

June 2016 • Volume 60, Issue 3

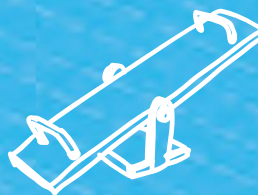
JOURNAL

OHIO SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

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Digital edition available!

You can access the Journal's digital edition on the OSBA website at www.ohioschoolboards.org/journal.

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OSBA Journal (ISSN 0893-5289) is published bimonthly by the Ohio School Boards Association, 8050 N. High St., Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43235-6481. Periodicals postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to OSBA Journal, Attn: Mailroom, Ohio School Boards Association, 8050 N. High St., Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43235-6481.

Comments and articles should be sent to the editor at the above address or email gmotz@ohioschoolboards.org. The views expressed in articles appearing in OSBA Journal are those of writers and do not necessarily represent OSBA policies or positions.

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Mission Statement

OSBA leads the way to educational excellence by serving Ohio's public school board members and the diverse districts they represent through superior service, unwavering advocacy and creative solutions.

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Correction

Due to a typographical error, an incorrect figure was published in the April Journal article "Ohio districts have many levy options." The final sentence at the bottom of the first column on page 23 should have read, "An income tax levy must be at least 0.25% and the rate can be higher ..."

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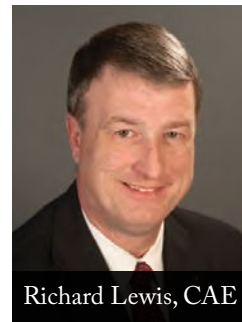
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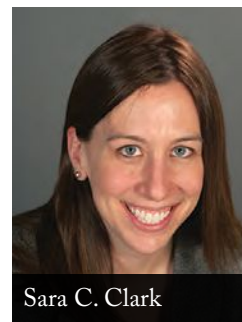
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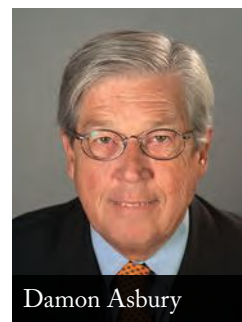
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Get involved with OSBA

OSBA's strength rooted in democratic ideals

Richard Lewis, CAE, executive director

Democracy is a lofty and inclusive concept. It is built on the unwavering belief that as a nation or organization, we are best governed when as many as possible fully participate in the process. It provides a forum for a dialogue where the insight and knowledge of many combine to create solutions and plans of action that reflect the will of the largest possible number of people.

We frequently hear about the many benefits and rights of democracy, but, without question, its true strength is rooted in widespread participation.

As a member of OSBA, you recently received a Call for Nominations. This booklet, which can be found on our website, details numerous ways to become more integrally involved in the leadership of your association. It is posted at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/40095>.

OSBA's strength lies in our diverse membership and the multitude of talents and perspectives those members bring to the table. Participation on regional or state committees provides an excellent opportunity to help make the association even more effective as an advocate for public education. It also provides an avenue for you to learn and grow as a school board member and, through that, better serve the students of your district.

I encourage you to consider sharing your knowledge, skills and abilities for the betterment of OSBA and school boards across Ohio by serving on one of these groups. For more information about any of these opportunities, visit the website listed above or contact the association office or your regional manager. The deadline for nominations is June 30.

For members who are unable to serve in a governance role, there are other vital functions to fulfill, such as serving with the OSBA Delegate Assembly or introducing an amendment for consideration by this important body.

Abraham Lincoln once observed, "The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next." To ensure that the philosophy of school board members is clearly heard by policymakers and positively influences public education, the Delegate Assembly adopted a Legislative Platform to formalize and reflect the legislative goals and beliefs approved by our members over the years.

This platform ensures that the voice of Ohio school board members is member-driven and widely communicated. Today, nearly 20 years after its creation, it is an evolving statement that publicly attests the association's positions on a variety of issues facing public education.

It conveys to legislators, a multitude of stakeholders, the public and the media where OSBA stands as an organization. The platform serves as a compass in advocacy efforts, guiding our leadership and staff in their work before the Ohio General Assembly, state regulatory bodies and in Washington, D.C.

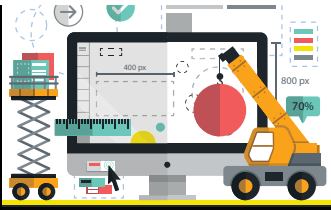
When our founders created this statewide association of school boards, they did not allow individual philosophies or ideas to prevail over the collective vote of its members. Remember, OSBA is not a 50-person staff in Columbus — it is more than 700 school boards across this state speaking with a unified voice.

Every member board in the state has the privilege, right and responsibility to propose changes to the OSBA Legislative Platform, which is posted at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/47535>. To date, resolutions for proposed amendments have been received from **Elida Local (Allen), Fremont City, North Olmsted City and Xenia Community City**.

These proposals will be shared with the OSBA Legislative Platform Committee in August when it meets to develop recommendations on amendments for the Delegate Assembly to consider. If your board of education supports a plank you believe should be incorporated into the platform or has a suggestion for an amendment to an existing position, contact the Division of Legislative Services for more information. The deadline to submit proposals is July 15.

Board member involvement in the legislative process has never been more crucial. Please make certain your board is represented at the Delegate Assembly on Nov. 14 when it meets at the OSBA Capital Conference. To participate in the process and make your voice heard, simply select your board's representative and return the delegate forms to OSBA by Aug. 31. The forms will be mailed with Capital Conference registration materials in mid-July.

Critical issues of school choice, finance, taxation, governance and more are being considered and debated at the state and federal levels every day. Your involvement is needed because Ohio's public schools are our future. Investing your time in this democratic process is an investment in that future. ■



Building accessible sites

How accessible is your district's website?

Sara C. Clark, director of legal services

School districts frequently use the Internet to communicate with parents and other community members. Online parent portals, e-newsletters and school websites are supplementing and, in some cases, replacing the traditional backpack folder as a source of information for the district.

While there are benefits to using these methods of communication, districts should be aware of their legal obligations to ensure their websites and Web content are accessible to all community members, including those with disabilities who may require assistive devices and specialized software to access the Internet. This article shares the current legal framework in the area of website accessibility requirements and makes recommendations for districts looking to be proactive in this area.

Legal framework

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance and by certain public entities.

Both the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) have jurisdiction over accessibility complaints. Although the federal statutes are silent on the issue of website accessibility, both agencies have taken the position that the general nondiscrimination requirements imposed by Section 504 and Title II include an obligation to make sure individuals with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate

in a school district's online programs, services and activities.

In spite of these positions, there is no legally binding technical standard that defines what constitutes an "accessible" website. More than five years ago, DOJ announced its intent to issue regulations to address the accessibility of public websites. In April, DOJ finally issued a Supplemental Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (SANPRM). The SANPRM poses more than 120 questions for public comment, including soliciting feedback on the appropriate technical standards, how much time covered entities should be given to comply with any new standards and whether the standards should also apply to apps on mobile devices. Comments on the SANPRM must be submitted by Aug. 8.

For many districts, implementing accessibility features is not difficult and will seldom change the layout or appearance of the website.

Even without final regulations in place, DOJ and OCR are moving forward with website accessibility complaints filed against districts and other public entities. Recently, OCR identified "compliance concerns" with websites operated by a number of school districts nationwide, including districts in South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Massachusetts.

Similar concerns have been identified with websites operated by the Michigan Department of Education, Youngstown State University and University of Cincinnati. Seattle Public Schools recently entered into a 3.5-year consent decree after the district was sued for failing to provide equal access to information on its website to a blind parent in the district. Implementing the decree is estimated to cost between \$665,400 and \$815,400, not including attorneys' fees or damages.

OCR has identified the following as some of the potential deficiencies district websites may have: lack of alternative text on images; documents not posted in an accessible format; lack of captions on videos and inability to operate video controls using assistive technology; improperly structured data tables; improperly formatted and labeled form fields; and improper contrast between background and foreground colors.

DOJ also has been actively advocating its position in the absence of final regulations. In 2015, DOJ filed statements of interest in lawsuits against Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology about the alleged inaccessibility of videos on the schools' websites. In the statements, DOJ expressed its expectation that public entities make websites fully accessible, even in the absence of a regulation that would provide guidance as to what DOJ considers a legally compliant "accessible website."

Providing equal access

To determine if a program, service or activity delivered online or through a website provides "equal access to

individuals with disabilities,” OCR considers if individuals with disabilities have the same ease of use, completeness of information, functionality and timeliness of response.

This is consistent with the standard set forth in a June 29, 2010, Dear Colleague letter jointly issued by OCR and DOJ. It stated that requiring the use of technology in a classroom when the technology is inaccessible to an entire population of individuals with disabilities (for example, individuals with visual disabilities) is discrimination prohibited by Title II and Section 504 *unless* those individuals are provided accommodations or modifications that permit them to receive all educational benefits provided by the technology in an equally effective and equally integrated manner. Specifically, the letter explained that districts must ensure that students with disabilities can access the educational opportunity and benefit with “substantially equivalent ease of use” as students without disabilities.

However, OCR and DOJ both acknowledge that a school district with an inaccessible website could still satisfy its legal obligations by providing the same information and services through other accessible means. In a 2003 DOJ technical assistance document, *Accessibility of State and Local Government Websites to People with Disabilities*, DOJ states that “an agency with an inaccessible website may also meet its legal obligations by providing an alternative accessible way for citizens to use the programs or services.”

This language seems to suggest that a district could refer individuals to a telephone line through which they could obtain information that is otherwise available on its website or provide written content as an alternative to a website video. The federal agencies are clear, however, that the district’s alternative would have to provide an equal degree of access in terms of hours of operations and range of information, options and services available. Specifically, the same

services must be offered 24/7 and without cost if offered that way to those without impairments.

There are a number of resources available to districts wishing to be proactive in making their websites accessible. The first is the Section 508 standards, which federal agencies must follow for new Web pages. The standards contain technical criteria specific to various types of technologies and address access for people with physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities. The U.S. Access Board maintains information at www.access-board.gov and has a useful guide for Web developers at <http://links.ohio.schoolboards.org/25641>.

