



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

Whitepaper



July 2017

Sponsored by:

First  **Student**

Caring for students today, tomorrow, together.®

10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....

10 Strategies for Safety Success.....

 Strategy 1: Start at the Top.....

 Strategy 2: Know Your Critical Safety Features.....

 Strategy 3: Identify and Vet Trends.....

 Strategy 4: Cultivate Safety Discussions.....

 Strategy 5: Cross-Utilize Classroom Rules.....

 Strategy 6: Evaluate Effectiveness vs. Efficiency.....

 Strategy 7: Think Outside the Bus.....

 Strategy 8: Develop and Implement Engaging and
 Rewarding Training Programs.....

 Strategy 9: Take a Step Back to Reevaluate.....

 Strategy 10: Modify, Modify, Modify.....

Conclusion.....

A Real-World Success Story: Wausau School District PBIS....

Resources.....

About First Student, Inc.....



*Students are **70** times safer riding the yellow school bus than riding in another vehicle.*

INTRODUCTION

It starts at a young age. “Don’t touch the hot oven.” “Look both ways before crossing the street.” Safety centers human’s development. That’s why when the most important people in our lives go off to school, our thoughts revolve around how to keep them safe.

School bus accidents, emergencies and tragedies leave their mark. Not just on the communities where they occur, but throughout the entire educational and transportation system. It reminds us all of the great responsibility we have in safeguarding the lives of the students in our care. With almost 25 million students riding school buses each day, this responsibility for safety lies with all of us, from the superintendent to the school bus driver (contracted or in-district), as well as to the drivers of other vehicles.

According to the American School Bus Council, students are 70 times safer riding the yellow school bus than riding in another vehicle.¹ While this safety excellence is thanks to the amazing safety, manufacturing and regulatory advances in the industry, mistakes still happen. In a 2017 report on school-transportation- related crashes², the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) analyzed the number of fatalities that occurred over a ten-year period and concluded that only 54 out of the 301 fatalities were of an occupant of a school bus.

But those statistics don’t tell the full story. Stanford Children’s Health Hospital states that 17,000 students are treated each year for injuries associated with school buses.³ Student safety also involves caring for their mental well-being. More than 1 in 4 children ages 12–18 say they have been a victim of bullying during the school year.⁴ There are still even more issues at play regarding the safety of the nation’s children related to student transportation. Some of those challenges include:



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

“No doubt about it... every day, the priority of leadership must be the care and feeding of the safety culture.”

*– Dr. Edgar Schein,
Professor of Organizational Development,
MIT Sloan School of Management*

- Bus driver distractions (Example: a dog running into the roadway)
- Driver drowsiness
- Drivers of other vehicles
 - [According to the American School Bus Council, passing vehicles cause an estimated two-thirds of school bus loading and unloading fatalities.](#)⁵
- Old or under-maintained vehicles
- Student behavior (Example: upset or fighting children)

With all of these issues challenging the school bus transportation industry, how do we overcome the distractions and focus on developing a safety program dedicated to keeping students safe?

Creating an ecosystem and culture of safety starts by addressing and developing four key areas of safety. It's only through the integration of these four elements that safety can take hold. We liken it to a home's foundation; each foundational corner is needed to build the whole.

1) Culture

No big culture or attitude change can happen without the buy-in from executives and other management. Reinforcement of safety attitudes must start with the superintendent and school board, filtering down through transportation management, to drivers, to monitors/aides, to the students themselves. Fostering this idea of safety as a core value drives home safety culture within an organization and team.

2) Equipment and Operations

Yellow school buses are one of the most heavily regulated modes of transportation. Buses sold in the United States must meet 40+ Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) applicable only to school buses, as well as all standards for all other vehicle types. Without processes and operational discipline to keep vehicles updated and operating well, safety falls short.



*“Safety is an ecosystem.
There’s no one particular piece of
safety that stands out. All safety
is relevant ... All of it works together.”*

*– Leslie Kilgore,
Vice President of Engineering,
Thomas Built Buses*

3) Community

Similar to our focus on culture, our communities play a large role in the ecosystem of safety. The input — and actions — of our community members play a role in how safe students, families, pedestrians and drivers behave.

4) Administrative Policies and Procedures

When schools and districts create their safety programs and policies, creators must ensure the transportation department feels as supported in the process as academic departments. Safety input gathered by all departments district-wide must be taken into account. This back-and-forth discussion only strengthens the value and worth of a program.

