

LD 2114, currently in the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, will expand public preschools to include 3-year-olds beginning in the 2026-27 school year (4-year-olds have been eligible since 2015-2016). Federal safety experts, including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, Maine Department of Education, and National Congress on School Bus Transportation all recommend that preschool-aged children be transported in appropriate child safety restraint systems (CSRS) on school buses, but currently there is no clear guidance for local school districts on how to properly and safely transport our youngest students. Headstart Preschool programs, funded with Federal funds, require the use of CSRS and bus aids when transporting; recommendations are based on extensive research demonstrating that restraints significantly reduce the risk of injury and death in the event of a crash or sudden maneuver.

Pre-kindergarten children are developmentally and physically different from older students, and school transportation policies must reflect those differences, just as educational strategies do. Allowing Pre-K children to ride unrestrained on school buses places them at unnecessary and preventable risk. The use of CSRS for Pre-K riders is not simply a preference, it is a critical safety necessity.

Large school buses are equipped with a built-in restraint system, Compartmentalization, that is designed to protect passengers, who are over 50 lbs, much in the way an egg carton protects the eggs we purchase at the grocery store. Compartmentalization was designed for children who are tall enough, heavy enough, and developmentally able to sit upright with their backs against the seat and feet on the floor. Younger, smaller children lack the maturity and physical requirements to safely rely on compartmentalization. Pre-K children often cannot maintain a proper seating position for the duration of a bus ride. They may lean forward, twist, stand, or slide off seats—behaviors that are developmentally normal but dangerous in a moving vehicle. Their smaller bodies, weaker neck muscles, and higher center of gravity make them far more vulnerable to head, neck, and spinal injuries during sudden stops, sharp turns, or crashes. A CSRS provides the necessary support to keep a child properly positioned and protected, just as it does in passenger vehicles.

We already recognize the necessity of child safety restraints everywhere else in a child's life. For most of us, it is unthinkable to transport a Pre K student in a car without a car seat or harness, yet school buses—vehicles that carry our most vulnerable passengers—are often exempt. This inconsistency sends a confusing message that safety standards can be lowered simply because transportation is provided by a school.

Beyond crash protection, CSRS also improve everyday safety and driver focus. When children are properly restrained, drivers are less likely to be distracted by children standing, moving, or falling from seats. This creates a safer environment for all passengers on the bus, including other students and the driver.

Pre-K children cannot advocate for themselves. They rely on adults, school systems, and policymakers to make decisions that prioritize their safety. Requiring CSRS and aids on school buses for Pre-School students is a reasonable, evidence-based, and morally responsible action. Many districts argue they cannot hire enough drivers it is unreasonable to hire aides, but RSU 57 and Saco school district for example have been able to do this. Protecting children should never depend on age thresholds, convenience, or cost—especially when proven solutions already exist.

Ultimately, this is not just about Pre Schoolers, this is about protecting students with disabilities as well, those that are using CSRS are often being used incorrectly. School Departments are required to provide students with disabilities transportation to and from school, yet may do so without proper training on the use of the CSRS's required to do so safely and properly.

Corey and I have assisted several districts since the beginning of the 2025-26 school year and offered the National Child Passenger Safety on School Bus Training which focuses on Pre K and CSRS for students with disabilities three times in 2026, what we have found is alarming. There is widespread unintended misuse of CSRS: drivers are unknowingly using bus only CSRS in vans or not using CSRS properly or not securing the students at all. The School Departments have not been educated on how best to transport their tiniest students. Maine law requires proper use of CSRS per manufacture instructions, so misuse is a violation, but MDOE currently does not require any training.

In general, there is a lot of confusion around the Child Passenger Safety Laws, a couple examples:

Maine Law only exempts the large school buses; any other mode of transportation does require proper use of a CSRS under 55 pounds and many districts do not seem aware of this.

Maine Law requires seatbelts use if they are present, many transportation departments are not aware of this law.

Most attendees of our classes were SRO's who are interested in learning more to support their district because they are concerned about what they are seeing on buses. Most are either CPST already or are interested in becoming one this summer. I do think we will see an increase in enforcement in the next couple of years. Unfortunately, the way the law is currently written liability falls on the driver and the decisions are often made by a Superintendent or a Special Education director this may also impact retention and recruitment of drivers.

[Guideline for the Safe Transportation of Pre-school Age Children in School Buses](#)

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