



# NYAPT

NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

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*Our future is riding with us!*

## SCHOOL BUS SAFETY AND SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION



### Vision

The New York Association for Pupil Transportation believes that the school bus ride is not only the first encounter a child has with her/his school but that it is also an integral part of the school day and learning enterprise.

Accordingly, every student's ride on a yellow school bus should be a positive and reinforcing experience devoid of anxiety or violence or undue disruption by other students, the public or the school bus driver.

### Overview

The New York Association for Pupil Transportation is eager to share with state policy makers, including the State Legislature and the Governor, several perspectives and recommendations regarding school bus safety and school transportation security considerations related to the school bus. The school bus must be seen as an integral part of the school day. The yellow school bus transports over 2.3 million of our children to and from school each day on local roads and streets and it does so OUTSIDE the four walls of the school building. The fact that the school bus is not adequately addressed in the State's SAVE provisions increases the significance of addressing school bus safety and security at this important juncture.



### Threat and Risk Assessment

NYAPT is concerned that the school bus itself is vulnerable to the kinds of violent incidents that occurred at Newtown or in Alabama. If a risk assessment were conducted on the school bus, it would likely find that the school bus, among other factors:

- Appears on-time at its stops on a pre-determined, daily schedule
  - Is staffed by a single school bus driver who is secured by a seat belt and is responsible for navigating the vehicle as well as managing as many as 70 students riding on the bus
  - Is unaccompanied on its routes into rural areas as well as urban neighborhoods
  - Has significant areas comprised of glass windows and doors
  - Has one main entrance that opens to load students at regular intervals
  - Has narrowly spaced seats with high seat backs that reduce visibility
- Has a driver compartment that is immediately adjacent to the main entry to the bus
  - Has a narrow aisle up the middle of the school bus to allow access and flow of the students

Each of these factors taken alone could be cause for concern and attention. Taken together, they present a real challenge to be addressed by those engaged in school bus safety and overall safe schools efforts.

Many of the concepts included in this review were generated in surveys and discussions with our members and association leadership. Others were generated through a review of industry literature and the elements of the May 2010 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures.

## Recent Incidents

On a regular basis, school buses are exposed to risks and situations that expose our student riders to danger. These come in the form of unauthorized boardings by parents, strangers, neighbors and friends of students. They also come in the form of sexual predators, criminals, terrorists and others who observe school buses and children on a regular basis for less than honorable purposes. They also include the carrying of weapons onto school buses by students and others who intend to do harm or who are ignorant of the rules about such weapons.

School bus operators and drivers will share that there are frequent and serious incursions into the school bus by parents and other students and that many school bus drivers are threatened and harassed by individuals on a regular basis. These kinds of situations cannot continue if we were concerned about overall safety and a positive learning environment.



On January 29, 2013, a school bus driver in Alabama was shot to death by a would-be kidnapper who boarded his school bus and demanded that a child be turned over to him. That driver, Charles Albert Poland, Jr., defended his school bus and his children, giving them enough time to evacuate while he confronted the assailant. The assailant shot Poland four times and then ran off with a small child who was seated behind the driver's seat and could not escape. The audiotapes of the incident clearly depict Poland as a hero who was not going to allow an unauthorized person, including one carrying a gun, to endanger his students or commandeer his school bus. He died in defense of his students.

This painful incident raised many questions and issues for all of us in school transportation and caused us to review equipment, driver preparation, student education and safety procedures. This paper reflects many of the results of the conversations and explorations we undertook.

## Safety and Security Elements for Consideration

What follows are a series of recommendations and strategies for consideration by state policy-makers, including the SED Safe Schools Task Force that focus specifically on school bus and school transportation issues and settings.

### District-Level Infrastructure for Safety Planning

It is important that planning efforts at the school district level as well as at the school building and facility level include consideration of school transportation aspects and elements. This gap in our planning efforts must be rectified in any new safe schools initiative. Some considerations that will be pursued by our Association include:

- School Transportation managers and supervisors should be included in district-wide and building-level safety planning
- School transportation facilities and equipment should be included in district-wide and building-level safety planning
- Information on school bus design and construction should be included in the materials that are shared with law enforcement, fire departments and first responders to facilitate their actions and access to students on a school bus involved in an incident

### School Bus Equipment and Related Procedures

Our review of the school bus revealed several ideas that we will pursue with school bus manufacturers as well as during the 2015 National Congress on School Transportation, *including* the following:

- Installation of GPS/Telematics to allow greater management and monitoring of school buses on their routes
- Install video cameras with live-feed and still camera options to allow more timely and accurate information about incidents that occur on the school bus
- Identification numbers and information on the roof of the school bus
- Standard use of real-time GPS devices on school buses
- Installation of lights or similar signal that will alert law enforcement officials that a school bus is in distress
- Development and installation of different glass products to afford better protection for students

