



Partner Alliance for Safer Schools

WHITE PAPER: School Transportation Safety and Security

A Tiered Assessment and Improvement Guide

The volunteers who make up the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS) bring together their research and expertise from the education, public safety, and industry communities to develop and support a coordinated approach to make effective use of proven security practices for schools. The PASS team is also dedicated to developing white papers on specific school-safety topics.

The content in these white papers may point to specific products, brands, or organizations as illustrations of how certain safety and security measures are implemented. PASS does not endorse specific products or brands. Together, the volunteers and partners of the PASS share a single vision: making all schools safer is both achievable and urgently needed.

AUTHORS

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KEY TOPIC

Using a tiered, evidence-based framework to assess and improve the safety and security of student transportation across routes, campuses, vehicles, contractors, and transition points.

PROBLEM SOLVED

This white paper addresses a common transportation-safety vulnerability: schools may have policies, equipment, or training records without reliable evidence that responsibilities are clear, controls operate consistently, and failures are detected and corrected. These include:

- Clarifying responsibility at each student transition and handoff
- Prioritizing foundational safety controls before investing in enhancements
- Assessing actual performance rather than the mere presence of documents or devices
- Connecting transportation to the larger school safety and emergency-management system
- Creating a practical improvement and verification process

- Specifying the working relationship between the district and a transportation contractor

RELEVANT PASS GUIDELINES SECTIONS

- District-Wide Layer
- Policies and Procedures Component
- People (Roles and Training) Component
- Architectural Component
- Communication Component
- Access Control Component
- Video Surveillance Component
- Supervision and Monitoring practices

MOST RELEVANT FOR

- School and district administrators
- Transportation directors and route supervisors
- School safety and security directors
- Facilities, operations, and emergency-management personnel
- Drivers, monitors, contractors, and training personnel
- School board members and other governance stakeholders
- Contracted companies providing transportation services

TIME TO READ

Approximately 8-10 minutes

Executive Summary

School transportation is more than a logistics function. It is the first and last major student transition of the school day and one of the few school operations in which children, buses, private vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, public roadways, contractors, and emergency responders routinely converge.

This white paper accompanies the PASS Transportation Safety and Security Tier Matrix. The matrix carries most of the instructional content. This brief narrative explains how to use it, how to interpret the tiers, and how to avoid mistaking the existence of a policy, technology, or training record for evidence that a control is working.

Working Definition

Transportation safety and security is the controlled movement of students through predictable transition points. A safer system defines each transition, assigns responsibility, separates students from foreseeable hazards, communicates when conditions change, and verifies that the process is working.

Five Questions

- Who is responsible at each transition and handoff?
- Where are students supposed to be?
- How are students separated from foreseeable hazards?
- How does the school know the procedure is being followed?
- What happens when the ordinary process fails?

Central Principle

A higher-tier practice should not substitute for an incomplete foundational control.

Using the Matrix

The matrix contains 68 controls organized into seven categories. Review it vertically by tier and horizontally by category. The result should be a transportation control profile—not a single score.

1. Begin with Tier 1. Determine whether each foundational control is present, assigned, trained, and operating.
2. Mark actual performance. Use Yes, Partial, No, or Not Applicable. Do not award credit solely because a document or device exists.
3. Identify priority gaps. Correct missing or unreliable Tier 1 controls before relying on higher-tier enhancements, unless local conditions require immediate action.
4. Assign improvement work. For each gap, identify an owner, target date, evidence of completion, and method of continuing verification.

Assessment Mark	Meaning
Yes	Established and operating.
Partial	Present but incomplete, inconsistent, or unverified.
No	Absent or not functioning.
N/A	Not applicable, with the reason documented.

The Seven Control Categories

- **Policies and procedures.** Defines transportation boundaries, handoffs, loading, conduct, reporting, contractor expectations, vulnerability review, and improvement planning.
- **People, roles, and training.** Addresses screening, role-specific preparation, special transportation needs, drills, supervision, district training capability and alignment of district hiring practices with transportation contractor hiring practices
- **Architectural.** Uses physical design, access, visibility, signage, traffic flow, and pedestrian infrastructure to reduce exposure and dependence on improvisation.

