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September 6, 2017

Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street N., Washington, DC 20503
Attention: NHTSA Desk Officer

Re: Written Comments to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Information Collection Request "Education on Proper Use of Seat Belts on School Buses" (FR Doc No. 2017-16602)

Dear Sir or Madam:

The National School Transportation Association (NSTA) is pleased to offer comments for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA), New Information Collection Requirement, Titled: Education on Proper Use of Seat Belts on School Buses, as published in Volume 82, No.152 of the Federal Register on August 9, 2017.

About the National School Transportation Association

The National School Transportation Association (NSTA) is the leading resource for school bus transportation solutions and the voice for private contractors for over 50 years. NSTA was formed in 1964 as a membership organization for school bus contract-operators engaged primarily in transporting students to and from school and school-related activities. Members range from small family businesses serving one school district to large corporations operating tens of thousands of buses across multiple states with all committed to the safe, efficient and economical transportation of our nation's children and future leaders.

Summary of NHTSA's Request for Comments

This NHTSA has requested comments on its proposal to collect information to understand the factors considered by state and local agencies when deciding whether to require seat belts on school buses and to determine the funding mechanisms that are used to pay for seat belt installation. The NHTSA proposes to conduct discussions and informal interviews with school districts that have seat belts on school buses, and those that do not currently require seat belts on school buses. Of those that do not have seatbelts, NHTSA will further distinguish between those that are not considering implementation and those that are struggling to implement seat belts. The discussions will be held via telephone, email, and/or in-person throughout the course of the project. The project will be used to develop a model policy and a best practices guide to assist jurisdictions that are considering a seat belt requirement. This project also aims to obtain data related to the effect that seat belt use may have on school bus driver distraction as related to student behavior and seat belt use to see if the use of seat belts has influenced disruptive behavior. NHSTA will identify target

school districts by reaching out to organizations such as, NSTA, NASDPTS, NAPT, and ASBC, and also to school bus manufacturers and dealers.

Comments Offered by the National School Transportation Association

The National School Transportation Association agrees with the NHSTA's plan described above and recommends consideration of the following additional issues.

1. **NHTSA should determine if the additional cost of requiring seatbelts on school buses result a reduction of school bus service and force children into less safe modes of transportation to/from school.** NHSTA's own statics show that a child is always safer in a yellow school bus, with or without belts, than by any other means of transportation to/from school.
2. **NHTSA should examine seat belt usage rates in school districts that have mandated seat belts to determine if the seat belts are actually used.** If a school district implements seat belts on school buses that are not used, or are not properly used, the cost and effort of requiring seatbelts will have no benefit.
3. **NHSTA should examine the cost of maintaining, repairing, or replacing seatbelts that are damaged by normal use or by vandalism,** which would be in addition to the cost of initial installation of seat belts on new or existing school buses.
4. **NHTSA should query drivers specifically** about concerns they may have with seat belts, including whether seat belts effect student discipline and whether or not seat belts serve as an impediment during evacuation, especially during fire or water events.
5. **NHTSA should review the January 2017 report of the Louisiana Task Force on School Transportation** presented to the Louisiana House and Senate Education Committees recommending that seat belts should not be required in school buses (copy attached).

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this information collection request and look forward to continuing to work with NHTSA. If further information is needed, please do not hesitate to contact me at 703-684-3200 ext. 702 or by e-mail at lsokolowski@yellowbuses.org.

Sincerely,



Lester B. Sokolowski, Esq.
Regulatory Relations Director
National School Transportation Association

REPORT TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION OF THE
LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE



Response to Senate Resolution 122
of the 2016 Regular Session

FROM THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OVERVIEW OF THE RESOLUTION

Senate Resolution 122 of the Regular Session of the 2016 Louisiana Legislature urges and requests the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) “to establish a task force to study and make recommendations regarding student transportation and school bus passenger safety.” Reasons for the request, as stated in the Resolution, follow.