A more comprehensive resource is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG), which DOJ suggests will be the new standard in its SANPRM. These technical standards created by the World Wide Web Consortium help developers and site managers make websites more accessible for everyone, including those with disabilities. WCAG has 12 guidelines organized under four principles:

- information and user interface must be presentable in ways users can *perceive*;
- user interface components and navigation must be *operable*;
- the information and operation of user interface must be *understandable*;
- content must be *robust*.

Please see “A detailed look at WCAG 2.0 principles” (right) for additional information on WCAG guidelines.

District personnel should start discussing website accessibility, even in the absence of DOJ regulations on the subject. For many districts, implementing accessibility features is not difficult and will seldom change the layout or appearance of the website. For a voluntary action plan, see DOJ’s technical assistance guidance document online at: www.ada.gov/websites2.htm. For additional information, please call the OSBA Division of Legal Services. ■

According to Law is designed to provide authoritative general information, sometimes with commentary. It should not be relied upon as legal advice. If legal advice is required, the services of an attorney should be obtained.

A detailed look at WCAG 2.0 principles

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG) are based on four principles of accessible online content:

Perceivable

- Provide text alternatives for any nontext content so it can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.
- Provide alternatives for time-based media.
- Create content that can be presented in different ways (for example, simpler layout) without losing information or structure.
- Make it easier for users to see and hear content, including separating foreground from background.

Operable

- Make all functionality available from a keyboard.
- Provide users enough time to read and use content.
- Do not design content in a way that is known to cause seizures.
- Provide ways to help users navigate, find content and determine where they are.

Understandable

- Make text content readable and understandable.
- Make Web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.
- Help users avoid and correct mistakes.

Robust

- Maximize compatibility with current and future user agents, including assistive technologies.



Raising the threshold

What to expect from new overtime rules

Van D. Keating, director of management services

Last month, President **Barack Obama** announced changes in the overtime rules as contained in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

While the media has heavily promoted the announcement, it is important to realize the final rules will not take effect until Dec. 1. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is taking steps to publish the rules. Some members of Congress have said they are evaluating and considering ways to delay or nullify the rules prior to them becoming effective.

The new rules, issued May 18, will more than double the annual salary threshold that determines if an employee qualifies for overtime. Salaried employees earning less than \$47,476 will now be eligible for time-and-a-half overtime pay when they work more than 40 hours per week. The current threshold for salaried employees is \$23,600.

The National School Boards Association initially reviewed the final rules and identified changes that will most likely affect school districts as employers.

Rule: All employers must be in compliance with the new salary threshold by Dec. 1, irrespective of their fiscal year start date.

Implications: This could be a challenge for school districts since they likely will have prepared their budgets for the 2016-17 school year by Dec. 1. However, there still may be time to make modifications based on a July 1 fiscal year.

Rule: Although the executive,

administrative and professional exemptions expressly apply to an "employee employed in the capacity of academic administrative personnel or teacher(s)," the salary level and salary basis requirements do not apply to bona fide teachers.

Implications: Administrators and teachers are exempt from the overtime rule and not eligible for overtime compensation.

Employers will need to clearly identify those situations in which overtime can and cannot be avoided well in advance of the rule's effective date.

Rule: The minimum salary threshold for all employee categories (executive, administrative and professional) not highly compensated is \$47,476 per year, based on the lowest-wage census region (Southern Region).

Implications: This is lower than what was in the proposed rule. DOL initially proposed \$50,440, so fewer school district employees will likely be affected by the rule change.

Rule: The minimum salary threshold for all highly compensated employees increased to \$134,004 per year.

Implications: This is higher than what the proposed rules initially set forth and

is based on national wages. DOL initially proposed \$122,148. This higher threshold means more highly paid school district employees will continue to be ineligible for overtime.

Rule: The proposed annual update to the minimum salary threshold has been changed from every year to every three years, setting the increase date to Jan. 1 beginning in 2020. Again, this triennial automatic salary update will occur irrespective of a school district's fiscal year start date.

Implications: A longer period for salary threshold changes means school districts do not have to anticipate yearly budgetary changes based on the final rule. This shift to a calendar year schedule means school districts will have to make these financial changes in the middle of a budget cycle. However, the three-year period gives school districts more time to include changes in annual budget cycles as they prepare for the triennial increase. Thus, a school district can prepare for the Jan. 1, 2020, increase while planning the 2019-20 school-year budget in early spring 2019.

The changes to FLSA are important for school districts to understand and include in their budgets. Obviously, raising the threshold for salaried employees to \$47,476 means more employees will be eligible for overtime, which will need to be anticipated and reflected in budgets. However, remember that employers generally have control in approving overtime. They will need to clearly identify those situations in which overtime can and cannot be avoided well in advance of the rule's effective date. ■



Finding direction

What guides you? Boards need vision

Steve Horton, school board services consultant

Once heard a school board member say, “When we stop bickering about athletics and what time we have our meetings, we actually get things done.”

How many of you have felt this way? Do you spend a lot of time nibbling at the corners or, as we like to say, “wandering in the weeds?” If that is the case, you have company.

It is difficult for some boards to see or even understand what the big picture is. Early on as a board member, I found a rhythm to the work. The schedule of monthly correspondence, delivery of meeting packets and meetings themselves pretty much went like clockwork. The first year seemed rather laissez-faire in nature and left me wondering what, if anything, I was accomplishing.

OSBA works with some boards that apparently live in drama. The internal strife and discourse can be epic. It is a constant struggle for power and control that never ends well for the district.

As I have worked with boards, the definition of “doing things” for many board members often is, unfortunately, just dealing with day-to-day matters. For an individual board member, it may seem gratifying, but in reality, it typically becomes an issue the entire district must then deal with.

What is the answer? The balance needs to be somewhere between those two scenarios. Boards have a key role to play in every district, as do administrators and staff. If, as a board member, you are looking at your policies, you will see clearly stated roles and expectations for all district personnel and the board. That

understanding seems to be a challenge for many boards, but perhaps a bigger issue is simply a lack of vision.

A board’s most important and beneficial role is to set a strong vision of what success looks like and hold all those in the district accountable to that vision. That takes hard work and commitment. It also requires trust and communication.

You must trust that all members of the board are willing to engage in creating a vision and defining the goals needed to move toward it. You must trust that the board’s role is to oversee and require a fair, evidence-based account of the work being done. You must trust that this role is the most important work for the board and that each member will leave the “doing” to those employed to carry out the work.

Communication is equally important. You cannot over communicate your vision and goals. It takes a concerted effort to maintain clear and aligned goals for each layer of your organization. Without those goals, the work will

become fragmented and lack focus.

Strong communication needs to continually flow from and back to the board; it cannot be an individual process. Each board member is one-fifth (for most boards) of the governance team. Boards tend to work well when communication is equally shared, and no one feels left out or left wondering what someone else is talking about. When communication flows well, making decisions becomes a collective endeavor for the entire board.

If your board is not spending time together seeking to communicate openly, working on self-evaluation and striving to understand and agree on the district’s needs, then it is time to start. Consider these areas to be a good starting point for establishing goals that the entire team can commit to.

Difficult conversations are a fundamental reality of board work, but if your focus is on the district’s needs and what is best for your students, you can get to the work of governing the district. ■

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A refreshing opportunity

Joint education panel has long-range goals

Damon Asbury, director of legislative services

Even casual observers of the state political scene know that public education has been the target of constant change over the past decade or more. With each succeeding governor and General Assembly come a flood of changes and directives. The federal government overlays even more mandates.

Educators have grown weary of the litany of topics such as Common Core, third-grade reading guarantee, Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, Ohio Principal Evaluation System, Race to the Top Fund, American Institutes for Research, PARCC and more. It has become common for actions taken quickly during one legislative session to be subject to revision in the next. Too many of these changes appear fragmented, without any long-range consideration as to how the parts fit together and, even more importantly, where they are intended to lead.

There is, however, a refreshing opportunity to take a step back and consider the long-range needs of public education in Ohio. This opportunity arrived with a new legislative structure approved in the biennial budget bill — House Bill (HB) 64 — adopted in June 2015.

HB 64 created the Joint Education Oversight Committee (JEOC). It is similarly structured to the Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee and the Ohio Retirement Study Council, which give legislative committee members an opportunity to study, analyze and recommend legislative actions.

The main purpose of JEOC, as stated

in the enabling legislation, is “to review and evaluate education programs of schools and state institutions of higher education that receive financial assistance from the state of Ohio.”

Although commissioned in mid-2015, JEOC held its first two meetings in April.

The authorizing language establishes a 10-member committee composed of five members of the Ohio House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House and five members of the Ohio Senate selected by the Senate president. The five members from each chamber must include three members of the majority party and two members of the minority party. The chair rotates annually between the House and Senate, with the Senate president appointing the chair in even-numbered years, and the House speaker doing so in odd-numbered years. Either the House speaker or the Senate president appoints the committee’s ranking minority member.

The appointed committee members are:

- Sen. **Randy Gardner** (R-Bowling Green)
- Sen. **Cliff Hite** (R-Findlay)
- Sen. **Peggy Lehner** (R-Kettering)
- Sen. **Tom Sawyer** (D-Akron)
- Sen. **Sandra Williams** (D-Cleveland)
- Rep. **Andrew Brenner** (R-Powell)
- Rep. **Bob Cupp** (R-Lima)
- Rep. **Ryan Smith** (R-Bidwell)
- Rep. **Teresa Fedor** (D-Toledo)
- Rep. **John Patterson** (D-Jefferson)

JEOC members are experienced legislators who represent leadership positions and come to the table with

a personal commitment to students, public education and school finance. Hite currently serves as the committee chair.

HB 64 gives the committee specific responsibilities to select various educational programs operated by school districts, other public schools and state institutions of higher education and review and evaluate those programs. Other public schools include schools for the deaf and blind and community, STEM and college preparatory boarding schools. State institutions of higher education include state universities and colleges, community colleges, university branches and technical colleges.

The review and evaluation process may include any or all of the following:

- assess how state monies are expended and determine if the expenditures are for the intended purposes and lead to improved performance;
- determine if the program meets intended goals, operates efficiently with sound procedures and controls, serves only authorized activities and has any unintended effects;
- examine pilot programs that have been developed and initiated and determine if they offer innovative and effective measures that others could use.

JEOC has broad powers to complete its work and may investigate any school district, other public school or institution of higher learning to fulfill its duties. Individual committee members may not conduct any inspections

independently without approval from the committee chair, the committee itself and the Senate president and House speaker.