Within this narrative, we provide *10 Strategies for Safety Success* weaving together these four elements as the backbone of our conversation. Leslie Kilgore, Vice President of Engineering for Thomas Built Buses says, “There is no one particular piece of safety that stands out. All safety is relevant... all of it works together.” By following our 10 strategies, you’ll understand how you can build a successful safety program.

Following our *10 Strategies for Safety Success*, we’ll explore a real-world success story where one school district’s holistic safety approach has already yielded measurable improvements.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

10 STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY SUCCESS

Safe school transportation is always the result of a partnership across various stakeholders including school administrators and teachers, students, parents, communities, board members, school transportation service providers and equipment manufacturers.

One thing to note before we start with the *10 Strategies of Safety Success* is that safe school transportation always results from a partnership across various stakeholders, including school administrators and teachers, students, parents, communities, board members, school transportation service providers and equipment manufacturers. It's only with respectful and collaborative discussion between all parties that a successful safety program can be fully realized.

Strategy 1: Start at the Top

Dennis R. Maple, President of First Student, Inc. says it best when he states, "One thing we know is that when we look at high performing companies, we see that their culture is what ends up driving their safety performance. When you have a great culture, you also have great performance from a safety perspective."

Cultivating this safety culture mindset requires intentional focus. Leaders must demonstrate strong, genuine and continuous commitment to bringing safety to their communities. Leaders can use many ways to connect with staff, including:

- Holding safety discussions to reinforce safe critical behaviors with all members of the team.
- Calling coaching meetings for discussion on team safety trends and discussion of best safety practices.
- Riding on a school bus to build connection with workers and emulate a safety mindset.
- Setting periodic meetings to review processes and policies for safety assurance.
- Recognizing safe team members.



“There are visible ways you can demonstrate you care about people and that’s really the highest form of leadership.”

– Dennis R. Maple,
President,
First Student, Inc.

When a leader establishes connectivity with colleagues and community members, teams emulate the same attitudes and actions. Empowering school bus drivers to make safety a core value is difficult as they operate within a “lone” work environment; they are the “captains” of their own “ship.” But while they operate mostly without supervision, their safety purview includes more than just the students on the school bus; it includes other drivers and pedestrians. If leaders utilize the above referenced actions to connect with their staff, drivers feel empowered to stop unsafe actions and find a safer way to complete the task.

If safety is the center of a team’s focus, it contributes to a wider community culture, where other drivers will slow down and take caution, bikers may recognize the safety of each action and walkers will look both ways before crossing the street.

Strategy 2: Know Your Critical Safety Features

[Did you know that school buses started as nothing more than horse-drawn carts borrowed from local farmers?](#)⁶ Since the creation of school transportation in the early 1900s, school buses have become the most regulated vehicle on the road today. With more than 40 distinct Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS), today’s school buses are not the buses remembered by parents and grandparents. Every aspect of the bus body — the exterior lighting, bright color, ruggedized non-slip floors, stop arms, handrails, fire-retardant upholstery, cushioned compartment seats, escape hatches and exit doors — has been studied, debated and improved upon with one goal in mind: keeping the students inside it safe.

For this reason, it is imperative that school districts do not – under any circumstances – supplement another type of vehicle in place of the yellow school bus for student transportation. Other vehicle types are not as well-regulated as the school bus and will lack many of its inherent safety features.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

“We have built upon the safety foundation with our unique engineering and building processes along with our quality checks during manufacture. This additional due care is beyond what we are regulated to do.”

– Leslie Kilgore,
Vice President of Engineering,
Thomas Built Buses

School districts are always looking to modernize and become a cutting-edge leader in all things. But when it comes to modernizing a district's bus fleet, knowing these critical safety features is imperative. For example: you want to install Wi-Fi on the school buses used for athletic teams, but the safety tread is wearing thin on a few other buses. It can be tempting to install the latest bells and whistles, but when you want to have a safety-first culture, it leads your decision making. Your answer to the athletic teams' school bus question is always to put safety first – get that new safety tread on the other buses first.

Strategy 3: Identify and Vet Trends

Knowing critical safety features assists you when facing and identifying current transportation trends. Trends can increase the safety of a district's transportation program, but if not fully vetted can lead to safety failures. For our purposes, let's focus specifically on technological, and driver wellness and behavioral topics.

Technological Trends

Safety advances are occurring all the time as bus manufacturers develop and modify equipment based on new technologies and research. While purchasing a new fleet is out of the question for some school districts, retrofitting buses can be accomplished for a relatively low cost — an invaluable investment in the lives and wellbeing of students and their families.