- Thousands of Louisiana public and private school students ride a bus every school day; and
- It is of utmost importance that these students be transported to and from school in the safest manner available; and
- Technology impacting school bus passenger safety is constantly changing and improving;
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) continually conducts investigations and studies on school transportation safety and has recently begun to conduct a comprehensive review of its school transportation safety recommendations; and
- NHTSA updated its policies [sic: NHTSA did not update its *policies*; rather, NHTSA updated its *recommendation*] in 2015 to recommend "that every child on every school bus should have a three-point seat belt"; and
- A thorough review of student transportation and school bus passenger safety should be conducted in light of the NHTSA recommendations and with full knowledge of Louisiana data, policies, and laws.

In conformity with the request of the Louisiana Senate, the state Department of Education established a task force comprised of the following persons and the respective organization or agency they represent.

NAME	REPRESENTING	NAME	REPRESENTING
Michael Comeaux	LA Dept. of Education	Capt. James McGuane	LA Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections
Mary Fontenot	LA Association of School Transportation Officials	Sharon Pender	LA Parent Teacher Association
Gay Hebert	Nonpublic School Council	Janet Pope	LA School Boards Association
George Horne*	LA Association of School Transportation Officials	Melissa Stilley	LA Dept. of Education
Kathy Jarrell	LA School Bus Operators Association	Kenneth Trull	LA Highway Safety Commission
Eric Johnson	LA Association of School Superintendents	Steve Vales	LA Association of School Transportation Officials
Joe Kenney	LA Association of Public Charter Schools	Ronna Weber	National School Transportation Association

*Task Force Chairman

BACKGROUND

School buses are recognized by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and by the National Transportation Safety Board as the safest form of ground passenger transportation in the United States of America. The outstanding safety record is attributed to the unique design and construction features of school buses and to the training and performances of school bus drivers.

Beginning in 1939, school bus safety advocates from across the United States of America met to codify specifications and procedures to be adopted by individual states, and in so doing, school bus designs became more or less standardized throughout the country. Similar meetings were convened from the 1940s through the 1970s. Thereafter, these “conferences” were scheduled every five years, and in 2005, the official title was changed to the National Congress on School Transportation (NCST). The adopted recommendations of each Congress are published in the *National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures*. By statute (R.S. 17:164), Louisiana school buses and related equipment must conform to specifications adopted by the NCST. Furthermore, the NCST operational recommendations form the primary corpus of the school bus industry’s “best practices,” many of which have been incorporated in the Louisiana Department of Education training curricula for school bus drivers and bus attendants.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration of the United States Department of Transportation is responsible for developing Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSSs) that are federal regulations that specify design, construction, performance and durability requirements for motor vehicles and motor vehicle equipment. Thirty-six (36) FMVSSs apply to school buses, and eight (8) FMVSSs are school bus-specific. These standards require that manufacturers of school buses and related equipment incorporate design standards that protect “our most precious cargo” when the bus is involved in a crash, a rollover, sudden erratic maneuvers and other situations that might endanger school bus passengers. No other passenger vehicle affords its passengers the number of safety features that are required in every school bus.

DATA ANALYSIS

On an annual basis, approximately 480,000 public school buses transport some 25 million students and travel 6 billion miles. During the period 2005 through 2014, nationally, an average of eleven (11) school transportation vehicle occupants (five drivers and six passengers) were fatally injured each year (source: NHTSA “Traffic Safety Facts,” May 2016). As indicated in Table A on the following page, during the same period of time in Louisiana, a total of one school bus passenger was fatally injured, 35 occupants (3.5 annual average) were severely injured and 219 occupants (21.9 annual average) were moderately injured (source: Highway Safety Research Group, Louisiana State University). Considering the number of passengers transported by school buses and the distance traveled annually, these numbers reflect the outstanding safety record enjoyed by the school bus transportation industry, both nationally and in Louisiana.

