

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) POLICY

Version 0825

This policy includes general ADA requirements, including addressing reasonable modification requests. This document does not address paratransit, no-show, or suspension policies.

For

Autism Model Community School



Approved by:

Autism Model Community School Board of Directors

Date Approved:

Will Be Brought to Board at Future Date

ADA Contact Information

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Reasonable Modification Contact Information

Name/Title: Joel Vidovic, Director

I. Introduction and Purpose

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires that individuals with disabilities receive the same level of service as non-disabled individuals. Services that are “separate but equal” are not acceptable. Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

This ADA policy is written to establish operating and service guidelines and procedures for the implementation of the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) regulations for implementing ADA (49 CFR Parts 27, 37 and 38), and any applicable state laws and regulations. Autism Model Community School (“the agency”) operates a demand-response service and complies with ADA requirements with respect to such services.

ADA Policy Statement

It is the policy of Autism Model Community School to comply with all the legal requirements of federal and state laws and regulations as they pertain to individuals with disabilities. If state laws and federal regulations are contradictory, the federal ADA regulations prevail. The transit system provides quality transportation services without discrimination to all persons including individuals with disabilities. Discrimination on the basis of disability against any person by transit system employees will not be condoned or tolerated.

Goals: Service is provided in a manner that meets the following goals:

1. Provides safe, accessible, and dignified services to all persons, including individuals with disabilities.
2. Expedites the safe and efficient boarding, securing, transporting, and alighting of all passengers, regardless of mobility status.
3. Accommodates a wide range of mobility aids within the confines of available vehicles and commercial standard equipment.

Applicability: This policy applies to all transit system employees, services, facilities, and vehicles. It applies equally to all people needing and/or using the services provided by the system.

Definitions:

Disability: With respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.

Fixed Route Service: Operates along a prescribed route according to a fixed (regular) schedule.

Mobility Device: A device that is designed to assist an individual with disabilities with locomotion. Examples include wheelchairs, canes, crutches, and walkers. Also called mobility aid.

Securement Area or Station: A designated location for riders using wheelchairs, equipped with a securement system.

Securement Device, Equipment or System: Equipment used for securing wheelchairs against uncontrolled movement during transport.

Service Animal: Any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal that has been individually trained to work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, including, but not limited to, guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to intruders or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, or fetching dropped items.

Wheelchair: A mobility aid belonging to any class of three- or more- wheeled devices, usable indoors, designed or modified for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered.

II. General Guidance and Procedures for Implementing Policy

Recruitment and Employment

As stated in the transit system's personnel policies, the agency is an Equal Opportunity Employer (EOE) and fully complies with ADA in its recruitment, hiring, and continued employment practices.

Facility and Vehicle Accessibility

The transit system administrative facility, passenger facilities and vehicles shall meet or exceed the requirements of 49 CFR Parts 27, 37 and 38 and requirements of the State of Ohio. If state requirements do not meet federal requirements, the federal ADA regulations prevail. All vehicles purchased for fixed route and route deviation service will be accessible. Vehicles purchased for demand response service will only be non-accessible to the extent that the demand response system, when viewed in its entirety, provides the same level of service for individuals with disabilities as for individuals without disabilities. The transit system will conduct an analysis of service equivalency prior to the acquisition of any inaccessible vehicles for demand-responsive service.

Vehicle and Route Assignment

The demand response system of Autism Model Community School, has a fleet that is either 100% accessible or when viewed in its entirety, is accessible. When Autism Model Community School has less than 100% fleet accessibility:

- All trips by wheelchair users will be assigned to accessible vehicles.
- To the extent possible, the assignment of particular types of vehicles will be based upon rider needs.

- Trip denials will be tracked by whether or not a rider requires use of the lift or ramp, to monitor that service is not disproportionately denied to individuals with disabilities because an accessible vehicle is not available.

Autism Model Community School provides demand response rural public transportation and provides equivalent service to individuals with disabilities, that is consistent with U.S. DOT ADA regulations under 49 CFR Part 37, Section 37.77. This transportation will be provided in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the individual and will be equivalent to the service provided other individuals with respect to:

- Response time
- Fares
- Geographic area of service
- Hours and days of service
- Restrictions or priorities based on trip purpose
- Availability of information and reservations capability
- Any constraints on capacity or availability

Maintenance of Accessible Features

Accessibility features on vehicles, including lifts, ramps, wheelchair securement devices and public address systems, will be maintained in operative condition. The preventive maintenance program of Autism Model Community School provides for regular and frequent maintenance checks of these features as well as preventive maintenance as recommended by the equipment manufacturers. In addition, the lift must be cycled as part of each pre-trip inspection.

