



# ‘Making Kids Safer’ With School Bus Safety Company

## What is Safety?

Student transportation professionals live and breathe safety in order to successfully transport 25 million U.S. schoolchildren to school and return them home every day. But how many can actually define what “safety” is?

Jeff Cassell, president of the School Bus Safety Company, defines safety as “freedom from risk.” Risk, then, is “the possibility of injury or damage to property.” About 1 percent of risk comes from unsafe conditions like faulty steering or faulty bus brakes. However, he stressed that 99 percent of road accidents come from “conscious and deliberate unsafe behaviors by drivers.”

Cassell has a long history of being concerned with such topics. He was the vice president of corporate risk management for school bus contractor Laidlaw, leading operational and safety programs for the drivers of more than 38,000 school buses that transported over 2 million children to and from school every day. Under his guidance, Laidlaw reduced its accident rate by more than 72 percent and its cost of losses by more than \$40 million a year.

After a 21-year career at Laidlaw, Cassell considered retiring but then asked himself the question, “How can I make a difference in the school bus industry and save kids’ lives?” He created the School Bus Safety Company (SBSC), whose trainings are now used by seven out of

the 10 largest school bus contractors in North America as well as by about 3,000 school districts in the U.S.

## Powerful, Impactful Techniques

“Your greatest asset is the person in the [driver’s] seat,” Cassell stressed, regarding student transportation operations.

Knowing that many school districts cannot afford expensive training programs and that they often create their own based on state requirements, Cassell brought together a team of performance improvement experts with specialties like fleet operations and safety, industrial psychology, instructional design and media production.

They combined common sense, logic and experience to create affordable, actionable training. The courses are built around a safety management system, in which one identifies the risks, analyzes them, and takes actions to mitigate them.

The resulting SBSC courses, Cassell said, far exceed any state requirements and provide practical, comprehensive, essential training for school bus drivers. The practical training gives school bus drivers an immediate way to implement safety strategies in their daily jobs, Cassell reiterated.



He underscored that safety starts with hiring selected people and providing them with a high quality of training. "Get the right person and then train them right," he said. The right person, he elaborated, is one with the mindset and desire to be safe.

This is enforced at Huntington Coach Corporation, which has 900 vehicles serving 12 schools in New York. Senior Manager Paul Mori has used SBSC materials for 15 years. If a driver claims an accident wasn't their fault, Mori said, he takes them back to the video to show that while they may not have done anything wrong, they also didn't do everything right – an important distinction.

As an example of preventive safety training, SBSC compiled a list of 22 safe and corresponding unsafe driving behaviors which it lists on a poster. Cassell suggested presenting this to every potential school bus driver and securing their agreement to follow the safe driving practices – before even beginning the training process. "You only get one chance to make a first impression," he said.

Transporting students with special needs has its own unique challenges, which is why it is so important to train these drivers and aides meticulously, Cassell explained. Newly updated, the Transporting Students With Special Needs course is also built around a safety management system that identifies hazards and trains transportation staff in safe behaviors to remove or reduce those hazards.



The SBSC student training programs also communicate vital behaviors in direct ways with time allowed for discussion.

"Whose job is it to teach the kids safety in and around the school bus?" Cassell queried. It's

## Featured School Bus Safety Company Courses:

### The School Bus Driver Training Course

*The Most Effective Bus Driver Training Course Available*

This course covers 26 integrated topics ranging from pre-trip inspections to defensive driving to student management and includes all the practices to meet ELDT requirements. Quality videos depict realistic situations and model correct behavior. Animations and discussion pages enhance the learning points. Wall posters provide ongoing reinforcement of the most important points. Quizzes and a final exam allow for knowledge checks.

### The CDL Written Test Training Course

The course includes video-based programs featuring narrators who work together to deliver the training to help trainees understand. There are many test tips and extensive CDL practice tests. The 16 tests containing around 500 questions show incorrect answers and provide the correct answer.

### Transporting Students with Special Needs

*A Recreated and Updated Students with Special Needs Training Course*

Safely transporting students with special needs has many challenges. This course trains drivers and monitors on what they need to know to help safely transport these students. The training is provided through eight interactive video-based programs including questions, discussion points and an extensive 50-question final exam.