During the same time period for which an average of eleven school bus occupants were fatally injured nationally, **transportation-related pedestrian fatalities averaged 24 annually**. These pedestrians were traveling to and from school buses or school bus loading/unloading zones or were waiting for school buses at

bus stops. In Louisiana, similar comparative data were reported by the Data Quality Team (DQT) at the Highway Safety Research Group, Louisiana State University. The DQT searched through 1,001 crash reports involving 1,319 pedestrians that occurred in Louisiana from 2012 through 2015. During that four-year period, while the number of fatal injuries sustained by passengers on board school buses was zero (0), the number of school bus-related pedestrian fatalities was two (2). An additional three (3) pedestrians were determined to have sustained “severe” injuries.

The tables listed below indicate the summary data compilation of the DQT. Table A represents on-board injuries; Table B reflects school bus-related pedestrian injuries.

TABLE A: PASSENGER SCHOOL BUS-RELATED INJURIES*

A. Injury Levels by Year for People Riding in a School Bus: 2005--2015							
YEAR	FATAL	INCAPACITATING/ SEVERE	NON-INCAPACITATING/ MODERATE	POSSIBLE/ COMPLAINT	NO INJURY	Total by Year	Percent Change From Previous Year
2005		2	32	391	1387	1812	
2006	1	3	50	284	1308	1646	-9.16%
2007		2	9	372	1487	1870	13.61%
2008		7	8	337	932	1284	-31.34%
2009		2	16	451	1467	1936	50.78%
2010			2	350	1793	2145	10.80%
2011		5	34	401	1639	2079	-3.08%
2012		2	19	383	1715	2119	1.92%
2013			24	393	1777	2194	3.54%
2014		12	25	425	1790	2252	2.64%
2015		1	26	404	1714	2145	-4.75%
Total by Injury	1	36	245	4191	17009	21482	
Percent of Injury	0.00%	0.17%	1.14%	19.51%	79.18%	100.00%	

TABLE B: PEDESTRIAN SCHOOL BUS-RELATED CRASHES*

YEAR	PEDESTRIAN INJURIES INVOLVING SCHOOL BUSES			CRASH REPORTS EVALUATED	
	FATAL	SEVERE	TOTAL CRASHES	PEDESTRIANS	TOTAL CRASHES
2012	0	1	1	299	243
2013	0	0	0	330	246
2014	2	2	4	320	244
2015	0	0	0	370	268

SOURCE: Cory J. Hutchinson, MBA, PhD, Director of the Highway Safety Research Group, Louisiana State University

In November 2016, the Department of Education conducted an on-line survey of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) via newsletter and email. The survey link was sent to 69 public school districts and 150 charter schools in Louisiana to obtain specific information. Forty-eight (48) responses were received from 44 traditional public school LEAs and from four charter schools. Three private transportation companies serve three traditional public school districts, and one company represents 20 charter schools. The following information, which was obtained from the responses, is confined to three years instead of the longer periods analyzed by the DQT:

- 5,176 total route buses are operated by the 48 respondents.
- 10 LEAs/private providers use occupant restraints to transport Head Start passengers.
- 43 use occupant restraints for passengers with special needs if mandated by students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
- 8 use occupant restraints for pre-kindergarten passengers.
- Within the past three school years, the combined total of 676 (average of 225.3) school bus passenger's sustained non-fatal, on-board injuries that required medical treatment away from the scene of a crash or other moving incident. The data does not differentiate between injuries caused by a crash and injuries caused by falls or other non-crash incidents, nor do data indicate how many injured passengers may have been secured with occupant restraints at the time of their injuries.
- Within the past three school years, no school bus passengers sustained fatal onboard injuries.
- Within the past three school years, 9 school bus passengers sustained injuries requiring medical treatment away from the scene as a result from being struck by a moving motor vehicle outside the school bus.
- Within the past three school years, one school bus passenger sustained fatal injuries as the passenger was crossing the roadway to catch the school bus.
- Nine of the 48 respondents operate some school buses that are equipped with exterior cameras to photograph motorists who fail to stop when school buses are stopped to pick up or drop off passengers.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

OCCUPANT RESTRAINTS

Despite the unequalled safety record of school buses, occasionally passengers and/or bus drivers are injured in crashes with other motor vehicles or with various objects. Until no school bus occupant is injured, transporters should evaluate every option to enhance school bus passenger and driver safety. One safety option that frequently is addressed is occupant restraints.