The purpose of the committee, according to Hite, is to try to help schools get better. He noted the committee will take its work on the road during the summer recess and visit different sites across the state to identify and share best practices. Visits to urban and rural areas that demonstrate high performance despite high poverty will be a priority.

Smith said the committee should seek to learn what schools are doing to fight back against poverty and its impact on student learning.

Cupp stressed that JEOP is not a second education committee but a group that will work directly with the legislature to conduct research and form objective, neutral policy recommendations.

At its inaugural meeting, the committee identified a long list of priorities, including achievement gaps, transportation, charter school accountability, testing and assessment, the state report card, teacher preparation, early childhood education

and the role of the State Board of Education.

Sawyer expressed hope that JEOP will provide lawmakers an opportunity to look deeper into complicated education policy issues than what typically is possible with the state budget and midbiennium budget review.

Both Lehner, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, and Gardner pointed to the need to quickly determine how the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act fits into the process. They noted that the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is currently gathering ideas from education stakeholders and suggested a JEOP-ODE partnership to avoid duplication of effort or potential conflicts.

Williams stressed that urban districts' needs should be taken into consideration.

Patterson described the committee as an "all-star panel of those who care deeply and know, intimately, the challenges educators face each and every day."

Brenner, chair of the House Education Committee, and Fedor, that committee's ranking minority member, round out the

House side of the panel.

JEOP is authorized to employ staff as necessary to successfully and efficiently perform its duties. This includes appointing an executive director and other professional, technical and clerical positions or consultants to help the committee in its work. An advertisement has been posted for the executive director position. A panel composed of Hite, Lehner, Sawyer, Cupp and Patterson will screen applicants.

One may ask: Will this be yet another study committee where the findings and recommendations end up on a shelf somewhere in the Statehouse only to gather dust? While it is much too early to arrive at any conclusions, the first two meetings have been filled with promising comments and aspirations expressed by JEOP members. Each offered interesting insights into their own goals and aspirations.

At least at the outset, members expressed their individual commitment to the important work before the committee. They appear to be creating a bipartisan and collaborative climate, a welcome condition that one hopes will persist over time.

Our children deserve no less. ■



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Playing the numbers

How you stack up as a board

by Amanda Finney, senior marketing and trade show manager

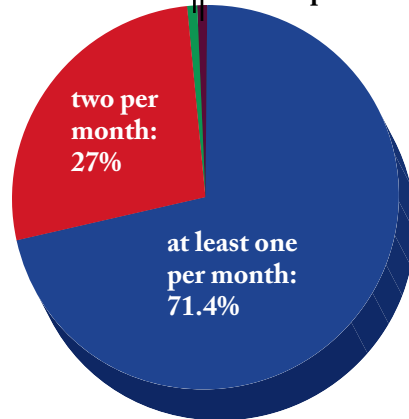
Every two years, OSBA conducts a survey of public school board members. Its purpose is to get an accurate and timely demographic profile of Ohio's boards of education. This year's survey was emailed to each district treasurer to complete and the responses were collected online. The results provide important demographic information for board members who serve Ohio districts.

This year, 260 districts responded to the survey. Following is a brief demographic synopsis of Ohio board members based on those responses. Due to rounding, some survey categories do not total 100%.

No matter how you add up the numbers, school board members play an important role for the 1.76 million Ohio schoolchildren. OSBA thanks you and your district for your service and dedication. ■

Number of regular or special meetings each month

three per month: 0.7% — four per month: 0.8%



This is a shift from 2014, when 52% of boards reported holding one meeting per month and 45% reported holding two meetings per month

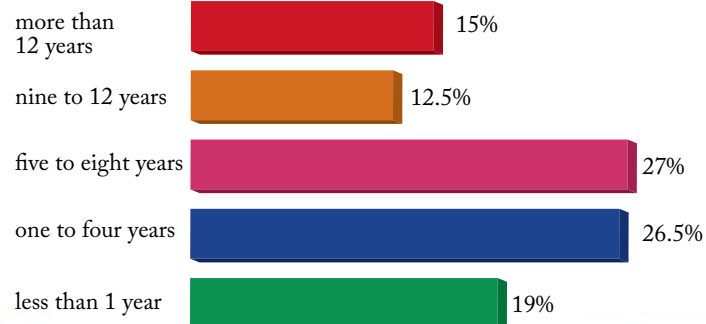
15%

of school boards have at least one former teacher serving as a board member

84%

of boards primarily hold meetings lasting one to three hours

Board members' terms of service



game
member

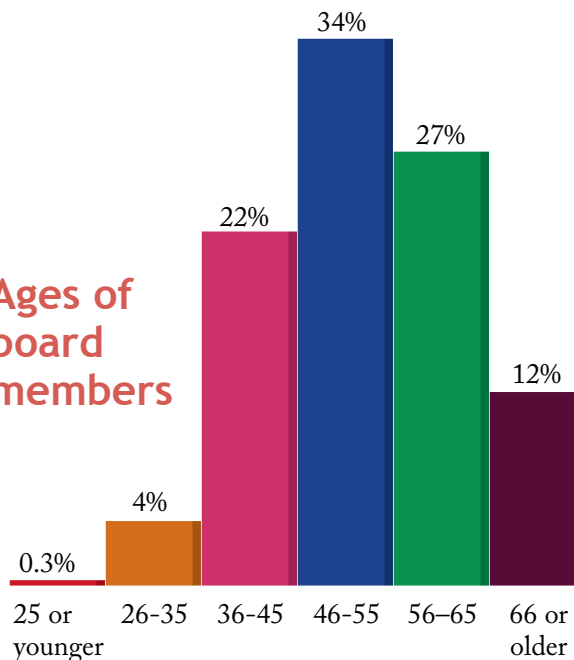
3,445

Total number of public school board members in Ohio (according to the OSBA database)

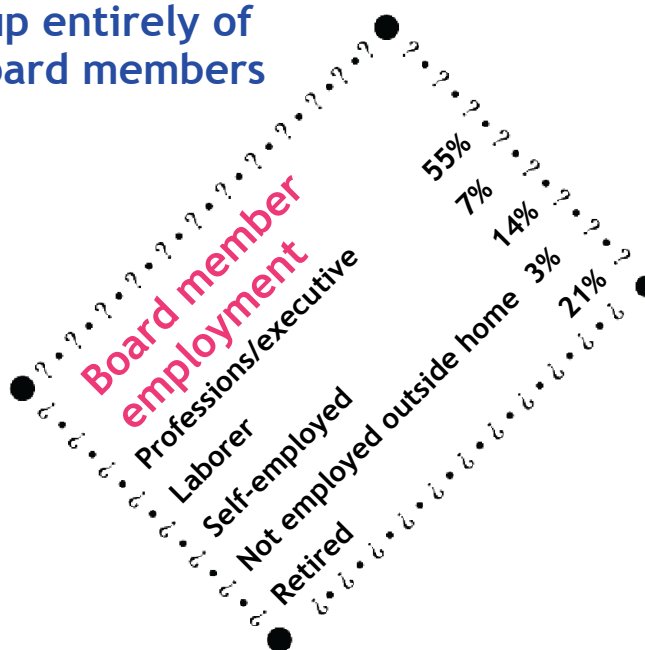
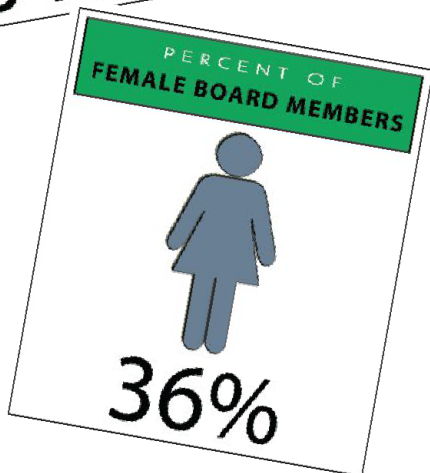
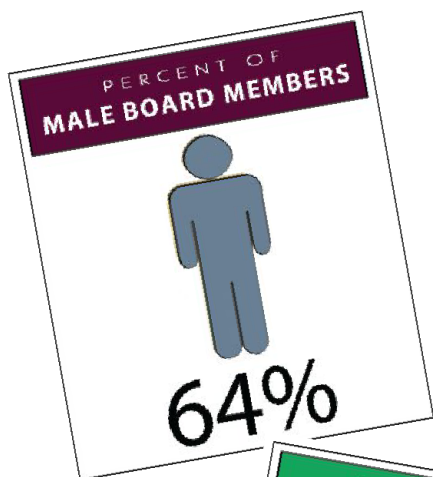
Diversity of board members

Caucasian	96%
African-American	3%
Asian-American	0.2%
Latin-American	0.02%
Other	0.07%

Ages of board members



11% of boards are made up entirely of male board members



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CHANCE

PARK PLACE

LUXURY
TAX

BOARDWALK

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Business Honor Roll program increases in participation

Amanda Finney, senior marketing and trade show manager

For the sixth consecutive year, the OSBA Business Honor Roll program marked another successful campaign. More than 40 school districts participated in the program this year. Statewide, districts submitted over 100 nominations of firms that provided invaluable support for schools and students.

Districts value the opportunity to recognize local businesses

for their support, especially as schools face budget uncertainty. This program helps districts say “thank you” for their vital contributions.

Businesses — large and small, corporate-owned or family-owned — play a key role in supporting local schools. From helping schools with in-kind or financial contributions, scholarship programs and extracurriculars to offering internship opportunities, volunteering in schools and sponsoring field trips, businesses contribute to schools in many ways.

OSBA mailed superintendents personalized recognition certificates and letters of congratulations for districts to present to each firm at a school board meeting. A full list of honored businesses can be found at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/50799>.

Although OSBA cannot list the name of every honored firm in the Journal due to space limitations, here is a sampling of district comments about their nominations:

Ansonia Local (Darke)

Paula’s Diner, the Whistle Stop restaurant and M’n M Petrol and Pantry support the district’s summer reading club. Students read 20 minutes during weekdays. The three businesses nominated for this award provide incentive treats for kids who meet their reading goal each week. Each business sponsors one month during the summer.

Chagrin Falls EV

The district partnered with the Council of International Programs USA (CIPUSA). CIPUSA is an international group that brings emerging leaders from other countries to the U.S. to give them firsthand exposure to the American system of participatory democracy.