Safety crossing gates are one example. The gate is a simple device that prevents students from crossing the road too close to the bus, where drivers are unable to see them. Student injuries from this type of accident have decreased sharply since the usage of crossing gates became widespread.



School administrators must decide what technologies, if any, fit in to the district's overall vision and financial plan. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach and districts may have to choose safety over technological pride.

No matter the technology, it's important to have a complete understanding of how technology impacts the overall safety program. Technology cannot fix anything unless you have the culture, equipment and operations, community, and administrative policies and procedures in place already. "Technology is part of a bigger system. Technology alone doesn't fix all types of situations. However, it does aid in the prevention of safety incidents," according to Thomas Built Buses' Leslie Kilgore.

Driver Wellness and Behavioral Trends

Increasingly, as more attention is being paid to building a safety culture, more focus is placed on ensuring drivers take proper safety care and are fit for duty themselves. In addition to the regular pre-employment and intermittent drug and alcohol screenings, many districts are implementing daily "Fit for Duty" checks with their drivers. The "Fit for Duty" check happens when a driver collects their keys at the start of each route. Dispatchers are trained to ensure each driver is mentally and physically prepared to operate a school bus safely.

The driver wellness trend continues to pick up speed as the driver shortage is an industry-wide problem. [As of November 2016, School Bus Fleet magazine reports that 90% of school districts face a driver shortage of some level.](#)⁷ Because of this trend, districts and contractors alike strive to find ways to keep healthy, happy school bus drivers on staff. To do this, the industry has put wellness guidelines in place for blood pressure, diabetes, and driver drowsiness, while equipping drivers with tools to stay healthy and help combat future medical issues.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

Global Positioning Systems (GPS) enables the management of driver behavior through the monitoring and analysis of data. With GPS, districts and contractors can see when a driver speeds, stops or starts hard, idles too long or how long they're waiting at bus stops. This allows for transparency and gives us the data to correct unsafe or inefficient driving practices.

Whether it's technological or behavioral trends, districts must take these trends into account when developing training to put safety first, creating community safety campaigns or developing new policies and procedures for the district.

Millennials and Student Safety

Transportation departments today are seeing a significant shift in expectations about safety on school buses and about the entire transportation process due to a generational shift. Most parents today are millennials and are demanding more information than prior generations of parents. In a recent focus group conducted by First Student, Inc., a parent said, "I receive 10 emails if my child's library book is late, but I get no notification when the bus will be 10 minutes late."

Kathy Furneaux, executive director of the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute says, "Part of the key to the millennial generation is that they were raised as the most protected generation ever. And so as we work with these parents, they have significant expectations for safety in and around the school bus, in and around the schools." She believes upcoming legislation will feature direct input from parents and further target safety as one of their concerns.

[Social media also plays a role in the immediacy of information transmittal. 79% of adults use Facebook as their primary social media platform.⁸ Within the same survey from the Pew Research Center, 6 out of 10 Americans get their news from social media sites.⁹](#) This information gathering process leads millennials to understand further options related to legislation and other safety programs. As social media proliferates in our society, so too, will the influence of a tech-savvy millennial population.



Strategy 4: Cultivate Safety Discussions

One way to keep safety at the top of everyone's mind and continue building a safety culture is by taking opportunities to foster communication about safety issues. If mistakes are made, view those mistakes as learning opportunities and share with your transportation personnel during open and honest safety conversations. While coaching sessions should take place, it is imperative that positive feedback also be provided.

Another way to stimulate safety conversations is by creating a committee where transportation personnel — including drivers and monitors — partner with administrators and educators to work collaboratively on district transportation initiatives. Administrators can spend time talking with the driving team and working on joint solutions to the challenges they're facing, whether they are behavior-management-related or driving-related.

Everything we do is for the students. And as they are the reason behind our efforts, they, too, should be engaged in the safety conversation. Through training and drills, students have the opportunity to hear the reasoning behind the safety behaviors they're asked to comply with, and have a chance to practice and ask questions. When a student does something right, whether in a drill or in everyday behaviors, drivers should take the time to acknowledge and praise the behavior. This builds trust between drivers and students that is critical to a safe bus ride.