In 1999, the Louisiana Legislature enacted R.S. 17:164.2, which directed the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to adopt rules and regulations "...to require that every bus used primarily for the transportation of students shall be equipped with occupant restraint systems by not later than June 30, 2004." Section C of the statute, however, added, "The provisions of this Section shall be subject to the appropriation of funds for this purpose." Inasmuch as funds never were appropriated, the law has not been implemented.

In the minds of voting legislators, the term *occupant restraint systems*, as stated in R.S. 17:164.1, may have been equated with *seat belts*, but seat belts are only one form of occupant restraint systems. Although most school buses in Louisiana are not equipped with seat belts, all passengers in Louisiana school buses are protected by some form of occupant restraint system.

- A. School buses with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) less than 10,000 pounds are required by Federal law to be equipped with seat belts (i.e., lap belts before 2011; lap/shoulder belts effective January 2011 and thereafter).

- B. School buses with a GVWR of 10,000 pounds or more are equipped with “compartmentalized seating,” a passive restraint system that requires passengers to sit fully upon their seats, facing forward, and does not require seat belts of any type.
- C. Head Start passengers are mandated by Federal law (45 CFR 1310) to be transported in some form of child safety restraint system (CSRS)—child safety seat, seat belt or safety vest—that is appropriate to each child’s height and weight.
- D. Head Start passengers and other pre-school age children and children with special needs who require assisted seating may use child safety restraints (CSRs) in the form of rigid child (aka “car”) seats that are attached to the bus seat bottom with a lap belt or steel anchors (lower abdominal tether child, or “LATCH,” system), or children may be protected in flexible safety seats (birth to 60 pounds) or safety vests (20-165 pounds) that are attached to belted seats or to compartmentalized seats with a “cam wrap” (one or two belts wrapped around the seat back and buckled).

Because many school buses are assigned to more than one “run” each morning and afternoon, transporting both small and larger passengers, few rigid child safety seats are found on larger Louisiana school buses; instead, other safety seats or safety vests are attached to the backs of compartmentalized seats. Unrestrained passengers must refrain from sitting in seats behind restrained passengers to prevent “double loading” of seat backs in the event of a rear-end crash.

Applied generally, there is no doubt in the truth of the statement, that “Seat belts save lives!” However, with respect to large (i.e., capacities greater than ten passengers) school buses, passenger compartment seating design provides a safety alternative to seat belts. Described as “compartmentalized seating,” school buses without seat belts protect occupants in a way that no other passenger vehicle is capable of protecting their passengers.

With respect to seat belts, lap/shoulder belts are preferred to lap belts because they restrain both lower and upper torsos of passengers in the event of a crash and, therefore, are less likely to cause additional passenger injuries. The most common school bus in Louisiana is a “conventional” (Type C) school bus with a rated capacity of sixty-five (65) passengers (@ three passengers per 39” bench seat). The increase in cost of purchasing one 65-passenger school bus equipped with three-point (i.e., lap/shoulder) seat belts compared to a bus equipped with compartmentalized seating is estimated by representatives of school bus manufacturers to range between \$10,340 (\$476.24 per bench seat) and \$20,350 (\$939.08 per bench seat). (These estimates include installation of reinforced seat belt-ready frames and three lap/shoulder belts per 39” seat.)

