

Your Question:

You asked for information related to equipping school buses with seat belts.

Our Response:

The federal government has established 35 safety standards for school bus safety and approximately 6 states have adopted legislation related to seat belt laws for school buses, to date. While the effectiveness of seat belts in passenger vehicles is well-documented, the effectiveness of school bus seat belts is unknown due to the variation in types of crashes, types of school bus, and types of restraint systems. Below, please find information on the current standards developed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for school bus safety as well as an overview of states with school bus seat belt laws and further resources for your review.

Safety Standards

According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) (NHTSA), school buses are one of the safest forms of transportation in the United States, approximately 7x safer than passenger cars or light trucks. On average each year, six school age children die in school bus crashes while more than 42,000 people are killed in traffic incidents on U.S. roads. Federal law authorizes NHTSA to set national standards for school bus safety. While the NHTSA uses ‘compartmentalization’ to provide passenger protection and does not require seat belts on large school buses, small school buses (<10,000 lbs.) must be equipped with lap or lap/shoulder belts at all designated seating positions. While this is still the official policy of NHTSA, the [Administrator of the NHTSA](#) indicated that the organization would take a number of steps to ensure that every child on a bus has a three-point seat belt in the future.

State Legislation

To date, only six states have enacted legislation related to seat belts on school buses.

- *California* and *Texas* require lap-shoulder belts on new buses.
- *Florida* and *New Jersey* require new buses to have lap belts and require passengers to be buckled up.
- *New York* requires all buses made after 1987 to have lap belts, although school boards may decide if students must use them.
- *Louisiana* requires that every bus is equipped with seat belts, however, compliance with the law is contingent on the appropriate of funds.

Resources

- A 2016 [report](#) on school bus safety released by the National Conference of State Legislatures provides an overview of the issue, state legislation, and further resources. This report indicates that, in 2015, 12 states proposed legislation related to this topic, but none passed.
- The Office of Legislative Research in Connecticut released a [research report](#) in December 2016 summarizing the issue, state legislation and federal regulations.
- A [2012 study](#) analyzed students’ usage of school bus seat belts and the variables affecting students’ decision to use a seat belt. While the findings do not specifically address whether or not seat belts increase students’ safety, there are a few interesting results:
 - Generally, students are more inclined to not wear seat belts.
 - High school and middle school students were less likely to wear seat belts than elementary school students
 - Female students were more likely than male students (especially in older grades) to wear seat belts