

# Transportation Program Handbook

*Prepared, designed  
And presented by*

**Niagara County  
Health Department  
and  
VMC Group, Inc.**

*Compiled by*  
**VMC Group, Inc.**  
*for the*  
**Niagara County  
Health Department**



**PLEASE CALL VMC**  
**FOR ALL**  
**TRANSPORTATION QUESTIONS**  
**(716) 285-6000**

**Program  
Telephone Numbers and Addresses**

**PLEASE CALL VMC FOR ALL TRANSPORTATION  
QUESTIONS at (716) 285-6000**

**Niagara County Health Department  
Children with Special Needs**

Trott Access Center  
1001 - 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Niagara Falls NY 14301

**Early Intervention Program**

Phone: (716) 278-1691  
Fax: (716) 278-8288

**Preschool Special Education**

Phone: (716) 439-7460  
Fax: (716) 439-7457

**Hours**

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**VMC Group, Inc.**

9701 Niagara Falls Blvd., Suite 1-A  
Niagara Falls NY 14304  
Phone: (716) 285-6000  
Fax: (716) 285-1000

**Hours**

Monday through Friday  
7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**Transporter**

Bus Company \_\_\_\_\_

Driver \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Notes  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Drivers**

All drivers serving this program undergo a thorough screening process. Background checks include fingerprinting, reference verification, licensing reviews, driving record checks, and drug screening. These reviews are conducted at the time of hiring and periodically thereafter.

In addition, all drivers must complete a physical examination before beginning service. Both regular and substitute drivers must be at least 21 years old and hold a valid Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Drivers are required to wear photo identification badges at all times.

All drivers receive State-approved safety and equipment training, including instruction on managing special needs students, defensive driving, behind-the-wheel road testing, and a mandated amount of classroom training. Yearly refresher courses are also required to ensure ongoing competence and safety.

**Monitors**

In various programs, monitors may also be called "aides" or "driver aides." Regardless of the title, these are dedicated professionals who accompany the vehicles to help ensure your child's safety and comfort.

Monitors must be at least 18 years old, wear photo identification badges, and complete special education awareness training, as well as basic first aid training. Their responsibilities include supervising all children on the vehicle, assisting with boarding and exiting, helping with car seats, seat belts, and wheelchairs, and monitoring and reporting on the behavior of children in their care.

Monitors undergo a thorough background check, including fingerprinting, drug screening, and reference verification. They are also trained in the proper use of all safety equipment required on their vehicles.

Please remember that drivers and monitors are not medical professionals and are neither qualified nor authorized to provide medical care to your child.

## ***Equipment***

### ***Car Seats***

All children under the age of four must be secured in an appropriate child restraint seat. Standard car seats are provided by the transporter; however, if your child requires a specialized car seat due to special needs, it is the parent's responsibility to provide it. The transporter ensures that any specialized equipment meets all legal safety standards and that drivers and monitors are properly trained in its use. Parents are responsible for keeping specialized equipment clean and in good working condition.

### ***Seat Belts***

The driver and/or monitor is responsible for securing each child in their seat belt. Before moving the vehicle, the driver must ensure that every child's seat belt is properly fastened.

### ***Wheelchairs***

If your child requires a wheelchair, it is the parent's responsibility to provide it. When your child was enrolled in the program and their need for a wheelchair was communicated, arrangements were made for transportation on a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. The transporter is responsible for ensuring that the vehicle is equipped with the necessary wheelchair restraints.

### ***Drivers and Monitors***

While your child is on the vehicle, their safety, security, and comfort are the responsibility of the driver and monitor. For this reason, Niagara County takes every precaution to ensure that these individuals are fully qualified. Each driver and monitor undergoes thorough background checks and receives comprehensive training before being entrusted with the care of your child.

## ***Introduction***

This Transportation Handbook is intended to provide parents and guardians with important information regarding your child's transportation. It includes helpful contact numbers for additional assistance and guidance. You will also find a clear overview of transportation policies and procedures. By reviewing this information and following these simple guidelines, you can help ensure that your child's safety and comfort are always maintained.

### ***Who to Call for All Transportation Questions***

Niagara County, through contracts with transportation providers, ensures that all children in the Children with Special Needs Program (Program) are safely transported to and from their authorized schools and special services programs, as determined by the Board of Education. VMC Group, Inc. oversees this process to ensure that transporters follow all safety procedures while caring for your child.

