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“FTS has always provided our district with great support, whether it is training, parts, service or warranty.”
Rick McBride | Director of Transportation | Pinellas County Schools

“Any time there is an issue they jump right on it. They treat you like you are their only customer.”
Charles Aquino | Supervisor of Fleet Services | Seminole County Public Schools

“Competitive pricing, outstanding customer service from time of purchase throughout the life of the bus and the positive reviews of the bus drivers...brings us back year after year...”
Richard Duckworth | Transportation Director | Charlotte County Public Schools
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Cover image courtesy: Smart Horizons – School Training Systems
It's time to chalk up another successful school year! As you all know, each year is different, full of surprises and challenges, but one thing is for sure: the professionalism displayed by each of you. I think it's important for all of us, as we reflect back on the school years, to remind ourselves why we do what we do each day. For some, it is a paycheck and for others, our profession and what it means to the people we serve. We all have horror stories to talk about, or could dwell on the issues we had to deal with or still deal with. What we need to reflect on are the positive situations from the past school year, and build upon those stories that tell the community how important we really are to the success of our school districts.

At the end of each school year, I reflect to see if our goals were met and where we fell short. We look at all the shortcomings to consider where we can improve. As transportation providers, we all have some common issues: student discipline, dealing with angry parents, doing more with less and seeing our budget dwindle away. Those are some of the tough challenges we face and work on building plans to improve on each year. I look at the turn-over rate for the department and see how well we are supporting our bus operators, attendants, mechanics and office staff. Ask yourself the question, Why do staff members leave the job? Oftentimes, the answer is simple: How were they supported by their supervisor? True success is if staff feels they are supported in their positions by the administration. The easy way to support your staff is to listen to the issues and work together to resolve their concerns. So, take the time out of your busy schedule, walk the hallways, just say hello and thank them for their support to your mission; you will be surprised how supported your staff will feel by this simple gesture.

On another note, I want to thank Ms. Kay Kanupp and Mr. Jamie Warrington for putting on the outstanding Lake Yale Conference this past March. The reviews from this event were outstanding. All the participants really enjoyed their time at the conference and took a wealth of knowledge to implement back at their district.

Many of you will be attending one or both FAPT summer events. June 17 – 20, the FAPT is putting on the Fleet Summer Workshop in Daytona Beach. This makes the third year that Daytona Beach has hosted the event. The reviews from this event were outstanding. All the participants really enjoyed their time at the conference and took a wealth of knowledge to implement back at their district.

We continue to focus on keeping the cost low while maintaining presentations at a very high level to ensure each participant receives maximum value for their school district's dollars.

I want to give a special thank you to all our vendor members—specifically the three Florida school bus suppliers who help immensely with sponsorships to all our FAPT events. On behalf of the FAPT, and our members, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to each of you for all of the time, effort and hard work you have invested in all our events. Thank you for sponsoring our workshops, mid-year Director’s Meeting and our annual Summer Symposium, and for showcasing and speaking to our members about your products and new technologies.

Finally, I say goodbye to you as your FAPT president. The past two years have passed so quickly, with many tasks still needing completion. During my tenure, we held two mechanic workshops, two mid-year director meetings and two summer symposiums. Our FAPT committees have completed many tasks, including a best practice for our FEFP reporting process. Without your drive for perfection, commitment to excellence and your membership, these tasks would have been left undone. Thank you for your support and I look forward to working with you all in the future.

Speaking of the future, you will be in great hands with Mr. Richard Duckworth, who takes over at the end of the 2013 Summer Symposium as president of the FAPT. Richard has been president-elect for the past two years and is eager to get started as your new president. I want to thank Richard for his support and willingness to tackle the tough jobs.

Where would the FAPT be without the dedicated support from our FDOE partners? I want to thank Mr. Charlie Hood and his professional transportation staff for working tirelessly to support all of our efforts day-in and day-out. Every time I have contacted them, they were always willing to assist in any way possible.

Most importantly, I thank you, our members. You are the reason we are here, and we are here to better serve our customers, the students, parents, district staff and our internal staff that are all part of this great transportation family. Thank you for being you and supporting the FAPT! That’s how we roll! Take care and be safe! *
"It never occurred to me when I was in college that I would end up being a ‘yellow bus’ guy," says the jovial Charlie Hood, director of school transportation for the Florida Department of Education. "But it worked out that way and I’ve been very grateful. It’s been an extremely rewarding career."

Indeed, Hood’s career journey to date has involved a few twists and turns along the way. Enrolling in the School of Education at Florida State University (FSU), he made the switch shortly thereafter to mechanics and began working at a friend’s Ford dealership. Eventually, the plan began to unfold for Hood in 1981 when he got the call from Florida State University to work on a contract developing an automotive mechanics curriculum for vocational students. The call from the Florida Department of Education (DOE) was not far behind.

“I guess Earl Wright and Larry McEntire, the leaders in DOE’s school transportation office at the time, had heard about my work at FSU and thought my combination of real-world mechanical experience and education background might be a good fit for their office,” recalls Hood, who at that time had seven years of auto-tech experience and had earned Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification as a master mechanic. “So I began working as a school bus maintenance specialist. Obviously I had a lot of learning to do, as I had never worked on a bus before, but I had great mentors.”

Once Hood entered the pupil transportation sector, he excelled—and fast. By 1989, he was promoted to his current position as director of student transportation, a role he has held ever since.

“IT’s been very interesting,” he says fondly of his time in the position. “No two days are the same.”

Hood’s 32 years with the Department of Education have brought with them many memorable moments, such as his work to develop school bus specifications for the safe transportation of students with disabilities. Starting in the early 1980s, he helped guide the FAPT School Bus Specifications Committee in developing and adopting some of the first state requirements for forward-facing wheelchair and occupant securement systems, which today is ubiquitous and a federal standard.

Thanks to Hood and his team, an official transportation manual and guideline was created on transporting preschool-age students. During his tenure, the DOE created a position dedicated to the transportation of students with disabilities, as well as preschoolers.

Additionally, many more unforgettable experiences have transpired through his involvement with the FAPT since he joined in 1981, the year he attended his first conference at the Sea Garden Hotel in Pompano Beach (which he labels “the best crash course” his boss could have given him). Hood is quick to note the local school bus inspectors’ certification program, which commenced in the early ‘90s, as one such experience. The voluntary program was made regulatory in 2000 thanks to the encouragement of the FAPT and the state’s school districts.

“I think it’s mutually beneficial,” Hood says of his relationship with the association. “Not only are we able to leverage a lot of our services by working with the FAPT, but the FAPT, I think, benefits from the institutional knowledge and the continuity of having a standing DOE board member.

“It’s a great organization. You don’t very often see government agencies that work as closely and are as much of a true partner with their clients as we are with the professionals that make up the FAPT.”
Jamie Warrington always knew he wanted to be a bus driver. In 1994, he realized his public service dream when the School District of Palm Beach County hired him to drive a school bus.

“I always wanted to be a school bus driver since I was a little boy. In Florida, you must have had a driver’s license for five years prior to becoming a school bus driver. So, here I couldn’t do it until I turned 21. After my 21st birthday, I was hired by the school district,” he recalls.

He worked his way up the ladder to a senior supervisory role in one of the county’s transportation facilities and in 2007, Warrington moved on to a state job as a school transportation specialist in the Florida Department of Education’s School Transportation Management section in Tallahassee.

Here, with three other department employees, he plays a key role in educating and supporting transportation professionals at all levels in Florida’s public school districts through conferences and meetings co-sponsored by the Florida Association for Pupil Transportation.

“We have our symposium every year that we do for transportation professionals at all levels and members of the FAPT. Usually, some of us in the office attend and present at these events,” he says.

“We also have our mid-year directors’ meeting; that is where transportation directors from all over the state are invited to Tallahassee for two and half days, and we talk about things that are coming on the horizon, such as the changes to medical examinations and legislative matters. We can give them guidance for the upcoming year on what projects and what priorities we want to work toward,” continues Warrington.

