



TRANSPORTATION UPDATES

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Senate Bill 546

SB546 amends Texas Law to strengthen and expand seat belt requirements for buses that transport students to/from school. This amendment replaces the existing Transportation Code § 547.701.

Seat Belt Requirement Expanded

- All school buses, school activity buses, multifunction school activity buses, and school-chartered buses operated by or under contract for use by a public school district must be equipped with three-point seat belts (lap and shoulder) for each passenger and the driver.
- Previously only buses purchased newer than certain model years were required to have seat belts, and districts could opt out. SB 546 removes some of those loopholes.

Exceptions and Flexibility

- A district's Board of Trustees may determine that its budget does not permit immediate compliance with the seat belt requirement. This must be done through a formal determination (and documented in a public meeting).
- A bus may also be exempt if installing seat belts would void the vehicle's warranty. All other model-year exemptions (e.g., "pre-2018 buses") previously in state law are removed.

Transition/Compliance

- Districts are not required to be fully in compliance with the three-point seat belt standard until September 1, 2029. This gives a multi-year transition for planning and budgeting.

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Reporting Requirements

SB 546 establishes detailed reporting requirements for school districts and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) so the state can track compliance challenges and estimate financial needs

District Responsibilities

If a district claims a budget-constraint exception, it must:

By the end of the 2025–26 school year:

Prepare a report presented at a public board meeting that includes:

- The number of buses the district owns that are:
 - not equipped with seat belts
 - equipped with two-point (lap) seat belts
 - equipped with three-point (lap and shoulder) seat belts
- An estimated cost to equip all applicable buses with three-point seat belts.
- Submit this report to TEA via Sentinel.

TEA guidance clarifies:

- TEA's Sentinel reporting module opens Nov 11, 2025.
- Districts must submit required information (with documentation) by 11:59 p.m. May 29, 2026.
 - Documents required to upload may include board agenda/minutes proving the public meeting.



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GCCISD School Bus Fleet Breakdown

Senate Bill 546 amends Texas Law to strengthen and expand seat belt *requirements* for buses that transport students to/from school. This amendment replaces the existing Transportation Code § 547.701.

Total number of Buses in Fleet: 252

Bus Use Breakdown:

- General Education - 189
- Special Needs - 48
- Field Trips - 15

Total number of Buses Lap Belts Only:
48 – Special Needs School Buses

**Total number of Buses Three Point
Lap/Shoulder Seat Belts:**

11 – 52 passenger Buses, not feasible/
efficient transportation, not operational, high
mileage, major engine issues, no ac and not
worth the value to repair.

Total Buses Out of Compliance per Senate Bill 546 :
241 Buses out of Compliance

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Three Point Lap/shoulder Belt Retrofit

Total projected retrofitting cost: \$8,163,430.30

International Corporation School Buses (11 buses): \$336,648.38

Thomas School Buses (209 buses): \$7,826,781.26

Total cost to retrofit 220 school buses: \$8,163,430.30



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Retrofitting Considerations

Retrofitting school buses (aged 2–14 years) with 3-point seat belts is a tedious, costly process involving complete seat removal, flooring replacement due to rot, and seat refurbishment. The Majority of the bus fleet exceeds the currently quoted retrofit price, largely due to required structural floor replacements that add roughly \$7,500 per bus and re-certification hurdles.

Key Points:

- **Process:** Intensive, involving total seat removal, flooring replacement, and new seat covers.
- **Additional Costs:** Many buses require expensive floor repairs before and because of the retrofitting needed.
- **Re-certification:** Manufacturers will not re-certify buses to meet Federal Motor Carrier Safety Standard (FMVSS) requirements for seat belts.

Given the existing budgetary constraints, retrofitting the school buses is neither practical nor advisable; emphasis should instead be placed on implementing a forward-looking, strategic replacement schedule to ensure future compliance.



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