Just as they did last year, respondents of SCHOOL BUS FLEET’s 2013 Special-Needs Survey report that they are transporting more special-needs students. Our survey found that these students represent 8.7% of the ridership on respondents’ buses, up from 6.9% in 2012, and up from 6% in 2011.

Pupil transportation officials are well prepared to handle this increase, as they report carrying a variety of items and equipment on their buses to accommodate students’ needs. For example, more than four-fifths (82.3%) say that they transport student medical information, while 61.6% transport EpiPens. Walkers/crutches, ventilators/suction devices and oxygen are among the other items on board.

Respondents also show a commitment to providing their special-needs bus drivers with the information needed to do their job. Training covers many subjects, from wheelchair securement to evacuations to first aid to seizure response. The majority of respondents (90.9%) say that the securement of wheelchairs and other restraints is discussed during sessions.

Although it is not represented in a chart, we asked those surveyed how many of their special-needs routes have an aide or monitor on the bus. About two-fifths (39.7%) say that all of these routes are accompanied by an aide or monitor, while 38.5% say that some of them are.

We also asked about the length of bus rides for special-needs passengers. Nearly half (49.2%) of respondents say that their operation has established a length-of-ride policy.

We asked respondents several new questions this year, including whether their operation conducts home visits for special-needs students. Most (81.8%) say that they don’t. Another new question asked was what percentage of their special-needs bus stops are in front of the student’s house, or curbside. On average, more than four-fifths (86.3%) of these stops are curbside.

Data for this survey were collected from managers and supervisors at school district transportation departments and bus companies. We received 194 usable responses. Thanks to those who participated.

Increase in special-needs students transported

Respondents report that 8.7% of the students they transport have special needs, which represents an almost 2 percentage-point increase compared to last year. Wheelchair use among special-needs passengers remains steady – 5.3% of students this year compared to 5.2% in 2012.
Majority transport student medical information

More than four-fifths (82.3%) of those surveyed say that they have special-needs students’ medical information on their school buses. Responses in the “Other” category include food for diabetics, feeding tubes, wheelchairs, Diastat, inhalers, and first aid and body fluid kits.

Driver training topics are extensive

The majority of respondents (90.9%) say their special-needs bus drivers receive instruction on the securement of wheelchairs and other types of restraints during training sessions, and it is among many subjects covered. Topics in the “Other” category include behavior support plans and how to administer Diastat.

Bus drivers trained to administer Diastat?

Almost one-third (31.1%) of respondents report that some or all of their school bus drivers have received instruction on how to administer Diastat for the treatment of seizures in students.

Conduct home visits?

Most respondents (81.8%) say that their operation’s staff does not visit the homes of special-needs students at the beginning of each school year.

Mainstreamed students dips

A third (33.3%) of respondents’ special-needs passengers are mainstreamed on regular-route school buses. Last year’s figure was 36.4%.
Most respondents have fewer than 50 buses. Mirroring last year’s figure, almost two-thirds (63.1%) of respondents have fleets of fewer than 50 buses.

On average, respondents say that nearly one quarter (23%) of the buses in their fleet are small buses (30 passengers or fewer). On average, just over half (50.6%) of respondents’ special-needs buses are equipped with video surveillance cameras to monitor the ride.

On average, respondents say that more than four-fifths (86.3%) of the bus stops for their special-needs passengers are curbside, meaning in front of the student’s house.

Over the past five years, the average percentage of passengers with special needs who ride regular-route buses is 35.6.

Breakdown of bus type

- Small buses: 23%
- Large buses: 77%

- Year
  - Percentage of Passengers
    - 2013: 50.6%
    - 2012: 50.6%
    - 2011: 41.3%
    - 2010: 33.3%
    - 2009: 34.4%

- Special-needs students mainstreamed varies

- Many buses have cameras

- 50.6%