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Getting the Board on the bus

*What every board member should know
about school transportation, and how to
keep them from ending up under the bus*

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The school transportation industry . . .

- Nationwide . . .
 - 25 million children ride school buses every day
 - School buses travel nearly 4.3 billion miles per year
 - Over 600,000 professionals watch over school children – including drivers, supervisors, mechanics, safety specialists
 - Parents in every child's household watch for that bus and depend upon that service
 - School buses provide more passenger trips than any other mode of transportation, including public transit service
- The school bus is the only mode of transportation which has been reducing accidents, injuries, and fatalities—while increasing mileage, size, and passenger load



Vehicle Safety Records

(1998 National Statistics)

**Children ages 5-18 killed nationally in 1998 by vehicle type
during the hours of 6-9 AM, and 1-4 PM**

– Passenger cars	3,113
– Light Truck/Van	1,425
– Pedestrians	573
– Bicyclists	264
– <u>Motorcyclists</u>	<u>134</u>
– Total	5,509
– School Bus Passengers	3



The safety benefit

- School buses continually have been found to be the safest mode of transportation
 - 15 times safer than a passenger car
 - 44 times safer than a student driven car
- Notwithstanding the reports of accidents and other news events, school buses continue to protect and safeguard our children
 - With a record that outshines every other option available,
 - And an incredibly conscientious team of safety professionals-continually looking for ways to increase safety and success. . .
- Because no one knows better, there is **NO MARGIN FOR ERROR**



There are also some less obvious values

The American School Bus Council asked parents across the country what they value in school bus transportation, and heard the following:

- Parents find school buses convenient
- School buses keep children off of the streets
- School buses provide access to school breakfast programs
- School buses are a great way for children to socialize in a safe environment
- School buses can be a safe haven between home and school
- The school bus driver is a great ambassador – and the first and last representative in the school to meet and greet each child who rides the big yellow school bus



It is not an accident !

School transportation is a highly regulated industry.

And it is managed and staffed by professionals who not only care for children, but who are also stakeholders.

Many of these folks are also parents of children who ride buses, and community members in the same district where they work.



Regulatory Agencies

- **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)**
- **National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)**
- **Federal Motor Carrier Administration**
- **Ohio State Highway Patrol**
- **Ohio Department of Education**
- **Local School Board**



Regulatory Documents

- **Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS)**
- **FMCA motor carrier regulations (CDL)**
- **Ohio Revised Code**
- **Ohio Administrative Code**
- **Local Board Policy**
- **Operating Procedures**



Ohio pupil transportation roots:

- 1892
 - Kingsville Township- (Ashtabula County)
 - In wagons drawn by horses
- First regulatory laws enacted in 1894
- First statewide authorization in 1898



Growth of an industry

- Factors that facilitated the growth:
 - Good roads (pavement?)
 - Development of the automobile
 - Consolidation of schools into districts
- Rapid growth became the norm
- Ridership doubled in the first 15 years, then doubled again in the next 20 years



The trend . . .

- Ridership peaked in 1980, and has been declining since
- Bus count peaked in 2005
 - 25 years after the ridership peak
 - Bigger buses notwithstanding
 - Standard 60 passenger compared to current 72
- Costs – both aggregate and per student are still increasing



Ohio's pupil transportation growth

School Year	Buses	Pupils	Aggregate Cost	Cost per pupil
1941	6,800	290,000	6,998,150	24.13
1956	8,141	623,965	16,458,201	26.37
1975	no data	1,382,344	96,805,550	70.03
1980	11,393	<u>1,384,153</u>	196,549,726	142.00
2000	14,523	1,346,243	515,751,116	373.79
2005	<u>15,000</u>	1,119,231	648,052,966	579.00
2010	13,342	918,257	695,122,866	781.43
2012	14,353	836,795	730,622,058	832.44



For the last 5 years. . .

- Declining ridership
- Declining funding
- Increased costs
- Increased regulations
- More media coverage
- Total transparency in all operations



School Bus Drivers, and their vehicles

School buses are the safest vehicles on the road. This safety record is the result of the design and construction of the school bus, the operating condition of the bus, the planning of the school bus route, the location of the loading zones and the school bus driver.

