



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Safety Recommendation

*Reg H-459*

**Date:** February 5, 1986  
**In reply refer to:** H-85-53

Honorable Diane K. Steed  
Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety  
Administration  
400 7th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20590

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About 12:20 p.m. on March 13, 1985, an Ashe County School District schoolbus, driven by a 17-year-old student driver and carrying 22 students ages 16 and 17, was traveling up an 8-percent grade on eastbound State Route (SR) 88 near Jefferson, North Carolina, when it went off the right edge of the road in a left curve and crossed the grassy shoulder. The 1980 schoolbus then rolled one revolution to the right and down a steep embankment and came to rest upright 24 feet below the road surface against two trees. There was no fuel leakage or fire. It was daylight, the weather was clear, and the two-lane roadway was dry. One student was seriously injured, one sustained moderate injuries, and the other 20 had minor injuries; the schoolbus driver was not injured. None of the bus occupants were ejected from the schoolbus. 1/

The evidence indicates that a lack of passenger discipline was a factor in this accident. The schoolbus driver, the passengers, and the motorist who saw the schoolbus before the accident stated that some of the passengers were moving around on the bus while it was in motion. The schoolbus driver stated that he was distracted by a game that passengers were playing and that he was concerned about one of the passengers involved. Rather than stop the bus on the side of the road to establish order, the student schoolbus driver tried to drive and maintain discipline at the same time. First he verbally warned them to behave and then he tried to "sling" the students back into their seats. Finally, as he was watching the students in the rearview mirror, he drove off the side of the road.

The North Carolina "Handbook for School Bus Drivers" states that if there is a problem on the bus, the driver should pull to the side of the road and maintain order before continuing on. The student driver involved in the accident could have pulled over to the right shoulder at the intersection of SR 194 and SR 88 instead of attempting to "sling" the students back into their seats. He also could have pulled over to the right shoulder at the bottom of the hill on which the accident occurred or at any other location.

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1/ For more detailed information, read Highway Accident Report--"Schoolbus Rollover, State Route 88, near Jefferson, North Carolina, March 13, 1985" (NTSB/HAR-85/05).

One possible explanation for the schoolbus driver's failure to maintain discipline was his age relative to the passengers. The 17-year-old bus driver, an adolescent, was charged with the responsibility of both driving the bus safely and maintaining order and discipline among passengers who were his peers.

The Safety Board has found that maintaining discipline on schoolbuses may be a serious distraction for adult schoolbus drivers as well as adolescent schoolbus drivers. For example, in its investigation of a Miami, Florida, schoolbus loss of control accident on September 28, 1983, 2/ the Safety Board found that "the driver (an adult) initiated a sudden steering maneuver when she was distracted, which caused the rear end of the bus to become unstable." The Safety Board determined that "Contributing to the accident was the busdriver's distraction from her driving duties by an unruly student passenger."

In the Safety Board's investigation of a schoolbus/freight train collision on April 12, 1984, in Carrsville, Virginia, 3/ documented proof of student misbehavior was included in the Board's report along with reports from the bus driver's husband, friends, and co-workers that "the driver (an adult) was experiencing difficulty in keeping order among the elementary-school-aged children on her current route." The school principal reported that the driver had come to him at least once a week with disciplinary problems, and, in some cases, the driver had gone directly to the parents of some of the children on her route. Several passengers on the driver's route reported that she "stopped the bus almost daily to discipline the children." In this investigation, the Safety Board found that "the lack of student discipline on the bus was a problem and the noise level in the bus may have interfered with the driver's ability to hear the whistle of the approaching train."

The purpose of Federal guidelines in pupil transportation safety is to reduce, to the greatest extent possible, the danger of death or injury to students being transported to and from school. Because student behavioral problems are recurring causal factors in the Safety Board's schoolbus accident investigations and because these aspects have a definite bearing on the driving of a schoolbus in a safe, careful manner, the Safety Board believes the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration should encourage school jurisdictions to comply with Highway Safety Program Standard (HSPS) 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety" and the program manual for HSPS 17 by emphasizing the handling of student behavioral problems in the training of schoolbus drivers and by instructing students in the rules for bus riders, enforcement actions to be taken for rule violations, and the need for students to practice good behavior at all times while riding on schoolbuses.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

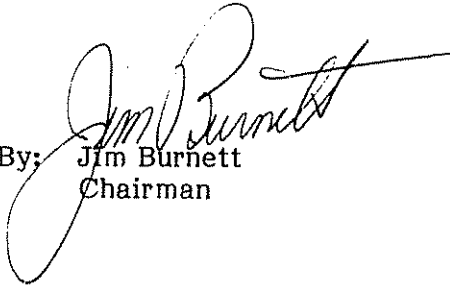
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2/ Highway Accident Report--"Schoolbus Loss of Control Accidents in Miami, Florida September 28, 1983, and Birmingham, Alabama, April 12, 1984" (NTSB/HAR-85/03).

3/ Highway Accident Report--"Collision of Isle of Wight County, Virginia, Schoolbus with Cheasapeake and Ohio Railway Company Freight Train, State Route 615, near Carrsville, Virginia, April 12, 1984" (NTSB/HAR-85/02).

Encourage school jurisdictions in all States to emphasize the portions of the Highway Safety Program Standard (HSPS) 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety," and the program manual for HSPS 17 addressing the handling of student behavioral problems in training courses for schoolbus drivers and in instruction given students in the rules for bus riders, enforcement actions to be taken for rule violations, and the need for students to practice good behavior at all times while riding on a schoolbus. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-85-53)

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, Member, concurred in this recommendation.

By:   
Jim Burnett  
Chairman