Strategy 5: Cross-Utilize Classroom Rules

Integrating a district-wide set of rules that apply to both the classroom and the school bus helps increase safety awareness and compliance throughout a student's entire school day. This is especially important for student behavior management on the school bus. Students can spend up to 60 minutes on a school bus both ways; that's a lot of time to interact with other students who may or may not be their friends.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

“There has to be a balance between efficiency and effectiveness. Because the first few weeks that you cut training everybody’s a little insecure and it’s uncomfortable. Then over the short term, perhaps there are no incidents. So everyone gets a little more comfortable. But over the long term, we know a lot of little incidents can lead to a catastrophic event. If we become more efficient we don’t have to reduce services or reduce how we do things. We can maximize the efficiency and still be effective.”

– Kathy Furneaux,
Executive Director,

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

By treating the bus as an extension of the classroom, and using the same set of rules there as in their teaching environment, behavior incidents are handled consistently throughout a student’s day. With this level of consistency, students have no questions about how to act around and with other students. This, in turn, also reduces driver distraction, which increases safety on a student’s ride to and from school.

A district can also include parents for this type of approach, as a way to extend the integration of classroom rules even further. By sharing the strategies being used and expectations being set at school and on the bus, a common language is developed that provides even greater consistency and reinforcement for students. Furthermore, a sense of unity is created in the community, as all individuals caring for your students enhances an overall culture of safety.

As an example, you’ll find a case study near the end of this document that will examine one school district’s safety and behavioral rules integration and its impact on their safety culture.

Strategy 6: Evaluate Effectiveness vs. Efficiency

Effectiveness and efficiency are often used interchangeably, but that’s a common misperception. Their actual definitions are quite different.

Effectiveness means to adequately accomplish a task.

Efficiency means performing in the best possible manner with the least waste of time.

When it comes to safety, effectiveness and efficiency are indirect factors. Let’s think about a real-life example: a school district faces financial constraints and decides to cut safety training for school and bus personnel. However, when an accident happens, the decision to cut training is seen in a new light.



"I often see operations that are not working efficiently. As a result, they end up making decisions that dilute safety in order to maintain their budgets. Maximizing efficiencies has the potential to increase safety levels by utilizing resources in more effective ways, rather than cutting costs. It's always a balance, managing efficiency and effectiveness."

*– Kathy Furneaux,
Executive Director,*

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

Kathy Furneaux of the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute says, "There has to be a balance between efficiency and effectiveness. Because the first few weeks that you cut training everybody's a little insecure and it's uncomfortable. Then over the short term, perhaps there are no incidents. So everyone gets a little more comfortable. But over the long term, we know a lot of little incidents can lead to a catastrophic event. If we become more efficient we don't have to reduce services or reduce how we do things. We can maximize the efficiency and still be effective."

This example of cutting training drives home the importance of an efficient safety program. Take a look at your levels of effectiveness versus efficiency when it comes to your transportation operation. Does your equipment operate at the highest levels? Do your drivers actively find safe, efficient ways to behave in a safe manner? How are your routes tiered? Are the bus stops aligned efficiently and in the safest areas for students? Do your maintenance technicians work efficiently toward a strict set of best practice guidelines, or are they just quickly fixing vehicles to get them back on the road?

Strategy 7: Think Outside the Bus

[Passing vehicles cause an estimated two-thirds of school bus loading and unloading fatalities, according to the American School Bus Council.](#)¹⁰

The "danger zone," the 10-foot radius around all sides of the bus, and the transition into and out of the danger zone, presents the most problematic safety issue. School bus manufacturers are developing additional technologies to help alleviate some of the concerns (such as 360 degree cameras showing the entire perimeter of the vehicle to the driver), but involving the entire community in a safety campaign elevates the safety message for all.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services estimate that, in interviews with 100,000 school bus drivers, 88,025 vehicles passed their buses illegally on a single day.¹¹

School districts may choose to partner with local law enforcement in safety campaigns, such as those geared toward encouraging motorists to follow existing stop arm laws. [The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services estimate that, in interviews with 100,000 school bus drivers, 88,025 vehicles passed their buses illegally on a single day.](#)¹¹ This lack of safety focus, or deliberate action to disregard safety, places students and waiting family members squarely in danger.

Thinking outside the bus could also take the form of public awareness campaigns for seasonal initiatives, like back-to-school awareness. Campaigns could include:

- Community events where students, and parents, can tour a school bus, talk with their transportation personnel and driver, sign a safety pledge and/or meet the school or contractor's safety mascot.
- A newsletter campaign for school personnel, parents and other motorists discussing safety on and around the school bus, and in their own homes.
- Posters and yard signs distributed and posted at community facilities and events like festivals or the post office; these posters/signs can demonstrate some safety tips, easy safety actions and reinforce the culture of safety.

