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BUY BONDS

Are your school buses safe?

Parents and community leaders will want to check



these recommendations against the vehicles their children ride.

by Jerry Klein

AMERICAN YOUTH nowadays goes to school on wheels! What with the growth of suburbs and the consolidation of school districts, some 11 million children need transportation to get to and from class. They represent about a third of our total school enrollment—a tremendous twice-a-day surge onto the nation's highways—yet school-bus accidents have been kept miraculously low. Still, seven youngsters lost their lives riding school buses last year. This compares with 70 passengers killed in commercial bus mishaps.

Making school transportation even safer is a matter for joint action by bus manufacturers, drivers, school boards, parents, and the children themselves. Studies show that only 7 percent of accidents are due to mechanical failures. Almost every state has minimum construction standards for school buses and even greater protection can be assured if communities look for certain built-in safety features.

For instance, experts say that the ideal school bus should have at least one emergency door, wide windshields with low-cut corners to avoid blind spots, curved rear-view windows, proper heating and ventilation. Other recommendations: an outside metal guard-rail the entire length of the bus to give extra cushioning at the heart level of young passengers, plenty of room for the driver, and enclosure of the door-operating mechanism in an accessible compartment which will remain free from ice, rust, and accidental damage.

In Towanda, Pa., people still talk about the "miracle" in which a school bus dropped 65 feet through a bridge floor, yet 43 children escaped uninjured. The bus body remained intact, apparently because of the way it had been constructed.

School officials should see that buses are inspected regularly. Road conditions and safe driving practices also need periodic scrutiny by responsible authorities.

Two-thirds of our states require annual

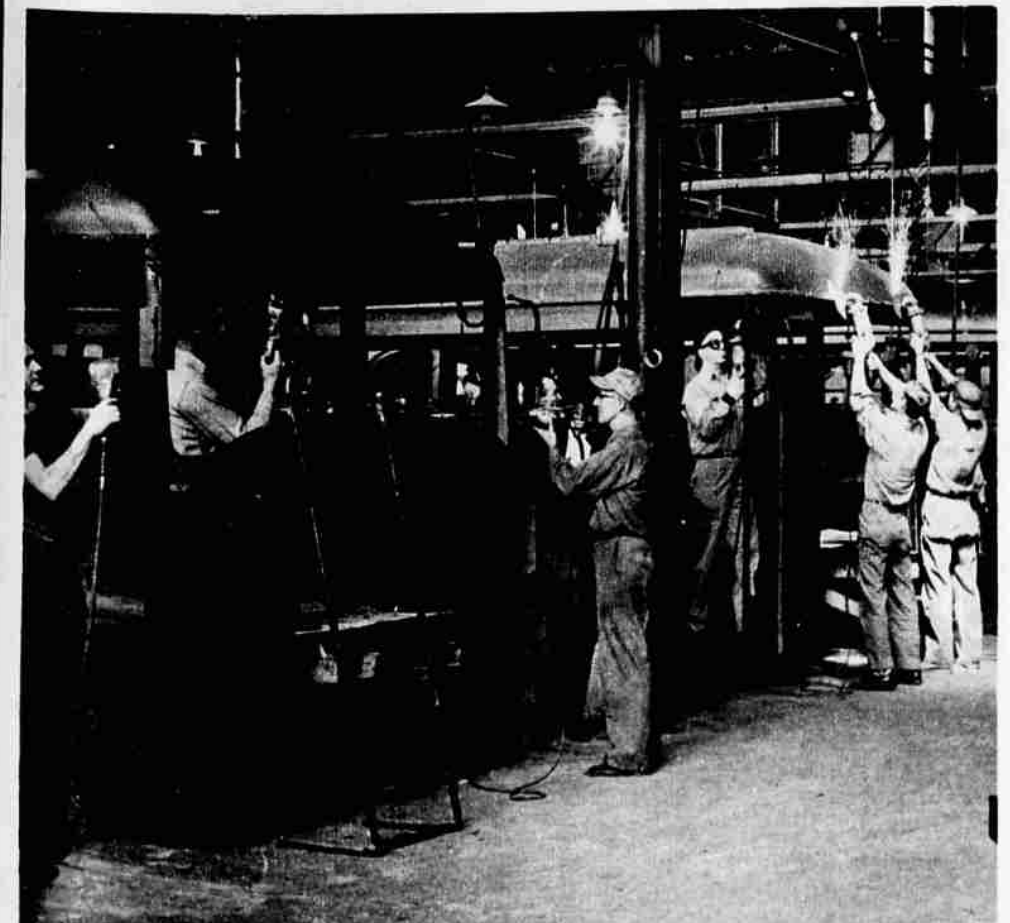
medical examinations for those who operate school buses. Besides being physically fit and technically able, however, drivers should also have a responsible attitude toward their jobs and be able to maintain good relationships with both the school children and their teachers.

Pupils should be taught the importance of discipline and good conduct on the road, transportation experts point out. Some schools assign seats in vehicles and use monitors to keep order.

Others stage regular drills emphasizing the best way to leave the bus in case of trouble. Students are assigned responsibility for opening emergency exits.

Although "standees" in moving vehicles are outlawed by most states, rising enrollments sometimes result in crowded school buses. The buses may be engineered to protect seated passengers, but standees run a greater risk of injury. One way to eliminate overcrowding, at least temporarily, is to use one bus on several routes, carrying only the recommended number of children each time.

Parents should warn their offspring to remain on the sidewalk after leaving a bus until it is safe to cross. Children should also be taught to cross in front of the bus in full view of the driver and of oncoming traffic. In all these ways, our children can be assured of rolling along to school in safety.



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