- **Communication.** Connects drivers, dispatch, administrators, contractors, parents, public safety during routine operations and serious incidents, and interoperability between contracted services, the district and first responders.
- **Access control.** Controls vehicle keys, personnel identification, student ridership, loading areas, facilities, and district access to contractor information.
- **Video surveillance / forensic review.** Establishes video and GPS use, retention, access, incident review, chain of custody, and data-informed improvement through incident-based and randomized audits of video systems
- **Supervision / monitoring.** Adjusts seating, monitor assignments, staffing, and alternative controls according to actual route and student risk.

PASS Transportation Safety and Security Tier Matrix

The matrix contains 68 controls organized across seven categories and four tiers. It should be read vertically by tier and horizontally by category.

DISTRICT-WIDE LAYER

		TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3	TIER 4
 TRANSPORTATION SAFETY AND SECURITY					
1. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES					
1	Transportation Safety and Security Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Bus Stop Selection and Review Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Student Loading and Unloading Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Student Transportation Conduct Rules	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Adult Boundary and Misconduct Rules	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Transportation Incident Reporting Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Contracted Transportation Safety Requirements	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	District Oversight of Contracted Transportation	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Periodic Route and Bus Stop Safety Review	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Parent and Student Transportation Safety Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Public Awareness on School Bus Passing Laws	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Transportation Vulnerability Review		✓	✓	✓
13	Behavior Trend Analysis by Route and Bus		✓	✓	✓
14	District-Wide Transportation Safety Improvement Plan			✓	✓
2. PEOPLE (ROLES AND TRAINING)					
15	Transportation Staff Background Screening	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	Driver Training on Student Management and Emergency Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Training on Abuse, Bullying, Fighting and Vandalism Reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Bus Monitor and Aide Training	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Training on Students with Special Transportation Needs		✓	✓	✓
20	Scenario-Based Transportation Drills		✓	✓	✓
21	Transportation Supervisor Safety Audits		✓	✓	✓
22	Temporary Administrative Ride-Alongs			✓	✓
23	District Transportation Safety Training Program			✓	✓
3. ARCHITECTURAL					
24	Designated Bus Loading and Unloading Areas	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Transportation Facility and Bus Yard Security Assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Secure Bus Parking	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Controlled Access to Transportation Facilities		✓	✓	✓
28	Lighting and Visibility at Transportation Areas		✓	✓	✓
29	Clear Signage and Traffic Flow Markings		✓	✓	✓
30	Review of Bus Stop Visibility and Access Vulnerabilities		✓	✓	✓
31	Perimeter Security for Bus Yards			✓	✓
32	Safe Pedestrian Infrastructure Coordination			✓	✓
33	Transportation Facility Security Integration				✓
4. COMMUNICATION					
34	Interoperable Radio System for Buses and School Vehicles	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Transportation Dispatch Communication Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Contractor Communication Protocols	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	District-to-Contractor Reporting Channels	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Parent Notification Procedures for Transportation Incidents	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	After-Hours Activity Transportation Communication Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Communication Protocol for Secure Bus Incidents	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Transportation Communication Integration With Emergency Operations	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Radio Interoperability With Public Safety Partners	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	District-Wide Transportation Communication Platform	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. ACCESS CONTROL					
44	Vehicle Key Control	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Authorized Access to Buses and School Vehicles	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Student Ridership Accountability Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Photo Identification for Transportation Personnel	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Controlled Access During Loading and Unloading	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	District Access to Contractor Route and Incident Data	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Electronic Access Control for Transportation Facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Card-Based Student Check-In	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. VIDEO SURVEILLANCE / FORENSIC REVIEW					
52	Video Data Use and Retention Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Driver Video Monitoring / Flagging Procedures	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Bus Video Surveillance / GPS System	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Video Review Procedures for Reported Misconduct	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Video Coverage of Transportation Facilities	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	District Access to Contractor Video and GPS Data	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Stop-Arm Camera Systems	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Forensic Video Review and Chain-of-Custody Procedure	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Transportation Safety Dashboard Using Video and Incident Data	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. SUPERVISION / MONITORING					
61	Driver Responsibility to Report and Supervision Concerns	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Assigned Seating for Routes With Repeated Misconduct	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Temporary Monitor Assignment for Known Problem Routes	✓	✓	✓	✓
64	Risk-Based Monitor Assignment Process	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Monitor Staffing Plan for High-Risk Routes	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Alternative Contracts When Monitors Are Unavailable	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Monitor Staffing and Alternative Supervision Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Annual Transportation Policy and Vulnerability Review	✓	✓	✓	✓