Not only do campaigns and events like these share the district's policies, but they build a safety culture and engage the community so parents feel more comfortable sending their children to school on a yellow school bus.

Strategy 8: Develop and Implement Engaging and Rewarding Training Programs

Instilling appropriate safety attitudes in drivers, and in community members, can be a challenge. Actively engaging drivers with safety training boosts these efforts. One of the principles of adult learning is to bring the experience to life, relating new knowledge back to



1 in 4 children ages 12–18 say they have been a victim of bullying at some time in their life, making this is a crucial issue.¹²

previously-learned knowledge. Using this and other adult learning principles, school districts can integrate new safety ideas and trends. A few ways to develop and lead effective training programs include:

- Providing opportunities for drivers and transportation staff to share experiences, and building training conversations by layering them with new safety best practices.
- Asking trainees to identify differences between what they do and what they are learning.
- Discussing with transportation staff their concerns and challenges, and then developing training sessions that target their exact concerns.
- Giving trainees a chance to develop autonomously by learning through guided inquiry and then facilitating small-group discussions.
- Rewarding drivers and other staff for their good safety behaviors; doing so is a double reward: it boosts employee morale and helps reinforce a safe action.

For clarity's sake, training topics should always include emergency response expectations, special needs transportation, safe onboarding/offloading procedures, behavior management (targeted to various age groups), railroad crossing procedures and other appropriate topics. Topics should change depending on national/local events. For instance, if a large school bus crash has made recent headlines after a stop sign was ignored, focus training sessions on reviewing sign meanings and proper procedures.

As already mentioned, training programs are often the first thing to be cut when there is a budget crunch. However, this is a big mistake, because as soon as a misstep happens, it cannot be undone.

For students with difficult home lives, a positive interaction with the bus driver in the morning can be really meaningful and set the tone for their



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

“Certainly when on the bus, when we make a mistake we’re transporting a child. And so there’s no going back and fixing that mistake.”

– Kathy Furneaux,
Executive Director,

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

whole day. To this end, trauma-informed care training can be invaluable for drivers, to help them respond appropriately to behavioral incidents on the bus and encourage them to develop positive relationships with their students.

Keeping students safe on the school bus has just as much to do with their physical well-being as their mental well-being. Bullying cannot be overlooked when developing safety training programs. [1 in 4 children ages 12–18 say they have been a victim of bullying at some time in their life.](#)¹² Teaching drivers how to properly deal with students’ emotions, calm them down, and diffuse any situation is imperative to a safe school bus ride. Just as a teenager and first-grader are different, your behavior management trainings must also be different.

For an in-depth look at how one school district used these strategies to put safety as the focus of all their district policies, turn to our case study at the end of this narrative.

Strategy 9: Take a Step Back to Reevaluate

Proper evaluation of a safety program hinges on the collection of data and opinions, which can then be used to influence policy implementation. This is where having a cross-functional transportation committee can be especially helpful, as there may be issues a driver would notice that an educator might not, and vice versa. Getting as many perspectives as possible is invaluable to strengthening the safety of your school transportation program. Kathy Furneaux lays out the plan succinctly, saying, “Begin by taking a few steps back. Meet with your transportation director again, take a specific look at the policy you’re trying to implement from their perspective. Listen to what the transportation director has to say in terms of unique challenges for putting that into practice. Revisit the training, and make it specific to the challenges you know they will face. From there, set deadlines with goals on how to monitor going forward.”



Once you've examined the safety measures in place with fresh eyes, identify areas where further growth is needed to achieve your objectives. Choose a point person to spearhead those efforts and keep your chosen issues top-of-mind as further planning is researched and implemented.

Strategy 10: Modify, Modify, Modify

The next step to safety success is all about learning from your past. Take a look at what's working in the program and what isn't. Continually reevaluate and refine the district's safety measures for the transportation program. Ask yourself – and your transportation team – the hard questions about where you want your district to go safety-wise, how it

Emergency Response Training

Every school district has unique characteristics, especially when it comes to climate and geography. Developing targeted training for emergencies – such as environmental hazards, school violence and police lockdowns, climate emergencies like flash floods or tornadoes, and a host of other scenarios – is imperative to keeping your students and staff safe. Create well-thought-out emergency action plans and widely communicate your expectations to staff and community members. Let no question go unanswered when developing your emergency response plan, and make sure to include a communications plan to parents.

