



## HISD Transportation: Seat Belt Analysis and Implications for SB 546

### Background

[Senate Bill 546](#) is an amendment to the Texas Transportation Code Section 547.701, which requires that school buses be outfitted with certain equipment. Prior to SB 546, a bus operated by or contracted for use by a school district for the transportation of school children had to be equipped with a three-point seat belt for each passenger, including the operator, *if the bus's model year was 2018 or later*. SB 546 eliminates the three-point seatbelt exception for a bus purchased by a school district that is a model year 2017 or earlier.

**SB 546's requirement** for all school buses to have three-point seat belts **does not apply** to a bus:

- If the board determines that the district's budget does not permit the district to purchase a bus that is equipped with the required seat belts, or
- For which the warranty would become void if the bus were equipped to comply with the law.

After a public presentation, if the HISD School Board determines that the district's budget does not allow for the purchase of new buses and retrofitting existing buses, HISD may submit a report to TEA requesting an exemption from SB 546 on or before May 29, 2026.

### HISD School Buses: Current State

Headlines-

- HISD currently owns 773 operational school buses, ranging in capacity from 9 to 81.
- The model year of operational buses ranges from 2006 to 2025.
- Of the 773 operational buses, 495 (64 percent) have seatbelts and 278 (36 percent) have no seatbelts.



The table below details the number of operational school buses, by range of model year and type of seat belt installed.

Model Year Range	Bus Capacity	3-Point Belts	Lap Belt or No Belt	Total Buses
2006–2010	<47	4	55	59
	65+	0	69	69
2011–2014	<47	0	16	16
	65+	1	50	51
2015–2016	<47	4	4	8
	65+	6	81	87
2017–2019	<47	21	0	21
	65+	126	3	129
2020–2023	<47	200	0	200
	65+	90	0	90
2024–2026	<47	27	0	27
	65+	16	0	16
<b>Totals</b>		<b>495</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>773</b>

**Cost for HISD to Comply with SB 546**

Headlines-

- It will cost HISD **\$29,093,000** to comply with SB 546.

Cost model assumptions:

- Buses with a model year of 2018 or later already have three-point seat belts (N=276)
- All buses with a model year of 2010 or earlier cannot have three-point belts installed and must be replaced (N= 124)
  - The cost to replace buses with a capacity of 65 or greater is \$165k for a new 71 passenger bus
  - The cost to replace buses with a capacity of 47 or less is \$156k for a new 29 passenger bus with a wheelchair lift
- Buses made by Bluebird with a model year of 2011 to 2017 cannot have three-point belts installed and must be replaced (N= 28)



- Buses made by International or Thomas with a model year of 2011 to 2017 will have three-point seatbelts installed (N=128). The average cost for retrofitting is \$38k for a full-size bus and \$24k for a specialized bus.

#### Cost Model

	Bus Type	Unit Price	Number of Units	Total Cost
<b>Replace</b>	Full Size	165,000	97	\$16,005,000
	Specialized	156,000	55	\$8,580,000
<b>Retrofit</b>	Full Size	38,000	106	\$4,028,000
	Specialized	24,000	20	\$480,000
<b>Total Cost</b>				<b>\$29,093,000</b>

#### Recommendation

The District's budget does not permit it to invest over \$29M in new school buses and retrofitting current buses with three-point seat belts between now and the start of the 2026–2027 school year. Given this, the administration requests the School Board's permission to seek an exemption from SB 546. This item will be presented for a vote during the May 14, 2026, HISD Board Meeting.