

# what is **safety** ?



Read this story to learn what Frank Kelly discovered when he joined a school district and took a fresh look at their claim to have a passion for safety.

How do you compare with what he found?

At your district, is safety a goal or is it real?

Do you know how to set the safest NORMS?

Using the best  
training materials  
is a no-brainer.

- Frank

# How does your transportation department measure up against the following story?

My name is Frank Kelly. I had just completed my last tour of duty in Afghanistan and returned to the Chicago area ready to join the workforce. In the army I was responsible for the safe operations of over 5,000 vehicles. Before I signed up I had worked in a school bus operation and just loved the job. Everyone involved really cared about the kids and I wanted to return to this industry. I contacted a number of school districts in my area and was hired as a transportation supervisor in a district operating 55 school buses.



## The School District

At the interview, I was told all these great things. They really cared about safety, they only hired first class drivers, the kids came first, so I couldn't wait to join the district.

In the first few hours, I was questioning these promised values. From my experience in the military, I knew that what you did mattered, not what you said or thought you did. When I arrived, I could not see the practical application of any of the values they told me about at the interview. I saw buses backing without a spotter, I saw pre trips done without really checking and on my first few ride alongs the norm was only two seconds back. I frequently saw drivers not count the kids away. As I tactfully questioned these practices, no one recognized any issues. This was always the way they operated.



Eventually, I sat down with the Director of Transportation, Linda, (who had interviewed and hired me) and she started to explain my duties, HR issues, scheduling and the working practices. As I listened, I thought, *Wow, this all seems very unorganized, but time will tell.* "Do you have any questions?" she asked, as the meeting was coming to an end.

## Do they even know what safety is?

"I see these posters in the driver's room, in the shop and in dispatch that say – ***We have a Passion for Safety.*** This sounds great, but what does it mean, what do we do to put this into practice?" Linda thought for a moment and told me "Yes, we have a passion for safety. We transport kids and have to make sure they are safe." "Yes, I understand that but what do we do in practice. Firstly, what is safety? What is the definition of safety?", I asked.

***"We Have a Passion  
for Safety."***

Linda looked at me a little confused and said, “You know, safety – keeping the kids safe, having no accidents.” It was my first day and I did not want to create a wrong impression. I smiled, stood up to leave and was thinking - *Wow, she really does not even know the definition of the word safety. How can you have a passion for something you don’t even know what it is? Having no accidents is the consequences of safety, not its meaning. It seems their intent is great – a passion for safety - but if they don’t even understand what safety is, how can they put this into practice? I need to ask more questions.*

As I met more of the staff, I asked the same question and no one came even close to the correct definition. I asked a few drivers and again I heard the same confused answers. Safety is doing all the things you are supposed to do to be safe. Over the next few days, I learned that the district’s goal was to be in compliance with our state regulations and that was the standard they aimed to achieve. The next day I thought I would ask more questions.

# what is safety ?

## All they want to do is meet the regulations

Why do we not teach defensive driving?

Why do we not teach safety best practices?

Why do we barely teach student management?

Why don’t we teach bullying prevention to drivers?

We transport many students with special needs, so how do we teach our drivers the many skills they need to safely do this?

Who teaches the kids how to be safe in and around the school bus?

The answer was always, “We are not required to do this under our state regulations.”

So, I see these posters, sayings on e-mails, notes on desks saying “***We have a passion for safety,***” but I see absolutely no actions to demonstrate this. In practice, the goal is to meet the state regulations, no more.

## Complying with regulations is the absolute minimum you can do

To my mind, complying with the regulations is the absolute minimum standard. Let’s face it, you cannot do any less, these are required by law. Thus, this district was doing the absolute minimum possible and feeling good about it. This was their way of applying their passion for safety. To me, it wasn’t even close to a passion for safety.

***Their only goal  
was to meet state  
regulations.***

***The regulations are  
the law, you cannot  
do any less,***

### **Outdated, poor, minimal training materials**

I joined a training class for new drivers. This was both classroom and behind-the wheel (BTW). The classroom training was minimal. We were taken through self-created PowerPoint presentations and shown some 15 year old VHS tapes. These were obviously dated and of very poor quality. No way was this ever going to change the behavior of drivers. The training materials were terrible and only covered a fraction of what I thought should be included. The BTW training was better, but I noticed the quality and content differed between the two trainers I observed. Why were we not training to one standard?



