

House Transportation Committee Meeting
submitted by
Dr. Penny Hargrove, Superintendent, Hiawatha Schools - USD #415

January 25, 2017

Chairman Proehl and esteemed committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony opposing HB 2008.

As the superintendent of a small rural school, I am responsible for all aspects of our district. This includes student transportation and bus safety. November 18, 2015 is a day I will never forget. I was in a meeting in our district office, when shortly after 7:30 a.m. I heard emergency vehicle sirens. A few minutes later, the district's Director of Transportation called me out of the meeting stating she had received a telephone call from police dispatch regarding a possible accident involving a school bus on the highway just at the edge of our district. As you can imagine my heart sunk to my stomach and began racing. I view all 900 students in our district as my personal responsibility. There is nothing more important than keeping them safe.

Imagine approaching the accident scene. You see evidence your bus has rolled over a complete 360 degrees down an embankment. Twenty-three of your students are/were on board along with one bus driver. I am a strong individual, yet the magnitude of what I saw buckled my knees. As a precaution, 21 students were taken by ambulance to two area hospitals. Besides the emotional scars, our students walked away with only minor injuries. In my educated opinion, the construction and compartmentalization system of the bus and the emergency evacuation drills we do with our students saved our students. From the research I've done and the experts I've visited with, I cannot find compelling information that persuades me our students would have been safer seat belted.

Many studies have been compiled on seat belt use on different types of buses and with children of different age groups. Some suggest that seat belts can help prevent injuries in frontal crashes, yet increase the risk of serious injury in side impact accidents. During a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration presentation on July 23, 2015 by Special Vehicle and System

Division Chief Shashi Kuppa, stated, “School buses are the safest form of school transportation in the United States” as suggested in the data below:

Average annual fatalities among school age children in the United States during school transportation time.

Transportation Mode	No. of Fatalities	% of Fataliteis
Occupants of Large School Bus	3.4	0.6%
Occupants of Passenger Vehicles	453.3	77.7%
Pedestrians near and around loading/unloading zone of school bus	11.6	2.0%
Pedestrians (other)	60.9	10.4%
Bicyclists	19.4	3.3%
Occupants of other vehicles	34.8	6.0%

FARS data for 10 school years from 2003-2004 to 2012-2013

She also shared, “Assuming 100% seat belt use, a Federal mandate for lap/shoulder belts could save 2 lives annually”. I am challenged by the word “assuming”. I have been in education a long time and know how the minds of our youth work. Some will comply and some will defy a mandate to wear a seat belt restraint.

There are so many variables and what if’s to consider. For example,

- Where would the funds to cover the increased cost of \$7,000 to over \$10,000 come from to equip the bus with seat belts?
- Would districts be required to hire an adult to monitor whether students were complying and wearing the seat belts properly?
- It would take, at minimum, 13 years to rotate new buses into our fleet. How do we communicate to parents and community members that all kids are equally safe?

This issue is complex. At this time, I just cannot find a cost-to-benefit advantage to seat belts on school buses. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Dr. Penny Hargrove