“Then, in March, we have our Leadership Conference for school bus driver trainers and entry to mid-level managers. It’s for those who train new bus drivers and retrain current bus drivers; we give them current resources, teaching techniques and a chance to network with other transportation professionals.”

The FAPT sponsors all three events, while the department provides the training support, guidance and a lot of the coordination.

Warrington and his coworkers also respond to individual queries from transportation officials and the public on a range of issues.

“We are a technical group,” explains Warrington. “If a school district wants to do something, but is not sure whether they can, or if it goes against best practices or violates state statutes, they will typically contact us for recommendations and guidance.”

His primary area of education is special needs transportation. He uses technology such as the Internet for group training and consults on a case-by-case basis so decisions can be made at the district level.

All this communication results in better ways to do things, which is the purpose of the conferences, says Warrington, who enjoys interacting with all the people he meets in his job.

“That’s the best part—the people I work with, we work very well together.”

In the end, it’s all in the interest of student safety.

“Myself and transportation professionals across the state take pride in the work that we do for thousands of students every day, and we do it relatively well—thanks to the collaboration between our office, the school districts and the FAPT.”
For the Kanupp family, driving bus is an inherent—and genuine—part of their DNA. Kay Kanupp, a second-generation bus operator from Volusia County, was inspired by her bus-driving mother to pursue the career. Not surprisingly, Kanupp’s own love of the trade has inspired a third generation of drivers, as her eldest son, Andy, has since taken to the family profession.

“My mother made it very, very interesting. She was involved with the kids on the bus,” Kanupp says of her entry into the profession. “And my son loves his bus. He drives everyday and he’s having more fun on that bus.”

It didn’t take long for Kanupp to find her career path. At 22, she was the youngest bus driver in Volusia County to drive bus—at that time, the age requirement was 25—and for the next eight years, she excelled on staff. After a brief hiatus from driving in the mid-’80s (when she worked in her mom’s restaurant), Kanupp decided to rededicate herself to her passion in pupil transportation. Contacting her past employer at Volusia County, she was promptly rehired and soon after promoted to dispatcher and third-party tester for the state.

In 1998, she earned the title of program specialist in Tallahassee, where she has worked for 15 years, training a total of 700-plus drivers and 400 commercial drivers’ licence (CDL) third-party testers.

“I’m excited everyday to be where I’m at,” boasts the mother of two, hinting that one day she would love to write a book. “I love what I do—it’s not a job. I love showing up everyday and I feel like I make a difference. I try to instill [in the trainees] that safety is number one—safety for every child, no matter who you are.”

Safety is indeed number one for Kanupp—one of the main reasons behind her long-standing involvement with the Florida Association for Pupil Transportation (FAPT) since 1998.

“I like the fact that I’m part of a group, part of the transportation family,” Kanupp says of her FAPT connection. “They’re just a good group that you can bond with, that have a lot of experience, that will talk with you—just a good group of people. They’re so much a part of my life.”

Today, Kanupp attentively teaches future classroom instructors and third-party commercial drivers’ license testers for school districts in Florida. But despite her many successes, driving a bus will always hold a special place in her heart.

“I do miss driving the bus,” she reminisces. “I felt like I changed the children’s lives everyday. You need to be and do the best you can. You need to make a difference in their lives everyday. Make that bus a happy place.”

In 1998, she earned the title of program specialist in Tallahassee, where she has worked for 15 years, training a total of 700-plus drivers and 400 commercial drivers’ licence (CDL) third-party testers.
Terri Egler is a woman who loves to challenge her comfort zone. In her spare time, the proud wife and mother of three is an avid camper and has been known to carry a tune or two as a beginner piano player and choir director for her church. But for the one-time teacher from Seminole County, her true life’s passion was uncovered only after relocating to Tallahassee in 1999; there she was able to integrate her love of children with her love of numbers.

“I love being a database administrator; that’s my forte,” says Egler, program specialist for the Florida Department of Education. “For me, it has extra emphasis if there’s some real service and meaningful content attached to it.”

As Egler reminisces, her first day on the job involved attending a Florida Association of Pupil Transportation (FAPT) event for service managers—and invariably the beginning of a long-standing relationship with the association. Over the years, this FAPT member has been actively involved with the association, even taking a seat on both the Inspection Committee and the Purchasing Committee.

“It was a natural fit,” says Egler of her FAPT involvement. “My job does involve coordinating the school bus purchasing contract; and then, of course, the inspection committee was something that came about in the last few years. But with the FAPT, there are several benefits. Being part of a group that gives information on a wide-spread basis … just being able to get on the FAPT website is a valuable resource. Without the FAPT, we could never put that information at the fingertips of those who need or want to know.”

During her time with the state’s Department of Education, Egler notes many career highlights, particularly her involvement with a team responsible for developing a new online bus inventory system. The system was designed to make data-entry easier for school districts from a state-wide perspective. Coincidentally, within a few months of rolling out the application, its necessity was reinforced.

“There was a recall for Carpenter school buses (some were subject to a roof collapse). It was a very big deal,” she recalls. “And because we had that data at our fingertips, I was able to run reports for all of the school districts so we could take very, very quick action on that matter. Subsequently, the team that built the application was nominated for and received the Davis Productivity Award in 2004.”

For Egler, it all starts and ends with transportation. Undoubtedly, this transportation specialist has found her niche.

“My job marries my love of administration with my passion for safety,” she says. “On one hand, I miss working with students, but on the other hand, I feel like I am an important part of what gets them to and from school safely.”

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SAFETY FIRST AND SAFETY LAST

By Jillian Mitchell
OZARK, Ala.—Nearly 30 school bus drivers and the director of transportation from Florida’s Escambia County School District drove to Alabama on Sunday, February 3rd to attend the funeral of a driver who was shot and killed while protecting his children on January 29th, 2013.

The Escambia transportation staff members boarded a school bus and headed to Ozark, where the funeral for Mr. Charles “Chuck” Poland was held. Their intention: giving their respect to a community and family who have lost one of their own.

It is a reflection on their character that they wanted to show respect to a school bus driver whom they have never met. The bus drivers said, “It is the right thing to do.” “He was one of us,” and, “We want to go to share condolences and respect.”

As they arrived at the service held for Mr. Poland, a state trooper said, “The Dale County school bus drivers would be honored to have you in the procession.” The Florida drivers were proud to be included. They didn’t come for that; they simply wanted to show their respect.

As they entered the building, the usher said, “Sit here.” They were seated in the section with the local drivers. They didn’t want to impose, but they were humbled that they were asked to sit there, with Mr. Poland’s school bus family. They really just wanted to show their respect.

During the service, they heard how kind Mr. Poland was—not only to his family and community, but to the students on his bus as well.

Three letters written by his students were read. They contained words like “love,” “kindness,” “caring,” “respect” and other such sentiments that spoke volumes as to the person their bus driver was to them. What resounded was the repeated statement that he taught them that these things are not just words, but important traits that they should have as well. The students on Mr. Poland’s school bus will never forget him.

One speaker stated that Mr. Poland would reject being called a hero. He was a simple man who didn’t wear a tie, who drank coffee with his wife every morning after his run, all the while talking about how much he cared for and loved his students.

All who spoke of Mr. Poland said that it was no surprise that he put himself between the children and the gunman. He did not “flinch in the face of adversity.”

The school bus drivers from Florida said, “Mr. Poland is a hero.”

In the procession, the Florida bus followed the Dale County buses throughout the town. About every quarter of a mile, there was a school bus parked, lights flashing, drivers and students standing with their hands over their hearts. The Florida bus was silent, with quiet tears and the knowledge that they are a part of a calling that is bigger than they could have ever imagined.

As the drivers from Escambia County School District left Ozark, Ala., they reflected on the words, sights and thoughts they had shared with the loved ones of Mr. Charles “Chuck” Poland. They had traveled to pay respects to the family of a fallen comrade, knowing that this tragic event could have happened to any one of them, at any time, on any yellow bus, in any school district.

