

New Tools Can Help Keep Students Safe on Buses

SERVICE ASSOCIATE Q & A

Q. *What are some of the new or existing products or strategies used on school buses to keep students safe?*

A. Common technologies such as GPS and cameras have greatly improved awareness of vehicle location and who has boarded and been in the proximity of school buses. Recent innovations have included the development of external cameras that allow school buses to provide video information to local law enforcement on a range of issues, including vehicles passing buses where students are boarding or departing the bus. Some new exciting technologies include card readers that track when students board and leave a bus coupled with the school bus tracking app SafeStop™ which allows parents and administrators to have immediate awareness of student and vehicle movement. This is a great communication tool and can be utilized to send emergency alerts in addition to other messages.

Q. *What do you think is the most important thing a school district can do to keep students safe on its buses?*

A. Training for students and staff is the most important thing a district can do. Bus drivers need to be trained in the safe operation of buses. This includes the safe operation of the vehicle and the management of students. These services are often provided using local materials and resources, but there are a number of

national providers who can greatly enhance the scope and materials used. Drivers should also be trained in situational awareness when on their routes. The Transportation Security Administration has partnered with the industry to develop resources and materials that can provide a structure and material to help bus drivers, monitors, and other transportation personnel develop critical awareness skills.

Q. *How should schools handle or direct school transportation if there is an incident at a school?*

A. In the event of violence on school property, school districts could re-route buses destined for a school where an incident was happening and they would be diverted to a different school or another safe location. If buses were unloading students at a school during an incident, students would re-board and the buses would leave the property. School staff would make drivers aware and instruct them on what to do via the dispatch system directly and parents could even be notified via apps like SafeStop™

Q. *How can school districts or school transportation providers attract qualified drivers?*

A. Compensation is clearly a driving issue and requires all stakeholders to recognize the value of the transportation service and bus driver positions. Too often, transportation departments are quiet professionals



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that fail to highlight the value of their efforts to stakeholders. Assessing performance and communicating that to the community can be a useful element in helping taxpayers and district administrators appreciate the need for appropriate compensation to maintain a full driver complement.

Districts and transportation providers must also focus on ensuring that the environment appropriately supports the individuals hired as drivers. For example, ensuring the timely follow up on concerns brought forth by drivers is crucial; as are things like ensuring that their “work environment” is inviting. Issues such as the age and condition of school buses are important elements in driver recruitment and retention. ■

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