

SCHOOL BUS Ride

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School Bus Safety Company Revolutionizes Training

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School Bus Safety Company Revolutionizes Training

For more than 12 years, the School Bus Safety Company (SBSC) has been at the forefront of the pupil transportation industry's safety trends and regulations with its school bus driver training programs.

The School Bus Safety Company's team of performance improvement experts – with vast expertise in fleet operations and safety, industrial psychology, instructional design and media production – have collaborated to create highly successful training programs for bus driver training, CDL training, trainer certification, safety leadership, special needs transportation, bullying prevention, garage safety, and student safety for kids of all ages.

School Bus Safety Company Origins

Jeff Cassell, president of School Bus Safety Company, was formerly the VP Corporate Risk Manager for the Laidlaw group for over 21 years. During Cassell's tenure, Laidlaw operated 38,000 school buses taking 2.5 million children to and from school. As the risk manager, Cassell was responsible for the claims handling.

"I saw firsthand the mistakes that led to accidents," he said. "In my 21 years, we were involved in 31 child fatalities. We operated 480 locations across 32 states and the level and quality of the training was a dog's breakfast. Most locations only sought to meet the state requirements, using self made guides and power point presentations."

While one might think that complying with state requirements is sufficient, the truth is that every state has wildly different standards. This is why the new FMCSA Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) requirements were created but, Cassell said, even meeting those new requirements is not nearly enough to develop the safe practices required for transporting children.

At Laidlaw, Cassell helped create a comprehensive video-based training course far ahead of state requirements and implemented the course at all 480 locations. Laidlaw reduced their accident rate by more than 72 percent and their cost of losses were reduced by more than \$58 million per year.

"After Laidlaw was acquired by First Group, I attempted to retire but was bored," he said. "I decided to create the School Bus Safety Company and developed a training course that was even better than what Laidlaw had. We sell it at an affordable price so every school district can afford high-quality training materials. This improves the quality of school busing and aims to save lives."

Making Safety a Standard

SBSC's courses fall into seven general categories, listed here: **School Bus Driver Training Course:** 26 integrated programs cover almost everything a school bus driver needs to know to do their job the right way, the first time, every time. This course aims to change the behavior of drivers, help them to remove or reduce risk, and provide a superior level of service while improving school bus safety.

The School Bus Driver Training curriculum was designed and written by school bus safety experts, and Cassell said it is a complete training system aimed at developing the safest and most professional drivers.

The Trainer Certification Process: Per Cassell, trainers have the greatest influence on drivers in everything they do and say – and, importantly, how they say it. The Trainer Certification Process covers everything a trainer needs to know, including



demonstrations of commentary driving, which Cassell said is the most effective Behind-The-Wheel training.

Safety Leadership Course: Safety Leadership is an advanced self-directed educational course for directors of transportation, managers, supervisors and trainers. There are six units, providing about four hours of instruction, followed by a 60-question final exam.

The course explains why people have accidents and how leaders can prevent them from happening by establishing and maintaining norms. By creating safety norms, leaders are able to influence the behavior of their employees to achieve better results. Cassell said that every manager and supervisor can benefit from this course.

Transporting Students with Special Needs: This course trains drivers and monitors on how to safely transport special needs students. The eight video-based programs are interactive through questions and discussion points.

The programs review roles and responsibilities for monitors, the different types of special needs, the use of lifts and mobility devices, securement best practices, and much more. This course follows a Safety Management System that makes the desired behaviors easy to understand and apply.

Bullying Prevention on the School Bus: This course aims to help drivers understand the differences between conflict and bullying. Upon completion, Cassell said, drivers will know how to set the stage for a bully-free bus, how to recognize bullying, and know what they can do to stop bullying and teasing.

The course contains three programs, a trainer's guide, and an informative job aid.

"The driver's main job is to safely transport the students; but with the corrective actions, they can also reduce the pain and suffering of kids who are bullied," he said.

OSHA Compliance/Bus Garage Safety Toolkit: A single source management tool designed specifically for school bus operations. When used properly, the course will help managers quickly and easily



achieve compliance with OSHA regulations. The toolkit provides education and training materials addressing 22 OSHA standards that apply to maintenance facilities and three standards that apply to drivers.

Student Programs: Student safety programs are available in three courses (Pre-K to Grade 2, Grades 3 to 5, and Grades 6 and up). They cover a range of topics from emergency evacuations to bullying and teasing prevention. The most important teachings are the correct and safe crossing procedures for drivers to teach and students to follow.