However, they left with the respect of people who had never met them, because they were school bus drivers, too.

No matter what part of the school bus industry you are in, you are part of the respected calling to protect the most important cargo that America transports: the nation’s children. You are valuable and important to the students. You are respected. You directly or indirectly touch the lives of the students who ride school buses.

On Monday, February 4th in Ozark, Ala., and Pensacola, Fla., school bus drivers cranked up the big, yellow buses and drove routes to pick up their students—with a little piece of Mr. Poland’s brave, kind and caring legacy riding with them.

About the Author
Lori Riddles is special-needs route manager for Escambia County School District in Pensacola, Fla.
What does a word that sounds like the name of a sub-deity from Greek mythology have to do with managing your school bus fleet? Before you answer “nothing,” read on.

The word we are talking about is “telematics.” (It does sound Greek mythology-like, doesn’t it?) Telematics, according to Wikipedia, is “any integrated use of telecommunications and informatics.” Not feeling terribly enlightened yet? Let’s simplify it a bit and focus on vehicles. (That’s where managing your school bus fleet comes in.)

Telematics describes the integration of vehicle-based hardware (for example, a Global Positioning System and a cellular communication unit) to transmit real-time data to a remote location for instant collection, processing, and subsequent transmission of actionable information (not data; there’s a significant difference between data and information) to decision-makers.

While your personal GPS is a great tool, it provides you with “in the moment” feedback on where you are; it does not tell you where you were an hour ago or two weeks ago. It does not measure your idling time and vehicle emissions, maintain a maintenance history of your vehicle, or track the comings and goings of the passengers in your car or van. It certainly does not provide you with the tools to inspect your car before you take a trip.

A comprehensive telematics product enables you to do all of these things and much more. Baltimore County, Maryland, covers 610 square miles of suburban and rural communities and virtually encircles Baltimore City. The county’s school bus system is a mix of 880 publicly owned and maintained route buses and 81 contractor-operated buses. Each day, the Office of Transportation’s school buses transport approximately 70,000 students to 173 schools (not including privately operated special needs schools, some of which are located in other school districts), traveling 14 million miles each year and making 18,000 stops.

As with any school bus program, our transportation mission includes four elements:

- Safely transport students to and from school and extracurricular events.
- Operate efficiently and within budget.
- Support the instructional mission by delivering students to school ready to learn.
- Provide responsive customer service.

A tall order indeed.

As budgets continued to shrink and demand for transportation for displaced students, special needs students, and students in magnet school and alternative education programs increased, the Office of Transportation decided that business as usual was not a viable option and began to look for technology solutions to ensure the district would still be able to accomplish its four-fold mission.

This article details the process we went through to find a telematics product that was within our financial means and addressed our operational needs, how we implemented a pilot program at one of our 11 bus lots, and the benefits we have realized.

The Wish List

Our first step was to assess our needs and identify desirable improvements to our business practices: a wish list.

In actuality, this is a fairly easy process when management consults with those who deal daily with school bus maintenance, scheduling problems, parents, and principals concerned about “late” buses, students getting on the wrong bus or getting off at the wrong stop, complaints about speeding, and so much more.

After we completed this analysis, we knew we needed to exercise due diligence in identifying an affordable product that addresses all or most of these needs. This can be done by meeting vendors at conferences, contacting them directly to make presentations to your school system (why not invite the fiscal staff to attend), or contacting school districts that already are using telematics products.

We were fortunate that a neighboring school system had been using such a product for several years. We met with their district officials several times, including meeting them on-site to watch the product in action, talk to the users, and generally learn from their experiences.

When we were satisfied that their
A system that enables management to know the whereabouts of a bus (and its driver), where it has been (maybe off-route?), or if the bus has been speeding or arriving late at a stop, could be perceived as a “Big Brother” style threat. To counteract that possibility, we made the effort to let everyone know the capabilities of the equipment being installed on their buses and inform them that, yes, it would be used to monitor their performance but, more important for them, it would be used to support them when we received unfounded complaints about late buses.

We selected a small cadre of drivers for the initial training in the hope they would buy into the new program and serve as mentors for other drivers as they were trained. Fortunately, these drivers recognized the program’s positive aspects and became solid supporters of the bus lot.

Telematics in Action

So, what exactly did we buy? How does telematics improve our transportation program in Baltimore County? How does it support student safety, encourage efficiency, support the instructional mission, and enhance customer service?

Our bus drivers now conduct electronic signature verified, pre- and post-trip inspections using a handheld device that provides them with a customized drop-down menu of possible defects in each of eight inspection zones on the bus. When an inspection is completed, all identified problems are instantly transmitted via cellular link to the maintenance shop and become part of the permanent record for that bus. It is important to note that all data and information are stored off-site by the vendor—no school system technological support or hardware is needed for any of the applications.

We can monitor idling times and dramatically reduce fuel costs.

We also have the capability to examine, on a daily basis or over a period of time, the duration of the inspections and a history of all the defects identified. The bottom line is that managers are able to ensure that mandatory inspections are done and done well, all from their offices. Ultimately, on-the-road breakdowns are reduced and more costly repairs are avoided when inspections are thorough and conducted on a regular basis.

Baltimore County’s system provides multiple reports and actionable information that district officials can use for effective fleet management. We are able to identify the location of a bus in real-time—not a big deal in the GPS world—but also are able to find out where it was yesterday, and the day before, and the days before that.

Through the use of geo-fences (around a bus lot, for example), we can track the arrivals, departures, and stay times for any bus entering that zone. Or we can create geographic zones that can be used to audit how long a bus remained in a particular zone—information that is invaluable if you are trying to create scheduling efficiencies.

We know the average, maximum, and minimum amount of time to complete a route, or the average, maximum, and minimum route miles traveled over a time period that we select. It’s an easy way to audit contractor invoices.

Questions about which buses have not left the bus lot in the morning can be answered with a quick click of the mouse button by the dispatcher. We can monitor idling times and dramatically reduce fuel costs. That information for an individual bus or for all of our fleet is available and the wasted fuel costs and emissions can be computed for us.

Such an array of readily accessible information is an invaluable tool in providing prompt and informative customer service. Questions about when a bus arrived at a bus stop (was it late today or is it consistently late?) or when it left (did it leave early?) can be answered immediately by anyone who has access to the information. If the bus is on time, complaints about chronic lateness can be refuted with hard facts. If valid, corrective actions are legitimate.
Our office staff now is better able to respond to questions about late buses.

Citizen complaints about speeding buses can be evaluated readily and the driving habits of drivers can be monitored over any given period of time and at any location. No more supervisors’ time spent “staking out” a street to validate traffic safety complaints.

Our office staff is now better able to respond to questions about late buses and we have the capability to give user permission to principals or other school personnel to access information about the current location of buses that serve their students.

Finally, options are available to use radio-frequency identification cards to record when a student boards and leaves a bus—invaluable information when seeking Medicaid reimbursement or trying to determine when a student got off at the wrong bus stop.

Can It Get Better?

What does the future hold for us? Integrating the employee pay process or designing routes with telematics? Performance metrics for vehicles and personnel? Preventive diagnostics that will alert a maintenance shop that a bus might have a serious equipment failure in the next 1,000 miles? Data mining and risk analysis that will identify a driver who drives too fast or brakes too hard?

To paraphrase an old rock song—the future’s so bright that you’ve got to wear shades. Our suggestion is to get in on it.

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So, What’s the Difference?

You wouldn’t call an apple an orange, would you? True, both are fruit, but clearly there is a difference. The same is true for a Cummins ReCon™ engine. While you have many options for a replacement engine, only a Cummins ReCon™ offers the best warranty in the business. Our ReCon™ engines are remanufactured to the latest Cummins specifications for the performance, fuel economy and reliability you need. Plus each engine is built with 100% Genuine Cummins parts for the highest quality and durability.

