



NAPT STATEMENT ON SEAT BELTS ON SCHOOL BUSES: EVOLVING FOR SAFETY

The National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) takes this opportunity to share with our members our position on the use of seat belts on school buses. Our position is explained in detail below but includes our opposition to the use of two-point lap belts on school buses, and the evolution of our thinking on the use of three-point lap-and-shoulder belts on school buses.

NAPT is a membership organization dedicated to assisting and supporting school transportation professionals in ensuring the safety of more than 25 million school children who ride yellow school buses each day in America and elsewhere. It is important to our mission to lead in conversations as significant as that of seat belts and school bus safety, to advocate on behalf of our members and to provide learning opportunities to facilitate and support their local decisions and efforts.

The issue of whether to install and utilize seat belts on large school buses has been a matter of extensive debate for the school bus industry for many years. The safety record of the yellow school bus and its unique 'compartmentalization' seating design has given our industry cause to oppose or to question the need to introduce seat belts absent scientifically derived data demonstrating their efficacy and a lack of secondary impacts.

Over the years, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has completed limited testing and, as a result, in 2011, required lap-shoulder belts on school buses weighing less than 10,000 pounds. However, in that same rulemaking, NHTSA declined to mandate lap-shoulder belts on larger school buses but did provide specifications to be used by operators opting to install them. Then, in 2015, NHTSA issued a memorandum recommending that school bus operators should install and use lap-shoulder belts on large buses because, while school buses are the safest vehicle on the road, the belts would increase safety for student riders.

Since that time and given the historic safety record of school buses, NAPT has urged the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), to complete testing of the efficacy of seat belts on school buses before mandating their use. Our belief has been that it would be imprudent to install new equipment on otherwise extremely safe school buses without knowing definitively that they would continue to be safe for our children. We continue to believe that it is incumbent on NHTSA to complete long-overdue testing, and we will continue to advocate for such action.

It is important to recognize that during any school year, numerous children are injured and killed on or near school buses in a variety of circumstances, including crashes with other vehicles. In several of those cases, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) found that the absence of seat belts on school buses involved in such crashes contributed to injuries and

fatalities that would have been avoided were seat belts in use. Accordingly, NTSB has recommended the use of lap-shoulder belts on school buses following their extensive investigations into those fatality accidents.

As circumstances evolve and new technologies and equipment emerge or are enhanced in the market space, it is important that NAPT review our positions, statements, and member resources to ensure they are current and appropriate to the safety equation for our children.

Accordingly, at this time, the Board of Directors has determined that NAPT should adapt our posture and statements on the issue of lap-shoulder belts on school buses to recognize the value and importance of NTSB's recommendations, and the evolution of school bus safety technology.

In the absence of a scientifically based mandate from NHTSA, NAPT believes it is important that the decision to install and utilize lap-shoulder belts is made at the local level and that our efforts should support and facilitate those decision-making processes. NAPT sees our role as encouraging informed conversations at the local school district level and, where appropriate, at the state level, and enabling our members to engage in those discussions with reliable and timely information.

It is prudent and timely for NAPT to take the following actions to inform our membership and to begin to advance our evolving position:

- Clarify that NAPT opposes the installation and use of two-point lap belts on school buses and recommends three-point lap-and-shoulder belts in cases where local officials decide to install belts on school buses
- Issue a public statement aligning NAPT with the numerous findings and recommendations from the NTSB suggesting that the use of lap-shoulder belts would increase safety on school buses and would have prevented fatalities in cases investigated by NTSB
- Share our statement with our members and partners to facilitate local decision-making that takes into account the benefits of lap-shoulder belts on school buses, including increased safety for students and, in many cases, improved student behavior
- Encourage our members to recognize and manage issues related to driver liability and adherence to school policies in the implementation of any district program related to the installation and use of lap-shoulder belts.
- Provide informational sessions (e.g., webinars, conference programs, podcasts) to assist and support the decision-making procedures of our members and their school leadership
- Communicate this statement to school superintendents, school boards, and other education partners to gain their understanding of and support for our position, and to assist our members' efforts to consider local decisions and implementation strategies
- Continue to raise concerns with NHTSA, school bus manufacturers, and school bus seat and seat belt manufacturers about the effectiveness of lap-shoulder belts in cases of rollovers, water-related events and thermal events
- Call on NHTSA to continue testing of lap-shoulder belt effectiveness, particularly in previously untested situations such as rollovers, water-related events and thermal events