

School Bus Industry Associations, Manufacturers Work to Enhance Safety Programs, Improve Transportation-Funding Options

Rosemont, IL (May 11, 2006)

School Bus Watch, the formation of a security task force, School Transportation Awareness Training, and a potential campaign to increase transportation funding were the main topics of discussion at the bimonthly meeting of a coalition comprised of key members of the three school bus associations – NAPT, NASDPTS and NSTA – and executives from each of the three large school bus manufacturers – Blue Bird, IC Corporation and Thomas Built Buses.

The School Bus Watch program is patterned after the popular Highway Watch Program, which encourages truck drivers to report suspicious activities through a toll-free hotline. The three associations have been working closely with that program's creator, the American Trucking Associations, on a similar program for school bus drivers. School Bus Watch was introduced last year with additional "train the trainer" sessions conducted by industry professionals coming this July. NASDPTS will administer the program on behalf of the three associations.

"With 24 million school children riding school buses every day, School Bus Watch is essential to help keep our neighborhoods and children safer," said Lenny Bernstein, President of NAPT.

The group also discussed an upcoming program, called School Transportation Awareness Training (STAT), which is being beta tested in 11 markets with very positive response from drivers. STAT is a comprehensive course for transportation officials and is a nice complement to School Bus Watch. Training sessions will be available via DVD and online this summer.

The group also reviewed the status of the Security Task Force, charged with identifying topics related to school bus security and also to develop new ideas and present them to the coalition for approval of process and budgets. Ron Kinney (NSTA) is chairing the Security Task Force and members include Bob Ramsdell (NSTA), Pete Baxter (NASDPTS), John Green (NASDPTS), Launi Schmutz (NAPT) and Corky Bynum (NAPT).

Another major topic discussed dealt with a popular nationwide education initiative to require that a minimum 65 percent of education funds be spent for in-classroom use. The three associations are pursuing an industry advisory paper on this topic to educate school bus industry advocates about the financial impact on student transportation services of the "65% Solution."

"As fuel prices continue to skyrocket, extraordinary factors are impacting the budgets of school transportation services," said Derek Graham at NASDPTS. "Our group is working together to provide as much relevant information as possible for industry members that may be involved in the debate surrounding this initiative."

Robin Leeds of NSTA will serve as a technical resource to offer an overview of the program and comment on the various versions in each of the states to provide an initial document that will be shared with the 3Ns. Then, NASDPTS will ask state directors in states where the "65% Solution" is enacted to comment on how it is working and provide a report. The resulting advisory paper will educate school transportation industry stakeholders how to educate the public about the impact of the "65% Solution" and provide a concise overview of what is happening across the country for the local stakeholder.

"The combined knowledge and resources of the three leading school bus manufacturers and the school bus associations can result in significantly positive developments for the entire school bus industry," said David Hillman of IC Corporation, who served as the meeting's facilitator. "Collectively, we are moving forward on a number of issues to help school districts improve their transportation departments."