- Development and installation of more secure entrance doorways for school buses

### **School Transportation Policies and Staffing Issues**

- Make provisions for locking school bus entrance doors, hatches, rear emergency doors and roof hatches when the school buses are not in use or are parked away from the school transportation facility
- Allow the costs of school bus monitors to be eligible for state transportation aid as a means to ensure the presence of additional adult supervision on the school bus
- Reduce or eliminate 'park-outs' of school buses to ensure that school buses are parked in secured areas under the control of a school district or contractor engaged by the school district
- Require school districts to adopt policies related to school transportation security, including procedures related to charter bus usage, field trip supervision, rider lists, and other elements of a sound safety plan (see National School Transportation Specifications & Procedures/May 2010 for related elements)

### **School Transportation Facility Security**

NYAPT believes it is vital that steps be taken to facilitate and provide financial support for school districts and private contractors to secure their school buses and equipment as follows:

- Allow state funds to be used to erect secure perimeter fencing and gates to enclose and protect school buses that are not now housed in garages
- Allow state funds to be used to install perimeter lighting that will help to protect school buses that are stored in open-air lots as well as in garages
- Allow state funds to be used to install and monitor video surveillance camera systems that will help to protect school buses that are stored in open-air lots and in garages

### **Driver and Related Training**

School Bus Drivers already undergo significant training in student management, road rules, evacuation planning, school bus safety drills and more. This training is a part of the "Pre-Service" and the "Basic Course" preparations and is also a part of their semi-annual refresher training courses. However, we have also identified several areas in which additional training and readiness may be appropriate:

- Identifying suspicious behavior and/or suspicious individuals
- Appropriate reporting of individuals or incidents of concern or suspicion
- Appropriate use of physical force in deterring a violent action
- Interacting with law enforcement and emergency responders in a violent incident
- Risk assessment training for school bus drivers
- Confrontation and de-escalation training for school bus drivers
- Provide training for drivers in performing a security-centered pre-trip inspection
- Providing training for law enforcement, fire departments and first responders on the design and construction of school buses to facilitate their responses

### **Student Readiness**

School districts are currently required to provide three separate school bus safety drill programs for students in grades K-12 at pre-determined times during the school year. NYAPT is recommending that these school bus safety drills be enhanced to include information and preparation for dealing with acts of violence or other sudden and violent acts on the school bus.

The students aboard that school bus in Alabama in January 2013 were prepared and were able to exit the school bus through the rear door of the school bus while their driver was otherwise engaging the assailant. Their actions (prompted by their safety drill preparations) saved their lives. NYAPT believes that students need to have:

- Training and preparation for a school-bus-based lockdown situation
- Increased training related to “see something-say something” as students have opportunities at the start and the end of the day to discuss concerns with their bus driver
- Preparation for a violent or confrontational situation with or without a weapon present
- Proper exiting of the school bus in a violent or confrontational situation
- Contacting law enforcement or school officials during a violent or confrontational situation

### **Local School Board Policies for Transportation**

School districts and Boards of Education should be encouraged to adopt policies that clarify acceptable responses to situations that arise on the school bus or in transportation situations. These could include policies related to:

- Non-student riders on school buses
- Access for parents and guardians to the inside of the school bus
- Students riding on school buses to go to a friend’s home
- Handling of information relating to children involved in custody disputes
- Handling of violent incidents including the use of physical force or restraint on a school bus
- Reporting of violent incidents to appropriate supervisors and law enforcement officials
- Distribution and daily use of identification badges or similar devices

These and other policies will serve to provide drivers and other school transportation personnel with clearer response mechanisms and lead to a safer school bus environment overall.

### **Protection for School Bus Drivers and Students**

The school bus must be a place of safety and security. Individuals who are not passengers or employed by the school district (or contractor) to facilitate the transportation of students should not be authorized to board a school bus. NYAPT will support the passage of legislation that will:

- Create a crime of criminal trespass related to individuals who board a school bus without authority or consent of the school bus driver
- Create a crime of aggravated assault for striking or otherwise causing physical harm to a school bus driver in the performance of her or his duties
- Create a crime of homicide of a school bus driver for causing the death of a school bus driver in the performance of his or her duties

## **Summary**

The New York Association for Pupil Transportation is eager to share this information with the state policy-makers for adoption and implementation.

We will continue to advocate for these ideas and in our efforts to ensure safer, more secure school buses for our transportation colleagues, but most of all, **FOR OUR CHILDREN.**

***FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT NYAPT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PETER MANNELLA,  
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