



NYAPT

NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

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RESOLUTION: 2006-001-P
SUBJECT: Passenger Restraint Systems on School Buses
DATE ADOPTED: September 30, 2006
AMENDED: -
REVIEWED 12/4/2010

PASSENGER RESTRAINT SYSTEMS IN SCHOOL BUSES

Background

The issue of seat belts on school buses has a long history in New York State. In 1987, New York became the first state in the nation to mandate the installation of seat belts on school buses, although that law did not mandate use of seat belts by students riding on school buses. Historically, the New York Association for Pupil Transportation (NYAPT) argued in strong opposition to that 1987 seat belt law. Our opposition was based on knowledge that the school bus seat compartment provided significant protection for our school children riding on school buses. Accordingly, NYAPT has consistently argued against the mandatory use of seat belts on school buses. Compounding our concerns is the reality that New York school buses are equipped with lap belts -- the same devices that are no longer supplied in automobiles because of occupant restraint injury concerns.

In the past year, NYAPT has again revisited this issue. We have carefully considered the question of whether installing three point lap-shoulder belts on school buses would improve overall safety. As part of our effort to be thorough and fair, NYAPT has reviewed federal crash studies and federal agency recommendations, nationwide expert opinions, the nationwide actual experiences of school districts using three-point lap-shoulder belt systems, and the feedback of our own members as to the factors affecting the safety question.

Policy Positions

Based on this review, NYAPT takes the following policy positions:

- (1) NYAPT re-affirms our strong support for the safety inherent in the school bus seat compartment. Research has shown that the school bus seat compartment provides protection for our children from death and injury in most accidents. Compartmentalization is a major contributing factor to the fact that school bus travel is the safest means available for transporting our children to and from school.
- (2) Based on the 2002 NHTSA research, NYAPT acknowledges the safety benefits of three-point seat belts, when properly worn, in certain types of bus crashes.

- (3) NYAPT recognizes that the installation of three point lap-shoulder belt systems will add new vehicle equipment costs and may result in loss of seating capacity on school buses. Accordingly, we believe that full funding of this expense by the state and/or federal governments is essential if installation of three point lap-shoulder belts were to be mandated.
- (4) NYAPT asserts that, since school buses remain the safest form of surface transportation, any reduction in the number of transported students as a direct or indirect result of the high cost of installation of three point lap-shoulder belt systems is unacceptable.
- (5) In order for State leaders to adequately and completely explore and understand the implications of introducing three point lap-shoulder belts onto school buses, NYAPT supports and encourages the creation of a New York State School Bus Passive Restraint System Task Force to:
 - Conduct studies to ensure belt configuration and seating arrangement are safe for the diverse student population transported, that is, pre-k through grade 12.
 - Determine the unintended consequences of installing three point lap-shoulder belts on school buses. The unintended consequences as we know them today are as follows;
 - a) Potential additional costs caused by increased fleet size due to reduced seating capacities.
 - b) The increased capital costs associated with the purchase of new buses equipped with three point lap-shoulder belts.
 - c) Increases in other operational costs including larger maintenance staffs and facilities, increased fuel requirements, and increased parts and supplies costs related to maintaining and replacing such seat belts.
 - d) Training for students and bus drivers in properly adjusting and securing the restraint system. Studies must be conducted to determine the extent of and the effectiveness of training to optimize the proper use of lap-shoulder belts. This is based on our belief that unlike the family car, school buses do not have booster seats to adjust the seating position of the student. This could result in the belt crossing the face and neck of the student.
 - e) Effects on the loading/unloading process to include the potential for increased route times and increased passing motorist's violations.
 - f) Thorough analysis of the financial needs of school transportation in New York State regarding implementing three point lap-shoulder belts on new school buses.
- (6) In the event that three point lap-shoulder belts becomes required equipment on New York State school buses, NYAPT would support legislation protecting school bus drivers and operators from liability associated with potential injuries caused by students who are wearing or not wearing the three point lap-shoulder belts.

Adequate Funding is Essential

Lastly, NYAPT urges the legislature and all interested parties to consider the significant and immediate costs of installing three point lap-shoulder belts or any other new passenger restraint technologies on all new school buses in the state. Availability of state funding would be critical to the ability of school districts and school bus operators to install such new devices on their school buses. No action should be taken by the state in this regard without having adequately addressed the matter of cost and cost reimbursement.

Small Buses, Vans and SUVs

NYAPT also anticipates and will likely support the introduction by federal regulation of three point lap-shoulder belts on all Type A school buses, provided concerns previously addressed are resolved. These buses are smaller and lighter than larger Types B, C, and D buses. Three-point restraints would serve to increase the protections afforded to students by the school bus seat compartment.

In the meantime, NYAPT continues to support state legislation that would require use of three point lap-shoulder belts that are standard equipment on van and sport utility vehicles used for school transportation purposes. These vehicles are not constructed to meet the same federal standards as school buses and are most often used as personal and family vehicles. It is important that students 'buckle up' when riding in these vehicles.

A Call for Dialogue

NYAPT calls on all involved in education and pupil transportation to consider the substance of this important issue. NYAPT believes in and calls attention to the long-term record of safe school bus travel and is committed ultimately to overall student safety.

Sharing

This statement will be shared with the New York State Governor, members of the New York State Legislature, the New York State Board of Regents, state agencies that have oversight of school transportation, educational organizations, parent and student safety organizations, the media and other interested parties.

For further information, contact NYAPT's Executive Director, Peter Mannella, in Albany at (518) 463-4937.