### ***Parent/Caregiver Absence at Vehicle Arrival Time***

- ◆ **It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to ensure that an adult is present at home to receive the child at the scheduled drop-off time.**
- ◆ **In the event that no one is at home for drop off, the child will remain on the bus while the bus company attempts to contact the authorized alternate drop-off person and/or until the bus route is completed.**
- ◆ **In the event that the route is completed and no drop-off location has been secured, the bus company may contact the Police or Child Protective Services.**

**PLEASE CALL VMC FOR ALL TRANSPORTATION  
QUESTIONS at (716) 285-6000**

The Children with Special Needs Program is located at:

**Niagara County Health Department**

Trott Access Center  
1001 – 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Niagara Falls NY 14301

**Early Intervention Program**

Phone: (716) 278-1691

**Preschool Special Education**

Phone: (716) 439-7460

**Hours**

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

By law, the County is required to publicly invite all transporters to bid for transportation services provided by the Program. Before each session (Fall and Summer), you will be notified of the transporter assigned to your child, as well as any changes to the transporter.

Any questions or concerns about transportation should be directed to The VMC Group at (716) 285-6000. The County strives to meet the needs of parents, guardians, children, and schools in a timely manner. You can help us achieve this by following the procedures outlined later in this Handbook.

***Parent/Guardian Responsibilities***

The Niagara County Health Department is committed to assuring that your child receives safe, comfortable and efficient transportation that gets your child to the Program on time. The following are simple rules and your cooperation in following these rules is greatly appreciated. Your child will not be released to anyone under the age of 14.

***Nursing on the Bus***

If it has been determined that your child requires a nurse on the bus, parents or guardians are responsible for notifying the nursing agency if their child will be absent from school. You must call the nursing agency and the transporter directly by 8:00 p.m. the night before the absence. If the absence is known in advance, you may leave a message including your child's name and the date(s) of absence. Parents or guardians must also inform the nursing agency and transporter if their child will be absent for an extended period or if there are other special circumstances or exceptions, such as your child riding to school but not home, or vice versa.

***Accidents***

In the event of any accident, regardless of severity, the transporter will immediately notify VMC and the County. You and your child's program will also be notified right away. If you receive notification of an accident, you can contact VMC Group, Inc. for information and answers to any questions about the incident.

***Vehicle Breakdowns***

If the vehicle transporting your child breaks down on the way home from their program, a replacement vehicle will be dispatched to complete the trip. VMC will be notified, and the transporter will call you to inform you of the delay and let you know when your child is expected to arrive home.

### **Extended Absences**

If your child will be absent for an extended period, please notify your child's program. The program will inform VMC and provide the date when transportation should resume. For a single-day absence, you must notify your child's transportation provider by 6:00 a.m. on the day of the absence, or the day before, to cancel pick-up.

After ten (10) consecutive absences, your child's program will contact your school district to provide notification and handle any necessary follow-up.

### **Medical and Emergency Concerns**

Any medical or other information that could affect your child's safe transportation must be provided at the Committee on Preschool Special Education meeting. This information will be kept strictly confidential. If any issues arise during the year that the transporter should be aware of, please contact the VMC Group so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

### **Illness of Child During Program Day**

If your child becomes ill during the school day—after being transported to the program site or before the regularly scheduled recess—and the program determines that your child should be sent home (including cases such as head lice, ringworm, or similar), it is the parent's or guardian's responsibility to ensure your child gets home safely. Neither the County, VMC, nor the transporter is able to make these arrangements on your behalf.

### **Medications**

Check with your child's program to see if they allow medications to be sent to school. If medications need to be administered during school hours, they must be provided in a sealed, clearly labeled pharmacy container and given to the driver for safekeeping during transportation.