I was shocked, not by just what they were and were not doing, but the fact they had convinced themselves that this was acceptable. It was all they needed to do. I was thankful they were not transporting my children.

I did all I could to share my concerns but could not generate any support. I was continually told, "This is the way we have always done this. We meet state regulations."

### **Meeting with the DOT**

I decided to ask for a meeting with The Director of Transportation. Here is how the conversation went:

**Frank** - "I have been here for two months now and when I started I was enthusiastic about what I heard in the interview. I was told you really cared about safety, the kids come first, and the district has a passion for safety. However, I have seen no actions that support this whatsoever. Your training materials are outdated and of poor quality. You barely teach some of the most important subjects required. No one even knows what the definition of safety is. How can you say you have a passion for safety?"

**Linda** - "I heard you have been questioning everything we do but I can assure you that we comply with the regulations, which is all we are required to do. School bus drivers receive the best training of all commercial vehicle operators. Why are you challenging this?"

**Frank** - "In my research I learned that truck drivers receive 240 hours of training, transit bus drivers receive 114 hours of training and paratransit bus drivers receive 72 hours of training. How long is the training for school bus drivers?"

**Linda** - "Err, well, we train 30 hours and I think this is about the average for all school bus drivers."

***"We have always done it this way."***

***Complacency that leads to inadequate performance.***

***No one even knows the definition of safety?***

***Truck Drivers – 240 Hrs  
Transit – 114 Hrs  
Paratransit 72 Hrs  
School Bus – 30 Hrs***

**Frank** – “So, our drivers receive only one eighth the amount of training a truck driver gets and almost a quarter what a transit bus operator receives. It is critical our training in such limited time needs to be of the highest quality, with the best materials.”

***With such minimal training, the highest quality is critical.***

**Linda** – “I never realized our training time was so low in comparison. But, we created the materials we use to train the drivers and are proud of them.”

**Frank** - “I hear you, and I think the materials you have created are very good with the limited resources you have. But I also fail to see how these improve our performance. I see nothing that will change the behavior of the drivers to avoid unsafe practices. There were two accidents last week, we were late on a number of pick-ups, I heard parent complaints and I heard drivers debating over what are the correct practices. Complying with the regulations is the absolute minimum we should do and is far short of our having the safest, most efficient practices in the district – the NORMS.”

***Our goal should be to set the safest NORMS.***

***We need to improve driver behaviors.***

### **What are NORMS?**

**Linda** - “NORMS, what are NORMS?”

**Frank** - “They are the normal and usual way everyone acts in the operation. They are what everyone knows is expected of them. They are the best way to perform each and every task and that everyone does the same correct, efficient way all the time. For example, every driver, supervisor and manager would always stay at least four seconds back and would be aghast if anyone did not practice this as a normal, standard way of operating. This is only one example. There are many more.”



**Linda** - “That sounds great, but how do you set such NORMS? Sounds like an impossible task.”

### **How do you set NORMS?**

**Frank** - “No, it is not impossible and in the long run is the easiest way of providing high quality, safe school bus transportation. First, we have to decide what the best practices are for every facet of our operation. Then, we have to train all our drivers in these best practices and persuade them to change their behaviors – way beyond what the regulations require. However, as school bus transportation is the same in every operation, this has already been done. At my last district, we used the driver training courses created by the School Bus Safety Company. These teach all the best practices and cover almost every subject we need to address.



These materials are outstanding. There is nothing else even comparable to them.”

**Linda** - “But surely, we already teach everything we need to and we have no budget to buy training courses.”

**Are we already training on all the topics we need to?**

**Frank** - “That is two issues. First, no, we do not teach everything we need to. In fact we do not train many critical subjects. For example, we do not train on Safety Best Practices, Defensive Driving, Bullying Prevention for School Bus Drivers, Student Management. Need I go on? Worse, the subjects we do teach are barely covered with outdated, poor materials and will never change the behavior of the drivers. If we do not change their behaviors, we are just going through the motions.”