Safety: Freedom from Risk

Cassell reiterated that meeting the state standards should not be the desired practice for districts and operators. SBSC's most effective training program, called Safety Best Practices, takes 90 minutes to deliver and really sets the foundation for anything SBSC teaches. However, there is nothing in any state requirement or in the new ELDT requirements that teach everything that is included in Safety Best Practices.

"Safety Best Practices starts by asking the trainees, 'What is safety? What does the word safety mean? If you go to the dictionary and look up safety, what will it say?'" Cassell said. "Believe it or not, only one in 10 drivers, trainers, or DOT professionals know what the definition of safety is. If you have a passion for safety but do not even know what it is, how can





you apply that passion? All you have is words and no actions.”

Cassell said that the most common answer is “having no accidents,” but that is incorrect. Having no accidents, he said, is the consequence of safety.

“Imagine that I blindfold myself and run across a busy street, and I make it to the other side,” he said. “I did not have an accident, but I certainly wasn’t safe.”

For the School Bus Safety Company, safety means freedom from risk.

“If you avoid risk, you are safe,” Cassell said. “If you reduce risk, you are safer. It is as simple as that, but most drivers at locations without our course do not know this.”

The training also asks, “What does the word ‘risk’ mean?” The training videos repeatedly ask questions and stop to allow discussions because, Cassell said, the more the trainees are involved, the more they will learn.

“Risk is defined as the possibility of injury or damage to property,” he said. “So, if we put these together: Safety is freedom from the possibility of injury or damage to property.”

Cassell reiterated that drivers do not deliberately have accidents, but they do deliberately perform the unsafe behaviors that lead to accidents.

For example, if a bus is only two seconds behind a vehicle and it rear-ends that vehicle – the driver did not mean to rear-end the vehicle; however, they did mean to be follow too closely. That was a conscious and deliberate act that led to the accident, and that is what the SBSC courses seek to change.

Effective Training at Top Operations

SBSC’s materials are in use at districts and driver locations all throughout North America, with some of the safest records being touted as a result of the training.

Huntington Coach has been transporting students in and around Long Island, New York, since the company’s inception in 1927. It has grown to a fleet of over 900 vehicles providing pupil transportation.

Paul Quinn Mori is Huntington Coach’s senior manager of safety and training and has known Cassell since his days at Laidlaw. Mori said that while some companies and districts opt to create their own safety training materials, he has found it to be too time consuming and labor intensive to match the quality and thoroughness of SBSC’s training.

“You have a job to do, and you can’t possibly spend all your time writing and producing in-house materials,” Mori said. “It is very

difficult to teach someone the concept of school bus driving unless you use a school bus, and that’s where SBSC is invaluable.”

Mori said that Huntington Coach uses all of the SBSC materials, not only for taking and passing the permit test, but the entire certification process. The company also utilizes the SBSC special needs training materials.

“The videos are really good,” Mori said. “I was so impressed with the latest video that I rolled it out within days of receiving it.”

“The system allows people to move forward in the curriculum and allows us to standardize that element of our training across different locations and with drivers of totally different backgrounds.”

Dean Transportation in Lansing, Michigan, serves more than 100 school districts in lower Michigan from over 50 locations. The company regularly takes approximately 80,000 students to school each day, with about two-thirds of that ridership having special needs.

Fred Doelker, Dean Transportation’s director of training programs, reviews and plans curriculum for most of the company’s new employee training as well as continued education training. For more than a decade, Dean has used SBSC courses to augment its employee training and education.

“We have formally adopted the driver training program as part of our ELDT,” Doelker said, “because of the way it nicely matches with our standard operating procedures. Any time we cover an SBSC module – which we consider national best practices – our regional trainer follows up with a review of federal, state, and local laws and policies. So, we cover laws, policies, and procedures relative to the practices that were just covered in the SBSC module.”

“By the time someone completes the courses, they know all our standard operating procedures, as well as national best practices, state law, and local district laws governing that training,” he said. “By the time they take a third-party exam, they’re well prepared to pass.”

Doelker said that this high-level training may be helping to combat the driver shortage, because drivers and potential drivers are so impressed with the preparation provided by Dean Transportation and SBSC.

“Some have been school bus drivers or attendants for many years and still never received this level of education,” he said. “They quickly become a real fan of the company and its culture when they realize the care that’s being put into helping them be successful.”