This past year, the program worked in partnership with Chagrin Falls EV to host six Russian delegates. The delegates met with students and staff to learn more about the American education system.

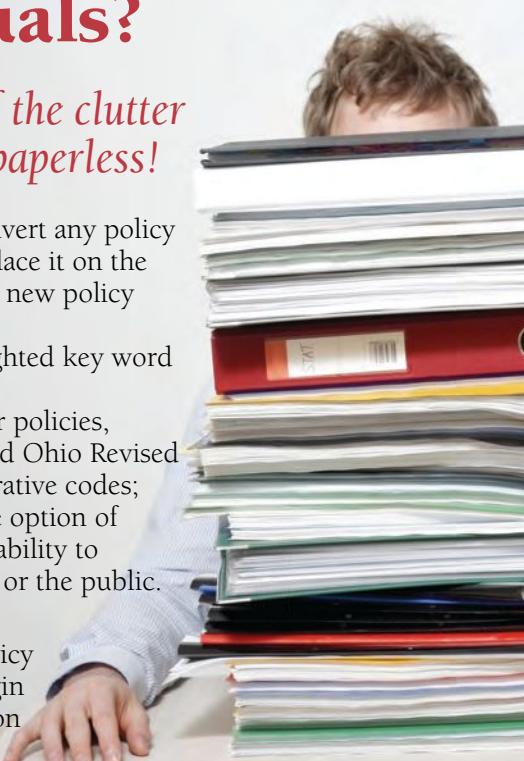
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Jeff Griff, owner of Lowe's Greenhouse in Bainbridge, discussed his career and the recent expansion of the greenhouse with students in the entrepreneurial class. Students put together a marketing plan to help bring in more retail trade for Griff's fresh flower products and produced a commercial at the greenhouse.

Lima City

Potash Corp. donated \$100,000 for improvements to Spartan Stadium and \$100,000 for a new video scoreboard. The company also donated \$23,000 for Smart Boards at Lima City's West Middle School.

Orthopaedic Institute of Ohio donated to stadium improvements and contributed \$50,000 for the scoreboard. The company also provides team doctors for the district.

Union Bank gave \$50,000 for the scoreboard and sponsored community tailgates before football games. The bank also paid for students to attend games.

Health Partners of Western Ohio opened a health center at Lima City's Lima Senior High School for students, staff and families. The firm also has hosted tailgates and paid for students to attend games.

Springfield-Clark Career Technology Center

Dentist Dr. **William A. Lord**, Northside Veterinary Clinic, Sweet Manufacturing Co. and Muncy Corp. have shown a special commitment to the center and its students. They have served on advisory committees, provided employment and/or internship opportunities and supported numerous projects involving the center.

Stow-Munroe Falls City

The district recognized the Stow-Munroe Falls Chamber of Commerce, Western Reserve Hospital and the city's Kiwanis and Rotary clubs for promoting leadership opportunities for educators and taking on various kindergarten through eighth-grade classroom and student-led initiatives. These initiatives included donating various items to classrooms annually, providing new dictionaries to third-grade students and promoting a yearly back-to-school program in which community members are invited to teach and help struggling learners by reading books to them.

OSBA thanks the 2016 Business Honor Roll participants and encourages your district to share its feedback, success and photos with us on the association's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/OHSchoolBoards. ■

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Morgan Local (Morgan) students head to their buses for the afternoon ride home. They are among more than 800,000 Ohio students who travel to and from school on buses every day.

From horse-drawn wagons to today's modern buses

Ohio schools provide transportation services to more than 800,000 students every school day using 15,000 school buses. The buses drive nearly 1 million miles per day to accomplish that task. In each district there are dedicated administrators and transportation staff who have special training and skills to provide a safe and dependable service for Ohio's schoolchildren.

Ohio laws require that all students in grades kindergarten through eight who live more than two miles from school receive transportation. Ohio's public schools also are required to transport students who attend nonpublic and charter schools and other schools of their choice, provided those

buildings are approved by the Ohio Department of Education and within 30 minutes of the child's home school.

These requirements are known as the "state minimum" transportation level. Many school districts recognize the needs of the families and students in their communities and provide more transportation than just the state minimum. This is not only convenient for students but also good for their safety. The federal government has regularly studied the relative safety of students in school buses and issued reports that continue to document the fact that school bus transportation is the safest mode of transportation for schoolchildren.

students

*Pete Japikse, deputy director
of management services*

There are both operating and capital (bus purchase) costs involved in providing student transportation. The average cost of a new school bus ranges from \$80,000 to \$95,000, depending on the size of the bus and the options included. Most buses can only be used reliably on routes transporting students between home and school for eight to 10 years and then will be used as spare or backup buses for the rest of their usable life span. Typically, buses are considered used up in 12 to 15 years.

Operating costs can vary from district to district — the state average for the 2014-15 school year was \$50,000 per bus. This cost is usually lower in rural districts and higher in urban districts. The cost per student is typically \$865 per year, provided the district can operate with buses that are full. When operating buses for community schools and nonpublic schools with lower enrollment and in very large districts with low population density, the costs per student can easily double due to the inability of districts to fill buses in a reasonable ride time.

Student transportation in Ohio began with horse-drawn wagons in 1892 in Kingsville Township in Ashtabula County. The first student transportation laws were enacted in 1894. Organized student transportation increased with the development of automobiles and better roads. Rapid growth continued as Ohio's school districts entered a period of consolidation.

To quantify this blossoming industry, in the 1941-42 school year 6,800 school buses transported 290,000 students to school at a cost of nearly \$7 million. Fifteen years later, during the 1956-57 school year, 623,965 students were transported on 8,141 school buses at a cost more than \$16 million. Early costs to transport students were \$24 per school year, compared with \$865 per student in the 2014-15 school year.

Using data from 2015, the most recent available, costs reported by districts for transportation exceed \$732 million. Costs can vary significantly by district, based upon the type of district, population density, the number of school choice opportunities and the physical size of the district. The funding formula in Ohio calculates reimbursement for districts at 50% of the average cost of transportation statewide but adjusts that amount in some cases by caps and guarantees. State assistance

Ohio school districts' transportation costs

School year	Number of buses	Number of pupils	Total cost	Bus cost per student
1941-1942	6,800	290,000	\$6,998,150	\$24.13
1956-1957	8,141	623,965	\$16,458,201	\$26.37
1975-1976	not available	1,382,344	\$96,805,550	\$70.03
1980-1981	11,393	1,384,153	\$196,549,726	\$142.00
2000-2001	14,523	1,346,243	\$515,751,116	\$373.79
2005-2006	15,000	1,119,231	\$648,052,966	\$579.00
2009-2010	13,342	918,257	\$695,122,866	\$781.43
2014-2015	14,056	832,921	\$732,452,385	\$865.51

for funds to buy school buses ended during the 2009 fiscal year.

Ohio districts' transportation costs, as shown from state data in the chart (above), include fleet insurance, maintenance costs, fuel costs and labor costs. In recent years, fuel costs have decreased; however, we still see increases in operating costs because of labor and health insurance expenses. Typically, these last two costs represent more than 80% of the total transportation operating expenses for a school district. The cost to purchase new school buses is not included in the summary listed in the chart and is an additional expenditure for Ohio's schools.

Data show that transportation costs have steadily increased each school year. That cost notwithstanding, the safety and efficiency of the yellow school bus used in today's student transportation is second to no other type of transportation.

For more on Ohio student transportation costs, see "Managing costs for Ohio school bus transportation" on page 26. ■

Rural bus drivers make kids' long rides a little smoother



Morgan Local school bus driver Tom Quaintance carefully steers his vehicle down a steep hill in Morgan County.

Morgan Local buses log over 625,000 miles a year

Gary Motz, editor

With 387 square miles to cover, bus drivers at **Morgan Local (Morgan)** spend a lot of time behind the wheel getting the district's 2,050 students to and from school.

Only four Ohio school districts are larger: **Switzerland of Ohio Local (Monroe)**, 546 square miles; **Ohio Valley Local (Adams)**, 487 square miles; **Vinton County Local (Vinton)**, 416 square miles; and **Miami Trace Local (Fayette)**, 401 square miles, according to the Ohio Department of Education.

"This year we run 3,629 miles a day," said Morgan Local Transportation Director **Doug Hughes**. "We cover the whole county with the exception of one township."

That daily distance adds up to 627,817 miles a year, said Transportation Secretary **Kerri Beam**. That figure doesn't include what in school transportation parlance is known as nonroutine miles, those driven for athletic events, field trips, extracurricular activities and summer school programs. That number tallies 35,000 miles.

Beam, who seemingly has every transportation statistic at her fingertips, even tracks the buses' annual diesel fuel consumption down to the tenth of a mile: 84,198.2 gallons last year.

Morgan Local's transportation budget for fiscal year 2015 was \$1.88 million, or 9.3% of the district's overall budget, said Superintendent **Lori Snyder-Lowe**. The state average is about 5%.

Sixty percent of the transportation budget went for wages and benefits, 30% for operations and 10% for vehicle purchases. The budget was funded 65% by the state, 18% locally, 13% from the federal government and 4% from other sources.

Transportation challenges

Bisected by the Muskingum River, Morgan County is covered with the rugged terrain typical of southeast Ohio. School bus drivers traversing the many back roads must contend with steep, one-lane gravel roads, narrow bridges, overhanging trees and blind bends. They also must be careful when pulling over for oncoming vehicles so they don't veer into the deep ditches that line many roads. Even the state routes pose challenges with their numerous curves, obscured intersections and high-speed traffic.

Additional challenges include snow, ice, localized flooding in deep valleys and the occasional cow or horse that slipped its pasture. Wildlife also is abundant, drivers said, and include

deer, turkeys, foxes, snakes, owls and, sometimes, bobcats and coyotes. And, with Amish living in the area, it's not uncommon to crest a hill and come upon a horse and buggy.

The school system runs 24 buses on a two-tier system and has several road-worthy backup buses, Hughes said. The early tier transports students attending the high school and junior high school. After those routes are completed, drivers deliver students to and from the three elementary schools. The driver with the longest routes travels 209 miles a day.

"We try not to have anyone on a bus for more than an hour but, unfortunately, a few are on for longer than that," Snyder-Lowe said.