Once an emergency action plan is created: practice, practice, practice. When students, staff and community members practice these scenarios, the responses become engrained in their memories and, if needed, they'll properly and safely respond without thinking.

If an emergency does arise, follow your plan while putting safety at the forefront of all your decision making. Once the immediate threat is reduced, gather all parties (drivers, management, school district personnel, a few parents, etc.) to review the response. What worked? What didn't? Maybe a specific action worked fine, but not well enough. How do we improve our actions? Gather opinions, then modify your actions for future safety issues.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

“We can’t totally put the burden on the transportation group as a whole, but that we all play a part in that if we remind ourselves of that. And I think we would create a better and a safer environment for everyone.”

*– Kathy Furneaux,
Executive Director,*

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute

links with your district’s mission, and how you get there. Then rework your safety campaigns, events and messages to fit this vision. A few questions to ask to further your success:

- How is technology changing the lives of those we serve? How is it changing the way we interact with our community?
- Is there new technology available that will support our safety vision?
- What are our failures? Our successes? How can we build upon those successes?
- Is our training working? Does it engage our team? Does it include all the right members?
- Are there trends that need to be evaluated that might benefit our community?
- What needs to be integrated into the program to address those changes?

While this is the last safety method on our list, it’s intricately linked to every other method for safety success. And just because it’s last on our list, does not mean it should be last on yours; it’s an evolving and delicate process to modify your safety program based on your district’s specific needs.



“Safe school transportation is about relationships – relationships between the drivers, principals, transportation managers, students, parents and school administrators.”

*– Dr. Kathleen Williams,
Superintendent,
Wausau School District, WI*

CONCLUSION

“Safe school transportation is about relationships – relationships between the drivers, principals, transportation managers, students, parents and school administrators.”

– Dr. Kathleen Williams, superintendent,
Wausau School District and First Student partner

There is no one main driver of safety success; it is based on partnership and collaboration. Without the integration and linkage of our four main cornerstones, safety success will be substandard. By using the cornerstones of Culture, Equipment and Operations, Community, and Administrative Policy and Procedures within these 10 Strategies for Safety Success, your district can develop a comprehensive, holistic safety program.

1) Culture

Making safety intrinsically a part of your team’s approach starts at the top and should filter into the actions of every other team member. Work together to build safety-focused relationships, and don’t be afraid to recognize good work and point out good safety behaviors. Recognition leads to motivation, which leads to good safety habits.

2) Equipment and Operations

Understand your equipment and operations: your need, your opportunities for improvement and your successes. By understanding your district’s vision, your current fleet, federal regulations and your maintenance needs, you can develop a plan to boost safety in all of these aspects. Whether through training or further process discipline, safe equipment and operations allows you to proliferate future safety messages and events.



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

3) Community

Students are hurt more often in the 10-foot space outside the bus than when riding as a passenger; this is because of other drivers on the road. Working safety into the fabric of your community further safeguards the well-being of your students. Not only does it build a community-wide culture of safety, but it allows school administrators to build closer relationships with families, parents and students outside the classroom.

4) Administrative Policies and Procedures

Setting policies and procedures, founded in safety knowledge and focus, ensures all team members are required to maintain the same standards of safety. And while discussions and improvements to policies and procedures are welcome, they must be well-vetted by all departments to establish safety best practices.



A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT PBIS CASE STUDY

Looking at their SWIS [school-wide information system] data for rural schools, I found the school bus to be the third highest problem area after the classroom and playground.”

– Kathy Guthman,

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support

(PBIS) Specialist,

Wausau School District, WI

Wausau School District in Wisconsin is a pioneer in their implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), a multi-faceted student behavior system centered on equipment and operational data analysis, evidence-based practices for the entire community, positive culture and systematic policy implementation.

In 2013, PBIS coach Kathy Guthman noticed a trend in Wausau School District’s student conduct data. “Looking at their SWIS [school-wide information system] data for rural schools, I found the school bus to be the third highest problem area after the classroom and playground.” The district realized that by treating the bus as an extension of the classroom, they could expand PBIS to their student transportation program. For the expansion to be successful, students and families would need to hear the same PBIS language, rules and expectations in their schools and on the bus. First Student began working in close partnership with the school district to help accomplish this goal.

The first step was to form a small transportation committee made up of school administrators, PBIS building coaches and teachers, First Student’s location manager, a driver and a bus monitor. First Student brought in a regional PBIS instructor to give key staff their initial PBIS training, and the school district provided ongoing training at regular safety meetings. This afforded the district and driving team a forum for regular communication beyond the implementation phase. Working side-by-side, the committee developed program tools, including a jointly administered bus behavior acknowledgment system – Bus Bucks.