Inoperative Lifts and Ramps

Drivers are required to report lift or ramp failures immediately. Vehicles with inoperative lifts will be removed from service and replaced with an accessible vehicle until the inoperative lift is repaired. For vehicles equipped with ramps, it may be possible to continue in service as long as the ramp can be and is deployed manually when necessary. If an inoperative ramp cannot be (or is not) deployed manually, the transit agency will apply the policy for a vehicle with an inoperative lift.

If there is no spare vehicle available to take the place of a vehicle with an inoperable lift, such that taking the vehicle out of service will reduce the transportation service Autism Model Community School is able to provide, Autism Model Community School may keep the vehicle in service with an inoperable lift for up to, but no more than 5 days – since Autism Model Community School serves an area of 50,000 or less in total population. If serving an area of more than 50,000 in total population, then Autism Model Community School will reduce the 5 days to 3 days per FTA requirements.

In any case in which a vehicle is operating on a fixed route with an inoperative lift, and the headway to the next accessible vehicle on the route exceeds 30 minutes, then an agency would promptly provide alternative transportation to individuals with disabilities who are unable to use the vehicle because its lift does not work.

Wheelchair Accommodation

All accessible vehicles meet or exceed the requirements of 49 CFR Part 38.

Transportation providers are required to carry a wheelchair and its user, as long as the lift can accommodate the size and weight of the wheelchair and its user, and there is space in the securement area for the wheelchair on the vehicle without blocking the aisle. If a vehicle lift/ramp and securement area can accommodate a wheelchair (or other mobility device), Autism Model Community School will transport the device (and its user).

An individual who uses a wheelchair that, when occupied, exceeds the weight rating of the vehicle lift/ramp, will be offered the opportunity to board and disembark from the vehicle separately from the wheelchair. However, transit agency personnel are not permitted to operate a passenger's wheelchair (i.e. a motorized wheelchair). The individual may travel with another individual who can assist with operating the unoccupied wheelchair to maneuver it on and off the lift/ramp.

Boarding

Drivers and scheduling practices will provide adequate time for a passenger with a disability to board and/or disembark the vehicle, which includes adjusting the schedule if necessary and waiting for passengers to be seated before moving the vehicle. Only a properly trained transit system employee can operate the lift or ramp and secure the wheelchair in the securement station. Passengers may board facing toward or away from the vehicle.

Wheelchair Securement

Autism Model Community School requires all wheelchairs to be secured. Drivers should not allow a passenger to ride if they are not secured properly unless the securement system will not accommodate the wheelchair. Drivers cannot deny a passenger a ride based on the inability to secure the wheelchair. However, drivers must warn the passengers of the danger of riding in a non-secured wheelchair. Passengers who refuse to allow their wheelchairs to be secured may be denied service.

Securement of wheelchairs is the responsibility of the driver. Drivers are trained in the proper operation of all securement equipment based on the equipment manufacturer's specifications. Drivers will listen to and respect riders' instructions on how to secure their equipment. Drivers cannot be expected to be familiar with each and every wheelchair type that may come aboard, and securement attachment points may differ by wheelchair manufacturer. The rider may be in the best position to instruct the driver on how to properly secure their mobility device.

If the securement system is not compatible with the wheelchair the passenger is using, the driver will still try to safely secure the wheelchair. If the wheelchair cannot be secured because of the wheelchair design, the passenger still has the right to ride in the vehicle. Seat belts and should harnesses shall not be used in lieu of a device which secures the wheelchair or mobility aid itself (per 49 CFR 38.23(d)(7)).

Drivers must secure wheelchairs in the designated securement area only, even if the passenger wants their mobility device to be secured in a non-designated area. The wheelchair is not allowed to block the aisle.

In cases where an individual using a wheelchair attempts to board and requires use of a securement location that is currently occupied by another passenger that is not using a wheelchair, the driver will ask that passenger to allow the individual using a wheelchair to use the securement position.

