

# LITTLE PEOPLE, BIG SCHOOLS

## PREPARING THE SCHOOL FOR YOUR YOUNG CHILD WITH SHORT STATURE

Requests for additional copies should be mailed to:

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Cost is \$2.00 including postage, which should be sent to the above address for each copy you wish to order.

This project is funded through a grant under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, PL 103-230, from the Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The information reported herein was compiled pursuant to the State Plan on Developmental Disabilities. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sending a child to school for the first time can be an anxious occasion for any family. For a child with short stature, parents may have additional worries: "How will he get there safely?" "How will she be able to reach the toilet?" "Will she be able to sit comfortably?" "How much help should I expect him to get?"



This booklet provides suggestions for parents of children with marked short stature (those with dwarfing disorders) and for the schools that will be welcoming them. Its focus is the specific adaptations and modifications that may be needed for your child to be as independent as possible in school. Although many of the photographic examples used here are of children with achondroplasia, we hope that this booklet can be a valuable resource for families who have a child with any bone growth

disorder. Indeed, there is enough variability even among children with the *same* diagnosis that you and school personnel will need to judge just how many (or how few) of the suggestions contained here are needed for *your* child. This requires a carefully reasoned balance between need and fostering autonomy and independence.

## GETTING THERE, GETTING IN...AND OUT

**WALKING AND BUSES.** If your child will be walking to school, remember that short legs will take a lot longer to get there. Allow extra time. If the distance is too great for your child to walk comfortably, special arrangements may be needed, even if the distance is considered short enough that a child of average stature is required to walk.

Many children will ride a bus to school. If your child will be boarding a bus you will need to determine if the steps are navigable. If not, a parent, an aide or the driver may need to be responsible for insuring that your child can get onto the bus safely. Some children may need a handicapped accessible bus, particularly those who need to be transported with motorized scooters or wheelchairs. Otherwise, one needs to balance the greater safety of riding on such a bus and the social advantages of riding with friends and neighbors on the 'big' bus.

Frankly, most buses are not particularly safe for any child. Most small statured children can ride with minimal additional risks. Special consideration will be needed for children who have special risks — such as those with cervical spinal instability, for whom riding unrestricted may pose special peril.

Whether riding or walking, many short statured children will have difficulty transporting heavy books to and from school. A second set of books can be issued to be kept at home.

**DOORS.** Some children with modest small stature can reach door handles without difficulty, while others may find this to be impossible. Even children with the same diagnosis and of about the same age may have different needs:



Outside entry doors need to be assessed. Every child, including one with short stature, should be able to independently escape from the classroom and from the school building. Outside exits can be a particular problem since crash bars may be impossible to reach or use:



Limited reach and small hands can make turning a door knob a real challenge. Lever handles and chain extenders make things lots easier.

Alternatively an additional handle may be placed at a height appropriate for the child's reach.

If this proves to be a dilemma, automatic door plates may be needed:

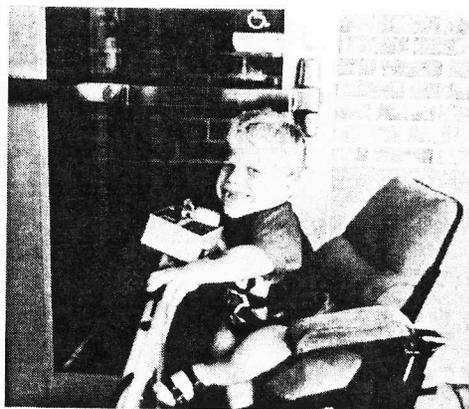
Such plates are in place in most schools to allow access by individuals in wheelchairs, but sometimes they are placed too high for a child with small stature to reach. Then, a permanently placed stool will need to be installed beneath the switch plate.



Door plates are essential for a child who requires a scooter — often the door handles cannot be reached from the scooter:



Plates can then allow independent access:



**STEPS.** All stairways should be equipped with railings, but often the railing is too high to be of any benefit for a child of short stature. A second, lower railing may be of value not only for inside stairs, but also for those outside the school or on the playground.



**FROM CLASS TO CLASS.** Long distances to, from and between classes may be a challenge. Children with short stature should be allowed a little extra time to get from one place to another. Early dismissal is often an easy and safe solution.

Some children with marked small stature or who are dependent on a wheelchair or scooter may need to use an elevator to move from one floor to another. Of course, an elevator is of little use without appropriate reachers for the buttons.

