP, so it may be related to that.

Ann: So, this is one I'm glad you're sitting next to me. So, this is a program that's going to have a child who is 130 pounds and is quite tall. So, what's the limit on restraints versus seatbelts?

Amanda: Yeah, that's a question that's come up frequently in the last few years. We have four-year-old children weigh over 100 pounds, and some people have wondered if that means they don't need a restraint. They still do, and there are a number of products that work really well. The Easy-On -- I shouldn't mention the brand name. There are vests that work with the school bus seatbelts that you can use with larger children. There are also products that have been developed for children with special needs that can be used. But the best thing is to find something like an adjustable vest that will work and is not necessarily markedly different. It's clear that most of the booster seats will not work with a child. Even if the child is tall for age four or five, their stature and skeletal system are such that they still need to be in a child safety restraint.

Ann: Thank you. So, there's one question here that I don't know that we have enough information to understand, but I'm going to read the question, and I hope the person that is participating will know it's their question and will email us, and I'm assuming we have an email address that people can email their questions. And I just want to let the person know. So, the question is about riding -- obviously it's a rural route, and it sounds like the school system is doing the transporting, and it sounds like the driver doesn't return the bus to the bus stop, so maybe the kids are being left someplace else. But I'm not sure we have enough information, so I'd like this person to give us more information so we can be more helpful to you in answering the question.

Amanda: I think there are cases where drivers take buses home on rural routes. So, they drop off all the kids and then they go home, but my big -- the red flag in that question is there should be a monitor on the bus. We require that there be a monitor on the bus until the route is complete. So, there might be something missing from that.

Ann: I think we want to answer it fully. So, I'm so glad people are asking these questions.

What about children who should be in booster seats? Most buses only have lap belts, and booster seats require lap/shoulder combo belts.

Amanda: Another great question. And, again, many programs have found that the vest works very well for children who can be in booster seats. And it's an easy solution. In fact, you can use vests with buses that are not seatbelt-equipped at all because there's a device called the cam-wrap that there's a strap that goes around the back of the seat that you can use with those vests. And there are a number of different products that are available.

Ann: So, here's one, and we get this question a lot. So, we plan our bus route to be less than an hour, which is what they should do, and sometimes in winter it can be longer. Is that okay? I mean, my reaction is, would rather have you go slowly and safely than worry about meeting the 60-minute timeline.

Amanda: I'm glad that question came up because people -- there's a big misunderstanding that you can't exceed an hour. The language in the regulation is that you shouldn't exceed an hour, that you should do everything possible to avoid exceeding an hour. We have many places in this country where it's impossible to do that, and there's no prohibition if -- as long as you're planning your routes as efficiently as you can; if it takes an hour and thirty minutes, that's how long it takes, and we don't have a prohibition.

Ann: I got another great question for you: Is there a minimum age for a person to pick up or drop off a child?

Amanda: That depends on the state's requirements around how old a person needs to be in order to be left with a child. And states all have regulations about that.

Ann: And someone might say, "Well, where do I find those?"

Amanda: You can find those at the local licensing authority, Department of Children's Services, kind of.

Ann: So let me push you. Are we sure every state has those? And if a state didn't have it --

Amanda: I think at some point the parents' judgment and the program -- I think if I were in a program and somebody wanted me to leave their four-year-old with their nine-year-old, I'd be uncomfortable, and in most states that would be prohibited, but if it wasn't in the state where you were, I think you'd have to really work with that parent about that concern.

Ann: And, again, so let me push you a little bit more. If the state had some rules, certainly and the program -- and a program felt like those are too lenient; we're not -- they can develop their own.

Amanda: They can. It gets dicey when it's a parent, you know, a parent has a lot of right about kind of who the custody of their child at a given point, but yes, you can -- I think the route to be working with the policy council and making local decision-making.

Ann: So, let me also ask -- these are really good. I think these are going to help to get these out en masse, all these answers, so folks, don't worry about writing them all down. So, here's a person said: Who can I work with, with local authorities if the monitor--

Amanda: Motorist.

Ann: Oh, the motorists are running the--

Amanda: I'm so glad that came up. There are a number of fatalities each year in schools, school-age kids because a motorist runs the stop arm on a school bus. They just go past. It's a huge problem. And many states are tackling it. There are actually school buses equipped with cameras that are taking pictures of license plates, but the first thing I would do is talk to my police department. If you have routes where it's happening regularly, ask the police if they can send somebody out to watch and to issue some tickets. That's usually pretty effective. You can do local public awareness campaigns. Sometimes, people don't understand the rules around.

And, of course, in Head Start and our regulations, we require curbside pick-up and drop-off which is incredibly important. You may still get somebody running the light or the stop arm, but they're unlikely to hit a child if you're doing both the curbside drop-off and pick-up.

Ann: So we have a couple -- we probably have -- we're probably only going to be able to take four more questions; so, keep writing your questions and we'll just continue to take them after the call. So, here's one I do want to ask, Amanda: Do we have a position on diesel buses and the potential for exhaust emissions that impact health and safety of children?

Amanda: We carefully don't have a position. We don't have -- when the first concerns came up about the idling diesel buses and the environmental impact and danger to children, we did a little inventory, and we don't have many diesel buses. So we don't think it's a huge problem. States have different rules, and we've asked that programs are aware of their State Department of Transportation rules around diesel buses, and that's as far as we've gone. We don't have any prohibition. But, again, it hasn't been a big problem. Actually, we try not to regulate in areas where we don't have a big problem.