Riverview Elementary School Principal Andy Place believes administrative presence is essential to implementation. “I was invited to a



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

“At the December Safety Meeting, Ed Slany [First Student Location Manager at Wausau] announced that First Student did not have any moving accidents to-date. I could not help to think there must be a direct correlation to the fact that behavior write-ups or incidences were at an all-time low.”

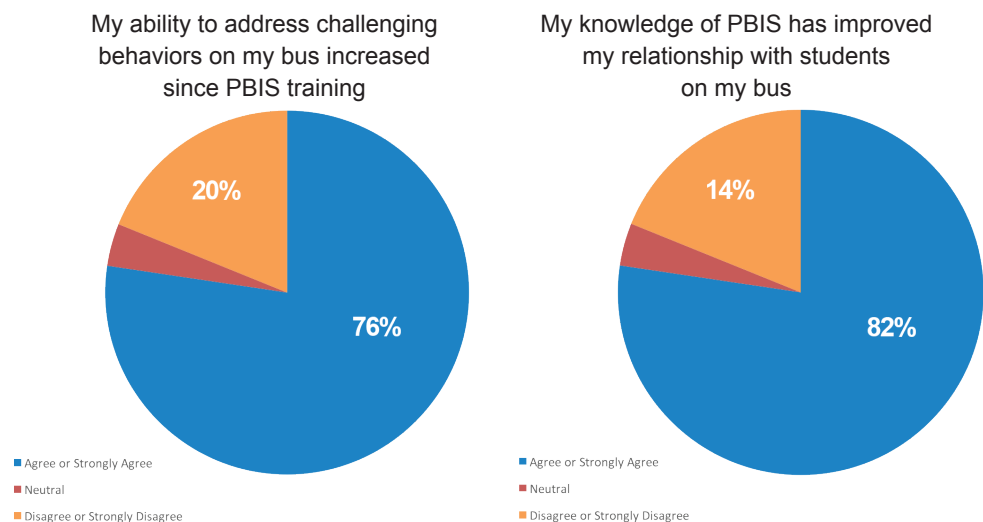
*– Dr. Kathleen Williams,
Superintendent,
Wausau School District, WI*

safety meeting and have not missed a safety meeting since.” Place spent half a school year riding the bus alongside the driving team, going the extra mile to understand the experience of drivers and to work with students who were struggling to meet behavior expectations on one particular bus. “The conduct data on that specific bus shows we have good days and bad days. But we have more good days, and the bad days are not as bad.”

Wausau School District is experiencing significant benefits from this innovative approach to school transportation. According to a recent driver survey and interviews with district staff:

- Drivers feel they now have the tools, and the power, to manage student behavior productively. They feel equipped and empowered to reinforce good bus behaviors. Drivers believe they have better relationships with the students and communities they serve (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



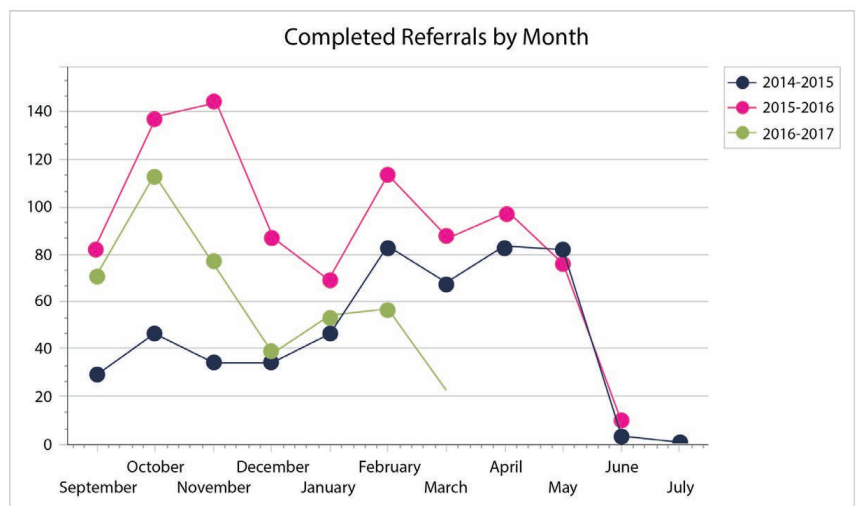
Results of a driver survey conducted after the PBIS implementation in Wausau



- Principals, teachers and school bus drivers now have a common strategy and foundation for managing student behavior. They operate under the same expectations and rules, using common tools and language, to proactively reinforce and model good student behavior. Fewer behavioral incidents are occurring on the buses (see Figure 2) and administrators are spending considerably less time investigating bus-related behavior issues.