Beam said the longest ride is the homeward trip for a girl living near the Athens County border: one hour and 25 minutes. The trip is much shorter for high school and junior high school students living in McConnelsville, just a few miles from those schools.

Almost all of the bus drivers take their vehicles home at night, because their homes are closer to their routes than the bus garage.

Bus driver qualifications, training

Student safety is paramount and built into every aspect of training and operations, Hughes said.



Driver Tom Quaintance traces part of his route on a map at the Morgan Local bus garage.



The view from a school bus on SR 376 as it enters McConnellsville alongside a Muskingum River lock channel.

To drive a school bus in Ohio, individuals must have a valid commercial driver's license with passenger bus and school bus endorsements, he said. The district conducts driving record and criminal background checks on all candidates.

"We first train them a state minimum of 12 hours with our OBI, on-bus instructor," Beam said. "On average, we train each one of them about 30 hours. The OBIs have to be certified through a certification process with regional instructors."

"The next step is training with district drivers," Hughes said. "They ride the routes and pick up pointers from the experienced drivers. So that gives them additional training."

Morgan Local's OBI is **Russ Clifton**, who has driven 22 years for the district and currently transports special needs students.

"I teach them the correct way to drive a bus," Clifton said. "They have to learn how to operate the flashing lights for picking up and dropping off, the different steps they have to go through at railroad crossings, how to operate a wheelchair lift, what the laws are for driving a school bus in this state and how to do a pre-trip inspection."

Clifton also provides training for experienced drivers, which includes four hours of state-mandated in-service sessions each year. The district provides additional training on such topics as properly completing paperwork, pre-trip inspections and bus evacuation drills. Annual physicals also are required.

Beam said drivers must be recertified every six years. That

A ride on a route No. 5

The OSBA Journal recently joined **Morgan Local (Morgan)** bus driver **Tom Quaintance** on his afternoon junior high-high school route. The trip covered 33 miles in a little under two hours.

Quaintance greets students by name as they board his bus; a few sit behind the driver's seat to chat with him about their day. As the bus fills, students linger in the aisles and talk excitedly about their after-school plans – a little too excitedly, as it turns out.

"Sit down," Quaintance says firmly over the loudspeaker.

Silence ensues, and students take their seats before quietly resuming their conversations.

Quaintance put his vehicle in gear and followed a line of buses pulling onto SR 376 along the fast-running Muskingum River. From there, buses head in both directions, with Quaintance steering upriver toward McConnellsville.

"I drive over 100 kids every day, about 45 on this route and 60 to 65 on the elementary route," he said. "About 35 of the elementary kids get off at the one town stop, just six minutes from the school. After that it's just mileage, one stop at a time."

After dropping several upper-level students in McConnellsville, the bus rolls into the backcountry. The roads are steep, narrow and bumpy. Ditches overgrown with weeds line the sides. Bushes and tree limbs occasionally brush against the side of the bus.

Quaintance keeps a sharp watch on the road while constantly



A Morgan Local student shares a program flier with bus driver Tom Quaintance.

monitoring his mirrors. A wide interior mirror above helps him keep an eye on his passengers.

At one stop, a dog runs off a porch to greet two boys. At another, a student walks up a winding drive toward his house, which is not visible from the road.

When topping a hill or rounding a sharp curve, Quaintance slows to a crawl in case he has to pull over for an oncoming car or truck. When vehicles do meet, both must steer to the right to get by each other. Pull over too far and you can end up stuck in a ditch.

After the last stop, Quaintance turns back toward McConnellsville, where he'll join other buses to pick up students at East Elementary School. He'll drop off half his kids in town. From there, it's back into the hills where it's all mileage, one stop at a time.

involves three days of three-hour classes with a regional instructor and taking a recertification test with the district's OBI. New background checks are conducted along with the recertification process.

An emergency procedures handbook provides instructions for dealing with everything from traffic accidents, illnesses and injuries, child custody disputes and weapons on a bus to tornados, bomb threats, hostage situations and student disruptions. The handbook also lays out the procedures for calling off school due to bad weather.

"We watch the weather radar and forecasts on several websites consistently throughout the winter," Snyder-Lowe said. "When bad weather starts, we drive the roads throughout the county to monitor the conditions. If we feel the road conditions are not safe for our buses, we immediately delay or cancel school. The safety of our students is our No. 1 priority."

Drivers do much more than just drive

Drivers can't help but get to know their students. Seeing them first thing in the morning and as they head home in the afternoon can give drivers a pretty good handle on how kids are feeling.

"When we ask the kids, 'How's your day?' you can tell by their face if something's going on," said 19-year driving veteran **Jeannie Voland**. "So I'll ask them, 'What's happening this morning? Are you not feeling good?'"

"Without even a word spoken you can tell how the kids are doing, if something is bothering them," said **Tom Quaintance**, who has been a driver for six years. "And then a lot of times if they seem bothered I'll say, 'Hey, come up here and sit down and talk to me while I'm driving.' You try to build a good rapport with them."

"One of my favorite parts of the job is being part of their lives," Clifton said. "I enjoy seeing them in the morning when they smile and call you by name; it kind of makes your day. When I see kids I used to drive, they'll usually remember me, call out my name and give me a hug."

Snyder-Lowe said the drivers' feelings about their passengers are typical of the Morgan Local staff as a whole. Whether it's a cafeteria worker offering a kid who's feeling down a little extra food at lunchtime, a custodian asking a student how the day is going or a bus driver inviting a troubled child to sit down for a chat, staff members care deeply about their students.

"The connections and relationships that these people make with our kids ... I just can't tell you how much that means to the kids and the families in our communities," she said. "They're very protective of their kids and they *are* their kids."

"They become your children," Voland added. "Their parents

entrust them to us and they become our children too."

Keeping them on the road

The harsh driving conditions take a toll on buses. To handle the rugged roads, the district orders them equipped with larger engines and heavy-duty suspensions, transmissions and brakes. To keep them running safely and efficiently, mechanics maintain a rigorous maintenance schedule.

"We bring them in for service every 3,000 miles," Mechanic **Wayne Robinson** said. "We check them out all over, adjust the brakes, grease them, things like that. We try to service two buses a day and work on other things in between. We recently switched to a synthetic oil, which doubles the time between oil changes to 12,000 miles."



Morgan Local mechanic Wayne Robinson works on an engine in the district's bus garage.

The Morgan Local garage and mechanics can perform just about any repairs a bus might need, from replacing engines and transmissions to bodywork and installing new mirrors and electrical components. They also are equipped to make road repairs and, if necessary, tow buses back to the garage.

"When they break down, we go out on the road to fix them," Robinson said. "Sometimes we have to pull them out of a ditch. We've got a 12,000-pound winch in the back of this truck (the bus garage's service vehicle). I've chained this truck



Relaxing for a moment before the buses roll are Morgan Local Transportation Director Doug Hughes, left, and driver Tom Quaintance.

to trees many times to pull them out because, most of the time, it's not heavy enough by itself. But, so far, I've never had to call a wrecker."

But no amount of maintenance and repair can keep a bus running forever. Eventually the time comes to call it quits.

"We've got some 1998 models still on the road that are getting to the end of their life span," Robinson said. "It gets to the point where we can't fix them anymore or they're just not worth fixing.

"We just parked (retired) one this year that had 473,000 miles on it. It needed a motor, so I told the boss we could put a motor in it, but I'm not sure it will pass inspection next year. So that's when you make the call, when it's not worth the effort and expense."

A valuable part of the county's culture

Longtime drivers, many of them transporting their second generation of Morgan Local students, are woven tightly into the community's social fabric. They know everyone, and everyone seemingly knows them. Along with the rest of the district staff, they have a special place in their hearts for *their* kids.

"I like seeing my children do something with their lives when they grow up," Voland said. "That's why you try to help them along the way.


"Being a small community, I get invited to their weddings and other things. And the parents of some of my kids I'm driving now rode on my route when they were in high school, so they know how I deal with children."

"The thing I feel the best about is trying to help turn some of the challenged kids around," Quaintance said. "If I can make an impact and point kids in the right direction, that's what it's all about."

Each August, the district hosts a welcome-back day, an in-service program for updates and a staff recognition called the Kudos Award, Snyder-Lowe said.

Recognized by community members and their co-workers, staff members are honored for superlative job performance and going above and beyond what is required of them. Transportation workers always earn a number of these awards.

"Our kids love their bus drivers," Snyder-Lowe said. "Our drivers are committed to their students, and when they say something, these kids are going to listen. The relationships our drivers build with them is an astronomical asset to our district as a whole. These are the first people our kids see in the morning. They are the last people they see at the end of the day. They set the tone." ■



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21st century high-tech drives the 'old' yellow school bus

Pete Japikse, deputy director of management services

The American School Bus Council performed a national parent survey in 2006 to find out what parents thought about the school buses their children ride to school. A common response was that school buses look old, have not changed in years and would benefit from some modernization and new technology.

In fact, school buses have continued to benefit from safety enhancements, modernization and new technology on a regular basis, even though the outward appearance has remained very similar for years. Some of the design changes were spurred by crashes or injuries. Others resulted from innovative thinking by a team of industry partners constantly searching for ways to increase student safety.

Following is a review of some of the more notable changes in school bus design in the last 30 years.

- Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) oversight contributes greatly to increased safety. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has staff and engineers who are continually working with bus manufacturers and industry experts to adopt safety design measures for the standards. These are under constant review and revised following public comment and formal adoption procedures. FMVSS regulations apply to every school bus built and sold in the United States and regulate many design safety features. These include side impact protection, windshield retention, joint strength standards, rollover protection, seating



The iconic yellow school bus might look much the same as it did years ago, but its structural design, engineering, technology and safety features are very 21st century.

crash standards and many more.

- Fuel tank integrity and emergency exits were studied and enhanced following a tragic accident in Kentucky in the late 1970s. All school buses now have crash protection cages around their fuel tanks as well as roof, window and emergency door exits.
- Passenger protection has been enhanced greatly over the years. Seats made of fiberglass in the 1970s progressed to metal and foam with vinyl seat covers in the 1980s. These seats were upgraded again to require total foam envelopes and fire retardant vinyl over the seat backs to provide students a padded protection barrier. Seat spacing has been further regulated to maintain consistent spacing between seats and sufficient height on the seat backs to keep children contained in the event of an accident.
- School bus exterior lighting has constantly been upgraded to add additional warning lights and increase bus visibility in darkness and inclement weather. Many of today's school buses now have strobe lights mounted on the roof to further increase visibility in bad weather and fog.
- Traffic control devices have been added to school buses, including stop signs and yellow and red warning lights to warn motorists that students are loading or unloading and may be crossing the street.
- Integrated child seats and passenger restraints are used in some places. While school buses are designed to be extremely safe for their occupants, some districts have elected to purchase buses with seat belts. Bus seats are available with integrated three-point restraints if districts wish to purchase them. Seats with integrated

child safety seats also are available for districts that transport preschool and small children.

