

1.0 General Provisions

The following policies govern the use of assigned and unassigned Thomas County Public School (TCPS) vehicles and are applicable to all users of TCPS vehicles. All TCPS vehicles purchased with Federal/State/County funds, transferred, or donated must be titled and licensed to Thomas County Schools. Titles must be issued in the name of Thomas County Schools. County government tags, clearly identifying the vehicles as government property, will be issued and placed on TCPS owned/titled vehicles. Vehicles owned by, titled to or otherwise controlled by TCPS are authorized for use in performance of all essential travel and transportation duties. Unless express permission has been otherwise granted by the superintendent, use is not authorized for unofficial travel duties or tasks, the transport of unauthorized persons or items, or the performance of tasks outside the rated capabilities of the vehicle.

1.1 Authorized Uses

TCPS vehicles are to be used for TCPS purposes, except when specifically authorized for other use. No one other than a TCPS employee, board member, or volunteer approved by the superintendent shall operate TCPS motorized equipment at any time. Employees, board members, and authorized volunteers may use TCPS owned vehicles as follows:

- A. When on official travel status, Employees may use vehicles to travel between places of official business and places of temporary lodging, places to obtain meals, and/or places to obtain medical assistance, including drugstores;
- B. When traveling to or from conferences that an Employee is required to attend, the Employee shall be permitted to transport his/her spouse and/or family in the vehicle;
- C. Employees may transport officers, officials, employees, clients or guests of TCPS, consultants, contractors, or commercial firm representatives when in direct interest of TCPS;
- D. Employees may transport materials, supplies, equipment, parcels, baggage or other items belonging to or serving the interest of TCPS;
- E. Employees may transport any person or item in an emergency situation; and
- F. Employees may commute between places of performance of official business and to his or her personal residence, if the Employee is assigned a vehicle with take-home privileges.
- G. "De minimis" personal use of TCPS vehicles such as going to lunch or an occasional stop for a personal errand on the way between a business delivery location and the employee's home (if assigned a vehicle with take-home privileges) shall not be considered a violation of this policy. De minimis personal use shall not exceed two miles of out of the way travel and shall not be daily, customary, or routine.

1.2 Unauthorized Uses

- A. Travel or task performance of a personal nature, not connected with the accomplishment of official business, except for authorized commuting and "de minimis" personal use;
- B. Travel or task performance beyond the stated capabilities of the vehicle;
- C. Travel to or use of vehicle at any bar, package store or adult entertainment facility;
- D. Transport of family, friends, associates or other persons who are not employees of the TCPS or serving the interest of TCPS, except for authorized commuting and "de minimis" personal use;
- E. Transport of hitch-hikers;
- F. Transport of items or cargo having no relation to the conduct of official business, except for "de minimis" transport;
- G. Transport of any item, equipment or cargo projecting from the side, front or rear of the vehicle in such a manner as to constitute a hazard to safe driving; or
- H. Loan of vehicle for use in non-TCPS authorized functions.

1.3 Take-Home Vehicle Use.

The Superintendent or designee may assign vehicles to certain employees, either solely for use during normal working hours or as a take-home vehicle, consistent with the criteria as provided herein. TCPS-owned vehicles shall be used exclusively for the conduct of official school business, and the use of such vehicles for personal purposes such as attending to personal affairs, social engagements or unapproved commuting is prohibited. If an employee is assigned a take-home vehicle, this shall be an employment condition. Any use of the take-home vehicle other than driving between the employee's residence and approved work center during non-duty hours shall only be a *de minimis* use as provided herein.

