



**NAPT STATEMENT ON
ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**

Background

The school transportation industry has worked hard for decades to ensure the safety of our nation's children through (1) rigorous standards for school bus manufacture and maintenance and (2) diligent and thorough preparation of school bus drivers entrusted with those children. It has been a driving force in the school bus community that we transport as many of our children as possible in what NHTSA and other state and federal agencies have determined to be the safest mode of transportation for our children.

We have taken extraordinary steps to reinforce that safety when children are being transported in vehicles other than school buses (e.g., coach buses, public transit buses) through standards that address both driver qualifications and vehicle integrity and safety features.

The need for school bus drivers and attendants and the on-going shortage of school bus drivers and attendants has led to the emergence of alternate transportation providers across the nation. As this trend has increased, NAPT believes it is important to clarify appropriate and necessary steps to ensure the safety of our school children when such services are utilized by school districts.

Current Situation

As noted, in recent years, several alternative transportation providers and modes of transportation have emerged in the school transportation market, and have met with success in offering school districts practical options to addressing their shortages of drivers and attendants.

To their credit, the alternative transportation service providers have, in part, initiated their own standards as an integral part of their approach to their work and as a means to assure school districts of their standards for safety. NAPT has worked closely with some of these providers, and we are pleased to count them among our business partners and members.

We note that these steps, while significant, vary among the providers and can vary from state-to-state in terms of rigor and coverage. It is with this as background that NAPT believes it is necessary for us to offer our members and the education community guidelines related to the selection and monitoring of these alternate providers.

In preparing this statement, NAPT makes no judgments about these providers who have worked to advance their services, business models, and safety requirements. Our purpose and interest is to

create clearer and nationally applicable standards that can be employed by school districts to make appropriate decisions to meet their needs. We intend to involve the alternate provider community in our efforts as partners and collaborators.

NAPT Position on Alternative Transportation Services

The NAPT Statement of Beliefs includes this fundamental element from which flows the tenets of our position on this matter:

While it is always preferable that children ride on yellow school buses there are some areas and instances where this may not be possible. In such situations, it is crucial that children are transported in the safest possible vehicles and driven by qualified, trained, and well-regulated drivers.

NAPT believes that every entity which intends to transport children to and from school needs to meet certain standards of safety. Given the well-documented safety record that the school bus has attained, we believe that alternative transporters must rise to the same or similar standards to achieve that record for the children being transported.

While we will not recommend detailed specifications for such standards, we nevertheless believe it is important to enumerate clear and reasonable criteria to help school districts assess these services and ensure that they meet their operational needs and the needs of their children, as follows:

DRIVER AND RELATED PERSONNEL

Providers of alternative transportation services must ensure that:

- All drivers have attained, and continue to maintain, a license appropriate to the vehicle used to transport children.
- All drivers undergo criminal background checks and are screened in accordance with the requirements of the state in which they are performing their duties.
- All drivers are subject to random drug and alcohol testing and that they have documented systems in place to conduct 'reasonable suspicion' checks.
- There are written procedures in place for reporting accidents, that drivers are trained in such procedures and that such reporting is rigorously monitored.
- Training in safety techniques similar to school bus driver requirements, including student behavior management, loading and unloading from their vehicles, bullying prevention, awareness of provisions required in the individualized education program (IEP), where applicable, personal hygiene, and related issues.
- Training related to children with disabilities and special needs including emotional considerations.
- Training in emergency situation management
- Understanding of policies and practices for parent relations and communication.

VEHICLE SAFETY

Providers of alternative transportation services must ensure that:

- Alternate transportation vehicles are equipped with adequate signage to ensure that the public is aware that the vehicle is transporting children, and that caution is needed.
- All vehicles undergo rigorous maintenance and inspection procedures and such procedures are monitored regularly to ensure roadworthiness.
- Standards are established for vehicle capacity to protect against inappropriate or excessive loading.
- There are appropriate evacuation procedures for passengers and drivers and those procedures are the subject of training and vehicle signage.
- All vehicles are equipped with lighting, signage, and signaling devices consistent with relevant state laws to ensure public awareness that they are transporting children.
- Vehicle equipment is sufficient to meet the needs identified in student IEPs, including wheelchair capacity, child safety restraint systems, oxygen securement, and related areas to ensure safety.

In furtherance of the above:

- NAPT will work closely with our state association partners, our business partners and our colleagues at NSTA and NASDPTS to evolve model state legislation and/or state guidelines for retaining and managing the use of alternative transportation providers in ways that are the same or similar to those used in relation to the yellow school bus.
- NAPT will collaborate with NASDPTS and NSTA to bring this overall topic to the table for discussion at upcoming sessions of the National Conference on School Transportation (NCST).
- NAPT will provide education, information, and resources to our school transportation community as well as to school superintendents, business officials and parent organizations to ensure responsive, legal, insurable effective, and efficient decisions can be made at the local level.
- NAPT urges school districts and states to ensure actions taken in relation to alternative transportation services are done in consultation with school attorneys and insurers to protect children and the district.