- Improvements in engine controls, with the use of onboard computers and self-diagnostic equipment, have helped increase fuel efficiency and decrease exhaust emissions. A notable landmark in clean engine technology was reached in 2010, which means diesel engines manufactured in or after 2010 emit cleaner air than they take in.
- Body panels at one manufacturer are now being bonded with high-strength adhesives that have more structural endurance than mechanical fasteners.
- New technology has been developed to incorporate GPS units into buses to help track bus movement and enable dispatchers to locate buses in real time.
- Additional new technology has been developed to allow video cameras to be installed in school buses to record student behavior. These same devices also can be mounted on the outside of buses to catch motorists who illegally pass a stopped school bus.
- Driver requirements, while not specifically part of the vehicle design, have been increased to improve bus drivers' skills. Employers now have additional resources to conduct criminal background checks and other reference checks to ensure they hire only the best individuals to work with and transport schoolchildren.

This list is not exhaustive; there are many other changes, both large and small, that have been incorporated in the familiar yellow school bus. All of these serve to enhance children's safety while preserving the look of school buses as something very familiar. ■



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State patrol inspections help ensure passenger safety

Lt. Douglas DeBord, Ohio State Highway Patrol Office of Field Operations, Licensing and Commercial Standards; and Pete Japikse, deputy director of management services, OSBA

Many individuals not involved in school bus operations take for granted that the buses are subject to thorough care and oversight. In fact, school buses are one of the most regulated forms of passenger transportation operated in the United States.

All school buses are subject to an exhaustive list of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS), ensuring that many safety aspects are successfully implemented in the design and building of the vehicles. All three of the leading school bus manufacturers in the U.S. have engineering departments that regularly work with the federal government, testing labs and the pupil transportation industry to research new technologies and test existing products to maximize the safety of school bus passengers.

Third-party labs working for the federal government regularly test vehicles to ensure compliance with FMVSS. These labs and government regulators also respond to customer concerns when products exhibit a rare failure or potential for failure.

In this state, there are additional design requirements for school buses that are promulgated by the Ohio Department of Public Safety and managed by the Ohio State Highway Patrol. These standards are codified in administrative code and apply to every school bus used for student transportation, regardless if a public school district, a nonpublic school or a private contractor owns the vehicle. One element in Ohio's administrative code is that additional products and technology, known as aftermarket add-ons, also must be reviewed and approved prior to being installed on a school bus.

The patrol's Office of Field Operations, Licensing and Commercial Standards administers the school bus construction standards. Office staff holds regular meetings with stakeholders and industry representatives to constantly review the standards and ensure they are current.

In addition to managing construction standards, the patrol performs regular inspections of all school buses in the state,



Ohio State Highway Patrol Motor Vehicle Inspector Mark King makes notes during a school bus inspection. The patrol is responsible for inspecting all of Ohio's school buses to ensure they meet rigorous safety standards.

in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code. These inspections are composed of annual comprehensive inspections as well as spot inspections throughout the school year.

The net goal of all regulations and inspections is to maximize the safety of each and every student being transported to school.

The mandate for owners is that all school buses are to be maintained without any defects. This is not only at inspections but also at any time school buses are used for pupil transportation. The school or company administrator overseeing school bus operations must ensure that this standard is met when buses are used for transportation and presented for inspection.

The goal of the patrol's inspection team is to ensure buses are maintained as they were designed and delivered by the manufacturer. Districts are required to perform their own maintenance checks, preventive maintenance and maintenance services as needed. Ideally, the state inspection team will not find any defects and confirm the vehicle owner has met the performance standard.

To help school bus owners and inspection teams, the patrol annually issues a school bus inspection manual so both parties can have the same understanding of the process and procedure. The ultimate authority on any school bus design feature is the set of construction standards that was in place when the vehicle was built and delivered to the owner.

This year, the patrol is going through a transition to put more officers on the road. This means that some officers who previously were working with inspection teams are being reassigned. As a result, districts are now working more closely with patrol civilian inspectors. There will be no change in the services provided during the annual and spot inspections. The patrol is committed to maintaining services and has procedures in place that will improve direction and communication.

School bus owners will continue to have state troopers involved in their school bus inspections, however, these troopers will be sergeants and lieutenants. These commanders have always been available, but bus owners will begin to see them more often.

This year's annual school bus inspections started in January if requested by a school district. In years past, annual inspections did not start until after school was out;

however, many districts have asked for earlier inspections. Bus owners who want annual inspections to be completed from May through July can still schedule them by contacting their local bus inspector.

The goal of the Ohio State Highway Patrol is to have all annual inspections completed by July 31. This date gives the patrol and bus owners a buffer zone for reinspections and other issues that could arise during the normal inspection process. This minimizes the possibility that the beginning of the school year is impacted by problems with bus inspections.

The net goal of all regulations and inspections is to maximize the safety of each and every student being transported to school. Bus owners should continue to conduct their operations with total safety in mind as they have always done, so that each new school year will be great and safe. ■

Ohio school transportation facts

- School buses in Ohio travel 1 million miles each school day.
- Ohio ranks 10th in the nation for the number of students riding school buses.
- Only six states in the U.S. have more school buses on the road than Ohio.
- It would take more than 550,000 cars to transport all the children who ride on Ohio's school buses.
- Children in a school bus are 12 to 15 times safer than in a passenger car.
- The average school bus in Ohio is rated for 66 passengers. However, that rating is based on three children in a bus seat. For most children older than 7, it is realistic to have only two children in a bus seat. Stated another way, the real capacity of a school bus is only two-thirds of its rated capacity.
- The average cost to purchase a new school bus is \$85,000.
- The average cost to operate a school bus for one school year is \$50,000.
- In the newest school buses with clean diesel engines, the air leaving the exhaust is cleaner than the air going into the engine.
- Many Ohio school bus drivers also are parents whose children have ridden or are riding school buses today, making them stakeholders in this very important industry.
- Ohio school bus drivers must pass annual physicals, have regular criminal background checks, are subject to drug and alcohol training and regularly participate in training to maintain and enhance their skills.
- The biggest challenge for Ohio schools today is to find enough school bus drivers.



Managing costs for Ohio school bus transportation

Pete Japikse, deputy director of management services

School transportation has become a critical part of students' lives. Surveys conducted by the American School Bus Council show that parents look to school buses for convenience, to eliminate the necessity and expense of driving children to school in family vehicles, to enable children to get to school without impacting parents' jobs and to maximize student safety by preventing them from walking in dark and high-traffic areas.

The result of these family needs is that school buses have become very much a part of the fabric of our society. When buses become unavailable, either due to funding shortages or other reasons, both family lives and student education are disrupted. Some children today cannot get to school without riding a school bus.

This need sets up a parental expectation in Ohio that all students will be transported. In fact, when this transportation is provided, it becomes accepted as a standard and sometimes is even taken for granted. The result of this expectation is that Ohio public schools are faced with communities that insist on having their children transported, at any cost.

When we analyze this cost it becomes apparent that the significant expenditure in school transportation is a district's cost per bus. With new school buses today priced in excess of \$85,000 and the state not providing any assistance for purchasing them, districts have been slow to replace buses.

This means bus fleets have been growing older, which leads to a very predictable increase in operating expenses. School buses, like passenger cars, become more expensive to own as they age. Data from districts across the state indicate the average maintenance cost per year for a new school bus is typically \$1,000 to \$2,000. As buses age, this cost increases.

Buses more than 7 years old have an average annual maintenance cost of over \$5,000. As buses approach 10 to 12 years of age, those costs can double and triple. Without

funds to replace buses, districts are left with little option but to keep repairing them.

To be clear, deferred maintenance is not an option with a school bus. Considering who the passengers are on these vehicles, it is critical that each bus in operation be maintained in outstanding condition to protect its student riders.

Another element that affects schools with aging buses is fuel economy. For many years, school bus fuel usage averaged 3.5 to five mpg. This was a necessary cost driven by the engine design and weight of the bus. In recent years, engineering improvements in engine design have increased that to eight to 12 mpg.

A district that can replace a school bus from the 2000-2005 era with a bus manufactured in the last several years can benefit from an immediate savings in fuel use — sometimes as much as \$4,000 to \$5,000 per bus per year. Between increased fuel economy and the reduced maintenance costs of a new school bus, total annual savings can easily be more than \$10,000.

Unfortunately, without funds to purchase new buses, districts enter a vicious cycle in which they keep repairing and feeding older buses. Over six or seven years, they can easily spend as much operating an older bus as they would to buy a new one.

So, what are a school district's options?

Cancel or reduce bus service

This option is not acceptable to families and results in students being late to school or not able to get to school. It also has a marked impact on the community.

National studies have shown that each school bus replaces an average of 35 cars on the road. If Ohio eliminated all of its school buses, the immediate impact would be an increase of nearly 550,000 cars on the road twice a day.



Although transportation takes up a relatively small percentage of most school district budgets, the expenses still are considerable and an ongoing challenge to contain.

This increases traffic congestion and commuter delays for the community. It also contributes to additional pollution and results in a daily statewide fuel consumption increase of 70,000 gallons.

An additional downside of eliminating buses is the impact on student safety. In a landmark study published by the National Academy of Science on the relative risks of school travel, the agency found that students in cars were 12 to 15 times more likely to be involved in a fatal accident as students riding school buses. That risk increases to 25 times more likely to be in a fatal accident when a student is driving the car.

Use fewer buses with longer routes, more passengers

Decreasing the number of buses on the road requires scheduling current buses to drive farther and pick up more students. In Ohio's rural districts where routes already are long, it is difficult to transport more than 25 to 30 students per bus because of the time it takes to pick them up and drop them off. There are more seats available on buses, but districts, students and parents are concerned with the length of time that children have to spend in the vehicle.