### **Travel Time and Distance**

1. **Please have your child ready for pick up 10 minutes before the scheduled pick up time**, and watch for the arrival of the vehicle. By doing this, you can help ensure that your child and others are picked up on time.
2. Unless a parent/guardian has given prior authorization, no child transported as part of this program will be picked up earlier than one and one-half hours before their program is to start. In addition, no child will be transported more than 50 miles (one way) to a program site without the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education.
3. **It is essential that an authorized adult be available at all times to receive and send your child during pick-up and drop-off.** If there is a change in the person meeting the bus, this must be arranged before your child begins their trip home by contacting your child's program. The person meeting the bus must have a valid ID and be prepared to present it upon request. The program is responsible for notifying the driver and VMC of any changes when your child boards the vehicle for the return trip.
4. Parents/Guardians must complete an Alternate/Emergency Drop Off information sheet for each child being transported. This sheet is to be submitted to the school or program your child attends. For information about how to change this information and what changes can be accepted, see the *Pick Up/ Drop Off Change Orders* section of the Program Policies (on page 8). The place you name for the alternate or emergency drop off should be near where your child is usually dropped off and the emergency drop off must be available during bus times (the time your child would normally be dropped off). This will ensure every child on the bus will arrive home on time. Following this procedure is the only way to ensure that your child is released safely and only to an authorized individual.
5. Please be sure that the information is updated regularly, and that your Program is notified of any change in address and/or telephone number.
6. If all attempts to contact a parent/guardian or an alternate/emergency drop off fail, the transporter is *required* to notify the Niagara County Department of Social Services Child Protective Services. Again, this is for your child's protection.

## ***Program Policies***

### ***General Safety***

We are committed to doing everything possible to ensure your child's safety and comfort during transportation. All transport providers are required to comply with applicable Federal, State, County, City, and Town laws and regulations. In addition, based on our experience and best practices, we have established additional safety guidelines that all transporters must follow. Please note that transportation services are provided on a curb-to-curb basis only. Door-to-door service is not available. **An authorized parent or other adult must walk the child to and from the bus. Please do not allow the child to run to/from the bus on their own.**

### ***Parent/Guardian Reimbursement***

Niagara County offers mileage reimbursement to parents or guardians who choose to transport their child to and from the program. Reimbursement is provided at the current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) standard mileage rate and is limited to a maximum of two one-way trips per day. If you plan to transport your child, please notify your school district. Detailed information about reimbursement procedures will be sent directly to parents or guardians by Niagara County Children with Special Needs.

### ***Session Start Up***

Before transportation services begin for the summer and fall school programs, drivers are required to complete a "dry run" of their assigned routes and notify parents of their child's approximate pick-up time. Your child should be ready at least 10 minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. To ensure all students arrive at the program on time, drivers may wait no more than three (3) minutes at each stop. For safety reasons, drivers and monitors are not permitted to leave the vehicle to knock on doors. Whenever possible, drivers will provide pick-up time information in person. This is encouraged, as it offers you the opportunity to meet the individual who will be assisting your child. If no one is available at the time of the visit, written notification will be left at your home. If you have not been contacted by your assigned transporter at least two days before your child's session begins, please contact the bus company responsible for your child's transportation.

## ***Reasonable Emergency/Alternate Drop Off Points***

To help ensure that bus routes remain consistent and that all children—including your child—arrive home on time, designated emergency drop-off points should be within a "reasonable" distance of your child's regular drop-off location. While this does not mean the emergency drop-off must be next door, it should not be several miles away. Please review your designated emergency or alternate drop-off points now and periodically to confirm that they meet these guidelines.

If you have questions about these policies and procedures, or need to provide information regarding emergency drop-off arrangements, please contact VMC at the phone number or address listed in this Handbook. VMC will be happy to assist you within these guidelines.

**VMC Group, Inc.  
9701 Niagara Falls Blvd., Suite 1-A  
Niagara Falls NY 14304  
(716) 285-6000**

**Hours:  
Monday through Friday  
7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**



## **Emergency Pick Up and Drop Off**

Emergency pick-ups cannot be accommodated without prior approval from VMC, as they may significantly disrupt transportation for other children. Any request for an emergency change to your child's pick-up location or time must be made by calling VMC directly at the phone number listed inside the front cover of this Handbook.

Emergency drop-off changes must be handled in the same manner. Please contact VMC by telephone so we can determine whether arrangements can be made.

An "emergency" is defined as an unexpected, last-minute situation that makes it absolutely impossible for you to be home to send or receive your child (for example, a sudden medical issue involving a family member). Scheduling conflicts or routine delays do not qualify as emergencies.

Parents and guardians are responsible for ensuring that a parent, guardian, or authorized individual is present to receive the child at drop-off. Transporters cannot keep a child on the bus until someone arrives, nor can drivers wait at the residence for an extended period. If no authorized person is available, your child's safety may be at risk.

