



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on August 29, 2011

## Feds Reject National School Bus Seatbelt Mandate

There are an estimated 500,000 public school buses in America, which will carry America's school children back and forth about 4.2 billion miles this school year. The Center for Auto Safety and the National Coalition for School Bus Safety had requested that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) mandate that all these buses install seatbelts; however, the federal agency has rejected that petition.



The Coalition's Arthur Yeager decried the decision:

It just confirms the long history of NHTSA in opposition to child restraints in school buses. There is a certain hypocrisy in their supporting seat belts in virtually every other type of vehicle under their control except for school buses

There are accident after accident [sic] where we can document that the cause has been [school bus] driver distraction. More kids are killed when their own school bus drives over them than by other drivers. Some of those kids are killed because the driver is distracted by kids jumping up and down on the bus.

Yeager also observed that children must be strapped in to ride in all other vehicles:

From their first ride home from the hospital, they have been secured by a restraining device. The very first time kids ever experience a ride without a seat belt is when they get on the school buses.

NHTSA Deputy Director Ronald Medford averred: We care deeply about schoolchildren and feel that the steps we've taken are in the best interests of safety. The analysis of the federal agency concluded that school buses are among the safest modes of motor transportation and that the costs of requiring seat belts would exceed the benefits. It noted that each year approximately 19 schoolchildren die in school bus-related accidents, and that only five of that number were passengers the other 14 having been in school bus loading areas.

Smaller school buses weighing less than 10,000 pounds [already are required](#) to have shoulder lap belts. The back seats are high and padded in front and back. The distance between rows of seats is also restricted to reduce the likelihood of trauma from a collision. If the bus did have a head-on collision generally the most violent of accidents the passengers would most likely be protected. In its response, NHTSA estimated that the cost of equipping each bench-style set with seatbelts would be between \$375 and \$600, a total of between \$5,485 and \$7,346 for each large bus. The cost would be borne by the school districts or local governments, which is to say that it would be a federal mandate which could easily run about \$100,000 per small school districts.

Furthermore, each individual school district would be responsible for enforcing the mandatory wearing of seat belts. Even if local law enforcement were tasked with that mission, it would be difficult for a



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police officer to view from a lower elevation who aboard the bus was and was not wearing a seat belt. School bus drivers in addition to looking out for students getting on and off the bus, monitoring other traffic, and keeping on their tight time schedules would then also have to insure that each student buckled up and remained so.

Constitutionalists note that the seatbelt issue is not in the purview of the federal government at all; rather, it more appropriately (according to the Tenth Amendment) lies with local school boards and city and state governments.

The requested change in NHTSA regulations would not affect the two largest states, California and Texas, both of which currently require students on school buses to wear seatbelts.



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