Students are spending more time on-task in the classroom, resulting in less instructional time lost. They have a consistent learning experience, from the school bus to the classroom. Because of this, students exit the bus feeling happy, engaged and ready to learn.

Figure 2



A marked decline in incident referrals for behavioral incidents occurring on the bus



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

Perhaps the most significant measure of success is best summed up by Wausau School District Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Williams: “At the December Safety Meeting, Ed Slany {First Student Location Manager at Wausau} announced that First Student did not have any moving accidents to-date. I could not help to think there must be a direct correlation to the fact that behavior write-ups or incidences were at an all-time low.”

Through their pioneering efforts at addressing school transportation issues with a holistic approach, Wausau School District has effectively created an ecosystem that has already proven to increase student safety.



RESOURCES

1. American School Bus Council website:

<http://www.americanschoolbuscouncil.org/>

2. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website:

https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/2015_school-transportation-related_crashes_traffic_safety_fact_sheet.pdf

3. McGeehan, Annest, Vajani, Bull, Agran, Smith. (November 2006) School Bus–Related Injuries Among Children and Teenagers in the United States, 2001-2003. Center for Innovation in Pediatric Practice, Columbus Children’s Research Institute, Children’s Hospital website: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/118/5/1978?sso=1&sso_re-direct_count=1&nfstatus=401&nftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&nfstatusdescription=ERROR%3a+No+local+token

4. Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, Morgan, Snyder. (2014, June) Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2013. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences (IES) report.

<http://americanspcc.org/bullying/statistics-and-information/>

5. American School Bus Council website:

http://schoolbusfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Safety_Guide_for_Families.pdf

6. National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services. (retrieved 2017, June) History of School Bus Safety – Why Are School Buses Built as They Are?

<http://www.nasdpts.org/Documents/Paper-SchoolBusHistory.pdf>



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

7. School Bus Fleet. (retrieved June 2017)

<http://digital.schoolbusfleet.com/Nov2016/Default/17/0/3411655#&page-Set=17&contentItem=3411655>

8. Pew Research Center. (retrieved June 2017)

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/>

9. Pew Research Center. (retrieved June 2017):

<http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>

10. Gissendaner, Art. (retrieved May 2017). Objects Are Closer Than They Appear in Bus Danger Zone.

<http://www.stnonline.com/news/latest-news/item/8576-objects-are-closer>

11. National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services. (retrieved June 2017)

http://www.nasdpts.org/Operations/documents/State_Laws_Regarding_Passing_School_Buses.pdf

12. StopBully.Gov website (retrieved June 2017):

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/media/facts/index.html>



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

First Student, Inc Resources:

- <http://www.firststudentinc.com/>
- <http://www.firststudentinc.com/why-first-student/school-bus-safety>

American School Bus Council Resources:

- <http://www.americanschoolbuscouncil.org/>
- <http://schoolbusfacts.com/>

Pupil Transportation Safety Institute:

- <https://www.ptsi.org/>

National School Transportation Association:

- <http://www.yellowbuses.org/school-administrator/>

National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services:

- <http://www.nasdpts.org/>



10 Strategies For Safety Success: A Holistic Approach To Student Transportation Safety

ABOUT FIRST STUDENT

As the leading school transportation solutions provider in North America, First Student provides the best start and finish to every school day. First Student completes five million student journeys each day, moving more passengers than all U.S. airlines combined. With a team of highly-trained drivers and the industry's strongest safety record, First Student delivers reliable, quality services including full-service transportation and management, special-needs transportation, route optimization and scheduling, and charter services for 1,100 school district contracts.

At First Student, safety is a core value and a way of life for all of our employees. Safety has always been at the heart of everything we do. As a result, we're twice as safe as the industry average in collisions. We're also the only school transportation company in our industry to have received the prestigious National Safety Council (NSC) Green Cross for Safety® award, the highest award for safety in North America.

For more information, please visit our website at www.firststudentinc.com or email us at info@firststudentinc.com.

© 2017 First Student, Inc.
All Rights Reserved



Sponsored by:

First  **Student**

Caring for students today, tomorrow, together.®

firststudentinc.com