Until November 2015, the official position of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration consistently has been that requiring seat belts on large school buses should be left to the discretion of states and/or local schools and school districts and that compartmentalized seating on large school buses is the most cost-effective means of protecting school bus passengers. On November 8, 2015, speaking at the Annual Summit of the National Association of Pupil Transportation, NHTSA Administrator David Rosekind announced that NHTSA had revised its previous position and now recommends that large school buses be equipped with three-point seat belts. **Of course, NHTSA’s revised position is a non-binding recommendation and not a regulation.** Louisiana often is cited as requiring seat belts on large school buses; however, as herein above previously described, the caveat for implementation predicated on available funding resulted in no action by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop appropriate plans. Five (5) states, California, Florida, New Jersey, New York and Texas, have passed some form of mandatory seat belt laws. California, effective in 2005, requires lap/shoulder belts on new buses; Florida and New Jersey require lap belts on buses purchased after 2001; New York requires seat belts on school buses but leaves to school districts whether or not passengers have to use them; and Texas no longer provides funding for the added cost of seat belts so that few school districts purchase school buses with seat belts. North Carolina has funded new school buses with seat belts on a

trial basis for eleven school districts, while Alabama decided after an amount of testing to use transportation money to increase safety in other areas, like training for bus drivers and other staff.

Monitoring passenger protection and enforcing proper use of most occupant restraints by school bus drivers on moving buses is difficult, if not impossible.

- A. On daily routes, bus drivers must concentrate on driving and monitoring traffic and pedestrians, with only occasional glances into the interior rearview mirror to monitor passenger behavior.
- B. High backs on school bus seats create a visual barrier between the bus driver and bus passengers.

To assist with school bus evacuations, especially in the event that the bus driver is incapacitated, and to ensure that occupants are using their restraints properly and thereby reducing potential liability for the bus driver in the event of a crash, hiring and assigning aides to every seat belt-equipped school bus may be required. Based on information submitted by the responding LEAs, the estimated cost per aide (salary plus benefits) ranges from approximately \$17,000 to \$35,000 annually, which would be a recurring annual cost.

Optimum protection of passengers on school buses equipped with compartmentalized seats requires that every passenger must be seated in a forward-facing position and must be positioned fully upon his/her assigned seat. Bus drivers can monitor proper passenger seating on buses equipped with compartmentalized seating easier than on buses equipped with other forms of occupant restraints because, by glancing in their interior rearview mirrors, drivers can detect any passengers who are not seated fully upon their respective seats and whose legs extend into bus aisles.

Some common “pros” and “cons” regarding seat belts on large school buses follow.

COMMON PROS AND CONS REGARDING SEAT BELTS ON LARGE SCHOOL BUSES

PROS

- Passenger behavior regarding the use of seat belts is consistent with protection during passenger transit in other modes of transportation.
- Passengers using seat belts on school buses are restrained in the event of a crash.
- Seat belts protect passengers in rollover crashes.
- Pre-schoolers and kindergarten passengers are kept in their seats, thus enhancing passenger management.
- As of January 1, 2011, mandatory higher backs on school bus seats allow for the option of the installation of lap/shoulder belts on school buses.
- Seating capacity no longer is reduced because three-per-seat installation of seat belts has been developed by Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs).
- Proper use of lap/shoulder belts may help to reduce the liability of schools, school districts or private transporters in the event of a crash.

CONS

- In case of fire or submersion, slower evacuations may increase injuries/fatalities.
- Ensuring the passengers are properly secured can increase length of time required for bus routes.
- Additional bus aides may be required to monitor use of seat belts and to assist passengers during emergency evacuations.
- Seat belts increase the cost of school buses.
- School districts may not have the financial resources to mitigate the increased cost of school buses.
- Seat belts increase daily inspection time.
- Seat belts require additional preventive maintenance and additional maintenance costs.
- Seat belts can be used by passengers as weapons.
- Seat belts have a shorter life-expectancy than do school buses; therefore, replacement costs must be factored into operational costs.
- Universal seat belt use policies have not been

developed.

- Bus drivers cannot reasonably be held responsible for passengers' proper use of seat belts.
- Bus drivers cannot reasonably be held responsible for passenger injuries when seat belts are not used properly.

NHTSA has estimated that if lap/shoulder belts were required on every school bus in the United States of America, an average of two (2) lives might be saved annually. In Louisiana, in the ten-year period from 2005 through 2014, one school bus passenger was fatally injured. The cost of equipping school buses with lap/shoulder belts must be weighed against the potential benefit gained.