Ann: So we have a couple left. One, I think, we can dismiss pretty quickly. What's the rule concerning medicine on the bus?

Amanda: That's a good question, too. Medicines have to be kept out of reach of children at all times, inaccessible. There have been questions about do they have to be locked up, particularly concerns about locking up of EpiPens. There have been cases of children being stung by a bee, for example, or given a peanut by -- on a bus. So we don't say that rescue meds have to be locked up. We say they should be accessible to the driver and the monitors. Staff should be trained in their use if they're needed. And all medications just in general, in life, need to be kept out of the reach of children.

Ann: So, is there any, you know, when we talk about a building, there's a useful life of a building; can we say there's a useful life of a bus?

Amanda: Sure.

It's probably between 10 and 25 years depending on the use that it's getting. Some of our tribes, they have very short useful lives because of the roads and the distances. They drive huge geographic distances. But we expect -- we want programs to amortize the value of the bus over its expected lifetime. We hope that transportation departments, you know, we're all about data now, data-driven decision-making, what's the average life of a bus in your particular fleet, how can you kind of amortize the value and plan for the eventual replacement so it's not a shock, having a budget line for those.

Ann: So, that's a segue into probably the last two questions that we'll be able to take, but people are asking about: Well, are there quality improvement funds for buses? And I think what you were just suggesting, and I think that this is really hard because they are big ticket items, what we encourage, because really when you say improvement, it's usually one-time funding, one-time emergency funding, and the Office of Head Start never knows how much one-time funding it's going to have, and when we do have one-time funding, it usually -- we get a lot of bus requests, and we try to meet those, particularly when people are suggesting the buses are no longer safe. But if folks realize the way we get one-time money is if certain -- if some grantees don't spend all their money, then we got a little leftover money for one-time money. And with the situation today, programs really don't have leftover money. So our ability to say, "We've got one-time funds, you know, tell us what you need," we will continue to do that to the extent that we have the funds, but the safest thing to do is to build the transportation costs into your annual budget.

And I know there's been a big: "Do we lease them; do we purchase them; do we purchase them and take out a loan?" I think these are decisions -- I think the safest thing is to have a schedule of ongoing replacement and repair that's built into the budget. For programs that don't do that, they take a risk, because if we don't have the one-time funds, you're not going to be able to replace the buses. So I think it's an issue of this is long-term financial planning when you know transportation is required because your families need it, then I think it's incumbent to really build it in. As expensive as it is, it certainly is an oppor -- I was going to say a vehicle -- to allowing the most needy children to be able to participate in a program that we think is the best thing in the whole world. So I think we might have -- so we have time for one more? We got one more?

I think this is a really good -- this is a really good question, and it also suggests something else. Is there any guidance on getting newly enrolled children acclimated to being strapped in?

Amanda: Great question. I love it.

So the first thing I bet Ann is thinking is, well, gee, kids should already be acclimated by the time -- Ann: You know me so well.

Amanda: Well, I mean, it's true. So part of the reason we think it's so important that kids are in safety restraints on school buses is it's a whole public health thing, that we want to bring up children just knowing you buckle up when you get in a vehicle. It starts when they're infants in their rear-facing car seats and it progresses through life. And so, but we also know there are lots of populations where there's pretty low compliance with the use of child safety restraints and very low adult compliance with seatbelts. So that's right. And I think it's a good sensitive question to think about this, if this is an alarming thing to a child. I would encourage you to have things in the classroom, buckling up with teddy bears and straps. They love doing that. And also, there's actually a study that shows that they encourage their parents to buckle up if they -- there was a Buckle Bear program. We get better compliance with adults buckling up after kids did that in school. I think having -- the reason you have an adult on the bus, a monitor, is to ensure that children are safe and comfortable, and they need to sit next to that child. I think you want to work with the parents and talking to the -- making sure the parent is telling the child this is safe; this is okay; this is what I want you to do. So, great question to end on.

Ann: Well, I think people ask really very thoughtful questions, and I probably would have flunked the test if Amanda wasn't here answering the -- providing the right answers. But, you know, seriously, folks, we need to bring it to a close. And as we said, we're going to get out a whole sheet of all the Qs and As. But I just -- I can't tell you how passionate we are about this subject, how it is our first priority, keeping our children safe. We absolutely understand the hard work you do every day often for little pay. This is about as much a vocation as it is a job.

And the mission of Head Start is the caring and the taking care of, and we talk about school readiness, but we're really down to the nuts and bolts of the very beginning of Head Start. So I'm so glad that our folks here offered us the opportunity to reach out to you today, and I hope if we do this again we can say, wow, this year, you know what, huge difference in the number of incidences. Because, it is everybody's business, and when it happens, it impacts so many people. So, let's keep our kids safe and make sure that our staff are well trained and our boards and our governing bodies and policy councils are also really informed. So we thank you. We wish you a great school year. I can't believe it's that time of year again. And I know Early Head Start kids have been in all summer.

And as we -- some of you will be now reaching out to childcare programs, you know, with our Early Head Start childcare partnerships. It's a whole other arena for you to spread your knowledge, your expertise, and your caring about all children. This is not just about our Head Start kids and Early Head Start kids. This is about all the children in our communities. And we want to maintain a leadership role in keeping all children in our communities safe.

So with that we say goodbye and have a great year. Thank you so much for joining us. And we had almost right under a thousand folks. So, that's a good outpouring of people. So, thank you very much.