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*Second year covers block only

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Cummins Power South is the official distributor for all Cummins engines, generators and parts in Florida and Georgia.
With Florida’s 2,786 miles of railroads and 1,268 public highway-rail crossings, our school bus drivers routinely make decisions about crossing tracks with students aboard. You needn’t look far to find cases in which drivers fail to stop—at least 15 feet from the nearest rail by state law, look—in both directions along the track while at a complete stop, and listen—for any approaching trains or for signals indicating a train is coming. But the cost of these risks and the consequences of being even just a few seconds off are too high.

The Numbers. Florida has the unfortunate distinction of ranking among the top states for collisions at highway-rail grade crossings. In 2012, 57 crashes happened. That’s roughly three percent of all rail-crossing collisions in the United States. We also ranked fifth in the nation for the number of
people (13) who died as a result of an incident at a rail crossing. We ranked fifth again for number of people injured at a rail crossing (40).

The Resources. Operation Lifesaver exists to drive home the message that the most important safety device on any school bus is you, the school bus driver. Transporting our children back and forth to school is not only one of your most important assignments as a professional driver, but it’s also a public trust. So when you’ve got a decision to make about a rail crossing, the buck stops with you and lives are at stake.

That’s why we’ve created “Drive Smart, Arrive Safe,” a video training course produced in cooperation with the pupil transportation industry and the U.S. Department of Transportation. It offers a no-nonsense and candid view of the taken-for-granted and surprising dangers that exist at rail crossings. It also describes step-by-step what drivers should do at rail crossings and in special-case scenarios. [To order a copy of “Drive Smart, Arrive Safe,” visit http://oli.org/education-resources/store.]

We’ve also got a great interactive game available for free. It’s called the “Money Taxi Quiz Show.” It’s like the reality show, but instead of a taxi, it’s all about you as a bus driver answering questions related to safety at highway-rail intersections. You can play it solo or with teams. Visit the School Bus Drivers’ section of our website (www.oli.org/training/school-bus-drivers) to download the game. You’ll also find additional materials that can help increase awareness of safety around trains for you and your colleagues.

Most important are the human resources we have around the state. Headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, Operation Lifesaver serves as an active and passionate team of volunteers who are ready to be resources to school bus drivers. Visit FloridaOL online at www.floridaol.org or call 850-414-4218 for more information.

The Challenge. Rail traffic in Florida is increasing. New passenger-rail services are coming to the Orlando area and along the Florida East Coast line on the new “All Aboard Florida” service from Orlando to Miami. This is a crucially important time to refocus on school bus safety around rail crossings. When so many drivers and even pedestrians cross over tracks without a second thought, it’s easy to drift into the habit of a simple visual check. Don’t let it happen and challenge your colleagues to avoid making this mistake, too.

About the Author

Joyce Rose is president and CEO of Operation Lifesaver, Inc. For more information, visit us on the web at www.oli.org and join our online communities on Facebook (facebook.com/operation.lifesaver), Twitter (twitter.com/olinational) and Pinterest (pinterest.com/olinational/).

Operation Lifesaver’s Recommended Safety Tips for School Bus Drivers
[Check with your local school transportation director for your specific policies and regulations.]

1. Slow down. Test your brakes and activate your four-way hazard lights about 200 feet before the crossing. (If your vehicle has a manual transmission, downshift before you cross.)

2. Check for traffic around you. Make sure your intentions to stop are clear. Use a pull-out lane if one is available. Flashers, if necessary.

3. Prepare the bus: Put the transmission in neutral, press down on the service brake or set the parking brakes (depending on your district’s policy). Turn off the AM/FM radio and all other noisy equipment; ask passengers for quiet.

4. Stop where you have the best view of the tracks, no closer than 15 feet and no farther than 50 feet from the nearest rail. Check beyond the tracks for traffic congestion, a signal or stop sign. Be certain the containment area across the tracks is large enough to hold the entire bus, plus 15 feet.

5. Open the service door and driver’s window. Look and listen for an approaching train in both directions. Proceed only after checking the crossing signals.

6. GO. When certain that no train is approaching on any track, do not hesitate. Cross in low gear and do not change gears while crossing.

Download these tips in a handy guide and share it with your friends: http://oli.org/training/safety-tips-for-school-bus-drivers.
Students in schools are subject to numerous vulnerabilities. School personnel need to be concerned with their vulnerability both inside and outside school buses. Extremists or terrorists may be more interested in getting media attention by inflicting mass casualties rather than by attacking critical infrastructure, so students on school buses may become ideal targets. As a result, protecting the safety of students while in school and on school buses is a top priority.

Why School Facilities and School Buses are Vulnerable

Schools have been designed to be warm, parent-accessible structures that provide a sense of community to the district with few restrictions for access. They run on set schedules with large numbers of people in a concentrated area, and they typically do not have a heightened sense of security so vehicles or people moving around school sites do not trigger a cause for concern.

School bus facilities, while not as accessible as schools, are still generally not restricted locations and so may provide ease-of-access that makes them vulnerable to attacks. Security at school bus facilities is generally minimal, with parking lots unlocked or not monitored on a full-time basis.

Additionally, both buses and schools run on highly publicized schedules, which add to their lack of security and make them more vulnerable in our society.

Four-Stage Approach to Prevention

(1) One of the easiest prevention measures for school buses is to expand normal pre- and post-trip inspections. Pre- and post-trip inspections are the most effective security programs to prevent threats. All bus drivers should perform pre-trip inspections anytime they are away from the bus for a period of time.

(2) Additionally, drivers should always practice good housekeeping. They should pick up after every run and keep the bus clean enough that they can easily detect unusual objects. Housekeeping missteps, as shown in the bus on the next page, make it harder to detect potentially dangerous objects.

Pre-trip inspections are designed to counteract potential threats and ensure student safety go beyond making sure the bus is mechanically sound. They are designed to find explosives on the bus by performing a thorough under the bus inspection, including wheel wells, exhaust system, fuel/air tanks, areas around the battery box and electrical panel; thoroughly checking for new wires or devices under the hood; and looking inside the bus, under the dash, and inside the bulkheads for any new packages, backpacks, or boxes.

(3) The next step is to harden the bus storage facility to external threat. This includes fencing the facility, keeping private cars out of the bus parking area, and restricting and/or monitoring all entrances and exits. Additional consideration should be given to active monitoring of the bus parking area and increasing overall visibility by creating sight-lines down parking lot aisles, trimming shrubs to allow visibility and deter intruders, and maintaining adequate lighting to make activity after dark visible.

(4) The final step is to implement procedures and training programs in order to detect and prevent terrorism attacks. Continuous training in terrorism awareness and how to mitigate potential threats should be the norm. This develops a safety culture not only to reduce accidents, but also to prevent crisis incidents through awareness.

Crisis Preparedness

Exercises help save lives and minimize damage by preparing people to respond appropriately when an emergency is imminent. Preparedness includes planning to respond when an emergency or disaster occurs and working to increase resources available to respond effectively. It also supports local, regional, and statewide emergency preparedness and response activities.

Schools should know about weapons and explosive devices. Knowledge about how a weapon or device looks and what it can do will lead to decisions about evacuation or shelter-in-place plans and how they need to be adjusted.

It is recommended that schools participate in “Table Top Drills” at least two times per year to plan an emergency response. They
should implement Operational Readiness Inspections (ORIs) to practice actual emergency situations and work cooperatively with local law enforcement to practice counter-terrorism tactics.

Crisis Response

Response activities occur during or immediately following a disaster and are intended to provide immediate emergency assistance. Response efforts also are designed to minimize secondary loss or damage and expedite recovery. Schools should typically follow the incident command system format used by emergency responders across the country.

The incident command system follows a similar four-stage system as outlined in this article for school bus safety. The system has an organization chart, a definition of “action levels” and how they are implemented, an outline of the expected sequence of actions before, during and after the emergency, and directions as to who will coordinate directly with emergency response teams.

In the incident command structure, every district’s transportation department should have an evacuation plan and map for every building in the district. The map should show the primary emergency loading and unloading area, as well as alternative loading areas if the primary is compromised.