- A. **Criteria for Assigning Vehicle.** TCPS vehicles may be assigned to employees on the basis of their job duties and responsibilities, as determined by the Superintendent. However, the following criteria shall be considered by the Superintendent or designee in assigning an employee the responsibility of driving a TCPS-owned, operated or controlled vehicle to his or her residence after the duty day is concluded.
 1. The employee is on-call and/or has emergency response duties during off-duty hours;
 2. The employee is assigned duties at multiple work sites;
 3. If the employee qualifies under (1) or (2) above on a temporary basis, s/he may be assigned a TCPS vehicle on a corresponding temporary basis;
 4. There is a need for the employee to have access to a specially equipped vehicle in order to fulfill departmental missions; and/or
 5. If it will be more cost effective to the TCPS to provide the employee with a vehicle, because the employee's mileage reimbursement consistently averages more than the cost of assigning a TCPS-owned vehicle to that employee.
- B. **Compliance with IRS Rules.** Employees authorized to take home TCPS-owned vehicles will be subject to applicable IRS requirements. Pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code, the annual value of commuting will be included on the employee's W-2 form at the end of each calendar year and shall be in accordance with IRS rules and regulations. The Chief Financial Officer shall be responsible for obtaining the necessary information from employees for the reporting required herein.
- C. **Periodic Review of Continuing Need.** By January 15 of each year, an updated Take Home Vehicle Authorization Assignment Form must be completed and submitted to the Chief Financial Officer.
- D. **Completion of Form.** Any employee authorized to take a vehicle home shall complete and sign the Take Home Vehicle Form. Such form shall be completed and signed by the employee and the Superintendent. The original form shall be provided to the Chief Financial Officer.
- E. **De Minimis Use Permitted.** Personal use of take-home vehicles is prohibited except for de minimis personal use (such as commuting to and from home to work; stopping for a personal errand on the way between a business delivery and the employee's home; or traveling to and from lunch, for medical appointments and personal errands). De minimis personal use shall not exceed two miles of out of the way travel and shall not be daily, customary, or routine.
- F. **Responsibility for Obtaining IRS Needed Information.** The Chief Financial Officer shall be responsible for obtaining the necessary information from employees authorized to take home vehicles for commuting in conformance with IRS regulations.
- G. **Revocation of Use.** Authorization for take-home vehicles may be revoked at any time without cause. Employees do not have the right to contest a decision to authorize or revoke a take home vehicle.
- H. The superintendent shall be in charge of implementing the provisions of this regulation with the responsibility to:
 1. Evaluate and authorize or deny commuting vehicle assignment requests from all departments;
 2. Notify appropriate supervisors and the Chief Financial Officer, in writing, each time a new commuting vehicle assignment is authorized; and

3. Authorize/reauthorize or deny Commuting Vehicle Authorization requests.
- I. The Chief Financial Officer shall be in charge of implementing the provisions of this regulation with the responsibility to:
 1. Prepare and transmit updated lists of employee auto fringe benefit withholdings at the end of each calendar year;
 2. Verify that the list of employees with auto fringe benefit withholdings matches the list of employees with authorized commuting vehicle assignments beginning January 1 of each year;
 3. Compute the auto fringe benefit calculation; and
 4. Input commute trip data into the payroll system for auto fringe benefit withholding.

1.4 General Responsibilities of Operators and Occupants. The following provisions shall apply to any employee operating a TCPS-owned vehicle. Failure to comply with these provisions may subject the employee to disciplinary action up to and including suspension or termination.

- A. **License.** Employees who operate TCPS-owned vehicles for TCPS business shall have a current and valid driver's license as required by law.
- B. **Business Purposes Only.** The TCPS-owned vehicles furnished to employees, whether for use during duty hours or for take-home, are to be used exclusively for TCPS business and shall not be used at any time for the operator's private, personal use or convenience, except as provided herein.
- C. **Used Only by Employee(s), board members, or volunteers authorized by the superintendent.** Only employees, board members, or volunteers authorized by the superintendent may drive or operate TCPS-owned vehicles.
- D. **Use of Seat Belts.** Employees, as drivers or passengers, and any other approved passengers shall use seat belts.
- E. **Employees Responsible for Moving and Parking Citations.** Employees are financially responsible for any moving violations and parking citations that may be incurred while using TCPS-owned vehicles. Failure of the driver to pay the fines may cause the loss of driving privileges of TCPS-owned vehicles.
- F. **Safe Driving Practices.** Employees shall obey traffic regulations, exercise reasonable care and observe safe driving practices at all times while driving vehicles owned, leased, or rented by, or on loan to, the TCPS.
- G. **Authorization Required.** Employees shall not alter or add any equipment to a TCPS-owned or leased vehicle without authorization from the Superintendent or designee.
- H. **Smoking or Tobacco Use Prohibited.** Driver and passengers are prohibited from smoking or using tobacco in TCPS-owned vehicles.
- I. **Responsibility for Care and Maintenance.** Employees using any TCPS-owned vehicle are responsible for its care and return in good condition.
- J. **Reporting Vehicular Non-Accident Damage or Theft.** Any damage to the body or tires of TCPS-owned vehicles, as well as mechanical damage or failure as a result of wear and tear or vandalism, must be reported within 24 hours to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO).
- K. **Reporting Vehicular Theft.** An employee must report immediately to the CFO the theft of the TCPS-owned vehicle or TCPS property from the vehicle.
- L. **Compliance with Other Administrative Procedures.** All employees who drive TCPS-owned vehicles must comply with other administrative procedures as established by the Superintendent.

2.0 Reporting Required for Traffic Violation, Change in License Status and Accident.

Any TCPS employee who fails to provide notice as required herein, or who knowingly operates a TCPS-owned vehicle with a suspended or revoked license, will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

- A. **Time Required for Notification Suspension or Revocation of Driver's License.**
Employees shall notify their supervisors of the suspension, restriction, or revocation of their

operator's or commercial driver's licenses upon the employees learning of such information but no later than the next working day.