**Budget should never be an issue**

“Now the second issue, we have no budget? This is ridiculous. We have to pay for accidents and if we had a really bad accident, we would have to pay out tens of thousands of dollars or our insurance premium would double. We find the money to pay for mistakes! It has been proven many times that the lowest cost of operation is from ***Doing It Right, The First Time, Every Time***. These training courses are very low cost and can be used for many years. **We say the safety of the kids comes first, but then balk at a few thousand dollars to buy quality training materials. How do these two statements line up with each other?** If we care about safety, if the kids matter, we should be using the most effective training materials available and we should be training every subject that creates the safe NORMS we seek. Your job as the DOT is to find the monies – involve Risk Management, ask your insurers, get the business official involved. Not buying the best training material and continuing to pay for accidents is penny wise and pound foolish. Last week’s two accidents will probably cost more than these training courses.”

“Let’s consider this another way. It costs around \$50,000 a year to operate one school bus. We operate 55 buses, so that is almost \$3 million each year to run the transportation department.”

“We could buy all six training courses that the School Bus Safety Company has for only \$6,000. If we consider that the training materials are good for at least 5 years, this is only \$1,200 per year against our \$3 million costs. Budget is not the issue, we spend more on office supplies, and we are talking about by far the most important factor in everything we do – the training of the drivers to change their behaviors to ***Doing It Right, The First Time, Every Time***. Budget should never be an issue.”

**We don’t train**

***Safety Best Practices  
Defensive Driving  
Bullying Prevention  
Student Management  
Special Needs etc.***

***We find money to pay for mistakes.***

***If we really care about the kids, if safety is our passion, why would a few thousand dollars stop us from doing the right thing?***

***Costs around \$50,000 per year to operate one school bus.***

***We spend more on office supplies than these training courses cost.***



### **Continuing to set NORMS**

**Linda** – “OK, I agree with what you say. The budget should not be an issue. I did not realize they were such a low cost. So if we train in all these subjects, will we set these safe NORMS you keep talking about?”

**Frank** – “Not on their own, but they are the foundations upon which we build the support to set the NORMS. Once we have clearly explained the best practices and trained our drivers in these, we need to provide our management support to make these the safe NORMS.”

**Linda** – “What do you mean. How do we do that?”

**Frank** – “As management, we set the NORMS. Firstly by training and then by follow up. We continually reinforce the correct practices using posters, guidance, consequences and no mixed messages. One example is how we should make sure that every driver understands we require a minimum four second following distance, this is not just a suggestion. We should ask each driver to agree and commit to this – this is an example of how we set safe NORMS.”

**Linda** – “I can see you are convinced we need to do this. Are you sure it is necessary?”

**Frank** – “As Einstein once said, ‘If we want to improve results, we need to do something different.’ We can deliver a better, safer service – that is what we are paid for. So, yes we need to do this. We need better, safer NORMS. We can wish and pray for being safe or we can take action to really achieve this. We can never keep the kids totally safe, but if a bad accident happens, we need to be sure we did everything we could to prevent it. Relying on compliance with minimal state regulations is not what parents expect and would not make me feel we had done our duty – the trust put in us requires far more than that.”

**Linda** – “You have opened my eyes; I really thought that complying with the regulations was enough. I agree, let’s take this operation to a whole new level, let’s improve the behavior of our drivers and set the safest NORMS possible.”

***High quality  
complete training  
is the foundation of  
setting safe NORMS.***



***Management sets  
the NORMS.  
Four seconds is a  
requirement, not a  
suggestion.***

***If we want to be the  
best we can be,  
we need to do  
something different.***

***Parents trust us to  
go the extra mile,  
not just to comply  
with regulations.***

***If a bad accident happens, will you know you  
did all you could to prevent this?***



How do you compare to the above scenario?  
Do you seek to be the best that you can be?

***If School Bus Drivers  
are professionals,  
they deserve  
professional training.***

### **Ten questions to ask yourself**

1. Do we only seek to meet regulations?
2. Do we have the safest NORMS?
3. Does our training change the behavior of the drivers?
4. Do we teach safety best practices? Should we?
5. Do we have a defensive driving program? Should we?
6. Do we have a good student management training program? Should we?
7. Do we teach the students safe school bus practices? Should we?
8. Do we teach bullying prevention for school bus drivers? Should we?
9. Do we want to be the best that we can be, or are we happy as we are?
10. Do we take the actions to show we really care?

