

## SENATOR FOR A DAY MOCK LEGISLATION

---

Senate Bill 12 - Seat Belts on School Buses

### **'Like Eggs in a Carton': Why Most School Buses Don't Have Seat Belts**

<https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/like-eggs-in-a-carton-heres-why-most-school-buses-dont-have-seat-belts/2294864/>

By: Rudy Chinchilla February 12, 2020

A video of an Ohio school bus flipping over and sending kids flying from their seats into the roof is making some people wonder whether seat belts should be mandated on all school buses.

But while such accidents send chills down the spine of parents, national safety data suggests that school buses remain the safest mode of transportation for children, even without seat belts.

A big reason for that is that large school buses are designed to withstand impact through compartmentalization. This design concept provides a “[protective envelope](#)” around students by placing strong, high energy-absorbing, padded seats close together, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Put another way, “Students are protected within the seating compartment much like eggs in a carton,” according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

Anyone who [watched the Ohio crash](#) will also notice that, while the kids hit the roof, the roof didn’t break. That’s because school buses also have minimum roof crush requirements, according to the NHTSA.

And, because school buses are so big and heavy, the impact from a crash is distributed differently than it would be in a car, light truck or van, meaning that people in a school bus “experience much less crash force,” according to the NHTSA.

The exception is buses weighing less than 10,000 pounds, like those used to transport special education students. Because they are closer in size to regular cars and trucks, the NHTSA does require seat belts in small buses to “provide occupant protection.”

Still, only four to six school-age children die each year on school buses, less than one percent of all traffic fatalities nationwide, according to the NHTSA. This means kids are about 70 times more likely to get to school safely on a school bus than they would if traveling in a car.

Those figures translate locally, too.

In 2018, there were [31,381](#) registered school buses in Pennsylvania, according to the state department of transportation. In the 2017/18 school year, more than 1.52 million students a day took the school bus.

But, of the [more than 1,600 crashes](#) involving school buses from 2014 to 2018, only 19 resulted in death, according to PennDOT. Of those deaths, only one person in the school bus itself died: a driver involved in a crash in 2017. The rest of the deaths were made up of pedestrians or drivers and passengers in other vehicles involved in the crashes.

However, there are drawbacks to not having seat belts.

The [NTSB notes](#) that despite school buses being “extremely safe,” they are susceptible to rollover crashes, like the one in Ohio.

“In these accidents, compartmentalization was not enough to prevent all injuries; for some of the children involved, a seat belt could have lessened their injuries or even saved their lives,” the NTSB said while recommending three-point seat belts for new buses.

To date, only eight states – California, Florida, Louisiana, Nevada, [New Jersey](#), New York and Texas – require seat belts on school buses. Even then, school bus seat belt laws in Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas “are subject to appropriations or approval or denial by local jurisdictions,” according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In response to a deadly crash, New Jersey has a new law requiring shoulder belts as well as lap belts on school buses. Wale Aliyu reports.

The cost of those seat belts also poses a financial problem. Newer buses can cost anywhere between \$80,000 and \$120,000 a piece, [according to the NCSL](#). Adding seat belts could cost between \$7,000 and \$10,000 per bus, and retrofitting older buses “costs even more,” according to the NCSL.

“Additionally,” the NCSL notes, “there is debate about whether children can quickly unbuckle and evacuate buses if needed during emergencies, such as a fire or being submerged in water.”

The NCSL also pointed out a New Hampshire report that concluded there was “insufficient data to decide if requiring seat belts to be worn on school buses would result in a net decrease in deaths and injuries.”

## **NTSB Reiterates Call for Lap and Shoulder Seatbelts in All School Buses**

<https://www.nts.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/NR20221103.aspx>

By: National Transportation Safety Board

### **Fatal school bus crash emphasizes the importance of seatbelts and other safety measures**

WASHINGTON (Nov. 3, 2022) — An investigation into a Decatur, Tennessee, crash between a school bus and a service utility truck that killed two—including a 7-year-old child—has led the National Transportation Safety Board to reiterate past recommendations that could have prevented this crash. The NTSB is renewing its 2018 recommendation that states require passenger lap and shoulder belts on new, large school buses as well as its call to require systems that prevent lane departure on heavy vehicles, first issued in 2010 and updated in 2021. All recommendations remain open.

“This case is a gut-wrenching reminder that failure to act on our recommendations can lead to unimaginable — and preventable — tragedy,” said NTSB Chair Jennifer Homendy. “School buses are often praised for their safety record, but we’ve become complacent. Children’s lives are at stake. The time to act is now.”

On October 27, 2020, a service utility truck was traveling on a two-lane state route in Decatur, Tennessee, when its right-side wheels departed the roadway while the truck driver was looking in his rear mirror. When the truck driver steered back onto the roadway, the truck crossed into the opposing travel lane. At the same time, a school bus was traveling in the opposing travel lane. Although the bus driver braked, she did not have time to avoid the collision and the school bus and truck collided. The school bus driver and a 7-year-old child died. Four other passengers sustained serious injuries and 10 sustained minor injuries.

The investigation found that several school bus passengers were not seated properly at the time of the crash, which increased their injury risk. While the school bus did not have passenger lap and shoulder belts, the NTSB found that the belts, if worn properly, would have reduced their level of injury.

Though not required, the school bus was equipped with inward- and outward-facing video cameras, whose footage gave investigators valuable insight into students’ position within the seating compartment before the crash, as well as the subsequent sequence of events.

As a result of the investigation, the NTSB is recommending the following measures to improve the safety of children traveling on school buses, all of which could have prevented or mitigated the crash:

- Requiring lane departure prevention systems on new vehicles with gross weight ratings greater than 10,000 pounds. NTSB has been asking the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require systems that prevent lane departure since 2010.
- Requiring lap and shoulder belts for all passenger seating positions in new, large school buses. One recommendation was reiterated to Tennessee and multiple states that have not yet

required lap and shoulder belts in new, large school buses. A second recommendation was reiterated to the three states that require only lap belts.

- Requiring all buses and trucks over 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating to be equipped with onboard video event recorders and for school officials to periodically review onboard video to ensure that students engage in safe transportation behaviors on school buses. These recommendations were issued to NHTSA and to the National Association for Pupil Transportation, the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, and the National School Transportation Association.

The full report on the Decatur, Tennessee, crash is available on the [NTSB's website](#). For additional information on school bus safety, visit the NTSB's school bus safety page: [School Bus Safety](#) (ntsb.gov).

To report an incident/accident or if you are a public safety agency, please call 1-844-373-9922 or 202-314-6290 to speak to a Watch Officer at the NTSB Response Operations Center (ROC) in Washington, DC (24/7).

#### Reports

- [HIR-22-06](#)