THE JOURNEY TO LAP/SHOULDER BELTS: The Iowa Story

IPTA Annual Conference
Airport Holiday Inn
Des Moines, Iowa
July 19, 2021

Max Christensen
State Director
Iowa Department of Education

Chris Darling
Executive Director
Iowa Pupil Transportation Association
Prior to 2007, seat belts were

...... just seat belts

~ Expensive
~ Reduced Capacity
~ Could Be Used As WEAPONS!
~ Could Cause Abdominal Injuries and/or Whiplash

This wasn’t just a 10-month sprint......
Then in 2007...........everything changed!

A thing called “flexible seating” was introduced........

~ Lap/shoulder belts had been introduced in 2002

~ Flex seating was introduced at the NAPT trade show in 2007

~ Flex seating went into production in February 2008
SOMETHING THAT STRUCK ME, & STUCK WITH ME...

Titled: “Be Proactive About Active Restraints”…..
from School Bus Fleet, March 2007

Please do not use my name. In my position, I’m trying to move the thinking in my state in the direction of active restraint systems, and I don’t need the firestorm that would encircle me should my thoughts on this subject become public. This is a subject that needs to be moved along at a snail’s pace and very gently.

…the leaders in our industry need to take a real, hard look at this issue …..Instead of hanging up the “road closed” sign …. how about putting up a “Reduced Speed Ahead” sign and at least starting us down the path we all know we’ll eventually be going?

Ten years from now …. do we want our industry to be looked at as the professional group that was proactive ….. Or do we want to be viewed as “that backward group that dragged its heels …. and was finally forced to swallow the seat belt pill”?

Signed ……. A State Director of Pupil Transportation
MEANWHILE, BACK IN IOWA

2005 – HR 49
2007 – HB 1955
2008 – HF 2040
2009 - A Senate bill was introduced
2010 to 2013 – nothing
2014 – HF2117
2015 – HF 35
2016 – Senate inquiry asking if we were looking at seat belts
2017 – HF 599
2018 – HF 599
2019 – HF 366
MONEY HAD A LOT TO DO WITH IT.....

~ 2009: $8.6 - $10.7 million
~ 2015: $3.15 million
~ 2019: $3.2 million
What if one of those “seat belt” bills actually takes off?

Would we end up with lap belts, lap/shoulder belts, or what??? To the rescue comes the “44 Update Group” !!

The 44 Update Group

~ Department of Education Staff
~ NCST Delegates
~ IPTA Members
~ Maintenance & Inspection Advisory Council (TD’s & techs)
~ School Bus Dealers & Factory Reps

This group meets every five years after the NCST to develop and update school bus specifications in Iowa’s Administrative Code Chapter 44 rules.
44.3(58) 44.3(57)  

**Seating, passenger restraints.**

a. Lap belts **shall not be installed** on passenger seats in large school buses (over 10,000 pounds GVWR) except in conjunction with child safety restraint systems that comply with the requirements of FMVSS No. 213, Child Restraint Systems.

b. Three-point (3-point) lap shoulder belts **may be installed** in all new buses. If installed, the restraint system shall include a flexible design feature, thus allowing three-two seating on the same 39-inch seat, depending on student size.
IT WAS A LONG DRIVE HOME THAT NIGHT
The next day – August 9, 2013

February, 2014 - NASDPTS fully supports the installation and use of lap-shoulder belts in school buses. NASDPTS is not advocating that the installation and/or use of lap-shoulder belts be required.
You know guys .............. NASDPTS has moved forward with our thinking concerning lap/shoulder restraints. The old arguments just don’t hold much water anymore, and anyone who sees the video put together by SafeGuard seats from the bus crash demos last summer would have a difficult time defending a position that seat restraints are bad.

I have no idea how the DE will fall on this one, but I personally will be pushing to at the very least not oppose it, and maybe even be in favor, with two provisions:

1. Not lap belts – must be lap/shoulder restraints
2. The driver must not be responsible for non-use.
"Is this a change in position? Yes," Rosekind said. "But it is consistent with NHTSA's role as the guardian of safety on America's roads.
NHTSA’s new position was shared. This began the process to inform and educate IPTA members.

We knew from the beginning that changing the mindset about compartmentalization was going to take some time.

**Chris Darling**  
Executive Director, IPTA  
Reviewed the new NHTSA position on lap/shoulder seat belts

**Max Christensen**  
DE Executive Officer/State Director  
Q&A - Lap/shoulder belts on school buses? **YOUR THOUGHTS?**
SynTec Seating Partners with Iowa’s Largest District for a Test Project.

High Point, NC, August 16, 2016 – SynTec Seating Solutions, the largest school bus seat manufacturer in the industry, is providing a test of its 03C Restraint Seats to the Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS), Iowa’s largest school district, and Thomas Bus Sales Inc. Iowa, for the 2016-2017 school year.

