

This announcement courtesy of the Pennsylvania School Bus Association: PennDOT Issues Statement on Driver Barriers

Many questions have been asked about the potential of installing driver barriers for school bus drivers prior to the reopening of school. Following a review of several suggested products, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) issued a statement this week that it will not be approving internal barriers for school buses at this time.

According to PennDOT, it is unclear whether any research has been done as to the effectiveness of these types of products against COVID-19 while not jeopardizing the safety and integrity of the school bus. For instance, the barriers reviewed by PennDOT do not meet flammability standards found in FMVSS No. 302, and PennDOT has concerns as to whether they would interfere with the design of the occupant protection system school buses are required to have per FMVSS 222.

Additionally, PennDOT stated that these products would create interior protrusions at the attachment points, which in the event of a rollover could pose severe additional safety concerns, and they do not meet the requirements found in Title 67, Chapter 171.58 relating to the interior of a school bus. PennDOT expressed additional concerns related to evacuations and whether these barriers impact the driver's ability to maintain clear visibility of bus occupants.

Therefore, at this time, PennDOT will not support changing the regulations to allow for the installation of internal school bus barriers. However, should anyone come forward with additional research on these types of products that demonstrate their effectiveness, PennDOT will review and also pass along to the Department of Health for their review.

PennDOT noted that its area of expertise is in the vehicles safety, and they will defer all health recommendations for school bus operations to the PA Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). Further, PennDOT encouraged all school bus companies and school districts to follow the current guidance provided by the CDC and the PA Department of Health.