A modern, safe, well-maintained school bus, operating on the best possible terrain, with ideal conditions can not compensate for an ill-trained school bus driver.

Likewise, today's highly trained school bus drivers can not provide the safest possible transportation to students with out-of date, poorly maintained buses traveling over illogical routes and stopping at dangerous places.



It takes all the pieces

- Safe, well trained drivers
- Safe, well maintained vehicles
- Competent routing and planning
- Competent management / oversight
- Good integration with the district



The Ohio School bus driver

Ohio's standards are among the toughest in the nation

- **Minimum age 21**
- **Must have a valid Commercial bus driver license and meet additional Ohio standards including:**
 - State level training at pre-employment and every 6 years (includes class time and behind-the-wheel training)
 - Drug and alcohol testing
 - Satisfactory driving record (including in their personal vehicle), and maintain a satisfactory record
 - Pass and maintain a satisfactory state and federal criminal background check
 - Pass an annual school bus driver physical
 - Complete annual inservice training with their employer / district
- **Must be knowledgeable and operate in compliance with Ohio's school transportation regulations**



Bus driver challenges

- Recruiting new drivers is difficult
- The on-boarding process is extended, sometimes lasting several months
- Training and on-boarding is expensive
- Keeping qualified drivers is difficult, especially in the shale industry areas
- Sometimes drivers make poor choices, and we have to separate from them
- These are typically part-time jobs



School Buses

- The most regulated passenger vehicles on the road
- Ohio buses are in the top 5 in the country with respect to design and build requirements
- Inspected regularly by the state patrol and must pass to be operated
- Designed for effective 'mass transit'
- There are varying bus sizes, with the most common being 65, 72, 77, or 84 passengers. However, this is based upon "average rump width". The working capacity is 1/3 less.
- Buses come in conventional or snub-nose style



School Buses (2)

- New bus cost is close to \$80,000, and can easily go up with options
- Buses have a limited life cycle, and can become expensive to keep
- The average age of a schoolbus in Ohio is over 10 years old.
- Buses in Northern Ohio typically have terminal rust issues after 8 years
- As buses age, the annual cost of maintenance increases, approaching \$5-6,000 per year per bus
- Older vehicles pollute more, newer vehicles are very green
- Older buses average 4-5 miles per gallon. Newer buses average 6-8 miles per gallon.



School buses (3)

- Current marketplace is very favorable for 'lease-purchase' options. This is not a traditional lease, but more accurately an installment plan. In a 5-7 year lease, the interest payments per year will typically be less than maintenance costs, and also result in fuel savings due to better economy.
- There are new fuel technologies coming up.
 - Diesel electric hybrid (payback questionable)
 - Propane (lowest diesel equivalent)
 - Compressed natural gas (CNG) (lower diesel equivalent)
- The barriers are higher initial vehicle cost and lack of infrastructure



Routing and planning

- Districts are required to provide transportation for certain students.
- Districts may, at their option, provide transportation for additional students.
- In general, districts are required to provide transportation 'on the same basis' for all students, regardless of their school of choice.



Service must be provided for:

- Minimum service required for regular ed. students
 - Grades kindergarten through eight
 - Two miles away from school
- Additional considerations
 - Special Education service required (IEP)
 - JVS shuttle service required (Contract)
 - Nonpublic and charter service – must be on “same basis”
 - Bus stops must consider hazardous / dangerous zones
 - Law does not require consideration of hazard / danger zones for non-bus areas, but the community will !



Routing and cost . . .

