

# IPTA School Bus Stop



## Iowa Pupil Transportation Association

### Today's Challenge for Retaining and Recruiting School Bus Driver's

Complementary Issue

Volume 114, Issue 1



Chris Darling, IPTA Executive Director

The number one question that I get asked almost every week here at the IPTA office is how can our school district attract school bus driver applicants? In light of increasing school bus driver shortages the questions in front of us are what is the cause? Why are bus drivers leaving or retiring at a faster pace, and what is so different now that makes driving a school bus less appealing than ever before? There is no doubt that especially during this time of year with all of the end of the year trips and normal absenteeism, almost every transportation department in the State of Iowa is scrambling to cover bus routes, sports and activity trips. Driver shortages are nothing new to this industry and there are many strategies that can be implemented that could provide help. More than likely it will take some out of the box thinking, changing your paradigm to solve the driver shortage problem in your community. However before any problem can be resolved it's a good idea to look at it from several angles. The first step is to ask yourself, why are we

short or losing school bus drivers in our District? I have researched the many points of view and ideas pertaining to this question, with school bus drivers, trainers, dispatchers, route supervisors and transportation directors from across the country, coupled with my own experience and here's what I found to be the main concerns.

School bus drivers earn less per hour than other CDL class drivers on the road. They do not drive the long distances that semi drivers have to endure and work less hours, however they do work a split shift, so there is a limited number of hours available. In many cases, extra work, like field trips, pay far less than the amount that drivers are paid for driving their regular school bus routes. Driver pay, split shift and number of hours available are three of the largest factors. A school bus driver position is a supplementary income at best and that makes it difficult or next to impossible to attract career school bus drivers like the trucking industry.

Another large factor is that most school districts are focused heavily on hiring teachers, and they use that same team approach to hire school bus drivers. Some applicants might stop in the middle of the hiring process, saying that it just takes too long and there are too many hoops to jump through for basically a part time job without benefits. Benefits, that takes us down the road to another hard to resolve problem for school districts. Even if drivers are offered benefits like full-time employees, employers still consider school bus drivers part-time employees because they work a minimum number of hours, one shift in the early morning and another shift in the afternoon. The trouble is that the hours of their part-time job are such that it makes it almost impossible to do any other part-time job, because not many employers will hire them for the hours they have available during the middle of the day. The driver's side of the benefit problem is that when bus drivers are offered health and other benefits they cannot afford them. We often hear them say, they are working for benefits because there is nothing much left of their check after the premiums for their benefits are deducted.

It may be time for School Districts to come up with some additional financial advantages to attract and retain applicants. A prospective applicant is required to have a pre-employment background check, drug test, and a DOT physical. They are also required to pass a series of tests and obtain a CDL license with passenger, air brake and type S endorsements. In many districts the new driver ends up paying all or part of the cost of all of these items themselves. Yes, the applicant will have a CDL license after completing training, but if that individual is between jobs, low on funds and then after they are hired it is still going to be a while before they get their first check, where is the incentive? Without any financial assistance from the school district many will just stop in the middle of the course simply because they cannot afford to work through the hiring process and go to work someplace else in your community.

(Continued on the next page)

## Today's Challenge for Retaining and Recruiting School Bus Driver's

(Continued from page one)

If we have not covered enough already, another fundamental part of the puzzle is fostering a good working environment by supporting the current driving staff you already have on your team. Drivers can be lost very quickly when they feel that they are not being appreciated or supported during student discipline issues on their bus. Retaining your current driving staff reduces the need and the expense of recruiting and training new drivers.

We have examined the wide-ranging list of concerns for retaining and recruiting school bus drivers in Iowa. At times I know it feels like there is no easy solution, but there may be some innovative approaches that could make a difference in your community. There are some school districts that have had some success by implementing bonus programs, using new approaches for advertising and offering supplementary work assignments to drivers between routes in school buildings. Two of these suggestions are financial incentives that work at other districts and in the over the road trucking industry. However not one strategy or incentive program will work by itself. To recruit and solve the driver shortage problem in your district it might be time to look at multiple concepts and strategies. Listed below are a few sample examples that could provide some talking points to begin the discussion in your district:

