

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 546
By: Menéndez
Transportation
6/5/2025
Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In March 2024, a fatal motor vehicle accident involving a Hays CISD school bus and concrete pump truck resulted in the deaths of Ulises Rodriguez Montoya, a pre-K student on the school bus, and Ryan Wallace, a doctoral student at The University of Texas, prompting an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). In the advent of this tragedy, it is important for Texas to consider ways in which students can be protected when they are being transported to and from school. Currently, Texas only requires that school buses be equipped with seat belts if they were made after 2018. There is also an exception for schools to not adopt seat belts if the cost falls outside of their budget.

School buses are considered as one of the safest vehicles on the road, with their compartmentalized system meant to protect passengers and heavy weight that can distribute crash force. However, even with these mechanics, school bus have a high center of gravity, making them predisposed to rolling over. School bus crashes can be deadly, especially when passengers are not equipped with a seat belt. In an age of discussing school safety and preventable deaths, it is clear that when school buses are equipped with seat belts, they could save the lives of children, bus drivers, and other passengers on board.

S.B. 546 would require all school buses, regardless of year, to be equipped with seatbelts for all riders. An exception for a two point seatbelt may be granted if the school district determines that they cannot feasibly adopt three point seatbelts on their fleet of buses. To assist with costs for implementation, school districts are allowed to accept gifts, grants, and donations from public or private sources.

(Original Author's/Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

S.B. 546 amends current law relating to seat belts on buses that transport children.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 547.701, Transportation Code, by amending Subsection (e) and adding Subsections (f), (g), (g-1), and (h), as follows:

- (e) Creates an exception under this subsection to the requirement that a bus operated by or for a school district be equipped with three-point seat belts. Provides that this subsection does not apply to:
 - (1) a bus operated by or contracted for use by a school district if the board of trustees for the school district determines that the district's budget does not permit the district to purchase a bus that is equipped with the seat belts required by this subsection; or

(2) a bus for which the warranty would become void if the bus were equipped to comply with this subsection.

Deletes existing text providing that this subsection does not apply to a bus purchased by a school district that is a model year 2017 or earlier or a bus purchased by a school district that is a model year 2018 or later if the board of trustees for the school district makes a certain determination and votes to approve that determination in a public meeting.

(f) Requires the board of trustees of a school district that makes a determination under Subsection (e)(1), not later than the end of the 2025–2026 school year, to submit to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and present in a public meeting of the board a report that includes the number of buses operated by or contracted for use by the district that meet certain criteria and the estimated cost to the district to equip with three-point seat belts each bus operated by or contracted for use by the district that is not equipped with three-point seat belts as required by Subsection (e).

(g) Requires TEA, not later than January 1, 2027, to:

(1) collect the information submitted under Subsection (f);

(2) calculate the total amount of financial assistance needed for all school districts to come into full compliance with Subsection (e); and

(3) summarize and make available to the governor, the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and each member of the legislature the information described by Subdivisions (1) and (2).

(g-1) Provides that this subsection and Subsections (f) and (g) expire January 1, 2028.

(h) Authorizes a school district to accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source to implement the requirements of Subsection (e).

SECTION 2. Provides that, notwithstanding Section 547.701(e), Transportation Code, as amended by this Act, a school district is not required to comply with that subsection before September 1, 2029.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2025.