Crisis Recovery

Recovery involves short-term and long-term actions needed to recover from a crisis. This includes assessing damage to coordinate potential state and federal disaster assistance. This phase also considers the human component of an event, and may require crisis counseling.

Schools manage small-scale crisis counseling on a continuous basis. Large-scale events may require significant outside resources. Planning for large-scale events will expedite the process, should it occur, and can speed the healing process over the long term. *
The Alabama Department of Education (ALDOE) has experienced a significant challenge from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) about state oversight to ensure that the provision of special needs transportation throughout the state does not result in a shortened school day for students with disabilities. When OCR identified four districts that violated students’ rights, ALDOE conducted its own review of districts not studied by OCR and required corrective action from six districts found to have provided shortened school days for some students with disabilities.

An October 2012 “Disability Rights Enforcement Highlights” report from OCR refers to this statewide investigation and no other, leading me to believe that, at least for now, OCR’s involvement in a state-wide concern about shortened school day has been limited to Alabama. However, “shortened school day” is one of those perennial issues that consistently crops up across the nation, and it won’t surprise me at all to have other southeastern states come under the federal microscope.

A June 2011 case demonstrates that Florida may be vulnerable to such concerns. In the case, a parent of a student in the Pasco County School District complained that her son and other students with disabilities were denied a FAPE when they were dismissed 10 to 15 minutes earlier than students in regular education classes.

In prior years, an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) memorandum was sent from the ESE and Transportation administrators which stated: “The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has required that school districts provide compensatory instructional services for students with disabilities who have lost instructional time due to being taken to the bus-loading area before the end of the day. Students with disabilities are not to have their school day shortened for any of the following reasons: school staff or district convenience, to facilitate early loading or buses, or to allow those buses to leave prior to the other buses.”

Despite this memorandum, a 1997 technical assistance paper from the Florida Department of Education, and a Pasco County School district policy specifically prohibiting a shortened school day unless provided as an educational necessity in the student’s IEP, OCR determined that, in practice, ESE students were leaving school anywhere from five to 30 minutes early with no provision in their IEPs warranting early release. Moreover, the evidence failed to establish that all these ESE students were consistently getting sufficient additional instructional time in the morning to make up for that early release. OCR required the district to revise its transportation schedules to provide students with disabilities with time in class equal to that of their nondisabled peers. It also required reporting throughout January, 2012 demonstrating pick-up and

Shortened School Day

When a school district engages in the regular practice of separate schedules and shortened school days for special education students, it is a violation of the students’ rights and a violation of law. One advocacy group notes the following example of just one aspect of a district’s obligations. In a school’s reminder to parents about the fact that there would be a half-day of school for all students on the next school day, the notice indicated that “Regular education students will be dismissed at 12:40; special education students will be dismissed at 11:20.” And, in a 2009 Arizona case, students with disabilities had a shortened school day not because an IEP team had made individual determinations of the appropriateness of the modified schedule, but only because the district had not provided an adequate number of accessible buses to handle a lengthy route.

Unless an individual student’s IEP or Section 504 team has agreed to a specific schedule as appropriate for a particular student, based on the student’s individual needs, students with disabilities should not be subject to the discrimination of a separate school schedule, or a shortened school day. Students with disabilities have the right to fully access their education, and a deprivation of that right may constitute a failure to provide FAPE unless there is a legitimate, disability-related need to modify their school day.
The California school district required students who used buses with wheelchair lifts to leave their last class of the day 36 minutes earlier than other students. For example, in Washington, “Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment (PAVE)” has published a Q & A titled “Parent Training and Information Program – Students Protected under Section 504.”

And, from time to time, school personnel may exercise authority they don’t have to unilaterally modify a student’s bus route to attempt to accommodate a student with a disability. Disappointed expectations do much to trigger litigation. Assertions about safety concerns may not satisfy OCR as a reason for the provision of a shortened school day for students with disabilities. In the 2011 case of Castaic Union Elementary Sch. Dist., the California school district required students who used buses with wheelchair lifts to leave their last class of the day 36 minutes earlier than other students. The school district argued that having the accessible and regular buses run on the same schedule was too chaotic and potentially dangerous. OCR acknowledged that “if a shortened day is medically and educationally necessary, it may be appropriate for an individual student. But a shortened day for an entire category of students (such as these students who used accessible buses), is not an individualized decision.” And, in the Pasco County case, OCR determined that “while the District has a responsibility to ensure the safety of all students, the District can meet its responsibility without requiring that disabled students leave class early.”

A Commitment to Resolve from a 2010 case from the State of Washington contains useful language approved by the OCR:

“The district agrees to provide each disabled student the same length of school day that it provides to his or her non-disabled peers, and agrees to not shorten a disabled student’s school day as compared with his or her non-disabled peers unless it has determined, through evaluation and placement procedures that satisfy the requirements of 34 C.F.R. § 104.35(a), (b), and (c), that the student needs a shortened school day to receive a free appropriate public education. The district agrees that any determination to provide a disabled student a shortened school day will be based on current evaluation data documenting that shortening the student’s school day is necessary to meet the student’s individual educational needs. In addition, the district agrees that any determination to provide a disabled student a shortened school day will not be based on factors such as the category of disability, severity of disability, availability of special education or related services, configuration of the district’s service delivery system, availability of space, administrative convenience, or any factor unrelated to the student’s individual educational needs.”

Lessons

To be pro-active, an individual district is well-advised to do a self-audit of its practices regarding consistency of length of school day for both students with and without a disability. Investigation might include:

- Review of documentation for the last couple of school years, including building data sheets and transportation records for students requiring specialized transportation.
- Review of student handbooks.
- Review of student IEPs.
- Observations of bus arrivals and departures.
- Observations of special education classrooms.
- Interviews with special and regular education school administrators, special and regular education teachers, and paraprofessionals and classroom/bus assistants.

Peggy Burns and Education Compliance Group, Inc. announce an Inventory Liquidation Sale. All four of Peggy’s video training programs and her book on special needs transportation are included (Note: the sale does not include Legal Routes subscriptions.) Full descriptions of each product, and video clips from the training programs, are available at www.educationcompliancegroup.com.

Shipping and handling for video training programs is $15. Shipping and handling for the book is $9.95; additional copies are $5.00 each.

Until August 15, 2013, the following products are available at a 50 percent discount:
- The Road to Compliance for Special Needs Drivers – video training program. Regular price, $175.00 – now $87.50.
- Putting the Brakes on Harassment – video training program. Regular price $175.00; now $87.50.
- Steering Clear of Liability – video training program. Regular price $160.00; now $80.00.
- Confidential Records – video training program. Regular price $125.00; now $62.50.
- Defensible Decisions about Transporting Students with Special Needs: Lessons Learned from Legal Disputes – book for study and for training scenarios. Regular price, $75.00; now $37.50.

Orders must be received by August 15, 2013. Supplies are limited, and the products will no longer be for sale after August 15, 2013. Order online at www.educationcompliancegroup.com, fax to 303-604-6143, or call 888-604-6141. Purchase orders, checks, or credit cards (MasterCard or Visa) will be accepted.
It seems every day I hear from school district officials curious about what they can do to make their school bus fleets greener. The reason is clear: parents and community members increasingly want school buses that run as clean as possible, reducing the overall environmental impact and keeping the air cleaner for the children on the school bus and for the community at large.

The good news is that improving fuel efficiency and reducing the environmental impact of school buses has been a key focus of the school bus industry for some time. In fact, clean diesel buses of today are 20 times cleaner than the diesel buses of just 10 years ago, with dramatic cuts in both NOx (nitrogen oxide) and particulate matter emissions thanks to more efficient engines and more effective emissions control technology brought about by EPA diesel emissions changes in 2007 and 2010.

Still, there are several simple steps a school district can take to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact.