- Offer a signing bonus of \$250 for a driver with no CDL and \$500 for a driver with a CDL. Applicants can receive half of the money after they complete training and the other half after training is completed or after six months of continuous employment.
- Have current drivers help recruit, by offering an employee referral program. If a current employee refers a new full-time or substitute driver they will receive a \$100 bonus once the new driver completes training and 90 days of service. This and other recruiting efforts can pay off by encouraging your veteran driving staff to look for and encourage applicants to apply.
- Advertise, there are numerous ways to advertise openings for school bus drivers. Create newspaper ads, use billboards, church bulletins, farmers COOP's or other types of public bulletin boards in your community. Create "Bus Drivers Needed" colorful banners to be placed in school buildings or on buses that can be parked around your community depending on local city signage rules and regulations.
- Print business cards and give them to staff to hand out when they are talking to a prospective applicant. One side of the card can say "Now Hiring Bus Drivers," with a picture of a row of yellow buses. The other side provides details about the job, including the flexible hours and benefits, and it gives potential applicants the district's web address and phone number.
- Electronic advertising on your school district website, via social media such as Facebook, or on community employment websites. If your district has street side electronic signage at school buildings, do not pass up an opportunity to place a "Bus Drivers Needed" ad to get exposure from the hundreds of cars that pass by your school buildings every day.
- Earned Bonus - Reward perfect attendance with an earned bonus program. This is a reward to drivers who exhibit safety, punctuality, exemplary job commitment, and quality job performance. Example: \$200.00 to \$250.00 maximum earned over the 26 weeks of the school year. Each regular driver will receive, according to their job assignments a bonus increment credit per pay period equal to their maximum possible bonus divided by the number of pay periods in the school year. It also should require that they drive the last 10 days of the school year to remain eligible.
- When possible offer supplementary work - The hours available for driving a school bus may not provide enough pay for some people, but supplemental work within the school district can be a convenient way to bolster their income and attract them to your school bus driving positions. Offer drivers the opportunity to work in other areas of the school district, such as, para's, teaching assistants, custodial or grounds-keeping work, on an as-needed basis or redesign job descriptions to create full time school bus driving positions.

Every school district has different hiring needs and some of these suggestions may assist your school when hiring career school bus drivers in the future. It's safe to say, you need school bus drivers, so is there a way to attract new driver applicants? Yes, although it may be time for transportation directors, personnel managers and business managers to sit down together and work out a new hiring and financial strategy at your school district to meet your needs in this challenging hiring environment.

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# Winter Pre-Trip and Driving Suggestions!



**Arrival time is important** - A school bus driver is expected to report to the bus garage to perform the pre-trip inspection before leaving on an assigned route. When weather conditions dictate, drivers should adjust their arrival time accordingly to take care of any emergency, such as a non-starting school bus, a pre-trip inspection problem or something as basic as the need to fuel the bus.

**Winter starting and warm up** - Start the engine early in your pre-trip inspection to obtain the maximum warm-up time possible before leaving the bus lot. Make sure to use the fast idle for diesel engines; warm-up time is important for diesel buses to ensure proper engine oil temperature.

**Glow plug assisted starting** - On diesel engines, this feature increases engine start ability in cold weather. Turn the ignition key to the “on” position, “wait to start” lamp on the dashboard will light up for approximately 15 to 45 seconds depending on the outside temperature. When the light goes out, the engine is ready to start.

**Electrical systems** - During the pre-trip inspection it is not a good idea to leave your red and amber warning lights, strobe light, or headlights on after your pre-trip inspection has been completed. Turning them off will reduce the amount of electrical drain on the bus charging system, and it will help keep the bus running better during the warm up period. Make sure everything is turned back on before leaving for the bus route.

**Drive slowly** - Everything takes longer on snow-covered roads, accelerating, stopping, and turning. Nothing happens as quickly as on dry pavement. Give yourself time to maneuver by driving slowly.

**Accelerate and decelerate slowly** - Applying the gas slowly to accelerate is the best method for regaining traction and avoiding skids. Don't try to get moving in a hurry, and take time to slow down for a stoplight. Remember, it takes longer to slow down on icy roads.

**Following distance** - The normal dry-pavement following distance of three to four seconds should be increased to eight to ten seconds. This increased margin of safety will provide the longer distance needed if you have to stop.

**Don't stop if you can avoid it** - There's a big difference in the amount of inertia it takes to start moving from a full stop versus how much it takes to get moving while still rolling. If you can slow down enough to keep rolling slowly until a traffic light changes, do it.

**Cruise Control** - Some buses have cruise control. Do not use cruise control when driving on any slippery surface (wet, ice, sand).

Have a safe winter driving experience!





## Should We Have Lap-Shoulder Seatbelts On Iowa School Buses?

One of the more common concerns after a school bus accident is, *“why don’t we have seatbelts on school buses?”* Believe me one of the most common calls we get here at the IPTA office from news reporters, superintendents, transportation directors, bus drivers and parents are either for or against seatbelts on Iowa’s school buses. One side says, “Yes, we want them,” and the other side says, “No definitely not. We never want them on our school buses.” With such strong lines drawn in the sand, it makes it hard to find

Both sides would agree that school buses are the safest way to transport your children to and from school. The size, lighting and color of school buses make them easily visible and identifiable. Their height provides good driver visibility and raises the bus passenger compartment above car impact height. It’s safe to say that emergency vehicles are the only other vehicle on the road that can stop traffic like a school bus.