Although NHTSA has recommended, but not mandated, that three-point seat belts be installed on every school bus, no federal funds have been appropriated for that purpose. **Neither has NHTSA developed universal guidelines for use by schools, school districts and private companies with respect to enforcement of use of seat belts on school buses.**

The Louisiana Legislature has not dedicated funding specifically for “occupant restraints” on school buses since 1999, when Louisiana’s so-called “school bus seat belt law” was enacted; although local education agencies may use existing funds for this purpose as funds become available. If a mandate is enacted for every local education agency to add seat belts to every school bus—or even every new school bus- without appropriating funds for implementing the mandate would create undue financial hardships for many school districts and charter schools. If mandated seat belts apply only to new school buses, an option that would delay implementation of the intended safety improvement is that LEAs would purchase used school buses to avoid the additional cost of new, seat belt-equipped school buses.

On-board injuries sometimes can be attributed to overloading of school buses. On buses equipped with compartmentalized seating, if passengers cannot be contained fully upon their respective seats, in the event of a crash or sudden maneuver they may be injured. This can be avoided by ensuring that buses are not overloaded and that passengers are sitting properly.

Louisiana Revised Statute 32:293 addresses proper seating on school buses.

§293. Prohibiting standing of school children under certain circumstances; limiting number of children transported at one time

A. Repealed by Acts 1997, No. 620, §2.

B. It shall be unlawful for the driver or operator of any school bus while transporting school children to permit any child to stand in said bus while same is in motion if there is seating space available for the use of such child.

C. It shall be unlawful for anyone responsible for the transportation of school children on school buses, including drivers or operators of buses, transportation supervisors, school superintendents, and members of parish and city school boards to permit a number of children exceeding the number of seats available on a bus to be transported at one time on such bus.*

Added by Acts 1968, Ex.Sess. No. 44, §1; Acts 1997, No. 620, §§1, 2.

*(emphasis added)

School bus capacity can be described in terms of “rated capacity” or “actual capacity.” Rated capacity is the school bus manufacturer’s official statement of the maximum number of passengers that the bus should transport. This rating is based on a maximum number of three persons per 39-inch seat or two persons per 26-inch seat. Actual capacity of a school bus depends on the sizes of passengers assigned to each school bus. Rarely can three middle school-age or high school-age passengers fit fully upon a 39-inch seat. Even some elementary school students are too large to fit three-to-a-seat. Thus, the actual capacity is less than the rated capacity, and the lesser number is the legal requirement.

PEDESTRIAN INJURIES

In Louisiana, the greater transportation-related danger to students occurs when they are pedestrians and not when they are passengers on school buses. As reported in the previous “Data Analysis” section, the Data Quality Team at the Highway Safety Research Group, LSU, analyzed crash data involving pedestrians for the years of 2012-2015. During that four-year period, no school bus occupants were fatally injured; however, during the identical time period, two (2) pedestrians were fatally injured and three (3) pedestrians were seriously injured in school bus-related crashes. Injuries were sustained when victims were struck by motorists when victims were exiting or entering a school bus or while crossing a roadway.

A. Motorists Failing to Stop for School Buses

Students are more vulnerable to injury when entering and exiting school buses, walking to and from bus stops, and while waiting for buses at bus stops than when they are riding on school buses. Motorists frequently drive past school buses when buses are stopped to load or unload passengers, even when the bus stop signs and warning lights are activated, thus putting students in harm’s way as they walk to and from the bus. This is a national problem, as has been documented in results of surveys conducted by the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS).

In 2015, a one-day survey by NASDPTS received responses from 102,371 school bus drivers in 26 states. Respondents reported 78,518 “stop-arm” violations—that is, motorists who failed to stop in obedience to state laws that required them to stop when school buses had activated their signals and had stopped to pick up or drop off students at bus stops. The violation rate was reported as a passing rate of 0.77 vehicles passing per school bus in 2015, compared to 0.78 vehicles passing per school bus in 2014 and 0.79 per school bus in 2013. Motorists may be confused as to when they are required to stop for stopped school buses; therefore, more frequent and more intensive public awareness campaigns are needed to educate motorists with respect to Louisiana statutory requirements. The Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles, the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, law enforcement agencies, parent groups and other public and private agencies can be a source of assisting the Louisiana Department of Education with efforts to inform motorists of their responsibilities as they approach stopped school buses.

