

According to the company's Web site, school buses will be equipped -- free -- with custom-designed equipment that will carry the company's proprietary programs. It is unclear whether the school systems will also be paid for broadcasting BusRadio. In an hour's broadcast, 44 minutes will be devoted to music and news, six minutes to public-safety announcements, two to contests and eight to advertising. On most commercial radio stations, there is usually 10 to 12 minutes, sometimes more, of advertising. BusRadio says pilot tests have shown that students behave better when its programs are on. Noise is reduced, and students are more likely to remain in their seats and more willing to follow school rules, according to the Web site. "Drivers used BusRadio as a behavioral tool. . . . If kids misbehaved, they lost the privilege of listening to the show," the Web site said.

BusRadio said that in test runs, its commercials were effective in attracting kids' attention. The WB network, for example, wanted to promote its television shows to kids. Print ads could reach the right audience but perhaps not on the day that the shows were to be broadcast. Commercial radio could do that, but it was considered inefficient for the youngest of viewers because kids "tend to turn the station when the ads begin." WB tried BusRadio, running the promotions on the days the shows were scheduled to air and broadcasting more ads during the students' ride home "so they could reinforce the message to watch that night."

"It's a pretty clever concept," particularly because the company is using the issue of child safety to promote the concept, said Paul Kurnit, head of KidShop, a New York marketing firm that advises food companies on promoting products to children...

BusRadio says on its Web site that its service is an improvement over what students hear if a bus driver listens to AM or FM radio. "It is virtually impossible to listen to commercial radio for 30 minutes without being offended by a song's lyrics or DJ's talk. . . . BusRadio entertains the students while virtually eliminating the concerns of inappropriate music, DJ talk and commercials."

Linda Farbry, director of transportation for Fairfax County public schools, said its buses are equipped with AM/FM radios precisely for students. "If they listen to music, they are controlled and quiet. . . . Some of these trips are long, and we want kids to do something other than pick on other kids."...