Seat Belt Usage

Autism Model Community School applies its seat belt policy equally to all passengers regardless of disability. Wheelchair passengers are not treated differently from other passengers when it comes to seat belt requirements.

Seat belts are required for all passengers, unless they have a condition in which the seat belt and/or shoulder harness could pose a health hazard. In those instances, the passenger may provide documentation from their medical professional indicating the need for an exemption to the seat belt requirement. These passengers should not ride in the front seat of a vehicle if the exemption is made.

Seat belts are not required for passengers.

Driver Assistance

Drivers will make themselves available to assist individuals with disabilities and will assist upon request of the passenger. Drivers will assist a passenger with using the vehicle ramp, lift and/or securement systems using the accessibility-related equipment and features on their vehicles.

Use of Lift or Ramp by Individuals with Disabilities Not Using a Mobility Device

The driver will deploy the lift or ramp for an individual with a disability who is not using a mobility device to board or alight the vehicle upon request.

Accommodation of Other Mobility Devices

Mobility devices that are not wheelchairs, but which are primarily designed to be used by individuals with mobility impairments, will be accommodated to the extent that the ADA-compliant lift or ramp and securement areas can safely do so. However, these devices are the responsibility of the individual passenger, and must be secured in a manner that does not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicles and the transport of other passengers.

Transfer to Fixed Seating

All passengers using wheelchairs have an option of transferring to fixed seating once on board the vehicles. Drivers may recommend, but never require, wheelchair users to transfer to fixed seating. No waivers are allowed to be required.

Accommodation of Portable Oxygen

Individuals are allowed to travel with respirators and portable oxygen supplies on board, consistent with applicable U.S. DOT rules on the transportation of hazardous materials in 49 CFR Subtitle B, Chapter 1, Subchapter C.

Priority Seating

With the exception of the wheelchair securement stations, the transit system does not require any passenger to sit in designated seating.

Priority seating for seniors and individuals with disabilities is to be designated by permanent signage in each vehicle. In cases where an individual with a disability requests use of priority seating that is currently occupied by another passenger, the driver will ask that passenger to move so as to allow the individual with a disability use of the priority seating. In cases where a wheelchair user requires the use of a securement location, the driver will ask any passenger (including other passengers with disabilities) to vacate the securement location.

Service Animals

In compliance with 49 CFR Part 37, the transit system allows trained service animals to accompany passengers with disabilities. The driver will not ask for proof of the qualifications of the animal but may ask what tasks the animal has been trained to perform. Autism Model Community School does not impose species or breed restrictions. However, any animal which is not under the passenger's control, or which becomes a direct threat to the health or safety of other passengers may be restricted from riding. Emotional support animals or "comfort animals" are not service animals within the context of the US DOT ADA regulations.

Alighting

It is the responsibility of the driver to determine that the location for passenger alighting is safe. For fixed routes, the driver will allow a passenger who uses the lift or ramp to alight at any stop, unless the lift or ramp cannot be deployed, will be damaged if deployed, or conditions at the stop would present unsafe conditions for all passengers. Only the driver will unsecure the wheelchair and operate the lift or ramp to return the passenger to the ground level.

Staff Training

All drivers and transit system staff are trained to proficiency in use of accessibility equipment, the operating policies related to each of the service requirements described, and in properly and respectfully assisting and treating individuals with disabilities with sensitivity. Mechanics are also trained to properly maintain lifts and other accessibility equipment.

Accessible Information

All printed informational materials are made available in accessible formats upon request, for example, large print for individuals with low vision or audio for blind individuals, as well as accessible electronic formats.

Personal Care Attendants

Under the ADA, an agency cannot require a passenger to have a personal care attendant (PCA). If a PCA accompanies a passenger, the PCA will ride free of charge. A family member or friend is not considered a PCA, unless that individual is acting in that capacity.

Stop Announcements

If Autism Model Community School operates a deviated-fixed route service, stop announcements and route identification announcements are made at transfer points, major intersections, destination points, intervals along the route sufficient to orient passengers to their location, and any stop request as is required.

Autism Model Community School will train drivers to verbally make stop and route identification announcements in a clear and concise manner in order to adequately assist clients who may have a disability that prevents them from otherwise recognizing stops and/or routes. Autism Model Community School may also utilize an automated system if available in lieu of drivers making verbal announcements.