Public awareness campaigns should be complimented with increased enforcement. Obviously, law enforcement officials cannot devote adequate resources to enforcing school bus stop laws. School bus drivers must monitor students as they enter and exit school buses at bus stops and, therefore, bus drivers are unable to adequately observe and record information regarding vehicles that illegally pass stopped school buses. A partial solution to the enforcement problem is exterior cameras installed on school buses that can record unlawful traffic movement at bus stops. Such camera systems are in use by at least nine (9) school districts, schools and private contractors in Louisiana.

Use of cameras for traffic enforcement has met with resistance in some municipalities by citizens and agencies in Louisiana. By enacting statutory authority or by adopting a Joint Resolution to encourage LEAs to equip

school buses with exterior cameras, the Louisiana Legislature can be of assistance to clear the way for school bus cameras to be approved as additional safety devices on school buses and as a means of assisting in the enforcement of illegal passing of stopped school buses by other motorists.

B. Inadequately Trained Or Untrained Students

Unit Four of the Louisiana Department of Education School Bus Driver Training Course describes proper procedures for school bus drivers when approaching bus stops, stopping to load or unload passengers, safe loading and unloading procedures and teaching passengers how to approach bus stops, wait for the bus to arrive at stops, safely cross roadways, behave on the bus, etc. Supervisory transportation staff should periodically review these procedures with school bus drivers and should document the training.

Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 119, *Specifications and Procedures*, Section 1301, describes the requirements for schools to instruct students in proper school bus transportation procedures, which include meeting the bus, waiting for the bus, loading and unloading, and leaving the bus after unloading. The safety instruction is required at least once each school semester for all students, pre-school through grade twelve. School principals are responsible for ensuring that teachers provide the instruction and that Form T-7 is completed, signed and submitted to the LEAs transportation department or other appropriate authority before the end of each semester. This instruction is especially vital to pre-school and elementary school students because they are the most vulnerable due to their lack of physical and mental maturity, according to NHTSA statistical data.

Free training materials are available on line for downloading from the NHTSA website, from the Thomas Built Buses website and from other sources. Training materials also may be available from school bus fleet insurance underwriters and from private transporters.

Training in school bus emergency response procedures is also required of school bus drivers, bus attendants and students. All students should be included in emergency evacuation drills, because students who do not ride buses each day may ride buses on activity trips from time to time. Proper evacuation procedures are described in Unit 7 of the Louisiana Department of Education school bus driver pre-service training curriculum.

For students, emergency evacuation drills must be conducted at least twice each school year (three times for Head Start passengers), and drills must include evacuations using the front door, the rear (or side, if equipped) “emergency door” or both exits simultaneously, if “time is of the essence.” School principals are required to ensure that the emergency evacuation drills are conducted and that Form T-8 is completed, signed and submitted to the LEA’s transportation department or other appropriate authority before the end of each semester.

School district superintendents, heads of charter schools and nonpublic schools should be aware of the safety instruction requirements and should ensure that all students within their respective jurisdictions are receiving the instruction in compliance with Bulletin 119. Topics covered and dates of instruction should be included in teachers’ respective lesson plans; dates and timing of emergency evacuation drills should be maintained in each respective school office.

C. Unsafe School Campuses

Injuries sometimes occur on school campuses when students run or walk between school buses or run in front of moving buses or when other motorists encroach on the school bus loading/unloading zones. School principals are responsible for ensuring that adequate supervision is provided by school staff each day during bus arrival and departure times.