- B. **Review Required by Supervisor.** When an employee has provided notification of the suspension, restriction or revocation of his or her operator's or commercial driver's license, the supervisor shall consult with the Superintendent to determine the consequences to the employee and to determine the circumstances, if any, under which the employee will be permitted to continue or resume the operation of TCPS-owned vehicles.
- C. **Notification for Traffic Citations.** Employees shall notify their supervisor of any traffic citation received while operating a TCPS-owned vehicle by the next working day. Failure to provide the required notice may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
 - 1. Any driver who receives a citation but is found innocent of charges by the appropriate judicial body shall not be charged with the traffic citation for employment purposes.
 - 2. A traffic citation shall not be charged against the employee for employment purposes when malfunctioning TCPS-owned equipment is the cause of a violation.
 - 3. Failure to timely notify an employee's supervisor of a traffic violation or change in license status constitutes a separate violation from any discipline or penalty imposed due to the traffic violation or license change.
- D. **Reporting Vehicular Accidents and Care of Vehicles.** In the event a vehicle owned by the TCPS is involved in an accident, the driver shall immediately report the accident to the local law enforcement agency, and shall report such accident as soon as possible to the supervisor, Superintendent and to the Chief Financial Officer.
- E. **Accident Procedures.** In an attempt to minimize the results of an accident, the driver must prevent further damages or injuries and obtain all pertinent information and report it accurately.
 - 1. Call for medical aid if necessary.
 - 2. Call the police. All accidents, regardless of severity, must be reported to the police. If the driver cannot get to a phone, he should write a note giving the location to a reliable appearing motorist and ask him to notify the police.
 - 3. Record names and addresses of driver, witnesses, and occupants of the other vehicles and any medical personnel who may arrive at the scene.
 - 4. Obtain the following pertinent information: license number of other drivers; insurance company names and policy numbers of other vehicles; make, model, and year of other vehicles; date and time of accident; and overall road and weather conditions.
 - 5. Do not discuss the accident with anyone at the scene except the police. Do not accept any responsibility for the accident. Do not argue with anyone.
 - 6. Provide the other party with your name, address, drivers license number, and insurance information.
- F. **Unsafe vehicles.** Employees are responsible for reporting unsafe or defective equipment to their supervisor and the systems head mechanic. A TCPS-owned vehicle that is unsafe shall not be operated until necessary repairs are made. Under no conditions shall TCPS-owned equipment be repaired by a private shop or a private individual unless formal approval is given by the systems head mechanic or the Superintendent.

3.0 Prohibition of Alcohol, Drugs, Weapons, and Other Contraband.

- A. Alcohol, illegal substances, weapons and other unauthorized materials or things may not be transported or possessed in TCPS-owned vehicles. Any employee determined to be in violation of the provisions in this section shall be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination, and subject to criminal penalties.
- B. The prohibition herein regarding weapons shall not be applicable to personnel authorized to carry weapons (School Resource Officers) in the performance of their official duties.
- C. Operation of TCPS-owned, rented or leased vehicles by employees impaired by or under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances is strictly prohibited. Any such operation is an unauthorized use of a TCPS vehicle and the employee operating such TCPS vehicle will cease to be a permissive user. The employee will not be protected by any insurance or self-insurance provided by the School Board.

4.0 Use of County Vehicles to Conduct Business Preferred

Employees are encouraged to use TCPS vehicles instead of their own for official TCPS business whenever possible. Personal vehicles may be used for official TCPS business with the prior approval of the employee's supervisor. Employees using their personal vehicles will be reimbursed at the established mileage reimbursement rate. The established reimbursement rate is published on the school systems webpage.

5.0 Driver's Evaluation

Prior to acceptance for employment with TCPS in a position that would necessitate the operation of a motor vehicle in the course of performing the assigned duties, the following evaluation of driving qualifications should be made:

- A. Possession of a valid driver's license of the proper class;
- B. Capability of passing a physical examination when a question of fitness to drive arises because of illness or injury;
- C. Capability of passing written tests on driving regulations whenever required;
- D. Capability of passing any required driving test; and
- E. Demonstration of proficiency with the particular type of vehicle or equipment routine to be utilized.