- Routine routes represent at least 80% of your transportation cost
- The cost for transporting high school students is discretionary
- The trap –
 - Districts that want to reduce expenses are tempted to reduce services for students they are not required to transport (high school and students who live close to school).
 - Unless they also reduce the number of buses used, costs may not be reduced
- Costs are most closely related to the number of buses operated, not necessarily related to the number of students transported!
- Operating with fewer buses is usually more cost effective than operating with a larger fleet
- In most cases it is possible to reduce the number of buses used and still transport the same number of students.
 - This requires multiple trips per day, sometimes called 'tiers'



Single vs. double routing

Single routes

- K-12 grouping
- 1000 students
- Avg 50 students/ bus
- 1 trip per bus
- Requires 20 buses
- Avg 1 ½ hr * 2 / bus
- Total of 60 hrs / day
- Requires 20 drivers

Double routes

- K-5, 6 – 12 grouping
- 1000 students
- Avg 50 students/route
- 2 trips per bus
- Requires 10 buses
- Avg 3 hr *2 / bus
- Total of 60 hrs / day
- Requires 10 drivers



Routing cost impact?

- Average cost to operate an Ohio bus is \$48,000 / year.
- For every bus that is removed from service, a district will save about 80% of that cost.
- For every bus that is left in service, it's costs are only increased by about 20% for a second trip.
- The impact: by scheduling schools at different times and carefully scheduling transportation, a district can transport all students on fewer buses for less cost.
- The district also saves by not having to purchase as many replacement buses.



State funding impact

- In a budget year when a formula is used, you must consider the impact on funding by changes in service level.
- In the current budget, districts are funded based on the number of miles travelled or students transported.
- More miles or students = more money



Special Cases

- Open enrollment
- Homeless students
- Scholarship programs (special education)
- Post secondary education
- 30 minute rule – ineligible
- Special education – non FAPE
- Payment in lieu of transportation



Management needs

- Transportation requires constant care and feeding
- It is next to impossible to operate a 'no issues, no complaints' program without a manager constantly paying attention.
- This makes it very difficult for a full time administrator with district responsibilities to manage this as a supplemental contract



Skill set needed?

Do we need a technical person?

...Or do we need a 'people' person?

Here are the basic task groups. You decide:

- Buses
- Computer routes
- Mechanics
- Rules, regulations, procedures

- Bus drivers
- Students
- Parents
- Other school staff
- Community members

Which ones vote, and show up at board meetings?

Which skills can be taught, or bought?



What is guaranteed to get attention in any school district?

How can you guarantee to pack a school boardroom?

Fire a head coach,
Close a neighborhood school building,
Uncover a scandal in a building,
Move or eliminate a schoolbus stop,
Or cancel bus service!



School transportation is no longer 'optional'

- School districts, parents and communities have come to depend upon school transportation
- Administrators depend on the buses to bring them students, and more importantly to take them away again at the end of the day
- Parents have come to expect the bus to show up each day – at the same time, with the same driver, and at the same location



Our goal . . . have a solid plan in place

Because . . .

- When a bus is in an accident
- When you do not have enough bus drivers to run the buses
- When you are challenged on a safety issue
- And when you do not have enough money to run the buses

School buses, and your district,
will be in the news!



What is that plan?

- Board members need to understand what their district transportation service does
- They also need to work with their administrative team to set goals and standards
- Having a basic understanding of their district department goes a long way in understanding what support is needed to continue successful, safe, and cost effective transportation.



The basic metrics:

(What questions should you ask?)

- Average age of your bus fleet
- Average cost per bus per year
- Average riders per bus
- Summary of district's annual driver training program
- Average number of miles between accidents/incidents . . . Or better yet, number of miles since the last accident!



Sometime soon . . .

- You will be asked a question you do not know.
- Or be forced to make a difficult decision.
- Get the facts – either from within, or ask for help. (OSBA is one source for you to turn to)
- Do not rush to decision making without all the information you need to decide wisely.



If we took buses off the road

- It would take many more cars

District	buses	cars
Columbus City	746	19,730
Olentangy	132	6,417
State	12,972	556,400
Cost of fuel/child	\$ 82.61	\$ 438.46

- More fuel, more congestion, more pollution, more cost per student
- Check out your district at www.ohioschoolboards.org



With bus service . . .



... without.





The goal . . .

- Transport as many students as possible
 - With minimum cost
 - In a manner that supports the educational day
 - With great dependability
 - With as little attention as possible
- With satisfied parents and communities!







Thank you!



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