First, and most obvious, maintain your school buses. Regular maintenance is critical to efficiently running school buses. Everything from properly cleaned air filters to regular oil changes will help contribute to cleaner and more efficient buses. But it is more complicated than that; advancements in emissions control systems have been a major factor in the recent drastic cuts in the emissions of NOx and particulate matter from buses. Keeping those systems performing at top levels is critical. Districts should work with their bus dealers and the manufacturer of their buses to make certain that all recommended services are completed, and that—when replacement parts are needed—the right parts are used and properly installed.

Second, train your technicians. Proper training is an important part of any well-maintained, clean-running fleet. As with everything else, new parts, new technologies and new techniques are being developed every day to help improve school bus efficiency and reduce environmental impact. Without regular training, technicians can get easily overwhelmed by this ever-increasing world of expertise. So make certain that your transportation officials and technicians take advantage of any assistance offered by dealers and manufacturers to keep them up-to-date on school bus maintenance technology.

Third, update your fleet. One of the most effective ways to improve fuel efficiency and reduce the environmental impact of your entire fleet is to simply replace your oldest buses with newer, cleaner buses. As mentioned, today’s clean diesel school buses are 20 times cleaner than the buses of just 10 years ago, thanks to advancements in engines and emissions control systems. Add in recent advancements in ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, and new buses operate with near zero emissions. Replacing even just one decade-old school bus with a new, clean diesel bus will reduce the emissions on that bus route by 95 percent—and it can be done without the need for investments in alternative fuels infrastructure, thus making bus replacement an efficient and affordable way to green-up your fleet.

And that brings us to the final step school districts can take to keep their fleets running as green as possible: we call it fleet management. If retiring one decade-old bus can cut the environmental impact on that route by 95 percent, imagine what regularly replacing all your decade-old buses will do. Each time you retire and replace a 10-year-old bus, it’s the emissions equivalent of taking 19 new buses off the road. Do that each year across the fleet, and the environmental and efficiency savings are exponential.

Once a fleet is greener, your maintenance team can work with your bus distributor and manufacturer to keep the fleet green and more efficient long into the future. And that’s better for everyone.

About LBS South, LLC

LBS South is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida and is owned and operated by the Leonard family, a recognized leader in the distribution and support of quality, environmentally friendly school and commercial buses. In addition to LBS South, LLC, the Leonard family owns Leonard Bus Sales, Inc. in New York and has nearly 50 years of experience in providing unmatched fleet management and customer support services, having recently won the coveted IC BusTM “Eastern Region Dealer of the Year” award in 2011. LBS South has facilities in Jacksonville and Davie, Florida. For more information go to www.lbssouth.com.
Florida Transportation Systems, Inc. (FTS) is very proud to be celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2013. It's hard to believe, but this little family-centric Florida business has been a constant in the Sunshine State since 1983. For a state that seems to have more transplants from up north than locals, some might consider that a lifetime.

In the early days, the company's vehicle sales dept. was focused on selling used buses from the contractor fleet of its related dealership, Rustman Bus Company back in St. Louis. Many of these buses were sold to contractors in Florida, some to private schools, and others left the state for foreign destinations. At the time of FTS's inception, Blue Bird was still selling buses to school districts factory-direct through the state bid. With only parts and service to make up the meat and potatoes of the business, FTS relied on partnership building and a keen attention to customer service in order to survive.

Customer service is what defines a truly successful company and establishes an expectation level within its industry. Think of Disney, Apple or Amazon as having set the bar for their respective business models, for instance. In our world of pupil transportation, customer service is what can set a dealer apart from its competition—customer service is also what can set a bus apart from its competition. Being a small, nimble, family-based company allows FTS to respond quickly to and address customer service concerns. From parts to service to warranty, every employee at FTS is empowered to do what is right and assist our customers—our partners—in the process.

Our customers—our partners—are well-aware that buses are mechanical creations. None of them are perfect and they will have failures and breakdowns throughout their lifecycle. The important take-away here, though, is that FTS fulfills its end of the partner relationship and is quick to respond and assist as needed—no ifs, ands or buts.

"Statistics suggest that when customers complain, business owners and managers ought to get excited about it. The complaining customer represents a huge opportunity for more business." ~Zig Ziglar

It’s our job as your partner to help you overcome any challenge you have relative to our products, and remedy any concern with our service or our performance. As a small company, we welcome that responsibility. Every complaint and every challenge is a chance to “wow” an organization or individual and raise that bar even higher. We may not be able to solve every problem to 100 percent satisfaction, but as your partner, we will strive to exceed your expectations and do what is right in our relationship.

What we ask of you is to please not lose your voice in this relationship. We need to know when we’re doing it right and, more importantly, when we can do it better. We can not fix what we do not know is wrong and we certainly don’t want you accepting anything that is not to your satisfaction.

With 30 years in the business—that’s 30 years here in Florida—we’re here for the long haul. Being in the pupil transportation industry, our products are also here for the long term. Our partners have enjoyed doing business with us for the first 30 years and we can’t wait to wow them with the next 30. Let’s make this partnership the most envied relationship possible! We’re here to help, and we’re here to listen when you need us. *
Today’s school transportation providers need to be agile, adaptive and responsive. No one understands this better than Trapeze. For more than 30 years, Trapeze has been a leader in student transportation technology solutions. With new trends and emerging challenges every day, we make it our business to understand what keeps you up at night and then deliver the best possible suite of transportation products to help make your job easier.

Our transportation technology solutions consider the full 360 degrees of your operations, bringing together and connecting you with the numerous sources of information you need to run an effective, efficient department. Our integrated approach provides a complete enterprise solution connecting the back office, operations and dispatching centers with your vehicles, as well as providing up-to-date transportation information to your organization and public.

Trapeze’s modular approach to application design delivers an integrated product suite that enables you to build your transportation software system as needs dictate. Our products feature graphical-user interfaces, an open database architecture, browser-based applications and proven, best-practice algorithms. In developing technology for student transportation, we maintain a strong and consistent customer focus, working to thoroughly understand your goals and operational requirements and providing programs that exceed your expectations.

We realize that implementing a transportation software program is a significant investment in both time and money. Our goal is to provide you with affordable, flexible solutions that increase efficiencies and reduce costs while enabling safe, reliable student transportation within your district. Most importantly, we are committed to continuing to invest millions of dollars in our transportation suite of products so that you are ensured the most current technology and functionality for the long term.
It is that HOT time of year again and school bus air-conditioning systems are working their hardest. In Florida, Matthews Buses customers have a direct link to Rifled Air Conditioning Systems (RAC) as Glenn and Brad Matthews own both RAC and Matthews Buses, Inc.

All of RAC systems are manufactured and installed at our facility located just outside the Thomas Saf-T-Liner C2 plant in High Point, North Carolina.

Prior to starting our own A/C manufacturing and installation company, as a dealer, we would experience finger-pointing between A/C manufacturers, the installer and vehicle manufacturers when things went wrong. Now that the vast majority of the buses we sell and service are equipped with our own RAC Systems, we are able to take 100 percent responsibility for the complete A/C system and provide best-in-class service and warranty support.

The way we approach A/C is to provide systems that perform extremely well and are built to last. Since we offer systems that exceed state specifications and work less than other systems that simply meet state specs, they last longer and require less parts and repairs over the life of the bus. We offer a five-year standard warranty with our “bullet-proof” BH12233 system. Just like the Cummins five-year engine warranty, preventative maintenance needs to be performed and documented to keep this warranty intact from year to year. To support customers’ A/C needs, we offer a convenient and easy-to-use website that features all brands of bus A/C parts that are in stock at our A/C warehouse in Orlando.

Since we own RAC, we are able to purchase A/C parts at the manufacturers’ level and pass these savings directly on to you. Our in house A/C parts expert, Laura Thomas, has over 18 years experience in bus A/C parts and service. She can be reached at lthomas@matthewsbuses.com or 1-800-288-6287 ext. 402.