5.1 Driver's Record Check

Prior to or during employment, motor vehicle records checks may periodically be made through the Finance Office to determine a safe driving record. A safe driving record is defined as no more than three moving violations within three years of a review period. Upon initiating a records check, all existing and prospective employees shall sign an "Authorization to Furnish Abstract of Driving Record" Form prior to the check being made. If a Department of Motor Vehicle Safety review indicates more than three moving violations within three years of the date of inquiry, the employee may be denied authorization to operate a vehicle while representing TCPS. However, other factors may be taken into consideration, including the seriousness of the violations and TCPS insurance requirements. If employment is incumbent upon the ability to operate a vehicle, the prospective employee may be denied employment, while the existing employee may be subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to termination.

5.2 Observe Traffic Laws

Employees operating TCPS-owned motor vehicles or privately-owned vehicles while conducting official business shall observe all traffic laws, rules and regulations, and the dictates of common sense and good judgment.

5.3 Revocation of Driver's Authorization

If during the course of employment an employee exhibits a disregard for acceptable safe driving procedures, the responsible supervisor may deny further authorization to operate a vehicle while representing TCPS.

6.0 Use of Private Vehicles While Conducting County Business

Any employee who operates a privately-owned vehicle while conducting official business for TCPS must maintain automobile liability insurance in accordance with the minimum limits required by State Law, or that may be required or recommended by TCPS's insurance carrier. Employees who do not maintain minimum liability coverage will not operate privately-owned vehicles in an official capacity. Employees who use their own vehicle to conduct official County business will be reimbursed at the current rate as published on the school systems website.

7.0 MARKING OF TCPS VEHICLES

- A. **Governmental License Plate.** Vehicles owned/titled to the Thomas County Schools must display a valid government license plate. Lost or stolen license plates must be reported to the Chief Financial Officer immediately, and steps shall be taken by the official in charge to secure a replacement tag. Temporary license identification may be employed. TCPS license plates must not be removed or exchanged for any reason except for the purposes of transfer, vehicle surplus or sale.
- B. **County Seals.** All types/classes of vehicles owned/titled to TCPS are required to display an

appropriate TCPS seal in a conspicuous location to be placed on the vehicle by the transportation department in accordance with O.C.G.A. 36-80-20.

8.0 Personal Items

TCPS shall not be responsible for damage to or theft of personal items left in vehicles.

9.0 Driver Safety Rules

- A. The use of a TCPS vehicle while under the influence of intoxicants and other drugs (which could impair driving ability) is forbidden and is sufficient cause for discipline, up to and including termination of employment.
- B. Cell phone use while driving should be avoided. Drivers need to be aware when use of the cell phone is creating a distraction from safe driving and adjust their usage accordingly, including pulling off the road to continue/finish the conversation if needed. Whenever possible, Drivers should complete calls while the vehicle is parked and/or use the phone in a hands free mode via a headset or speaker. While driving, attention to the road and safety should always take precedence over conducting business over the phone.
- C. No driver shall operate a TCPS vehicle when his/her ability to do so safely has been impaired by illness, fatigue, injury, or prescription medication.
- D. All drivers and passengers operating or riding in a company vehicle must wear seat belts, even if air bags are available.
- E. No unauthorized personnel are allowed to ride in company vehicles. Drivers are responsible for the security of company vehicles assigned to them. The vehicle engine must be shut off, ignition keys removed, and vehicle doors locked whenever the vehicle is left unattended.
- F. All State and Local laws must be obeyed.

10. Defensive Driving Guidelines

- A. Drivers are required to maintain a safe following distance at all times. Drivers should keep a two second interval between their vehicle and the vehicle immediately ahead. During slippery road conditions, the following distance should be increased to at least four seconds.
- B. Drivers must yield the right of way at all traffic control signals and signs requiring them to do so. Drivers should also be prepared to yield for safety's sake at any time. Pedestrians and bicycles in the roadway always have the right of way.
- C. Drivers must honor posted speed limits. In adverse driving conditions, reduce speed to a safe operating speed that is consistent with the conditions of the road, weather, lighting, and volume of traffic. Tires can hydroplane on wet pavement at speeds as low as 40 mph.
- D. Radar Detectors are strictly prohibited in TCPS vehicles. Drivers are to drive at or below the posted speed limit.
- E. Turn signals must be used to show where you are heading; while going into traffic and before every turn or lane change.
- F. When passing or changing lanes, view the entire vehicle in your rear view mirror before pulling back into that lane.
- G. Be alert of other vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists when approaching intersections. Never speed through an intersection on a caution light. When the traffic light turns green, look both ways for oncoming traffic before proceeding.
- H. When stopping behind another vehicle, leave enough space so you can see the rear wheels of the car in front. This allows room to go around the vehicle if necessary, and may prevent you from being pushed into the car in front of you if you are rear-ended.
- I. Avoid backing where possible, but when necessary, keep the distance traveled to a minimum and be particularly careful.
- J. Check behind your vehicle before backing. Do not back around a corner or into an area of no visibility.