Metal bar seat bracing replaced by high back padded seating.

When I was working on school buses at a school district here in Iowa quite a few years ago, the common thinking was that most injuries inside of a school bus came from the metal bracing poles and the metal seat bracing located at the back of the bus seats. The bus seats were much lower than the seats today and were responsible for many of the injuries like bruises to the head area, broken arms and some extensive tooth loss during heavy braking or sudden stops. It took years to correct this problem but manufacturers eventually removed the metal at those locations and replaced it with higher seat backs

It has been commonly accepted for many years that *“compartmentalization”* is one of the fundamental elements in the safety design for school buses. Compartmentalization is closely spaced, impact-absorbing, high-back, padded seats. Different from your personal car, it is a carefully designed protection model designed to protect children like eggs in an egg carton, compartmentalized, and surrounded with padding and structural integrity to secure the entire container. The seat backs are raised and the shell is reinforced for protection against impact. There is no arguing that it is much better than the metal bars that seat areas had in prior years.



Compartmentalization with impact-absorbing, high-back, padded seats.

Parents say our children are required to wear seat belts in our cars so why not have them on their school bus? Individuals have a hard time comparing personal cars to the school bus because there are very distinctive variations in size and the number of children being transported. The two vehicles are constructed differently and in your car, you can supervise your child and ensure that your child’s belt remains properly secured. School bus drivers work in a *“passive restraint,”* environment, meaning all a child must do to be protected is simply sit down and remain seated. School buses also must be designed as a multi-purpose vehicle used to transport students K-12, to and from school, educational field trips, including carrying support equipment for school bands and various team events.

One group says lap-shoulder belts are not needed on school buses!

One group says lap-shoulder belts are needed on school buses!

Which one is right?

Traveling around the State of Iowa for the 2016 IPTA regional meetings we had a chance to hear the pros and cons first hand from our association members as it pertains to lap-shoulder belts in school buses. At all nine locations we made notes of the comments that were shared. Listed on the next page are the more common comments that we received and a few more that were shared at the IPTA summer conference and trade show. You will find the most common comments listed in the first column and the response to those concerns from industry publications and other references in the second column.

**One group says lap-shoulder seatbelts  
are not needed on school buses!**

**Common concerns stated at regional meetings!**

- Overall, travel on a school bus is the safest way to travel, 40 times safer than riding in a car, with only a handful of deaths occurring to passengers on school buses every year.
- In compartmentalization, the seats on the school bus are placed very close to each other and have high backs that are very padded. As a result, in an accident, the student would be propelled forward a very short distance into a padded seatback that in a way is like an early version of an airbag.
- Children sit high off the ground in school buses adds to the safety, as the impact location with an automobile would occur beneath the seats.
- Lap-shoulder seatbelts would significantly increase the cost of school buses. It is estimated that adding lap-shoulder seatbelts to buses would add between \$7,000 and \$14,000 to the cost of each bus.
- Lap-shoulder seatbelts would reduce the seating capacity on each bus. Adding lap-shoulder seatbelts would mean that bus fleets would have to increase by as much as 15% just to carry the same number of riders.
- Children would hit each other with the seatbelt buckle, increasing rider injuries.
- How would the school bus driver unbuckle all the children if the bus rolls over and there was a fire?