The final piece of the A/C puzzle to complete a true one-stop shopping experience is service and training. Greg Stebbins, from RAC, offers A/C training at customers locations throughout Florida so that your techs can learn the latest techniques in maintaining school bus A/C systems. To arrange for this training, please contact Ali Rampartab, our technical support advisor/trainer and “2012 Thomas Built Buses National Trainer of the Year” at arampartab@matthewsbuses.com. Rampartab is available by phone at 1-800-330-1175 ext. 417 or cell 407-409-2239. Many of our mobile service trucks are set up with an A/C charging machine, A/C parts and a qualified A/C technician so that we can bring great A/C service to your garage. We also service and install bus A/C systems in our Orlando service facility.

It is our goal to be the best of the best when it comes to school bus air conditioning. The advantage of owning and operating Rifled Air Conditioning certainly helps us do this.

For more information, visit www.buspartsexperts.com.
Pensacola, Florida—School Training Solutions® (STS) offers a comprehensive online school bus operator certification course organized to meet State of Florida-mandated training requirements for school bus operators. The STS program is also designed to meet the professional development training needs of transportation specialists serving Florida school districts.

STS is a division of Smart Horizons. Smart Horizons is an online training provider that offers courseware developed by experienced instructional designers, customized programs, learning management services, and superior media design. As with all Smart Horizons programs, the STS online course for Florida school bus operators is available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

The STS Florida course, combined with a county’s behind-the-wheel training, exposes drivers to an ideal blended learning experience. The online course for bus drivers includes the full 20 hours of training mandated by the State of Florida’s Department of Education (DOE), broken down into 13 lessons plus an end-of-course test. Students enrolled in the program are able to complete their required 20 hours of training within the total flexibility afforded by the STS online system, while also getting the hands-on experience of the eight hours of behind-the-wheel training mandated by the Florida DOE.

The STS Florida bus operator course includes the following online lessons:

- Operator Roles and Responsibilities (one hour)
- Becoming Familiar with a School Bus (two hours)
- School Bus Vehicle Inspections (one hour)
- School Bus Vehicle Operation (2.5 hours)
- Traffic Control Devices (one hour)
- School Bus Critical Situations (two hours)
- Crash Procedures (one hour)
- Loading and Unloading Students (1.5 hours)
- School Bus Passenger Management (two hours)
- First-Aid (one hour)
- Students with Special Needs (2.5 hours)
- Field and Activity Trips (one hour)
- Commercial Driver’s License Pre-trip Inspection (1.5 hours)
- School Bus Operator Training end-of-course test (one hour)

Tommy Fitzpatrick, transportation operations supervisor for Florida’s Clay County School District, enrolled the district’s 230
bus drivers in the STS program at the beginning of the 2012-13 school year.

“The first thing I looked at is the fact that this program is recognized by the Florida DOE,” Fitzpatrick says. “The DOE can audit the program, so there are no compliance issues. They know our drivers are taking the courses, paying attention, and progressing through the program. It’s different from a classroom situation where someone may or may not be paying attention. This program encourages people to put effort into their training. Beyond that, School Training Solutions includes the newest materials and this is what we want to do—train and test each class of drivers with the latest information available. As the industry moves forward, there are updates, and all this is included in the School Training Solutions format.”

Fitzpatrick has received very positive feedback from the bus drivers in his district. “Many of our drivers have come up to me and said the course was hard, but that they really learned something,” he states. “Once I heard that, I knew this program was a big plus. Of course, the drivers also have their practical training behind the wheel and the online courses mesh well with that.”

Fitzpatrick likes the “transparency” offered by the STS program. “We like being able to show the DOE that we’re doing our job the best way we can do it, with the latest and greatest training methods out there.”

Larry Worth, assistant superintendent of operations for Florida’s Hendry County School District, has been using the STS training program for the district’s 80 bus drivers since the 2010-11 school year.

“In the past, we were pulling everyone together for eight-hour workshops in order to comply with Florida DOE requirements,” Worth says, “but when I found out the STS program would meet the DOE requirements, I decided to test it out.

“I went through the program myself and was impressed with the training and the way it addressed the types of things we needed to do. When we started the program, we set up computer labs for the bus drivers so they could take the courses at school or at home, but now 95 percent of them are working from home. There was a fear factor for people who weren’t used to working with computers, but everything has worked out exceedingly well and there’s no fear anymore.”

In addition to the STS program giving his drivers the ability to get their coursework done in their own time-frame, Worth also likes the fact that the program provides a single source for keeping up with all the documentation needed by the Florida DOE.

Flexibility, availability, and affordability are all features that make School Training Solutions the perfect solution for bus driver certification training in Florida school districts. *
Hopefully, it will be your school bus! If you are in the market for a bus air conditioner, Espar offers a solution to hot buses with air conditioning designed specifically for school buses. Many of you may be familiar with the popular Carrier AC 310 and AC 350 air conditioners. Those models are now available as Eberspächer 310 and 350 from Espar distributed by their partner, ACT – American Cooling Technologies.

A new “cool” item was recently released from Espar and distributed by ACT—the narrow rooftop AC system for school buses—Eberspächer model AC 353 G4 NARROW. This high cooling capacity system was designed to better fit the width and contour of the top of the school bus. This narrow version has the proven micro-channel heat exchanger, brushless fan motors allowing for a more efficient system, lighter weight, plus lower life-cycle costs.

Eberspächer places special emphasis on the development and manufacturing of energy-efficient and environmentally conscious products. These popular AC models have the support and attention-to-detail from Espar and ACT, a winning combination. (Visit http://actusa.us.com/ACT2.html.)

In the cool, damp winter months, a great solution from Espar is a “hot” preconditioned diesel engine. Without prolonged idling of the bus engine, the engine system can be warmed to operating temperature by an Espar E-Guardian heater with a timer-controller. Why precondition to warm the engine? Cool Florida mornings can be damp and foggy. A warm engine start for the bus means warm air from the defroster blowers and warm air coming from the heat exchangers when the driver turns the key. A warm engine start means no need to sit idling the bus for warmth and to defog the windows.

Besides the safety of giving the driver a clear view of the road and passenger comfort, a warm diesel engine is better for your engine and maintenance. A bus at idle wastes the most fuel when the engine runs but the bus doesn’t move—with
the bus consuming about a gallon per hour at engine speed of 1,000 rpm.

Idling the bus engine causes you to pay three times for extra idling. First, idling results in inefficient combustion, increasing the soot-load downstream into exhaust after-treatment. When the after-treatment plugs, more regeneration is required, which results in burning more diesel fuel to clean a soot-loaded DPF. More frequent regeneration decreases the life of the catalyst filters, which cost about $1,500 each. Second, engine idling results in a “dust-storm” under the hood which reduces the air-cleaner life and reduces engine life. Third, during engine idling, many components wear out prematurely, such as belts, the water pump, turbo, injectors, EGR valves, and about every part on the engine. The Espar E-Guardian 5 or 12 heater can precondition the bus engine for a warm start without prolonged idling while saving you money on fuel, engine wear, and maintenance.

Whether you need to be cool with an Eberspächer AC system or need to get warm with an E-Guardian heater, Espar can help you find the right solution for your needs.

Visit Espar’s website www.espar.com or contact Espar’s regional manager for Florida, Allan Webb, via email at awebb@espar.com or by phone: (443) 253-1808.

E-Z-ON Products Inc. of Florida recommends setting up schedules for thorough inspections of their vest and harness child passenger restraint systems. A thorough inspection consists of checking each product for the following:

- Excessive wearing or possible cuts in the webbing.
- Stitching should not be frayed or loose.
- Hardware should be intact and working properly.
  - Buckles and tongues should fit together with ease and release properly.
  - Adjusters should have covers in place and allow the webbing to be shortened or lengthened as needed.
  - Zippers should not have teeth missing and should open and close easily. The zipper tab/lock should not be missing.
  - Tether hooks should have the “spring” in place.
  - Hardware such as nuts, bolts, and any other connecting pieces used to anchor the child restraint to the seat or floor of the vehicle should be checked and tightened if loose.

