

Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency

The Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency provides hundreds of educational programs and services to students, educators, parents and the community.

Kalamazoo RESA Website: www.kresa.org

Kalamazoo RESA trains prospective school bus drivers

From a public awareness standpoint, school bus driver training may be one of the least-known programs of Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency.

It also may be one of the most important.

William Dawson, Kalamazoo RESA's facility/transportation coordinator, oversees a consortium of nine intermediate school districts in south and southwest Michigan called the Regional Transportation and Safety Institute. The programs provided through this institute serve 150 public and private school districts that employ about 2,500 bus drivers.

School bus trainees are selected by individual school districts. Applicants are screened, fingerprinted and interviewed. The districts perform driving record and criminal record checks, drug screens and Department of Transportation physical exams.

Once they are hired, driver candidates come to Kalamazoo RESA for a three-day beginning bus driver training, which involves classroom and hands-on time in the bus as well as practical use of fire extinguishers and flares. The candidates have 90 days to take the class, which is offered monthly, August through June. Continuing education also is necessary, with six hours of training required every two years.

Training is tough and thorough. In one exercise, Dawson places a series of different colored traffic cones at strategic locations around a parked school bus. Then he has all the trainees sit at the wheel and later grills them on how many traffic cones they had seen. In the most recent class, none of the trainees saw the two blue cones that were placed close to the front bumper of the bus.

For newcomers to the job, that's not surprising, according to Dawson. He announced their error to the whole group with this blunt, unequivocal statement: "You all just ran over two children." The training stresses safety at every step of the process.

As Dawson explained to the class, if bus drivers have all their mirrors adjusted properly, they can see everything around that vehicle – and they won't miss a child. That's a point he emphasizes throughout the training. "I tell bus drivers, 'You lose concentration for 5 seconds, you'll kill a kid.'"



Dennis Purnell, above, from Kalamazoo Public Schools, learned not to spray above the flames during one exercise. At right, Kalamazoo RESA facility/transportation coordinator William Dawson tests participants on proper use and adjustment of mirrors.



Kalamazoo RESA is a member of the Training Agency Association of Michigan, which writes a state-approved curriculum for these classes. It also provides bus stop reviews, which scrutinizes the safety and logistics at specific stops.

"There are a lot of things we look at to make sure it's a safe stop," Dawson said. "We look at speed limits, clear and continuous visibility. Can the bus get off the roadway or do they have to stay on the roadway? Do kids have a place to stand and how do they get to the bus stop?"

One of the greatest dangers for children who use school buses is not while they're rid-

ing on the buses, he added, pointing to the unacceptable number of motorists who fail to stop for school buses when the flashing red lights are activated.

In one test in October in Kalamazoo County, they counted a total of 65 cars that zipped by area school buses when their red lights were flashing, "which really was frightening," he said.

Kalamazoo RESA has been providing training for school bus drivers since 1978; in 1991, the state mandated the curriculum for these programs and standards were established to ensure consistency. The program offers year-round

training; the schools cover the cost for their bus drivers and the state Department of Education reimburses Kalamazoo RESA for the service.

The required beginning school bus driver training program is given to approximately 250 drivers annually.

In addition to beginning bus driver training; Kalamazoo RESA offers continuing education and transportation supervisor continuing educa-

tion. These are required by law.

Kalamazoo RESA also provides advanced driver training. About 700 driver's license third-party tests for automobile, commercial road skills and motorcycle skills are performed annually. Also, Kalamazoo RESA operates a drug and alcohol consortium enrolling approximately 650 bus drivers subject to random drug tests. It also serves as an information clearinghouse for school districts and the public.

Kalamazoo RESA also maintains a private/public sector training partnership with Eaton Corp. for Defensive Driving training. The Eaton Proving Grounds in Marshall have been the site for this training since 1978.

This partnership and the training itself are unique. Drivers receive hands-on defensive and precision driving instruction and practice. The relationship between Kalamazoo RESA and the Eaton Corp. is the longest running active cooperative private/public sector education venture in the nation.

Bus drivers receive behind-the-wheel training in small groups. Exercises include: Serpentine forward and backward, evasive maneuver, straight braking, off-road recovery and skid control. Drivers with one or more years of driving experience are eligible to participate in these sessions, which run from June through August.

Dawson said this kind of specialized training makes a difference. "We show them how the bus operates and how you can handle the bus in different situations on the roadway. You can't put the bus into a 360-degree skid on a normal road – but it can happen in the wintertime. We show them how that can happen on a closed track."



This attention to the thorough training of bus drivers – along with a careful scrutiny of key aspects of transporting students – ensures the safety of all who ride school buses as well as the motorists and pedestrians who are sharing the roads with them.

