

School Bus Safety & the Question of Seat Belts

The York Catholic and York Region District School Boards rely on school buses for the safe transportation of students to and from our schools. Together, the York Catholic and Public School Boards operate a Joint Board Bussing Consortium that provides efficient and safe transportation for up to 90,000 student rides per day.

Transport Canada, the Ontario School Bus Association and the Canada Safety Council provide school boards, such as ours, with critical information on bus safety. The consensus of expert opinion regarding the use of seatbelts indicates that children over 18 kg (40 lbs) riding in school buses are safer without seat belts.

Why aren't seat belts required on school vehicles?

Some parents are surprised to find that while seat belt use is mandatory in passenger vehicles, their children travel unrestrained in a school bus. School buses are designed to protect passengers through "compartmentalization". This means that school buses have:

- seats with high backs
- the seats positioned close together to form compartments
- seats filled with energy-absorbing material
- strong seat anchorages

Parents also need to be aware of additional information about seat belts:

- to be effective, seat belts must be worn correctly (snug and low on the hips) for full protection. Seat belts that are not correctly worn may cause injuries.
- because school vehicles carry passengers from the very young to high school students, seat belt fit must be readjusted and use monitored to ensure safety.
- because of increased use, seat belts on school buses are subject to more wear and tear, and their condition must be monitored.
- studies using dummies have shown that adding seat belts to the current school bus seating arrangement can actually increase the chance of head and neck injuries in restrained passengers.

Our School Boards support the Ontario Government's interest in continuing to review school bus safety measures and we remain committed to ensuring that all school bus operators contracted by our bussing consortium comply fully with all safety laws and regulations.

You can find more information about school bus safety at the following links:

<http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/schoolbus/safebus.htm>

<http://www.safety-council.org/info/traffic/schbusbelt/htm>

http://www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/bus/schoolbus/BUSBELTS_e.htm