The courses have had similar levels of success at Beacon Mobility, a national network of transportation companies that aims to provide

Safety Management System

Mission	Vision	Values
Remove or Reduce Risk	Do it Right the First Time, Every Time	No Unsafe Behaviors
Hazard Mitigation	Hazard Identification	
<p>Remove or Reduce Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leave room. Always stay back at least four seconds 2. Look ahead 3. Look around 4. Communicate 5. Stay within posted speed limits 6. Count the kids away 7. Avoid backing the bus or use a spotter or GOAL 8. Check for sleeping children 9. Rock & roll for turns 10. Use your reference points 11. Drop students only at approved stops 12. Adjust your mirrors 13. Do a thorough Pre & Post Trip and only operate a safe vehicle 14. If late, stay late 15. Focus on the driving 16. Always stop completely at stop signs 17. Learn the students' names, smile and greet them 18. Courtesy is contagious 19. Slow down and pull back for rain, snow, ice or fog 20. Get enough sleep, always be alert and awake 21. Always keep your balance, no rushing, use three point contact 22. Never be under the influence of drugs or alcohol 	<p>Unsafe Behaviors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following too closely 2. Unprepared for what is coming 3. Not being prepared for what is around you 4. Not communicating with other drivers or pedestrians 5. Speeding 6. Being unaware a student is still in the danger zones when you pull away 7. Backing without a spotter or GOAL 8. Leaving a sleeping child on a bus 9. Not rocking & rolling to see around blind spots 10. Turning without using your reference points 11. Dropping students at unauthorized stops 12. Not adjusting your mirrors to minimize blind spots 13. Operating unsafe equipment 14. Rushing to make up time 15. Distractions—texting, dialing, or reading maps 16. Rolling through stop signs 17. Not being able to identify students and having no communication with them 18. Developing a bad attitude 19. Driving too fast for conditions 20. Driver fatigue 21. Slips, trips & falls 22. Use of drugs & alcohol 	

Professionals apply these practices every day

“Everything taught throughout the 26 training programs in the Driver Training Course seeks to persuade drivers to avoid the practices on the right side of this poster and to follow the behaviors on the left side. It is easy to understand and easy to follow.

We teach that accidents are caused by conscious and deliberate unsafe behaviors and as such it is easy to change these behaviors to remove or reduce risk – and this poster summarizes the desired behaviors. We also teach that most accidents are caused by drivers failing to pay attention, exceeding their performance capabilities, developing unsafe behavior patterns, or they are willing to accept risk.

Everything we have talked about is just part of what is included in our leading in program –Safety Best Practices. However, none of these teachings are required in any state or by the new ELDT requirements.

All our training is to persuade drivers to do it right, the first time, every time, by avoiding the behaviors on the right side of the poster and to always follow the behaviors on the left side of the poster. It really is that simple.”

– Jeff Cassell



mobility without limits for its riders. Beacon Mobility specializes in high-needs transportation – from special needs students to paratransit riders like seniors and people with disabilities.

Kevin Kilner is Chief Safety Officer for Beacon Mobility whose role within the organization is to ensure consistent delivery of its safety program across all Beacon entities. The company aims to recruit drivers with zero commercial driving experience and prepare them each to have 20 to 30-year careers of successfully transporting students.

Kilner said that the company began using SBSC materials in January 2022, thanks to his experience at other organizations of seeing the consistent and predictable delivery of the courses.

“In my experience, SBSC is the only single source, off-the-shelf program that will cover all CDL requirements, as well as topics like student/passenger management and trainer certification,” Kilner said. “There is no other off-the-shelf program which I’m aware of that combines those elements with consistent language while leveraging adult learning concepts.”

“The program creates consistency of delivery through the use of videos and workbooks, while still leaving the opportunity for trainers to customize the learning experience to the individual trainee,” he added.

“Quite honestly, the training materials provided by the School Bus Safety Company far exceed anything else available. They are comprehensive, easy to deliver, and by having all the training focus on a Safety Management System, drivers can clearly understand what is expected of them. This is the absolute best training available”

– Yvonne Hill
 Safety/Transportation Training Specialist
 Seguin ISD
 Seguin Texas

Kilner also credited Cassell’s personal flexibility as an advantage of SBSC, including his willingness to customize, and availability to come to customer locations and assist with training trainers.

“Jeff is the type of person to roll up his sleeves and get into the frontline, and he’s not afraid to lean in to enhance the customer experience,” Kilner said. “He’s genuinely interested in the greater good of the industry, and not just moving product off a shelf.”

To learn more, visit www.schoolbussafetyco.com or call 866-275-7272.