As previously explained, if we are unable to reach you or your designated emergency contact, specific procedures must be followed. VMC will always make every effort to assist in genuine emergency situations; however, repeated "emergencies" may require a review of your child's transportation arrangements.

If no authorized individual can be located after all emergency contact options have been exhausted, the transporter will be required to contact law enforcement and/or Child Protective Services.

## **Weather/Snow Emergencies**

This Weather Policy establishes clear procedures for transportation during inclement weather or emergency conditions to ensure the safety of students, families, staff, transportation personnel, and partner agencies across all participating school districts and counties. When the public school district in which a program is physically located announces a closure, all transportation for that program is canceled, and no students will be transported from any district or county, even if their home district remains open. If the district where the program is located announces a remote learning day due to inclement weather, but not a full closure, transportation will continue as normal unless the program itself announces a late opening or closure. In such cases, transportation will follow the program's adjusted schedule rather than the district's remote learning designation.

For programs serving students from multiple counties or districts, differing weather conditions may occur. If one county or district is closed or delayed while another remains open, the program will determine whether transportation should continue for the unaffected county or district or whether the program will delay or close for all students. The program will communicate its final decision to all transportation providers, families, and VMC Consultants Inc., and transportation services will follow that determination. If a transportation company's terminal is located in a district that is closed, or if road conditions are deemed unsafe by the transportation provider, transportation will be canceled for the entire day, even if the program or other districts remain open.

When transportation is canceled but the program remains open, parents or guardians are responsible for transporting their child. The County emphasizes that student safety and continued access to education and therapies remain the highest priorities, and families are encouraged to use their best judgment regarding travel conditions. The program will notify families, transportation providers, and VMC Consultants Inc. of any schedule changes as early as possible through phone calls, text messages, emails, website postings, or local media listings. Families should monitor announcements from their home district, the district where the program is located, and the program itself. Above all, the safety of students, families, and transportation personnel is the foundation of every decision. Transportation providers may cancel or delay service if conditions are unsafe, and the County fully supports these safety-based decisions.

### ***Pick Up/Drop Off Change Orders***

Transportation is provided once each day to and once each day from your child's special needs service or program.

Except in special circumstances, transportation will be arranged from the same pick-up location each day of the week and to the same drop-off location each day of the week. The morning pick-up and afternoon drop-off locations may be different from one another; however, each location must remain consistent day to day.

Because short-term changes to pick-up or drop-off locations can significantly disrupt established routes and affect other children, the County is unable to accommodate temporary changes. Long-term changes (generally those expected to remain in place for several months) typically require up to five (5) business days from the date the request is received to be implemented, unless special circumstances or specific vehicle requirements apply. As always, we will make every effort to work with you to address reasonable requests.

All requests for transportation changes must be submitted in writing using a Change Order form, which is available at your child's program site. This form is required for changes such as a new address, pick-up and/or drop-off location, session time adjustments, or other important updates. Submitting the Change Order form is the only reliable way to notify the County, the transporter, VMC, and your child's program of changes and to ensure that transportation arrangements are updated accurately and without delay.

**If your child will be absent on any given day, you must notify your child's transportation provider by 6:00 a.m. to cancel pick-up. Whenever possible, please provide notice the day before the absence.**

### ***Permanent Changes***

Permanent changes must be requested through your child's school or program.

Once a Change Order form has been completed and signed, your child's program will submit it to VMC for processing. Please allow up to five (5) business days for changes to be arranged. Additional time may be required if special equipment, a new route, or other County-approved modifications are needed. Examples of changes requiring County approval include those that affect the school district, program placement, or number of program hours, as these require updates to your child's IFSP or IEP.

If you are requesting a permanent change, please remind your child's program to forward the signed Change Order form to VMC as soon as possible to avoid delays.

### ***Short Term or Casual Changes***

Transportation will be provided as arranged by the Committee on Preschool Special Education, with consistent pick-up and drop-off locations.

Because bus routes are carefully coordinated, short-term or occasional changes cannot be accommodated. Even minor adjustments require significant rescheduling and may disrupt transportation for other children assigned to the same route. Maintaining consistent arrangements helps ensure safe, reliable, and timely service for your child and all students in the program.