D. Instructions to Parents

Informing parents of school bus safety procedures is essential, and for Head Start agencies, it is a legal requirement (45 CFR 1310.21). Among the sources of information available to schools and school districts are parent-teacher group meetings, open-house assemblies, school and school district websites, and written materials that can be sent directly to households.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **At this time, seat belts should not be mandated for school buses in Louisiana.** Compartmentalized seating and other occupant restraint usage for students with special needs and for Head Start passengers generally have met the safety needs of Louisiana’s school bus passengers. **Moreover, there is no prohibition for school districts or schools to require their respective school buses to be equipped with occupant restraints appropriate for the sizes and ages of passengers.**
2. **If occupant restraints are mandated by an act of the Legislature, the Legislature should appropriate monies for funding for three-point seat belts and for employing a school bus attendant for every school bus so equipped in order to ensure that passengers are properly restrained and to assist restrained passengers during emergency evacuations of school buses.**
3. **Any mandate requiring seat belts should be accompanied by an exemption for LEA school bus operators from liability in the event that passengers do not properly use seat belts and when passengers are injured due to their failure to properly use seat belts.**
4. **Driver education documents should be revised to include information regarding Louisiana statutes that describe when motorists must stop for school buses.** The Louisiana Department of Education will provide information to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and request the DMV to incorporate the information in the *Commercial Driver’s License Manual* and in the *Class C and D Driver’s Guide*.
5. **The Highway Safety Commission, the Department of Education, the Office of Motor Vehicles and the Louisiana Association of School Transportation Officials should collaborate in the preparation of video scripts and documentary production to inform the general public of motorists’ stopping requirements when school buses are stopped to pick up or drop off passengers.**
6. **The use of cameras on school buses is encouraged to assist with the enforcement of statutory requirements for illegal passing of school buses and should develop guidelines and procedures for schools, school districts and private contractors that are willing to equip school buses with exterior cameras to monitor traffic conditions at school bus stops.**
7. **School superintendents, heads of charter schools, and nonpublic schools that provide and/or receive school transportation services should ensure that school bus drivers and individual schools provide adequate school bus safety instruction to passengers.** Unit Four of the Louisiana Department of Education School Bus Driver Course and a variety of materials available from many public agencies and professional organizations should be the basis for this instruction. (The Louisiana Association of School Transportation Officials should be requested to assist the LDOE in the preparation of training materials appropriate for specific passenger age groups.)

8. **The Louisiana Department of Education should adopt, and encourage LEAs to train school bus drivers in the use of, the recommended universal signal for school bus drivers to signal students when it is safe to cross roadways at bus stops.**
9. **School superintendents, heads of charter schools, and nonpublic schools that receive public school transportation services should be requested to ensure that mandated safety instruction and school bus evacuation drills for students are being provided in accordance with requirements specified in Section 1301 of Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 119.** The Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, the Louisiana School Boards Association, and the Nonpublic School Council should be requested to make this topic part of their respective meetings.
10. **School superintendents, heads of charter schools, and nonpublic schools that receive public school transportation services should be requested to ensure that school principals are aware of the importance of adequate supervision of students at school bus loading/unloading zones on school campuses.** The Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, the Louisiana School Boards Association, and the Nonpublic School Council should be requested to make this topic part of their respective meetings.
11. **School superintendents, heads of charter schools, and nonpublic schools that receive public school transportation services should be informed of the legal consequences of over-loaded school buses.** In compliance with R.S. 32:293, all passengers must be seated, and to be protected by compartmentalized seating, passengers must be seated fully upon their respected bench seat that is, no part of their body should extend into the bus aisle. The Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, the Louisiana School Boards Association, and the Nonpublic School Council should be requested to make this part of their respective meetings.
12. **Parent-teacher organizations should be requested to assist the Department of Education with opportunities for parents to be informed of rules and regulations for school bus safety and for reinforcing safety training that occurs in schools.**
13. **The Department of Education should create an advisory committee to recommend methods of improving school bus safety for Louisiana's students.** This committee should consist of transporters, law enforcement personnel, the Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, the Louisiana School Boards Association, the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools and parent groups.