

# TTD NEWS RELEASE

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## School Transportation's Glaring Problems a Renewed Focus for Transportation Unions

WASHINGTON, DC – The safety and working conditions found in school bus transportation operations became the subject of a renewed focus when the leaders of 32 transportation unions met today in an Executive Committee meeting of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO.

“School bus transportation must remain the safest way to transport our nation’s most precious cargo, America’s kids,” said Edward Wytkind, president of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO. “Parents are right to assume that our government has laws and regulations that provide a safety net for important things like school bus transportation – but there are a lot of holes in that net. To do better by our kids, we must do better by their drivers and other employees.”

Stemming from a School Bus Summit hosted by TTD in July with participation from many unions, bus drivers and their representatives identified several issues that are too important to ignore. Unsafe equipment and working conditions; a patchwork of vague and inconsistent standards, regulations and laws; and private employers that have created a race to the bottom in terms of wages, benefits and on-the-job safety, are among the issues the unions agreed to make a priority.

For example, many school bus employers don’t offer paid sick leave to employees. The unintended consequence is that students get exposed to illness when drivers are forced to work while sick.

“We should never force school bus employees to choose between their job security and the health of the children they transport,” said Wytkind.

Unlike teachers, school bus drivers are not paid year-round, and school bus drivers are routinely denied unemployment insurance during the summer. Because the summer is a limited window of time, bus drivers’ ability to find work – especially in these tough economic times – is difficult at best. And because of inconsistent schedules, school bus drivers are often denied overtime pay. TTD plans to highlight these concerns with the Department of Labor, and to work for enactment of H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act.

**Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO**

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Edward Wytkind, President / Larry I. Willis, Secretary-Treasurer



Many government agencies have been created to ensure safety in America. But when it comes to school transportation safety, these agencies have a very narrow role they can play. For example, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration does not oversee school-to-home transportation – which is clearly the bulk of school bus service. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is limited to certifying safe manufacturing of vehicles and approves how many students can safely ride on a bus, but it is not empowered to police overcrowded buses – a chronic problem. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) safety protections apply to employees of private employers but not to employees of public school districts. So workplace hazards like diesel fumes and heat stress go largely unaddressed.

“Many federal agencies may oversee some aspect of school transportation safety, but in a totally haphazard and incomplete way,” Wytkind said. “Much of the oversight lies with individual states, but many of their laws are inadequate and fail to provide one consistent level of safety.”

Despite the best efforts of workers who serve special needs students, they are increasingly offered little or no training. Initially responsible for covering 40 percent of costs, the federal government now only covers about 10 percent of costs. Providing transportation to special needs students has become an unfunded mandate. State and local governments are being expected to shoulder the financial burden almost entirely, and drivers are doing without the training they need.

Transportation union leaders approved a comprehensive policy statement, detailing these and other issues, in today’s meeting. In doing so, they approved an agenda to address many glaring problems in school transportation. For more information, please visit [www.ttd.org](http://www.ttd.org).

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*The Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, represents 32 member unions in the aviation, rail, transit, trucking, highway, longshore, maritime and related industries. For more information, visit [www.ttd.org](http://www.ttd.org).*