Advertising of ADA Policies & Procedures, and Complaints

Autism Model Community School ensures that the public is made aware of critical ADA policies and procedures as needed. The ADA complaint process is marketed in the same manner as other transportation services are marketed.

If Autism Model Community School has a website or brochure, then ADA compliant information will be marketed using those methods. The ODOT Office of Transit requires 5311 agencies to have both a website and a brochure, while 5310 subrecipients are not required to have either.

Complaint Procedure

All complaints of discrimination on the basis of disability will be forwarded to the Director and promptly and objectively investigated. The designated individual who handles these complaints is listed on the first page of this document. Complaints are also submitted to the ODOT Civil Rights Office.

Autism Model Community School will promptly communicate its response to the complaint allegations, including its reasons for the response, to the complainant. The response will be documented. Corrective or disciplinary action will be taken for behavior prohibited by this policy, up to and including termination of employment.

Documentation of each complaint will be kept on file for a minimum of one year, and a summary of all complaints will be kept for at least five years. This meets DOT regulations that require FTA grantees to maintain all complaints of noncompliance with 49 CFR Part 27 for one year, and a record of all such complaints, which is permitted to be in summary form, for five years.

Reasonable Modification Policy

The purpose of the reasonable modification policy is to ensure that Autism Model Community School offers equal and effective opportunities and access to public transportation services for persons with disabilities and full compliance with the provisions of the Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

This policy applies to all safety-sensitive transportation vehicle operators including full, part time and those staff that may be required to operate the vehicle. For the purposes of this section, the term reasonable accommodation shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the term “reasonable modifications” as set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act Title II regulations at 28 CFR 35.130(b)(7), and not as it is defined or interpreted for the purposes of employment discrimination under Title I of the ADA (42 U.S.C. 12111–12112) and its implementing regulations at 29 CFR part 1630.

Autism Model Community School is committed to providing equal access and opportunity to individuals with disabilities in all programs, services and activities. Autism Model Community School recognizes that in order to have equally effective opportunities and benefits, individuals with disabilities may need reasonable modifications to policies and procedures. Autism Model Community School will adhere to all applicable federal and state laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable modifications, as necessary, to afford equal access to programs for persons with disabilities. Autism Model Community School does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission to, participation in, or receipt of services and benefits under any transit program or activity. Autism Model Community School will take appropriate steps to ensure that persons with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate.

No individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of Autism Model Community School, or be subject to discrimination by Autism Model Community School.

A reasonable modification is a change or exception to a policy, practice, or procedure that allows persons with disabilities to have equal access to programs, services, and activities. Autism Model Community School will make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures when necessary to ensure access to transit services for individuals with disabilities, unless:

- ◆ Making the accommodation would fundamentally alter the nature of the public transportation service.
- ◆ Making the accommodation would create a direct threat to the health or safety of other passengers.

- ◆ The individual with a disability is able to fully use Autism Model Community School's service without the accommodation being made.
- ◆ Making the accommodation creates an undue financial burden on the transit system.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

An individual is eligible to be considered to receive a reasonable modification if that individual has:

- ◆ A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual
- ◆ A record of such impairment
- ◆ Or has been regarded as having such impairment.

REQUESTS FOR REASONABLE MODIFICATION

Autism Model Community School shall make information about how to contact Autism Model Community School to make requests for reasonable modifications readily available to the public through its website, brochures, and other rider policy guidelines. Autism Model Community School shall follow these procedures in taking requests:

- a. Individuals requesting modifications shall describe the modification to service needed in order to use the service.
- b. Individuals requesting modifications are not required to use the term "reasonable modification" when making a request. Personnel at Autism Model Community School will determine if the request represents a reasonable modification and proceed in accommodating the request accordingly.
- c. Whenever feasible, Autism Model Community School requests that individuals make such requests for modifications before Autism Model Community School is expected to provide the modified service.
- d. Where a request for modification cannot practicably be made and determined in advance (*e.g.*, because of a condition or barrier at the destination of a paratransit, demand response, or fixed route trip of which the individual with a disability was unaware until arriving), operating personnel shall make a determination of whether the modification should be provided at the time of the request. Operating personnel may consult with Autism Model Community School's management before making a determination to grant or deny the request.

Requests for accommodation may be made either orally or in writing. The reasonable accommodation process begins as soon as the request for accommodation is made. The request can be submitted in any written format.

