



**National Association
of State Directors
of Pupil Transportation Services**

Fact Sheet: States Requiring Lap Belt or Lap and Shoulder Belt Systems for Passengers in Large School Buses (updated February 28, 2020)

Note: This Fact Sheet is intended as a concise guide, not a legal document. Readers are encouraged to consult individual states and regulatory sources for complete information on this topic. NASDPTS welcomes corrections or additional information.

Background

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration establishes Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) with which all new school buses manufactured for sale in the United States must comply. FMVSS 222, School Bus Passenger Seating and Crash Protection, requires that all large school buses (over 10,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight Rating) be equipped with a system known as “compartmentalization.” Compartmentalization consists of closely spaced, high back seats that must be padded to prevent or reduce injuries in crashes.

To augment compartmentalization in certain types of crashes, especially those involving side impacts and rollovers, several states require that large school buses also be equipped with safety belts at each passenger position, either two-point lap belts, or three-point lap and shoulder belts. When either type of belt system is installed, it must meet the requirements of FMVSS 222 for voluntary installations.

School buses are far safer than the other means by which students get to and from school or school events.¹ This Fact Sheet is not intended to provide a detailed discussion of all aspects of school bus safety and passenger crash protection.²

There has been considerable misinformation in media reports over the years about how many states, and which states, require and have actually implemented either of the two types of school bus passenger belt systems. Below is a brief listing of the states that currently require either lap belts or lap/shoulder belts in new school buses to supplement federally required compartmentalization or will be doing so as of the specified dates.

¹ For school bus safety statistics and information, visit <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/school-bus-safety> and www.schoolbusfacts.com.

² For a more thorough discussion of belts, see the February 2014 NASDPTS [Position Paper](#), “The Equipping and Use of Passenger Lap/Shoulder Belts in School Buses.”

States

Note: This listing does not include local school districts, charter schools, private schools, contractors, or other local jurisdictions that may choose to require belts without a state mandate.

Arkansas: Local school districts may voluntarily equip school buses purchased new or leased for use on or after January 1, 2018, with a lap/shoulder belt system at each passenger seating position. At least ten percent of the electors in a local school district may petition the district to require a vote on equipping new school buses with lap/shoulder belts. If this occurs, the district is required to calculate the necessary property taxes to fund the proposal and place the proposed levy on the ballot at the next annual election. If approved by voters, the district must then equip new large school buses with lap/shoulder belts.

California: All new large school buses purchased July 1, 2005 or later (July 1, 2004 for small school buses) must be equipped with a three-point lap/shoulder belt at each passenger seating position. All students must be instructed in proper use of the belts. All school buses in use in California on or after July 1, 2035 will be required to be equipped with a three-point lap/shoulder belt at each passenger seating position.

Florida: All new school buses purchased January 1, 2001 or later must be equipped with a two-point lap belt at each passenger seating position. School districts may optionally equip buses with three-point lap/shoulder belts. Use of belts is required by passengers on any bus that is so equipped.

Iowa: All new school buses manufactured on October 2, 2019 or later must be equipped with a three-point lap/shoulder belt at each passenger seating position. Each school district is required to have a policy in place regarding usage.

Louisiana: All new school buses purchased on June 30, 2004 or later were required to be equipped with “occupant restraint systems,” subject to available state funding, but to date no state funds have been appropriated.

New Jersey: All new school buses purchased in 1992 or later were required to be equipped with a two-point lap belt at each passenger seating position. School buses manufactured on or after February 21, 2019 must be equipped with a three-point lap/shoulder belt at each passenger seating position. Use of belts is required by passengers on any bus that is so equipped.

New York: All new school buses purchased in 1987 or later were required to be equipped with a two-point lap belt at each passenger seating position. School districts may optionally equip buses with three-point lap/shoulder belts. Use of belts is not required unless mandated by local school district policy.

Nevada: All new school buses purchased on July 1, 2019 or later must be equipped with a three-point lap/shoulder belt at each passenger seating position.

Texas: All new school buses purchased starting with model year 2018 must be equipped with a three-point lap/shoulder belt at each passenger seating position. Use of belts is required by passengers on any bus that is so equipped. Any local school district may opt out of the requirement to equip buses with the belts if it votes in a public meeting that it has insufficient funds.