



## B-H-K CHILD DEVELOPMENT BOARD

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Houghton, Michigan 49931

*'Serving children and families through comprehensive  
early childhood education, health and family support services'*

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## B-H-K seeks volunteers to ride on preschool buses

### New Head Start safety rule requires second adult on all buses with young children

HOUGHTON – B-H-K Child Development Board is seeking volunteers to ride on its Head Start/preschool buses.

The need for volunteers is due to a new federal Head Start rule that requires a second adult in addition to the driver on all buses with young children. In the past, a second adult was required only when there were more than eight children on a bus.

“This new rule was developed as part of a larger effort to put additional safety measures in place for young children,” said Rod Liimatainen, B-H-K executive director. “Another component is child safety restraints – each of our buses is outfitted with harnesses for each child.”

While Head Start provided funding for the child restraints, no additional money has been earmarked for staffing the buses, he said. An added challenge is the rural nature and large size of the Copper Country; each day, 14 Head Start buses travel more than 1,000 miles while picking up and dropping off students.

Parents of preschoolers will be the primary source of volunteers, Liimatainen said. Parents at each center will be asked to ride the bus with their child to and from school one day each month. When parents cannot meet this monthly schedule, they will be asked to schedule another volunteer who can take their place. On days when a second adult cannot be recruited to ride the bus, classes at that center will be postponed. Similar to snow days, that class will be

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made up at the end of the year.

“Unfortunately, this strict policy appears to be the only option we have,” Liimatainen said. “The federal government is very serious about having a second adult on Head Start buses, and non-compliance could lead to an end in busing services or other severe consequences.”

Despite the strict new policy, Liimatainen said he expects parents and community members will respond enthusiastically. Parents already volunteer thousands of hours to help out in preschool classrooms, on field trips and at meetings. While the new busing policy primarily concerns safety, volunteering in general helps enhance the quality of early education.

In addition to parents and individual volunteers, the agency is working with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program to generate volunteers. RSVP is a public-service organization operated by the Western U.P. District Health Department that provides volunteer opportunities for senior citizens. B-H-K also plans to solicit help from student organizations at Michigan Tech and Finlandia universities.

To volunteer, community members should contact a teacher at the B-H-K center nearest them. Due to federal requirements, individuals who would like to volunteer must undergo a free background check at the local Family Independence Agency.

In addition to helping children into and out of restraints, volunteer bus monitors will help to maintain order on the buses, which allows the driver to focus on driving. During the trips, monitors will be encouraged to engage children in fun pre-literacy activities such as singing and word games.

B-H-K intends to recognize outstanding volunteers with mention in the agency newsletter, a certificate and perhaps a small gift. For more information on volunteering, individuals can contact the nearest B-H-K center or call 1-800-236-5657.