**Current SBE Policy on School Bus Alterations and Modifications per the NC Bus Fleet Manual:**

*“…no school bus is to be altered in appearance, color, lettering, or equipment unless authorized by the Department of Public Instruction, Transportation Services Section. It is permissible to update older model school buses to the current year school bus specifications. Any safety item included in the most recent issue of the North Carolina School Bus Specifications may be added. However, the items must be of the same model and type of material as described in the specifications and also installed in the manner described in the specifications.”*

The fleet manual does also have a list of additional items which are permitted on school buses, but states that *“Other safety or cost efficiency items not included in the school bus specifications may be installed on school buses. However, Transportation Services must receive a written request and approval granted prior to actual installation on a bus. Any item added would be considered a pilot test”*

**To effectively administrate this policy, the following procedures with regard to pilot tests will commence with all future pilot projects. Currently outstanding pilot tests may be wrapped in at some point in the future. These procedures will assure that new products are properly evaluated, and that pilot tests can proceed forward with the potential for approval or denial statewide, rather than indefinite testing.**

No additional technology, product, or vehicle equipment shall be installed in any North Carolina School Bus unless it is approved by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Transportation Services Section (the “department”).

For pilots of an item more integral to the vehicle, such as an engine or transmission, which are unable to be removed easily, terms must be determined in advance of the purchase of the vehicle.

A pilot test for the purpose of evaluating the performance of the new technology, product or vehicle component (“evaluated item”) may be conducted by request of the LEA and at the direction of the department. Initial statewide tests shall include at least five, but not more than forty, units, and no more than ten in any single LEA unless circumstances warrant. Further restrictions may be placed depending on the evaluated item. The locations evaluated items are placed, the evaluation period, and the methodology as well as the data gathering requirements are to be mutually agreed upon by the department, the LEA, and the manufacturer or provider of the product (“the company”) in advance of any installation. LEAs wishing to participate in the pilot test must agree to the project parameters.

The cost of the evaluated item and its installation shall be the responsibility of the company or, at the LEA’s discretion, the LEA.

Any LEA that wishes to participate in a pilot is required to receive written permission from the department prior to installation. All participating LEAs shall give a written quarterly report to the department on the project. At least one LEA representative with in-depth knowledge of the pilot project must be available to speak at the North Carolina School Bus Specifications Committee meetings to answer questions from the committee. The company must provide a quarterly report to the department to include any changes, upgrades, issues or other pertinent information regarding the evaluated item and its current pilot status.

To assure that the installation of the evaluated item is acceptable and does not present an immediate safety concern, the initial installation of the evaluated item, on at least one vehicle, shall be done in consultation with one or more staff of the department. If the construction of the different vehicles in the pilot warrants, staff of the department may need to be present at other installations or may provide written parameters.

The department will maintain records of the buses involved in any ongoing official pilots. Unsanctioned pilots of equipment may result in the vehicle or vehicles being removed from service.

**Evaluation and Project Termination:**

The following conditions are necessary to assure safe transportation of students. No technology which will negatively impact overall safety will be considered.

**The technology, equipment or component**

1. shall not compromise the effectiveness or integrity of any major safety system, unless it completely replaces the system (e.g. compartmentalization, the eight-lamp warning system, emergency exits, etc.).
2. shall not diminish the safe environment of the interior of the bus.
3. shall not create additional risk to students who are boarding or exiting the bus or are in or near the school bus loading zone.
4. shall not create undue additional activity or responsibility for the driver.
5. shall not generally decrease the safety or efficiency of the bus.
6. shall generally provide for a safer or more pleasant experience for the occupants and pedestrians near the bus, assist the LEA transportation department, and/or enhance the driver's ability to perform his/her job.

An evaluation of the product’s performance shall be conducted by the department, and, if, in the opinion of the department, the product is determined to meet the criteria listed in a. through f. above, measures shall be taken to formally approve the product for installation. An evaluated item which is approved for general use will be placed on the list of approved items in the fleet manual at its next revision, or, if necessary, into the next issuance of the North Carolina School Bus Specifications.

An evaluated item not recommended for approval by the department shall immediately be removed from vehicles upon which the pilot tests were being conducted; and its use shall be discontinued by schools or individuals serving as pilot test sites, upon receipt of written notice from the department.

The department or the LEA, at their discretion, can terminate the pilot of an evaluated item at any point by issuing written notice to the company, and copying the Section Chief for the department. In such an instance, the company shall retrieve their installed equipment and return the vehicle to its original condition within 30 days of written notification.