**The other group says lap-shoulder seatbelts  
are needed on school buses!**

**From industry publications and other references.**

- Agreed, school buses are 40 times safer than riding in a car, but they could be even safer with lap-shoulder belts. In a frontal or rear collision (or even sudden stops) children can be thrown into the seat in front of them. While they may be spared more serious injuries, they are often still injured, receiving everything from bumps and bruises to concussions. Lap-Shoulder Seatbelts could prevent a number of these injuries.
- With only compartmentalization, during a rollover, students are tossed about the interior of the bus like clothes in a dryer. They strike other students, seats, windows, and even the ceiling. When a child is buckled up, they are far less likely to be seriously injured.
- Children sitting high off the ground in school buses also adds to their safety, as the impact location with an automobile would occur beneath the seats. However in several high impact crashes over the years with larger vehicles, and solid roadside objects, lap-shoulder seatbelts could have kept children in their seat and reduced the seriousness of some of the injuries.
- Lap-shoulder seatbelts will increase the cost of school buses. But we should treat that cost as a worthy investment to *“further enhance the safety of the students,”* as NASDPTS put it, and not as a reason to oppose lap-shoulder belts for school buses. The life of a school bus can be between 12 and 18 years. Lap-shoulder seatbelts are a one-time cost, for the life of the bus.
- Installing lap-shoulder seatbelts will not reduce the number of seats. Newer style bus seats will seat three elementary school children or two high school students in a single seat, just like a regular school bus seat without lap-shoulder seatbelts.
- Lap-shoulder seatbelts have been on school buses in several states for more than a decade and there have not been reports of them being used as a weapon. The seat belts are similar to what you use in your car. They’re on a short strap under tension that retracts into the seat. If a student wishes to harm another student, there are unfortunately other items such as books, backpacks, tablets and lunchboxes that are far easier to swing.
- Federal standards require that lap-shoulder seatbelts release easily with or without weight on them. Children of all ages can evacuate easily at the click of a button, even if they are upside down. When they are not buckled up and are thrown around the interior of the bus, resulting in more serious injuries, they are slower to evacuate if they are capable of evacuating the school bus at all.

## Should We Have Lap-Shoulder Seatbelts On Iowa School Buses? (Continued)

Reading through those two lists it becomes very clear that the lap-shoulder seatbelt debate is a complex and sometimes an emotional issue. Individuals that do not want to see lap-shoulder belts and individuals that want to see them installed in school buses both have some valid points. It's hard at times to figure out what is a myth and what is factual with many individuals already having their minds made up and distinctive lines drawn in the sand.

The two main concerns that the IPTA has heard from school bus drivers are:

1. Will the driver be held liable if a child is not wearing the lap-shoulder seatbelt, if there is an accident?
2. Will the school bus driver be expected to make sure that the students are wearing the lap-shoulder seatbelt during the regular scheduled routes or when driving sporting and educational fields trips?

These concerns were not on the previous page lists because they may be the hardest to answer. This part of the equation will take some clear legislation. If lap-shoulder seatbelts are required to be installed in school buses then school bus drivers will need a strong commitment from Iowa law makers and school district officials. Once there is clear legislation in place protecting the school bus driver from liability, then school districts will need to have a policy in place that is supported by district officials from the building principals all the way to the superintendent. With that policy, training for the school bus driver, building staff, students and parents would be a very important component.

District's have zero tolerance policies for fighting and bullying, this is another area that there needs to be zero tolerance to protect the school bus driver and the school district or transportation contractor. If a student does not use the lap-shoulder seatbelt then they lose their bus riding privileges.

Some interesting information that I discovered was that in states that currently have seat belts as many as 93% of bus drivers report witnessing bullying on their school buses before lap-shoulder belts.

School districts with lap-shoulder belts, assigned seating, and an enforced usage policy have found that bullying and other disruptive behavior has been significantly reduced, and in some cases eliminated entirely, on their school buses.



Additionally with the lap-shoulder seatbelts, student discipline problems were also reduced by 90 to 95%. Without lap-shoulder seatbelts children can get a little rowdy at times, they walk the aisle, lean over their seat to talk to others behind them, and turn sideways to talk to the kids across the aisle. All of these things increase driver distraction, which is potentially dangerous for not only the students on the bus, but for everyone on the road. Lap-shoulder seatbelts ensure students are seated correctly.



Crash test, left side riders are secured in lap-shoulder seatbelts and on the right, three riders were unbelted.

**It has been said that if you put lap-shoulder seatbelts on all buses you may only save one life per year, however they could reduce approximately 15,000 injuries!**

No one can or will assure anyone that if we install lap-shoulder seatbelts in every school bus in Iowa that we can eliminate any loss of life. However there has been extensive crash testing done and the findings show, if children are wearing lap-shoulder seatbelts injuries would be reduced significantly. It is also possible that student discipline and student management could be improved significantly. How our legislators approach the lap-shoulder seatbelt issue is an important safety issue to all **9,000** plus school bus drivers and to the approximately **243,283** students riding on Iowa school buses.





## Department of Education News and Reminders

**Max Christensen**, Executive Officer / State Director of School Transportation



It always amazes me how summer seems to slip into fall with very little notice. It's hard to believe that we're already well over a month into the new school year. It's been a very busy start to the school year, and I suspect if others outside our industry could follow in our footsteps for a few days (if they could keep up), I believe there would be a great deal more appreciation and understanding of our work.