## **School Bus Safety Company**

Our goal is to create training materials that:

- Are of the highest quality
- Are comprehensive, systematic and integrated
- Are refreshingly new
- Maintain trainees interest
- Only apply to vehicles they drive every day – School Buses
- Involve many professional actors and include video showing everything being taught
- Are by far the best in the industry
- **WILL** CHANGE THE BEHAVIOR OF THE DRIVERS TO AVOID ALL UNSAFE ACTS

They do work, they help you change driver behaviors and set safer NORMS. For an updated catalogue or a personal webinar showing how these courses change behaviors call 1-866-275-7272.

***To set safe NORMS  
and improve  
performance –  
Training, Training  
and Training  
backed up by  
Leadership***



\$3,750



\$1,795



\$950



\$275



\$220



\$150

All six for  
\$6,000



**Making Kids Safer™**

5601 Hudson Drive, Hudson, Ohio 44236 [www.schoolbussafetyco.com](http://www.schoolbussafetyco.com) Tel 1-866-275-7272

## **Postscript to the above story by Jeff Cassell**

I was the V.P. Corporate Risk Manager for the Laidlaw Group for almost 21 years. Laidlaw operated over 38,000 school buses from 450 locations.

When I first joined Laidlaw, the operations were exactly as described above. At every one of the 450 locations the goal was to comply with regulations, despite the fact that Laidlaw claimed that safety was of the highest importance.

Being the Risk Manager, I was also responsible for settling the claims after accidents occurred. As we studied the causes of the accidents, we realized that the training provided to comply with regulation was woefully inadequate to prevent unsafe behaviors. Furthermore, there were almost no quality materials available to provide this training. Laidlaw engaged an outside company to create refreshingly new effective training courses that would change the behavior of drivers to be more professional and avoid unsafe driving practices. The results were outstanding. Over a few years, accident frequency reduced by close to 72% and the cost of risk by 58%. Most importantly, the kids were far safer and Laidlaw had a great service reputation.

I left Laidlaw after the company was acquired by First Group and created the School Bus Safety Company. I partnered with the owner of the outside entity that created the Laidlaw training courses. Together, we then created all the training courses we now sell. These are considerably better than what Laidlaw had – everything can be improved. The point is, these training courses do work, they do change driver behaviors and they do reduce losses and to create a more professional driver.

As I have worked with other contractors and school districts, I realized they were still only looking to comply with minimal regulations and were using outdated poor training materials. This is the basis for the above story.

## **All you are trying to do is sell your product**

Yes, of course, we want to sell our courses. They cost over \$1 million to create. When you can buy all of them for only \$6,000, knowing they are refreshingly new, comprehensive and do work – they are almost free to you.

Our goal is to help bring school bus operations into the 21st century and that is why we created these courses.

We do not just sell our materials. To help save children's lives in the danger zones, we have:

1. Given away for free over 3,000 copies of our Danger Zones Driver Training Program. If you would like a free copy, contact us.
2. Created five powerful Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to educate the public on not driving past stopped school buses. These are available to you for free. If you would like free copies, contact us.
3. Led a campaign to have crossing gates installed on every school bus.

The point is, we truly care about improving the school bus industry and making kids safer.

Jeffrey Cassell, President  
School Bus Safety Company  
1 866 275 7272

## Just a few of our many testimonials



**STUDENT TRANSPORTATION INC.®**

"We have seen a 36% reduction in preventable accidents since using your training course."



"There is nothing even comparable to this quality being used in school bus training anywhere in the industry."

**Anchorage School District**  
*Educating All Students for Success in Life*

"Last year we went down in overall incidents by 74%."



"Thank you for inventing such a great program."



"I highly recommend your programs to any school transportation division."



"I am excited by the quality and content of the programs created by The School Bus Safety Company - they are exemplary." - Dr. Linda Bluth.



**PETERMANN**  
Safety One Person at a Time

"Our accident rate has significantly been reduced for a second year in a row."



**Making Kids Safer™**

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[www.schoolbussafetyco.com](http://www.schoolbussafetyco.com)