Suburban districts can fill up a bus quicker because children live closer together. But there comes a point when the bus cannot hold any more children and has to go to school to unload.

Use fewer buses by staggering school start times

Scheduling some schools at different times allows buses to make multiple trips. This enables districts to minimize the size of their school bus fleets because each bus can make several trips in the morning and again in the afternoon.

The departure from one school time for all students can disrupt family schedules and is a change for teachers. However, it is the most effective use of transportation resources. It allows districts to use fewer buses to transport as many students as needed.

An easy way to think of it is that if all students attend at the same time, the district needs a seat for each student. If students are assigned to go to school at two different times, the bus fleet can be half the size. Operating fewer buses allows a district to spend less money.

What is the bottom line? Districts can minimize transportation costs by carrying as many students as possible on as few buses as possible. And, those buses should be as new as possible.

This goal can only be achieved if districts replace buses when they are no longer cost-effective to operate. They also must schedule buses and routes in a manner that uses their resources in the most effective way. ■



Shared services take root in Ohio school transportation

Pete Japikse, deputy director of management services

It is true — there are school districts in Ohio that have learned how to leverage strengths and resources among districts and other government entities to increase the efficiency of school transportation.

That said, it also is true that a concept promoted by several past studies has not been embraced, that of merging smaller districts and operations into larger districts to theoretically increase efficiency.

To understand why the latter point is true, it is notable that public school districts throughout Ohio enjoy a strong sense of identity and independence. The ultimate desire of communities and families is to identify with their own local school district, elect their own school board and preserve control over district functions, including starting and ending times.

This is consistent with the results of one of the earlier studies commissioned by the state in 1999 and conducted by the accounting firm Plante Moran. This study found that merging transportation operations countywide was not likely to be effective. It would reduce the flexibility of individual districts, cause personnel issues and result in conflicts of attendance times and the ability of districts to adopt their own local procedures.

Sharing strengths, outsourcing tasks

What Ohio districts have learned to do well is find specific areas within transportation where they can collaborate and leverage each other's strengths. This has been demonstrated both with districts collaborating directly with each other as well as with ESCs representing groups of districts.

Several of these initiatives have involved coordinating routing services for specific groups of students; others have managed services common to neighboring districts. In all the cases, it has become evident that the real benefit is to allow school administrators and transportation offices to increase their own effectiveness by focusing on strengths and outsourcing tasks that can be done better by others.

It is significant to note that reduced cost is not always the goal or outcome. While none of these ventures results in increased cost, not all of them result in significant cost reductions. What they do is allow administrators to focus on other tasks that are equally important.

Trumbull County ESC has long served as a central management source for special education transportation, serving all the districts in its area. Districts look to the ESC



Ohio school districts sharing transportation services reap benefits by coordinating route management, collaborating on vehicle maintenance, combining fuel facility resources and more.

for transportation services for special education students, and the ESC, in turn, contracts with a service provider to manage routing, family contacts, staffing, fleet management and other aspects of the service.

This allows the districts to focus on transportation services for the rest of their students and eliminates the need to buy buses and hire staff specifically for special education transportation. Districts are able to operate smaller bus fleets and reduce staffing requirements for special needs transportation.

There have been other consortiums throughout the state, but most have either disbanded or stopped providing formal service for one reason or another. Routing consortiums are, by their nature, difficult to sustain unless all the parties have a continued need for the consortium and agree to participate and remain active for the long run. The existence of these groups is challenged when districts drop out for a period, then want to re-enter only when they are challenged with expensive services for a particular student or two.

What is more common, and a regular practice statewide, is for districts to collaborate with neighboring districts to transport small groups of students attending nonpublic or community schools outside of their districts. In these instances, districts have long been communicating with

each other and transporting students on buses already routed to a school choice program and with seats available. These casual agreements enable two districts to jointly run just one bus for transportation to a particular school in lieu of each providing its own bus.

Collaborating on vehicle maintenance

Another area where districts are working together is school bus maintenance. In the old model, each district takes care of its school buses. Some districts do this in their bus garage with school mechanics; others contract with a local repair shop to maintain their buses.

Several factors have led districts to collaborate. Maintaining a small fleet of buses is not cost-effective. These districts do not buy enough parts and supplies to get volume discounts, it is difficult to staff a long school day in districts with too few buses to justify more than one mechanic and the cost of tools and equipment is very high.

Using a commercial repair shop is typically more expensive than in-house labor. Shops charge higher hourly labor fees, parts are purchased after retail markups and scheduling becomes difficult because not every commercial shop will keep mechanics on duty solely to work on school buses. In some cases, districts have found that local repair shops lack the expertise to appropriately perform repairs specific to school buses.



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- transportation operation cost analysis and benchmarking studies;
- routing analysis;
- fleet management assistance;
- general operations evaluation;
- regional coordination studies;
- in-service presentations for drivers and administrators;
- evaluation of specific transportation services, including payment in lieu of transportation;
- bus purchasing and specification development;
- driver qualifications compliance review;
- transportation emergency plan development;
- development of local student transportation handbooks.

To learn more, contact **Pete Japikse** at (614) 540-4000, (800) 589-OSBA or schoolbus@ohioschoolboards.org.



There are multiple advantages for several small districts merging repair services. By basing all mechanics in a single location, districts can lengthen the garage service day by scheduling shifts. The immediate result is that buses can be repaired sooner and returned to service with minimal downtime.

A second advantage is that purchasing power for parts and supplies is increased because of the increase in volume. Finally, the overhead cost of specialty tools and equipment is reduced; instead of each district needing to purchase the same items, they can share one set.

In 2001, **Barberton City** experienced a particularly bad annual school bus inspection. The buses were being serviced by a local private repair facility as they had been for 50 years. The level of service had degraded to where the vehicles were not being maintained at the standard required for school buses, and the district was left without sufficient buses for its routes.

One year later, the district again failed inspection, leading to discussions with a neighboring district, **Norton City**, for a shared service agreement for school bus maintenance. After a series of discussions, officials from both districts agreed on costs, staffing levels, parts purchasing and cost distribution between the districts. They signed a contract and launched a joint maintenance operation.

Twelve years later, the two districts are still sharing maintenance services, and all buses are safely operating in optimum condition with little or no inspection issues. The classic benefits were achieved: The district providing the service increased staffing and extended service hours, bus downtime was reduced and both districts were able to increase the size of their bus fleets without difficulty.

Pooling fuel resources

Another service that districts can share is fuel. Several districts in the state share fuel facilities with their local government entities — cities, townships and counties. In some cases, districts share fueling resources with commercial transporters.

The advantages here are twofold. First, costs are lower when fuel is purchased in higher volumes. Second, by eliminating the need for infrastructure such as pumps, tanks, lighting and safety controls, the entities sharing resources reduce maintenance expenses.

Sharing fueling resources will become even more vital to public schools as the market offers more options for alternative fuel, including propane and compressed natural gas. Instead of incurring the costs of installing their own fueling infrastructure, districts will be able to buy fuel from other agencies that already have these facilities in place,

such as local governments and commercial suppliers. This will enable schools to gradually convert their fleets to the newer alternative fuels without abandoning current diesel fuel resources.

ESCs partnerships prove effective

Another way in which districts can coordinate resources is by working with their ESCs. Both **Stark County ESC** and **Muskingum Valley ESC** have been leaders in this area.

Stark County ESC has done a very effective job of coordinating the purchase of key resources for their districts and providing them favorable pricing. In a relatively new venture, the ESC is working with its districts to coordinate services for special needs students that cause significant challenges for individual districts.

Muskingum Valley ESC also initiated services for its member districts to acquire technology and other equipment to study transportation more broadly, with the intent of identifying and implementing efficiencies.

The ESC has been able to obtain grants to add equipment to buses, including GPS tracking technology and RFID student accountability devices. RFID, which stands for radio frequency identification, includes student identification cards imbedded with electronic chips that are tracked by card readers mounted in bus doorways. The system provides a record of ridership and attendance on individual buses.

The GPS and RFID technology helps districts collect and isolate data elements that are critical to developing and maintaining transportation efficiency.

What are the possibilities?

Is there a limit to what we can do with shared services? Perhaps, but we also are nowhere near exploring all the options.

What about collaborating on driver training, dispatching and call centers? How would combining business centers help districts better manage purchasing and mandated state reporting requirements?

By sharing services, districts not only reduce costs and increase efficiencies, but also enable their staff to invest more time in managing effectively. Creatively sharing talent and resources with others benefits everyone and enables districts to focus on their primary mission — educating their students. ■

Editor's note: Norton City Transportation Supervisor **Paul Stoneking** contributed to this story. Stoneking was a key figure in the Norton City-Barberton City transportation maintenance operations merger.

Busing challenges in Ohio's fastest-growing district



Olentangy Local (Delaware) students, accompanied by Hello Kitty, Minions and Shopkins, walk to their buses at Heritage Elementary School. Olentangy, Ohio's fastest-growing school district, is the fourth-largest student transporter in the state.

Pete Japikse, deputy director of management services

One of the most difficult support services Ohio schools provide is transportation. It requires vehicles, maintenance, operations support, drivers, public relations, communication channels and money.

And though it can be argued that both small and large districts have the same liabilities and responsibilities, the sheer volume of the work involved in overseeing transportation in a large district can be staggering.

Imagine managing transportation for **Olentangy Local (Delaware)**, the state's fastest-growing district.

At one point, the district was mostly farmland like many other

rural districts. As urban sprawl from nearby Franklin County consumed the farms, the school district began to see new subdivisions, apartments and condominiums springing up all over its 110 square miles.

A district that used to have one campus for all of its students now has three high schools (soon to be four), five middle schools and 15 elementary schools. Its enrollment has exploded to approximately 18,000 students from fewer than 5,000 in 1998.

Ohio has districts that are geographically larger and a few with greater enrollment, but Olentangy has the unique attribute of being the quickest to go from large and rural to the fourth-

largest student transporter in the state. Only **Columbus City** and **South-Western City** transport more students on school buses, and **Cincinnati City** is in a virtual tie with Olentangy.

OSBA recently visited the district to ask two of its transportation administrators about the challenges of keeping the operation running at peak efficiency. Here's what Director of Transportation **Jodie Clark** and Transportation Supervisor **Amy Morgan** had to say.

OSBA: How many office staff members does it take to support the transportation operation at Olentangy?