Last spring, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) performed spot checks on 52 Iowa school districts to determine if schools are in compliance with Drug & Alcohol testing rules. The FMCSA did this same thing about three years ago, and a number of districts were surprised (or maybe not) to find that they were not in compliance. During this last round in the spring, a number of schools were found to be in overall good compliance, but others were found to have problems with their programs as well as Commercial Driver's License issues. The two most prevalent violations were schools failing to ensure supervisors had sufficient training for reasonable suspicion testing and failing to ensure their drug and alcohol policies met all requirements.

Some other violations found which were fairly high in number and can cause the integrity of a school's program to be questioned if something like a serious accident happens were:

- 1) *Failing to ensure each driver has an equal chance during random selection*
- 2) *Using drivers before receiving a negative pre-employment test*
- 3) *Failing to ask an employee if any pre-employment test conducted in the preceding 2 years resulted*

Licensing issues found were due to schools failing to ensure (through driver's license checks) their drivers were properly licensed. This particular issue isn't complicated. Drivers of 15 passenger or less vehicles require at minimum a Chauffeur's Class D3 license. Drivers of 16 passenger and more vehicles need a CDL, typically Class B, with both the "P" and "S" endorsements.

With all of this in mind, the administrator for this program contacted me at the end of August to let me know that FMCSA will again be conducting checks of schools throughout the coming year. While not doing as many checks as last spring, they do plan on visiting 15-20 schools between now and May of 2019. For more information on drug and alcohol testing procedures, there are a number of resources available to you. You can go to [Federal D&A Testing Information](#) for informational brochures. Many schools in Iowa use **Medical Enterprises in Omaha for D&A testing**, so you reach them at **402-393-8826 extension 122**, and ask for Lou. The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) have a really robust drug and alcohol training program at [IASB](#). Any of these resources should be able to help you with any questions or concerns you may have on this topic or in regards to the results of the spot check you may incur.

FMCSA was kind enough to allow me to make you aware of these checks. They will likely be checking the same items as they have in the past. This would include looking at the various types of tests conducted (Pre-Employment, Random, Post-Accident, Reasonable Cause, and follow-up testing if applicable), checking to see if you do the required background checks, and if you have a DOT mandated policy in place. They may check other things too, but what I listed are the bigger items.

A district found out of compliance will most likely be given a Notice of Violation which will require the particular district to respond as to how they have corrected any violations found. Fines would only be considered in cases of egregious type violations (like knowingly using a positive tested driver and failing to do any type of mandated follow-up with the individual). Because school districts are public in nature, FMCSA will likely lean more towards education than penalties. Take note that in cases when a Notice of Violation (NOV) is issued and they do not receive an adequate response from you, the NOV can be converted to a Notice of Claim (NOC) which is a fine and even then it will depend on how egregious the violation is. They typically find that non-compliance at schools is due more to 'not knowing' than to a willful violation. The resources listed above should help with your efforts in learning the rules.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [515-281-4749](tel:515-281-4749) or at [max.christensen@iowa.gov](mailto:max.christensen@iowa.gov)

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Excellence

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Iowa Pupil Transportation Association



#### Our District Membership Includes:

- IPTA Bus Stop Newsletters
- Technical support by phone or email
- District access to the IPTA Website: [4ipta.org](http://4ipta.org)
- IPTA Transportation Emergency Assistance Manual
- Website for resources, including free downloads
- Access to printable safety information for staff training
- Conference workshop New Transportation Directors
- Regional Training Meetings - held all areas of Iowa
- Reduced fees for the IPTA Conference/Trade Show and no fee for regional meetings for member schools
- Accessible lists for IPTA sustaining company vendors
- Legislative updates and actions
- Recognizes school bus driver for longevity and heroism
- Opportunities for IPTA Board Positions

**The IPTA provides school administrators, drivers and technicians with safe solutions.**

The mission of the Iowa Pupil Transportation Association is to serve as a resource for school administrators, supervisors, mechanics, drivers and the Iowa Department of Education in the upgrading of Iowa's pupil transportation programs.



The IPTA provides assistance to members over the phone, through timely newsletters, regional meetings and our Annual Transportation Conference & Trade Show. The IPTA also updates and provides the only Transportation Assistance Manual for Iowa Schools along with access to the IPTA Website: [4ipta.org](http://4ipta.org)

**T.E.A.M.**  
Transportation Emergency Assistance Manual for Iowa Schools  
2016 Edition

#### School Bus Driver & Student Safety Training Information



Technical and informational support to transportation personnel, school administration and school bus drivers



The Iowa Pupil Transportation Association provides access to excellent pupil transportation safety information that is helpful to keep students safer in an effort to maintain effective and efficient transportation operations for all Iowa Schools.





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**United School Bus Seat Service, Inc.**

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