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Practice Report

Crossing Guards: A Safety Patrol Program at a Residential School for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

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In 2001, the California School for the Blind (CSB) was faced with a dilemma. The dropoff point for the day buses had to be changed. The new route to the only logical location for this change sent the buses through a driveway where residential students crossed to travel between the school and the dormitories. Some staff members wanted to eliminate this location as a

possibility because of the increased traffic congestion and potential danger to the students. But we, the orientation and mobility (O&M) staff, saw this change as an opportunity. Schools all over the country have student crossing guards. Our thought was, “Why can’t we do the same?” We designed a program that has worked for four years. This article describes the design and administration of our crossing guard program.

Program design

The O&M staff examined the location of the crossing in question. We analyzed the crossing in terms of traffic patterns, times of day, width, the location of corners and ramps, and ambient noise. The crossing guards would be responsible for one-way traffic only; they would direct the students toward the school in the morning and toward the dormitories in the afternoon. The crossing guards would be responsible only for students crossing during established times. If students crossed before or after these times, they were expected to use reasonable judgment and established O&M skills for crossing driveways.

To present the program to the school’s administrators for approval, we established the following guidelines for the crossing guards:

- **Purpose:** to assist students in crossing streets and driveways safely; to serve as role models to younger, less-experienced students; to serve as a

physical presence, so drivers act more responsibly; and to direct students, not traffic.

- **Qualifying skills:** Crossing guards need to (1) be older than 10 years, (2) be recommended by their O&M instructors, (3) demonstrate safe street- and driveway-crossing skills, (4) demonstrate good overall O&M skills, (5) be dependable, and (6) demonstrate respectful behavior.
- **Means of identification:** a vest and a handheld stop sign.
- **Hours of duty:** morning (8:15 to 8:40 a.m.) and afternoon (2:50 to 3:15 p.m.). These times were determined by the time of day during which buses were typically moving through the crossing.

Once we had approval for the project, we collaborated with the on-campus jobs teacher to make the position of crossing guard a paid job. On-campus jobs at the California School for the Blind are paid with funds from the school budget. They are viewed as an important precursor to subsequent off-campus jobs, teaching not only the skills necessary to complete tasks, but reliability and problem solving. The on-campus jobs teacher assisted us in determining the appropriate pay (\$2.50 per shift). The crossing guards would be subject to the same rules and procedures as all other positions with regard to supervision, time cards, and evaluations. The O&M instructors would be responsible for assessing their ongoing job skills with

regard to the actual mechanics of being crossing guards. The on-campus jobs teacher would be responsible for hiring and firing the crossing guards and assessing dependability, use of time cards, ability to find substitutes as needed, and other basic job skills. Assessments were done by spot checks throughout the year. Anecdotal feedback was also accepted from the staff members.

We contacted the California Automobile Association for print and video materials on student crossing guards and the principles of safe street crossings. The association provided a free booklet, *How to Organize and Supervise a School Safety Patrol*, and related pamphlets. We also rented the videos, *I'm No Fool as a Pedestrian*, *See and Be Seen*, and *Walk Safely*. We ordered child- and adult-sized safety patrol vests and 18-inch reflective stop signs from Schoolmasters Safety in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The total cost was less than \$160.

Recruitment and equipment

The next step was to nominate students and ask them if they were interested in applying for the crossing-guard positions. Of the five students who were nominated for nine time slots, some were totally blind and some had low vision. One candidate had a significant physical disability that required an adaptation of the stop sign that he could hold. For this student, a small, laminated cardboard stop sign was mounted on a wooden dowel,

since the regulation sign was too heavy for him to hold up in an elevated position. Recess times served as initial training periods. The following was covered during training:

1. Reporting for duty

1. Time: 8:15–8:45 a.m. and 2:50–3:20 p.m.
2. Equipment: a safety vest and a stop sign
3. Canes, as appropriate
4. Clothing, shoes, and a wristwatch, as appropriate, for the weather and the task

2. Qualities for the crossing guard position

1. Demonstrates safe street- and driveway crossing skills
2. Has good overall O&M skills
3. Pays attention to the task (is alert and dependable)
4. Is able to follow rules
5. Has the ability to be directive (has a strong, commanding voice)

6. Demonstrates good reaction time
7. Is older than 10 years of age
8. Demonstrates good auditory skills

3. General purpose

1. To assist students in crossing streets safely
2. To serve as a role model to less-experienced students
3. To direct students, not traffic
4. To serve as a physical presence, so drivers act responsibly

4. Job description

1. Arrive on time, dress appropriately for the job, and have the equipment for the job
2. Establish and maintain your position on the corner (one step in back of the edge of the curb)
3. Attend to traffic and have approaching students wait at the corner
4. Determine if the traffic is moving or

idling

5. If the traffic is moving, advise the students to wait until the safe crossing is announced
6. If there are no traffic sounds or if the traffic is idling along the curb edge, follow these steps:
 1. Ensure that the students wait on the corner until they are given the safe-crossing signal
 2. Move to the middle of the crosswalk and hold up the stop sign, so it is visible to the drivers
 3. State loudly and clearly, “It is safe to cross now”
 4. Remain in the middle of the crosswalk until all the students have safely crossed the street
 5. Go back to the corner and wait for the next group of students
5. Return all equipment to the designated place in the Recreation Center at the end of the shift

The crossing guards were also advised that in the unlikely occurrence that a student did not follow the crossing guard's directive, the crossing guard should report the student to the on-campus jobs teacher, who would consult with the O&M department.

The initial training session took place in a small-group format. The students then worked individually with their O&M instructors during practice and real times. The overall training time varied according to the needs of individual students. The actual time invested in individual training ranged from one to six hours. The instructors also phased out assistance according to the needs of individual students. Eventually, all eligible students were trained and put on the job.

Of course, the rest of the student body needed to be alerted that the crossing guards were now on duty twice a day. Some students needed help from the dormitory staff, classroom teachers and assistants, and O&M instructors to understand how to follow the crossing guard's directions. Some of the bus drivers also needed advice.

Program evaluation

We learned a lot during the first year of this program. We initially started the program after the school year began. It was later determined that the crossing guards were not able to gain credibility because other students

had already begun the school year without their presence. A letter was sent to all staff explaining the program and asking for their support by serving as role models when crossing streets and driveways with students. We also learned that it was important to delineate clearly between selection and training by the O&M instructor and job supervision by the on-campus jobs teacher. With this delineation, the O&M instructors were freed from the responsibility of dealing with time cards, evaluations, and the like. Adjustments were made to the times of duty on the basis of the ongoing evaluation of students' actual travel times. A procedure was needed for obtaining a substitute when a crossing guard was absent or unable to do the job for any reason. The crossing guards were given a list of crossing guards in their preferred reading medium so they would be able to find their own substitutes. Much to the dismay of some crossing guards, reporting for duty in bad weather (essentially rain, in our part of California) was expected. Finally, the crossing guards were reminded that their first priority was the job at hand, not chatting with a friend who happened to approach the crossing.

We have found that the crossing guard program is an excellent means of

- recognizing students who demonstrate good O&M skills
- supporting basic O&M skills, such as facing

traffic or another person, identifying idling and moving vehicles, and concepts such as near and far, approaching, waiting, louder and softer, and left and right

- offering students the opportunity to work toward a goal—training and becoming crossing guards
- increasing students' safety while traveling between the school and the dormitory
- increasing the self-esteem of students who are crossing guards
- providing peer role models for independence in travel

This is a program that will no doubt require further design changes as we learn more about the capabilities of our students and as our student population changes. We are pleased with the overall guidelines we have set up and with the response from the students and staff.

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