To kick off the program, DMPS issued an order for two Thomas C2 buses equipped with SynTec’s 03C Restraint Seats for students in grades K-3. The buses were delivered to SynTec’s facility in High Point, North Carolina where they will be converted to lap/shoulder seats as part of the Thomas Buses of Iowa’s program to install lap/shoulder belts on all school buses in Des Moines ready for delivery to DMPS.

DMPS will monitor the impact of the lap/shoulder seats on these buses during the 2016–2017 school year. The following=

DMPS Adds School Bus with Seatbelts to Fleet

DES MOINES, IA (October 27, 2016) – The Des Moines Public Schools transportation department is launching a bus seatbelt trial, in partnership with the Iowa Department of Education, school bus seat manufacturer SynTec and Thomas Bus Sales.

The district continues to believe school buses are one of the safest forms of transportation available. Their size, color and lights make them highly visible to other motorists. Given buses transport tens of thousands of Iowa students every day, accidents are relatively rare. However, the DMPS transportation director Todd Liston believes that when new options in safety become available and they appear to be viable, a trial is warranted.

“We have several questions,” said Liston. “Among them, will the students use the seatbelts or are they a distraction? Can the students secure themselves, or would they need assistance getting in and out of their seats, possibly causing a hazard if quick evacuation of the bus became necessary? All of these
“We have seen some interest ….. mainly on lift units.”

“We have priced lap/shoulder belts half a dozen times this calendar year.”

“Have you seen any interest in equipping buses with lap/shoulder belts since the start of this calendar year?”

“I haven’t seen any call for full buses equipped with 3pt belts.”
One of the more common concerns after a school bus accident is, “Why don’t we have seat belts on school buses?” Before we use the most common calls to get people to see the IPTA offers from auto insurers, experiences, transportation directors, bus drivers and parents are either for or against seatbelts on Iowa’s school buses. The safety of children is the most important concern. Bus drivers have to ensure their passengers’ safety. With such strong harm shown in the studies, it is hard to find common ground to open up a meaningful dialogue on this sensitive issue.

Both sides agreed that school buses are the safest way to transport your children to and from school. The sun, lighting and color of school buses make them easily visible and identifiable. Your child is more visible, and it is more likely that they will make good driving decisions and not be at the mercy of the bus driver since he or she has to ensure their passengers’ safety. With such strong harm shown in the studies, it is hard to find common ground to open up a meaningful dialogue on this sensitive issue.

This article attempted to dispel the myths with facts.
54th Annual IPTA Conference/Trade Show!
Monday, July 17, 2017

Christopher A. Hart
Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

Todd Liston
Then current Transportation Director, Des Moines Public Schools. DMPS is doing a test project with lap/shoulder belts thru SynTec Seating

Monica Coburn
IMMI/Safeguard, 32 years in Indiana as a transportation Director at three school districts. She promoted lap/shoulder seat belts first hand in Indiana school buses. Monica also traveled to all 9 IPTA regional meetings in the spring of 2018, promoting l/s belts
The NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) recommended for the first time that all new school buses in the U.S. be equipped with lap and shoulder belts.
The NTSB’s recommendation that all new school buses in the U.S. be equipped with lap/shoulder belts started in the Governor’s office, and went full circle.
Monica Coburn
Presented:
“NTSB Crash Report & Lap/Shoulder Seat Belt Overview”
sharing that enhancing compartmentalization with lap/shoulder belts means:

➢ Safer bus rides for students
➢ Behavior improvements
➢ Reduced bullying
➢ Driver satisfaction
Back in the hands of the ‘44 Update Group’

The 44 Update Group
~ Department of Education Staff
~ NCST Delegates
~ IPTA Members
~ Maintenance & Inspection Advisory Council (TD’s & techs)
~ School Bus Dealers and Factory Reps

It’s been 7 years since we took control of the narrative. It’s time to do it again! At the very least, the legislature is going to have to talk about and discuss this issue via the rules process.

44.3(57) Seating, passenger restraints.

a. Lap belts shall not be installed on passenger seats in large school buses (over 10,000 pounds GVWR) except in conjunction with child safety restraint systems that comply with the requirements of Child Restraint Systems.

b. Three-point (3-point) lap-shoulder belts shall may be installed in all new buses. If installed, the restraint system shall include a flexible design feature, thus allowing three-two seating on the same 39-inch seat, depending on student size.

Passed on a 6-4 vote! someone is going to have to say ‘no’ ……"
Thus began what many think was the 10-month sprint.

The Rules Process Is Six Steps

~ Give notice to the State School Board
  ✓ **May 9, 2019**

~ Public Comment Period
  ✓ **May 9 – June 25, 2019, with a public meeting on June 25**

~ Give notice to the ARRC (Administrative Rules Review Committee)
  ✓ **July 9, 2019 – told us it should be a “legislative process”**

~ Final Adoption from the State School Board
  ✓ **August 1, 2019**

~ Final Adoption from the ARRC
  ✓ **September 10, 2019**

~ Rules become effective
  ✓ **October 2, 2019**
Keep in mind – other things were still going on......