E-Z-ON recommends conducting thorough inspections a minimum of three times during the school year. Daily inspections should occur when placing the child in the restraint. If something is missing or a part doesn’t work correctly, DO NOT USE THE PRODUCT! Given the size of the school and or school district, there needs to be an appropriate number of spare vest and harness child passenger restraint systems for use in the event of any product failing to pass inspection.

Scheduled inspections are a good time to check the child restraints for cleanliness. Products that can be washed have instructions sewn inside. Many schools and contractors schedule their thorough inspections when schools are closed for holidays or seasonal periods.

Once the inspections are complete and products have been cleaned, it is a good idea to keep them in inexpensive clear plastic containers with covers. We suggest marking the containers for easy identification.

If you have any questions about any part of a product or if you are not sure about something, please contact E-Z-ON Products at 1-800-323-6598.
Jacksonville, Florida—Expanding on the company promise to provide the best customer service possible, LBS South announced in April 2013 the addition of accomplished Florida school transportation professional Don Ross as the new service director for the company.

“While our customers across Florida are already getting industry-leading service and support, it will only get better with the addition of Don Ross,” said LBS South president Mike Leonard. “Don brings impeccable experience that combines world-class business skill and an in-depth knowledge of the needs of school districts. He will make sure our customers get the support and fleet management advice they deserve.”

Ross joins the LBS South team after spending more than 13 years with the School Board of Manatee County, where he served in several high-level positions, including director of transportation and vehicle maintenance. Prior to his time with Manatee County, Ross spent 17 years with a Fortune 500 company in senior management. Ross is also a published author who has received awards for his pupil transportation expertise.

As the service director, Ross will provide the leadership necessary to achieve the highest customer satisfaction possible, and will be a member of the LBS South senior management team. Ross officially began with LBS South on April 29th, 2013.

About LBS South, LLC

LBS South is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida and is owned and operated by the Leonard family, a recognized leader in the distribution and support of quality, environmentally friendly school and commercial buses. In addition to LBS South, LLC, the Leonard family owns Leonard Bus Sales in New York and has nearly 50 years of experience in providing unmatched fleet management and customer support services. LBS South won the coveted IC Bus™ “Eastern Region Dealer of the Year” award in 2011 and IC Bus’s 2013 Pursuit of Excellence award. LBS South has locations in Davie and Jacksonville, Florida.

For more information, go to www.lbssouth.com.
10628 General Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32220

Contact: Cort Ruddy (855) 215-3844 ext. 704 or cort@pcpublicaffairs.com
Our membership represents a cross-section of individuals and organizations involved in the safe transportation of school children. As the association’s name indicates, members include those individuals with the primary responsibility for school transportation in each state. Additional members include school bus manufacturers and other industry suppliers, school transportation contractors, and a number of state associations whose members include school transportation officials, drivers, trainers, and technicians.

This diversity in membership, combined with the day-to-day involvement of the state directors in policy matters, creates a unique perspective on pupil transportation issues. Each state has a state director who is typically the lead school transportation officer for the state education department. For an example, my day job is to function as the executive officer for the Iowa Department of Education school transportation department; but I’m also serving as the president of NASDPTS, a two-year term expiring in October of 2014. It’s been a great honor to hold this office, with one of my duties being to tell others about NASDPTS and what we do.

NASDPTS was founded in 1968, and while we do represent all 50 states, not all 50 state directors are members of our association. I’m sure you are no stranger to budget cuts and having to tighten your belt? Some of the same budgetary problems you experience at the local level extend all the way up to the state level, and beyond. As state employees, state directors oftentimes are not allowed to attend conferences and meetings at the national level, simply because the “budget won’t allow it”—worse yet, at times when a state director position is vacated, the occasional state won’t fill that position. Despite these problems, NASDPTS still attempts to keep every state in the loop with regard to school transportation concerns from the national level, as well as trends that may be occurring in other states. Whether the state director or state is active in our organization, or is even a member, we still maintain this informational contact. We feel it’s very important to keep the lines of communication open and to provide information on an ongoing basis.

The yearly “School Bus Illegal Passing Survey” is one of the latest projects which NASDPTS has sponsored. It helps to document the increasingly dangerous problem of other motorists passing our stopped school buses during the loading/unloading procedure. This survey is now in its third year, with about 30 states participating each year. We are sometimes asked how this information is put to use. A number of federal agencies draw on these statistics for a variety of reasons, as do many other groups, including state legislators. As an example, in Iowa, a new stop-arm law was passed in 2012, which we call “Kadyn’s Law” in honor of a seven-year-old girl who was struck and killed by a motorist while walking to her school bus one morning. With the help of the NASDPTS survey, legislators in Iowa were able to see how widespread this problem had become, and as such were able to pass some of the toughest and most stringent stop-arm legislation in the nation. Not only that, but after the passage of “Kadyn’s Law” in Iowa, legislation was put forth at the national level in Washington, D.C. to pass a federal “Kadyn’s Law” also using the NASDPTS survey information as proof of what a terrible problem this issue has become. Though this national legislation proved unsuccessful at the time, the survey information was highly regarded in D.C. and has been named as a prime motivator for the legislation moving as far as it did.

NASDPTS is also a member of the American School Bus Council (ASBC). This group consists of the three national school transportation organizations: the NAPT (National Association for Pupil Transportation), the NSTA (National School Transportation Association), and NASDPTS—along with the three major school bus manufacturers, BlueBird, Thomas and IC. Together, they meet as the ASBC on a quarterly basis, typically in Chicago. The main thrust of the ASBC is to bring attention to the school bus in a positive manner, stressing the reasons why we need to keep the yellow school bus on the road and in the forefront of education. After all, without the yellow school bus, a number of students would simply have no way of getting to school in the first place; and how can you teach a child if you can’t put them in the classroom?

Did you know that the yellow school bus on average replaces 36 cars on the road during those peak traffic times every morning and afternoon?

GREETINGS FROM NASDPTS –
the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services

By Max Christensen

Did you know that the yellow school bus on average replaces 36 cars on the road during those peak traffic times every morning and afternoon?
Also, did you know that the yellow school bus on average replaces 36 cars on the road during those peak traffic times every morning and afternoon? Not only is the school bus yellow, but it's also “green” as it saves all those gallons of fuel and in the process keeps the air we breathe cleaner. During the month of February, the ASBC sponsors the “Love The Bus” program nationwide. Schools are encouraged to participate in events highlighting the yellow school bus. At the same time, the ASBC puts together a special “Love The Bus” event showcasing a district doing a special event or perhaps a school bus driver who has gone over and above the call of duty. In several past years, the United States Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood, has joined with the ASBC to help bring the message of the yellow school bus to groups of elementary school children in the Washington, D.C. metro area. These special events have been very successful, as has the overall success of the “Love The Bus” program.

The “School Bus Champions Awards Program” is a new program the ASBC is sponsoring. Awards will be made to districts, persons, organizations, or other entities that have excelled in one or more of the following areas: safety, access to education, environmental benefits, and/or community impact. This program debuted in April, with two Champions awards. One went to the EPA and one to the State of Utah, both for their work in helping to reduce diesel emissions. The EPA has done a lot of work in this area via their DERA program, while the State of Utah has secured grant funding to retrofit many of their older buses with diesel oxidation catalysts along with other emissions-reducing technology. The next Champions Award will be made at the Southeastern States Regional School Transportation Conference in July, when the family of murdered Alabama school bus driver Charles Poland will be honored and will accept an award for his bravery while protecting the children on his bus.

As you can see, NASDPTS is very involved, on a number of levels, with helping to promote the yellow school bus and to provide information to every state. Through our network of state directors and local directors, this information will hopefully reach every school bus driver in the nation. Those drivers are the backbone of our industry, and are the first ones to see a student every morning as each child gets on the bus. Our drivers have the opportunity to help make it a good day for every student on their bus. We want to give them the tools to make that happen.

About the Author

Max Christensen is the state director of school transportation in Iowa and current president of NASDPTS. He has 26 years’ experience in the school transportation industry, having worked as a driver, mechanic, local director, and state director during that time.

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