Alternative means of filing a request, such as personal interviews, phone calls, or taped requests, will be made available for persons with disabilities if unable to communicate their request in writing or upon request.

INTERACTIVE PROCESS

When a request for accommodation is made, Autism Model Community School and the individual requesting an accommodation must engage in a good faith interactive process to determine what, if any accommodation shall be provided. The individual and the Autism Model Community School must communicate with each other about the request, the process for determining whether an accommodation will be provided, and the potential accommodations. Communication is a priority throughout the entire process.

TIME FRAME FOR PROCESSING REQUESTS TO PROVIDE REASONABLE MODIFICATION

Autism Model Community School will process requests for reasonable accommodation and then provide accommodations, where appropriate, in as short a time frame as reasonably possible. Autism Model Community School recognizes, however, that the time necessary to process a request will depend on the nature of the accommodation(s) requested and whether it is necessary to obtain supporting information.

GRANTING A REASONABLE MODIFICATION REQUEST

As soon as Autism Model Community School determines that a reasonable accommodation will be provided, that decision shall be immediately communicated to the individual. This notice must be in writing in order to maintain the required information for reporting purposes. Upon request, alternative means of response will be provided.

In choosing among alternatives for meeting nondiscrimination and accessibility requirements with respect to new, altered, or existing facilities, or designated or specified transportation services, Autism Model Community School shall give priority to those methods that offer services, programs, and activities to qualified individuals with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

DENIAL OF REASONABLE MODIFICATION REQUEST

As soon as Autism Model Community School determines that a request for reasonable accommodation will be denied, Autism Model Community School will communicate the basis for the decision in writing to the individual requesting the modification. The explanation for the denial will clearly state:

- ◆ The specific reasons for the denial;
- ◆ Any alternative accommodation that may create the same access to transit services as requested by the individual; and
- ◆ The opportunity to file a complaint relative to the Autism Model Community School's decision on the request.

COMPLAINT PROCESS

Autism Model Community School has a process for investigating and tracking complaints from qualified individuals. These procedures shall be posted on the Autism Model Community School's website and will be provided to any individual where the Autism Model Community School has denied a request for accommodation. The process and any forms necessary to file a complaint are readily available from the web. Alternative means of filing complaints, such as personal interviews, phone calls, or taped requests, will be made available for persons with disabilities if unable to communicate their request in writing or upon request.

Any person who believes she or he has been discriminated against in obtaining a reasonable modification may file a complaint by completing and submitting a Autism Model Community School's Reasonable Modification Complaint Form. Autism Model Community School investigates complaints received no more than 30 days after receipt. Autism Model Community School will process complaints that are complete. Once the complaint is received, the complainant will receive an acknowledgement of receipt. If more information is needed to resolve the complaint, Autism Model Community School may contact the complainant. The complainant has 30 business days from the date of the letter to send requested information to Autism Model Community School.

If Autism Model Community School is not contacted by the complainant or does not receive the additional information within 30 business days, the Autism Model Community School may administratively close the complaint. In addition, a complaint may be administratively closed if the complainant no longer wishes to pursue their case.

After Autism Model Community School investigates the complaint, a decision will be rendered in writing to the complainant. Autism Model Community School will issue either a Letter of Closure or Letter of Finding.

- ◆ **Letter of Finding** – This letter will summarize the complaint, any interviews conducted regarding the complaint, and explains what actions will be taken by Autism Model Community School to address the complaint.
- ◆ **Letter of Closure** – This letter will explain why Autism Model Community School has determined that the complaint does not merit accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act and that the complaint will be closed.

If the complainant disagrees with the decision of Autism Model Community School, an opportunity to appeal the decision may be pursued provided the complainant files notice of appeal within 21 days of the initial decision of Autism Model Community School.

In the event of appeal, the complainant will be granted all due process, including the ability to be present additional evidence, present the case in person during an appeal hearing, and to be represented by counsel.

DESIGNATED EMPLOYEE

Autism Model Community School shall designate one official within the organization responsible for processing reasonable modification requests and handling complaints. This individual is:

Joel Vidovic
Autism Model Community School
3020 Tremainsville Road, Toledo, Ohio, 43613
740-835-8474

RECORD RETENTION

Autism Model Community School will maintain all records related to reasonable modification requests and denials for at least three (3) years.