The tiers reflect increasing capability. A district may operate at different tiers across categories, campuses, routes, and transportation modes.

Interpreting the Tiers

Tier	Primary meaning	Key question
Tier 1	Foundational controls	Have we clearly defined and assigned the basic work?
Tier 2	Managed implementation	Are the controls consistently supported and applied?
Tier 3	Integrated capability	Is transportation connected to the larger safety, security, and emergency system?
Tier 4	Sustained improvement	Can the district measure performance, adapt, and improve over time?

Verification: Knowing Whether Controls Work

The matrix should not be used as a policy inventory. A district should credit a control only when there is reasonable evidence that people understand it and it operates under real conditions.

- Observe arrival, dismissal, loading, unloading, and representative routes.
- Conduct supervisory ride-alongs and route or bus-stop reviews.
- Test communication among drivers, dispatch, schools, contractors, parents, and public safety.
- Review incidents, near misses, complaints, misconduct patterns, and recurring exceptions.
- Use risk-based video and GPS review where available and legally appropriate.
- Sample training, access, ridership, contractor, and corrective-action records for fidelity.
- Exercise abnormal events such as a missing student, crash, threat, severe weather, bus breakdown, evacuation, or reunification.

Accountability Principle

A transportation control that is not trained, observed, tested, or reviewed will eventually become optional in practice.

Setting Priorities

Do not simply total the checkmarks. Give first attention to missing or unreliable Tier 1 controls, then to partial foundational controls, locally necessary higher-tier controls, and controls that exist but cannot be verified.

Important Applications

Students with disabilities and special transportation needs

Define each handoff and responsible adult; align transportation plans, equipment, driver and aide training, emergency information, family communication, substitute coverage, and evacuation support.

Student behavior, bullying, and abuse prevention

Treat the bus as a supervised school setting. Personnel should recognize, interrupt, document, and report misconduct in compliance with school policy, state reporting laws and Title IX. Repeated concerns may require changes in seating, route design, staffing, student support, or monitoring.

Custody, release, and student accounting

Use a consistent process for custody restrictions, dismissal changes, unauthorized pickup attempts, late pickup, and students who do not appear where expected.

Contracted transportation

Extend district expectations and compliance requirements to contractor screening, training, communications, reporting, data access, supervision, evaluation, and corrective action.

Field trips, athletics, and off-site activities

Apply the same boundary, manifest, medical, chaperone, communication, student-accounting, alternate-plan, and return-confirmation principles.

Conclusion

Safe transportation requires more than safe vehicles and efficient routes. It requires coordinated controls for student movement, supervision, traffic separation, communication, access, accountability, special needs, misconduct, emergencies, and learning from experience.

The matrix provides the practical starting point. Establish the foundational controls, identify where implementation is partial, add higher-tier capability according to local risk, and verify that the system works. The goal is not to claim the highest tier. The goal is to know how transportation is supposed to work, whether it is working, and what the district will do when conditions change.

References and Resources

- PASS K-12 Safety and Security Guidelines, current edition.
- Applicable federal, state, and local pupil transportation requirements and guidance.
- Safe Routes to School and pedestrian/bicycle safety resources.
- Applicable special education transportation and student-support guidance.
- Local traffic engineering, public works, law enforcement, fire/EMS, emergency management, and school district procedures.