2019 – HF 366

Would have required belts and usage after July 1, 2019
Unanimously approved by the IPTA Board of Directors on January 16, 2019. It was released to the public on February 4, 2019 - five years to the day after the original NASDPTS position paper was released!
2019 IPTA Regional Meetings

It was announced that we were going to have a **school bus rollover crash demonstration** on July 15, 2019 at the IPTA Conference & Trade-Show.

- Using fully electronic crash test dummies in the bus, belted and unbelted, for real time impact data analysis pertaining to the use or non-use of lap/shoulder belts.
- Seven on board cameras to document activity inside the bus.
- Remote driving system will be used during the crash test.
- Side-by-side evacuation drill demonstrations using two school buses furnished by the Des Moines CSD. One bus equipped with lap/shoulder belts and one without.
- Will include a follow up meeting the next morning to provide preliminary test results to conference attendees.

DMACC Transportation Institute Site
Bleachers that will seat 250 conference attendees.
More bus crash demo’s were being done in June near Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This one was a rear-end collision...........

Midwest Association of Technical Accident Investigators
Annual Conference – Cedar Rapids, Iowa
June 3-5, 2019
This one was a side impact collision............
Our messaging also changed ………

- REDUCING INJURIES
- BETTER BEHAVIOR
- SAFER OVERALL RIDE
- LESS OF A DRIVER SHORTAGE
- DRIVER RETENTION
- DRIVER RECRUITMENT
- HAPPIER DRIVERS
The conference opened with Michele Beckjord, Senior Project Investigator for the NTSB. She reviewed accidents from all over the nation and here in Iowa. Max Christensen then led a discussion during this session pertaining to lap/shoulder seat belts.

During the morning sessions Dave Hallman and his team of crash specialists were out at the DMACC Transportation Institute Site preparing the school bus and the eight (8) crash dummies for their ride later in the afternoon.
The evacuation drills used two doors - the service door and the rear door.

**Evacuation #1**
No lap/shoulder belts – 66 seconds

**Evacuation #2**
With lap/shoulder belts – 42 seconds

These tests seemed to show little or no difference in evacuation times between belted and un-belted students.
What happened?

➢ The 3 non-belted crash dummies disappear from view while being tossed out of their seats and hitting the floor.
➢ The 2 belted crash dummies with lap/shoulder seat belts are still in their seats before, during and after the crash.
➢ This test seemed to demonstrate that lap/shoulder belts will improve student rider safety!
The Iowa State Board of Education has adopted rules requiring seatbelts on new school buses ordered on or after Oct. 2, 2019. The rules will return to the state’s Administrative Rules Review Committee for final review, which is preliminarily scheduled for sometime next month.

The rules were adopted unanimously by the State Board of Education on Thursday. The rules require lap-and-shoulder seatbelts and other safety equipment on newly purchased school buses.
August 15, 2019 - IPTA sent one last letter to every member of the ARRC (Administrative Rules Review Committee)

- The IPTA board voted unanimously for lap/shoulder belts to be added as standard equipment on all new Iowa school buses.
- The IPTA fully supports and recommends lap/shoulder belts be standard equipment on all new Iowa school buses.
- Research statistics, recommendations, nationwide trends, and laws favoring lap/shoulder belts to protect our most precious cargo are not wrong.
- Do not let this issue be decided in the future by a serious injury or death of a student on a school bus.
- This very important issue is in your hands and the time to begin making students safer is today!
SEPTEMBER 10, 2019 – Voting Day!

Nicole Proesch, Legal Counsel, DOE on the left and Max Christensen, Executive Officer DOE on the right answering questions from the ARRC members.

From the left: Jack Ewing, House Member Megan Jones, Chair and Senate Member, Waylon Brown, Vice Chair asking questions during the review session.

From the left: Chad Duncan, IC; Marc Steele, and Brian Watley, Hoglund Bus Co, Chris Darling, IPTA, Wade Campbell, School Bus Sales, Merrill Mueller, Algona CSD & IPTA Board Member, Mike Kennedy, Boone CSD and Max Christensen, Department of Education.

September 10, 2019

➢ Will be remembered as one of the most historic days in Iowa school transportation history.
➢ The rule for requiring lap/shoulder belts on all new school buses was fully adopted by the ARRC.
➢ Iowa became the 5th state in the nation to require lap/shoulder belts on new school buses, effective with new school buses ordered on or after October 2, 2019.
If anyone tells you it’s easy ...... it’s not.

If anyone tells you it can’t be done ...... it can.
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Signed ....... Max Christensen, State Director of Iowa