



PSBA Statement on Occupancy Protection in School Buses

The Pennsylvania School Bus Association (PSBA) is dedicated to the safe transportation of students and takes pride doing our part to provide the safest transportation system in the country.

Recently, NHTSA's research has confirmed the fact that compartmentalization—the occupant protection system found in today's school buses—works extremely well to protect school bus passengers. Further, NHTSA's finding that lap belts not only provide little, if any, benefit on large school buses, but also could induce serious injury to young passengers, should quell the long-standing lap belt debate that has been driven by emotions rather than facts.

While NHTSA concludes that lap/shoulder belts, when properly used, are the most effective form of occupant protection and could possibly reduce the number of fatalities in frontal school bus crashes by one a year, the report warns that there are a number of potential negative consequences of installing lap/shoulder belts that could result in a net loss of safety. Among them are:

- A high expectation of misuse, as children find the shoulder belts uncomfortable or confining and put them behind their backs or under their arms. When that occurs, the restraint system acts like a lap belt, with the potential for severe neck and abdominal injury.
- The possibility that the restraints will not properly fit the youngest or smallest passengers without the use of belt-positioning booster seats.
- A higher risk of injury to unbelted passengers from the modified seats, which are stiffer and heavier and have added hard points that occupants could contact.
- The danger that school districts, in order to offset the additional cost and loss of capacity of buses with lap/shoulder belts, will reduce the number of students who are transported by school buses. Should this occur, any potential benefit of the restraint system would be far outweighed by the increased risk to students who are forced to find more dangerous alternative travel to school.

PSBA urges Pennsylvania policy makers to fully consider these potential consequences. As NHTSA says in the report, *[I]n a very good restraint system like compartmentalization in school buses, extreme caution must be taken when considering any changes to the safety equipment that have provided high protection and safety benefits to children for over 24 years. Any change in vehicle safety systems must be weighed against the benefits that could accrue and the negative benefits that could result from those changes.*

School buses without restraints are still safer than any other current mode of transportation—whether it's walking to school, riding bikes, or traveling in parents' cars.

PSBA is dedicated to safety and gives full support to NHTSA's ongoing effort to discover those measures that will provide improvement in school bus occupant protection.

Pennsylvania School Bus Association
4405 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110
(717) 975-1951