



Hannah Piecuch • Daily Times

Coventry life skills teacher Laurie Masterson, students Denaija McGee, Patrick Delehanty, McKinley Blalock, Kimberly Cote, Physical Therapist Paula Souler, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services James Erinakes, Middle School Principal Michael Almeida, and teacher assistants Maria Ferreira, Patty Vanasse and Lisa Johansen recently got their own handicapped accessible transport, which allows them greater freedom and opportunity to learn.

Bus helps life skills students achieve

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COVENTRY — Life skills students at the middle school have a new ride.

A shiny, white bus with handicapped accessible features, double wheelchair tie-ins, a lift, seatbelts and big windows arrived just before Christmas.

Since then their teacher, Laurie Masterson, has taken her students on multiple outings and field trips that never would have been possible before, she says.

“We’ve brought them to restaurants, grocery shopping, over to Coventry High School as part of their transition to meet people. Some of them visited the cosmetology program.”

Prior to purchasing this bus, middle school life

skills students had to rely on borrowing the high school’s bus, which was in use daily, or walking to the bus stop to ride RIPTA, according to Assistant Superintendent of Student Services James Erinakes.

While walking to the RIPTA stop, learning where the bus goes and learning bus manners are all helpful, they could be limiting at times, he said.

Having their own bus not only gives the students mobility, Masterson said, but it allows them to split up with teacher assistants wherever they may go.

“This keeps the kids from being too overwhelmed or too overwhelming. We can focus on their time and space needs and do things individually with them.”

The need for the bus at the middle school was identified three years ago, Erinakes said. After se-

curing enough grant funding to cover the \$50,000 price tag, the purchase of the bus was made possible last year.

Middle School Principal Michael Almeida is very pleased with the new bus, he said.

“It has really eliminated barriers and increased opportunities to get kids out into the community where they can practice life skills and support their growth and learning,” he said.

Masterson plans to take the kids out at least twice a week, at minimum, she said.

Although the middle school is still their primary community, out-of-the-classroom experiences will be very helpful to their future transition to have a whole variety of real-life experiences, Erinakes added.

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Bus helps broaden pupils' horizons

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Many life skills have to be practiced in a real-life setting, he said. They can't just be explained in the classroom and then applied elsewhere.

"Now we have every number of contexts to learn these social skills within our reach," Masterson said.

The student support program at the middle school gives students opportunities to broaden

their world, Masterson said previously. Her classes adapt all the grade span expectations for her students; they focus on concrete ways to learn language, vocation, mathematics and life skills.