Watch the video at: kresa.org/busdrivertraining

For more about this program, call 250-9290 or go to kresa.org/transportation

EFA seeks proposals for art scholarships

Student applications for arts scholarships will be sought soon through Education for the Arts program. EFA, with funds from Irving S. Gilmore Foundation, offers grants for K-12 students in public and private schools to explore or expand their appreciation, understanding and practice of the arts. An optional workshop to assist applicants is set for 5:30 p.m. Dec. 12 at the Service Center, 1819 E. Millham. Jan. 24 is the deadline to apply. The application form will be available online at: kresa.org/efa on Dec. 1.

Students galore at EFE Business Bash

Hundreds of students and teachers from Education for Employment business and accounting classes gathered at Kalamazoo Valley Community College recently for a day of learning and networking. Students attended six sessions on a variety of business-related topics. EFE offers 38 career and technical programs covering six career pathways. More than 3,500 high school students participate in courses throughout Kalamazoo County.

For more information: (269) 250-9303.

PNC "Grow Up Great" makes a difference

"Marvelous Music!" for Kalamazoo RESA preschoolers offers activities intended to build participation, teamwork, creativity, and pre-reading skills. After two years, it's having an impact. Jane Rooks Ross, with the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra and director of Marvelous Music!, has noticed "an increase in engagement, focus, recall and musical skills. Parents were enthusiastic . . . and teachers were communicative about the ways 'Marvelous Music!' supported their curriculum goals." PNC Foundation's Grow Up Great initiative partners with KSO and Crescendo Music Academy to provide this program in Kalamazoo County.

Y.O.U., city provide youth employment

Youth Opportunities Unlimited and the City of Kalamazoo are longtime partners in providing employment opportunities for young people. Since City Summer Work Experience began in 2005, it has provided work experience to 1,094 young people. This past summer, 124 students between the ages of 14 and 17 participated. Businesses, neighborhood associations and community organizations provided on-site job opportunities. In addition, 96 participants from 16 area schools received a half-credit toward graduation. To help: (269) 349-9676.

Project SEARCH helps young adults make life transitions

About 300 students who have received special education services transition from school to adult responsibilities in our community every year. Special educators throughout Kalamazoo County are responsible for ensuring positive outcomes for all the students who are leaving school for the world of work. One way that Kalamazoo RESA is accomplishing that is through Project SEARCH, with its goal of training students with disabilities to perform specific jobs and support them in finding competitive employment in the community.

The program, which launched this fall, is a collaboration between Kalamazoo RESA, Bronson Methodist

Hospital, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Bureau of Services for Blind Persons, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Disability Network of Southwest Michigan.

Eight students between the ages of 18 and 26 from the Young Adult Program are receiving curriculum instruction throughout the day as well as on-the-job training in various departments at the hospital, where they perform systematic and routine tasks. Daily



Adam Danapilis

instruction and support is provided by two staff members, teacher Mark Hubbard from Kalamazoo RESA and job coach Kelly Tucker from Disability Network, in collaboration with on-site staff in each department at Bronson.

"An example would be one of our students works as a greeter in the cardiac intensive care unit," said Adam Danapilis, Kalamazoo RESA transition coordinator. "Part of his job is to interact with any person who comes into the unit, a visitor or guest, or anyone who exits the unit."

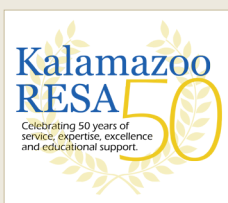
"Everyone has to check in with him. He has guidelines that he must follow. A patient may have restrictions, so he will tell the visitor what

those restrictions are to ensure the safety and well-being of the patient."

The students must develop a mastery of the specific skills they are expected to perform and show that they can do them independently. Students receive three different training experiences throughout the hospital. Each learning experience is 10 weeks.

"We have an orientation process that is very intense," Danapilis said. "Besides assistance from the job coach and teacher, Bronson has designated mentors to be natural supports for these interns."

"That's the real success: It's an employment mindset. So they are interns, not students, and they are prepar-



www.kresa.org

Education for the Arts (EFA): 250-9244

Education for Employment (EFE): 250-9300

Great Start/Early Childhood Programs: 250-9640

Hearing/Visually Impaired Services: 250-9700

Instructional Services: 250-9210

Juvenile Home Schools Intensive Learning Center: 385-8523 Youth Center School: 385-8549

Lakeside School: 381-0353

Preprimary Evaluation Team (PET): 250-9670

Regional Educational Media Center (REMC 12): 250-9350

Service Center: 250-9200

Special Education: 250-9323

Valley Center School: 388-9494

WoodsEdge Learning Center: 250-9400

Young Adult Program (YAP): 250-9600

Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) Employment Services/ Michigan Works!: 383-2536 Kalamazoo: 349-9676 Three Rivers: 269-273-2717 Coldwater: 517-278-0200