

Ray H-460



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

## Safety Recommendation

**Date:** February 5, 1986

**In reply refer to:** H-85-54 and -55

Dr. Roger Jackson  
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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 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.

In another Ashe County schoolbus accident, which occurred on June 1, 1984, the 18-year-old schoolbus driver was stopping the schoolbus "in order to restore order on the bus" when the schoolbus was rear-ended by a station wagon. In Craven County on October 17, 1985, 17-year-old schoolbus driver was distracted by a student passenger, causing the schoolbus to run off the right side of the road striking a culvert and several other objects at two residences.

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).

The North Carolina "School Bus Driver Instructional Program Instructor's Manual" states, in part:

The first and most important step in handling a discipline problem is to stop the bus in a safe place. Once the bus is stopped, restore order, if possible. The inside rearview mirror is not to be used to correct a discipline problem. You cannot watch the mirror and the road at the same time, and you endanger your students' lives by attempting to do so.

The Highway Safety Program Manual for Highway Safety Program Standard (HSPS) 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety," issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, addresses the issue of schoolbus discipline. Under "Driver Selection," it states that "School vehicle drivers should be in good physical condition, of good character, skilled in the operation of their vehicles and in personal relationships with the children they carry." Under "Pupil Instruction," the manual states that:

...pupils who are knowledgeable about the rules for bus riders are more easily accountable for their behavior and reduce the need for adult or student monitors. Good student behavior permits the school bus driver to give all his attention to the driving task. Students whose behavior threatens the safety of all aboard should be denied transportation until their behavior becomes acceptable.

The Safety Board believes that the Ashe County School Board should emphasize the instruction of safe riding practices to all students in Ashe County.

The postaccident inspection of the accident bus revealed that the fire extinguisher and the first aid kit were missing from the storage box and had been reported missing on the last monthly inspection report conducted on February 1 and 4, 1985 (Friday and Monday). Two 10-foot-long, 25-pound tire chains were found at the rear of the bus. One chain was secured to the leg of each of the two rear seats. An examination of 12 other Ashe County schoolbuses by Safety Board investigators disclosed 9 buses without fire extinguishers, 2 buses with inoperable fire extinguishers, and 1 bus with an operable fire extinguisher. Several schoolbuses also had tire chains secured to the rear passenger seat legs. First aid kits were missing from 6 schoolbuses. The Supervisor of Transportation for Ashe County stated that these items are often stolen from the schoolbuses and are not replaced due to the cost involved.

Because of inoperable and/or missing fire extinguishers and first aid kits in the Ashe County schoolbuses, the Safety Board believes that the practice of checking safety equipment during monthly inspections may not be taken seriously in the school district. The Safety Board believes that the Ashe County school district should replace the missing and inoperable fire extinguishers and first aid kits in its schoolbuses and insure that these items are properly maintained.

The Safety Board also believes that the Ashe County school district should place additional emphasis on thorough and timely monthly maintenance inspections of schoolbuses. Since the last recorded monthly inspection of the accident schoolbus was conducted on February 1 and 4, 1985, it is possible that the monthly inspections are not being conducted every 30 calendar days as required. Also, the missing fire extinguisher and first aid kit on the accident bus, which had been reported in the last monthly inspection, and the presence of uncontained heavy chains attached to rear seat legs indicate that potential safety hazards are not being recognized and rectified by the Ashe County school district during the monthly inspections.

Although no difficulty was reported during the emergency evacuation of the accident schoolbus, the failure to conduct emergency evacuation drills in this school district could have had serious safety consequences in another accident situation. The Safety Board believes that the Ashe County school district should comply with the emergency evacuation drill procedures recommended in HSPS 17 and adopted by the State of North Carolina.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Ashe County School District:

Comply with the Federal guidelines in Highway Safety Program Standard 17, "Pupil Transportation Safety," which suggests that "one emergency evacuation drill should be held during the first week of school each semester" and that "at least twice during each school year, each pupil who is transported in a school vehicle shall be instructed in safe riding practices." (Class II, Priority Action) (H-85-54)

Develop a program to follow up on reports of monthly schoolbus inspections in which missing or damaged safety equipment is noted, and assign specific responsibility for the replacement and repair of such items and for the correction of other noted safety hazards. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-85-55)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "...to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any actions taken as a result of its safety recommendations and would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter. Please refer to Safety Recommendations H-85-54 and -55 in your reply.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, Member, concurred in these recommendations.

By:   
Jim Burnett  
Chairman