### Student Safety Programs

#### *Kids School Bus Safety Practices*

This course contains three video-based safety programs, divided into age groups.

- Pre-K to Grade 2: video lessons are taught both by real people and in animation format.
- Grades 3 to 5: this program teaches school bus safety practices as well as bullying and teasing prevention and emergency evacuation.
- Grades 6 and up: more in-depth instruction on how and why to safely ride the school bus, bullying prevention and emergency evacuation.

#### Plus:

- Trainer Certification Process
- Safety Leadership Course
- Bullying Prevention
- Bus Garage Safety Toolkit

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everyone's job to teach and reiterate these things, he answered – parents, teachers, drivers and aides.

But a school bus driver presenting "10 Safety Rules" at the start of the school year isn't nearly enough, he cautioned. "How many kids will listen and put that into practice?" he noted. The SBSC Student Safety Programs include classroom videos, games and interactivity to ensure students are properly trained on appropriate school bus behavior.

### Highly Recommended

Kevin Kilner, chief safety officer for regional contractor Beacon Mobility, has been using SBSC programs since 2014. He agreed that the techniques taught are sound. "The defensive driving model is simple, comprehensive, and measurable," he said.

The SBSC training courses are lauded by industry veterans like Fred Doelker, director of training programs for Michigan school transportation contractor Dean Transportation. With about four decades of safety training under his belt, he called the SBSC Driver Training course "the best and most relevant" school bus driver training package he has reviewed.

Veronica Burns, team lead and driver trainer at Crandall Independent School District in Texas, noted that other training videos are outdated and feature old buses or the same actors and actresses repeatedly. She praised SBSC materials as being vibrant, colorful, up-to-date and modern. She added that she appreciates how their focus is not on trucks, but on the same types of school buses being used in operations around the country.

Mori at Huntington Coach shared that he had been impressed with the positive results achieved by two different instructors in different locations working with different demographic groups. The SBSC training "does a good job and is on point," he confirmed.

He is also speaking as a master instructor for the New York state education department for anything to do with school buses.

"Once [applicants] have a permit, I can get them to the road test, but getting them to pass the written test has gotten harder and harder," Mori said.

He explained that he's seeing an influx of older applicants and college educated people who nonetheless must understand how the test is written. This, he said, is why the detailed SBSC training which explains the "why" behind the "what" is so useful. "It's getting people through the hump so much quicker," he commented.

Dean Transportation, meanwhile, requires the course for both new CDL trainees and drivers who have credentials. "Our employees find much greater relevance in training materials that reflect exactly what these folks have and use (and even look like) every day. The SBSC materials are the best I have found that strive for that level of relevance," he stated.

Kilner concurred, adding that his drivers respond positively to SBSC materials. "I have taken 20- and 30-year

veteran drivers through this program and have received specific feedback on how it changed their thinking and behaviors," he said.



Furthermore, he added, integrating operation-specific information takes everything to the next level. "Jeff's program lends itself to a location or school district inserting their facilitation techniques and their district-specific content on their specific student population to make the trainee experience a 10 out of 10," he said.

Doelker said Dean uses a similar technique. "The SBSC program is set up very nicely in segments, which allows our regional trainers to follow up each segment by teaching our own standard operating procedures relative to those specific segment topics," he shared.

When it comes to the newly implemented Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) requirements from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), SBSC says student transportation customers are covered.

"We reviewed the entry level driver theory training federal requirements in detail, and even considered creating our own entirely. The SBSC program was successfully, we feel, updated to meet the requirements very well," Doelker confirmed.

Burns said that her drivers have done well with the courses and that the district will be using SBSC's professional development courses soon. "I'd give it a 10 out of 10," she shared.

The materials are ones Doelker regularly recommends to area districts. "I've let many school districts in Michigan know the SBSC Driver Training Course is a great choice if you are going to be providing all of your own CDL Entry Level Driver Training," he said.

"We've also had great response from SBSC when we have asked for product support or have pointed out any items needing to be updated," he said, adding that this unprecedented level of support after the sale is one he hasn't experienced elsewhere for school bus training materials.

"I would recommend the SBSC training materials to a district for the content of the program, facilitation support and most importantly the support of the SBSC staff," Kilner agreed. ●

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