Clark: The district has two transportation offices — one on each side of the district. Each office has four staff members and a supervisor. A transportation director floats back and forth between the two offices. One of the offices also has a routing support staff person to assist with student discipline and driver support. Each of the transportation compounds also includes a fully equipped bus maintenance facility.

OSBA: The district currently uses district-owned buses and drivers that work for the district. Have you ever considered using a transportation contractor?

Clark: No, Olentangy has always been a district-owned and district-operated transportation program. We believe that our

Olentangy Local School District transportation overview

School year	Bus riders	Daily bus miles	Buses	Cost
2001	4,609	5,204	65	\$ 2,552,096
2005	7,367	7,343	107	\$ 4,363,686
2015	10,146	10,393	147	\$ 7,286,631

customers want the district to operate its own service and have drivers that are employed directly by the district.

Morgan: Because of the number of routes we run and the number of buildings with field trip needs that conflict with those routes, the district has recently contracted with a school bus vendor to assist with field trip transportation. The contractor picks up our groups at school in the afternoon and takes them to their destination. District employees on district-owned buses go out after their routes to bring the groups back home.

OSBA: How big of an impact does school choice — nonpublic and charter schools — have on transportation?

Clark: We have a significant number of families that choose nonpublic school education for their students. This year we are transporting 376 students to 11 out-of-district schools and

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providing payment in lieu of transportation for another 175 students.

The cost for this transportation is well over \$300,000 and requires buses that meet the calendars and attendance hours of those schools, which are not coordinated with the Olentangy calendar and attendance hours. This causes a significant logistical challenge for the district and results in a higher operating cost than for in-district routing to the district's public schools.

OSBA: Describe your routing plan.

Morgan: We operate multiple-tier routing, with some buses on two tiers and others on four tiers based upon the bell times of the schools to which they are assigned. The actual routing is supported by computer routing software, with two routing secretaries and two supervisors operating the system.

OSBA: Is technology important as a tool in your operation?

Morgan: There are many areas where we use technology to organize and manage data and workflow. We use software for routing, an in-house database for field trip management and bus discipline, software to manage the fuel dispensers, another software package to track vehicle maintenance and service and GPS tracking as well as radios to communicate with and monitor the buses.

We also keep a number of documents on cloud servers so that both of our offices can communicate with each other on common databases and files.

OSBA: Why do you feel that Olentangy is unique?

Clark: As the fastest-growing district in the state, we are regularly opening new buildings, buying new buses and recruiting new bus drivers. Each time a new building is opened we have to manage redistricting of enrollment boundaries and revised routing plans. Recently, we had to split a single bus compound into two service facilities and offices to support the size of the transportation operation as well as the geography of the district.

The district is a combination of suburban and rural property, has several major roadways running through it with increasingly heavy traffic, a number of active railroads and regular construction projects with associated road closures for utility installations.

The district administrative team is committed to serving clients well and considers many requests for individualized service and routing exceptions. Each of these is considered with an eye on the environment as well as the impact on safety considerations.

OSBA: What are the greatest challenges facing successful transportation in your district?

Morgan: We have an aging bus fleet. We have had to invest

a lot of resources in constantly growing the fleet, and that has limited our ability to replace buses on a regular schedule.

Driver staffing has been a major challenge — with constant growth we are constantly recruiting, training and hiring substitutes into full-time positions almost as soon as they have completed training. This leaves us with a shortage of substitute drivers to cover regular absences, which on one recent day totaled 25 drivers on leave, out of a total bus count of 147.

With a strong focus on safety, there is a lot of management time invested in thorough and comprehensive training, both for new drivers and for veterans who may have had a mishap. All drivers participate in retraining after an accident and staff evaluates each event to determine if something new can be implemented to prevent recurrences.



Olentangy Local students wave to their teachers at the end of the school day.

OSBA: If we could ask the genie in the bottle for anything to make life better for your transportation operation, what would those wishes be?

Clark: Lots of things ... it is hard to decide what is most important.

Included in the list of wishes would be: return of state funding to help purchase buses; provide state funding for all students we transport, not just those over one mile away from school; change the rules for transportation in school choice (by) limiting transportation requirements to just schools located inside our district boundaries; standardizing the school calendar for all schools, including nonpublic and vocational; set a minimum number of students, such as 30, before we would have to bus students to a nonpublic or community school; and redefine the walking distance rule to allow students to walk on walking paths. State law currently requires schools to use road miles to calculate distances to school, even if a walking path that is not along a road is shorter. ■



OSBA transportation services go the extra mile

Gary Motz, editor

From congested city streets to steep, winding back roads, 800,000 Ohio children ride school buses every day. The combined distance of those daily routes covered by more than 15,000 buses is nearly 1 million miles.

The drivers responsible for getting those children safely to school and back home must pass annual physicals, have regular criminal background checks and undergo training to maintain and improve their skills. The buses they drive cost an average of \$85,000 and have annual operating expenses of \$50,000.

School transportation is subject to an ever-changing maze of state and federal laws and regulations. Districts also must work hard to ensure safety, plan their routes to maintain optimum efficiency and be prepared for crises and emergencies.

Simply put, school transportation is a complex, costly undertaking filled with challenges.

As part of its commitment to provide superlative support to its members, OSBA launched a school transportation service in 2012. The program is led by veteran school



School transportation professionals work on a small group project during an OSBA Master of Transportation Administration Series seminar at the association's headquarters in Columbus. The series is among the many transportation services OSBA offers.

transportation expert Deputy Director of Management Services **Pete Japikse**. His experience includes 12 years as the Ohio Department of Education's state pupil transportation director and 20 years as a school district transportation director in the Cincinnati area.

OSBA offers a wide range of transportation services, including personalized assistance with transportation rules interpretation, policy questions, technical advice and consultation on such topics as safety, operations and finances. General services include:

- school board member in-service presentations;
- driver training seminars;
- administrative training seminars;
- routing efficiency audits;
- bus purchasing and specification development;
- evaluation of specific transportation services, including payment in lieu of transportation;
- driver qualifications assurance studies;
- district obligations for state reporting;
- emergency plan development;
- development of local pupil transportation handbooks;
- routine transportation consulting and assistance.

Districts also can contract for specialized services. They include:

- Transportation operation cost analysis and benchmarking studies — This service evaluates the district's operating costs, provides comparisons to peer districts and helps school systems see where they could reduce costs by revising practices or procedures.
- Routing analysis — This in-depth analysis provides a study of districts' bus transportation and examines operational costs and ways to reduce them by implementing different logistical models, such as changing routing plans.
- Fleet management assistance — This program evaluates the cost of maintenance and current maintenance practices and explores different options to increase effectiveness and reduce costs.
- General operations evaluation — The program includes spending time with the district to evaluate current practices and procedures and providing recommendations for improvements and adjustments to enhance safety and increase operational effectiveness;
- Regional coordination studies — This service includes working with multiple districts in specific areas to determine if there are opportunities to share transportation support services as well as bus transportation.

Professional development opportunities include the Master of Transportation Administration Series (MTA), an in-depth curriculum of workshops designed for new and veteran transportation administrators. The program



Some of the first graduates of OSBA's MTA program are all smiles after completing the course. The series offers in-depth workshops designed for transportation administrators.

focuses on three core areas: compliance and safety; operations management; and governance and finance. The curriculum is presented over three years, with a minimum of five classes per year. One core area is covered each year.

District staff and administrators can sign up for individual workshops or contract for the series in one-year increments. Those enrolling by the year will be required to complete a project each year on a topic that will benefit their school district. OSBA staff mentors and guides participants on their projects and provides reference materials.

Individuals successfully completing all three years of the program will earn OSBA recognition as a Master of Transportation Administration. Twenty-two members of the initial class graduated from the program last month.

OSBA also offers a new transportation support service — the Virtual Transportation Supervisor program. This subscription service focuses on expanding access to transportation expertise, guidance and training. It also provides networking opportunities for school administrators responsible for student transportation.

Program components include:

- regional in-service training events;
- cursory reviews of T-1 and T-2 reports before they are submitted to the state;
- monthly conference call/webinar forums;
- access to OSBA's advanced transportation library;
- Web-based cost analysis calculators, efficiency studies and funding forecast tools.

School transportation plays a vital role in educating Ohio's 1.76 million students. After all, students who can't get to school safely can't learn.

For more information on OSBA's school transportation services, contact Japikse at pjapikse@ohioschoolboards.org or (614) 540-4000. Further information on services and training programs is available at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/41906>. ■

Leadership for learning



Leland Melvin, center, poses with Columbus City school board members W. Shawna Gibbs and Michael D. Cole following his presentation at the First General Session at the 2015 Capital Conference.

Preparations ongoing for 2016 OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show

Scott Gerfen, assistant editor

In preparing for an event like the OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show, organizers get down to work as soon as the curtain closes on the previous year's event.

There is little time to relax, and OSBA's preparations for the November event have kicked into high gear.

By now, presenters for learning sessions have been picked; keynote speakers are being booked and booths for the ever-popular Student Achievement Fair are filling up.

The 2016 OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show — the event's 61st edition — is set for Nov. 13-16 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. The annual gathering, which draws nearly 10,000 attendees, features inspiring and enlightening keynote speakers and more than 100 learning sessions, workshops and seminars led by top experts in their fields.

Driven by the philosophy of "Leadership for Learning," the conference offers incomparable professional development



for school board members, district administrators and staff. Learning session topics explore district leadership, finance, school safety, school law, blended learning and technology, among others. Spotlight sessions dig deeper into topics such as current legislation and diversity in schools.

This year's learning sessions have been shortened to one hour, allowing time for 22 additional sessions. Sessions begin at 9 a.m., 1 p.m., 2:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 14, and Tuesday, Nov. 15, and 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 16. OSBA experts will lead four free in-depth workshops during the afternoon on Sunday, Nov. 13.

A highlight of the conference, the Student Achievement Fair is set for Tuesday, Nov. 15, from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Students and teachers from districts across the state will share their groundbreaking programs that are preparing students for the future and increasing achievement.

Some of the programs to be featured at the fair include robotics, community service, mentoring and various career-technology initiatives. To highlight how Ohio students succeed on all levels, an entertainment group from each of OSBA's five regions will perform during the fair.

The nation's largest education trade show will be open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Nov. 14, and 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 15. The exhibition of school equipment, supplies and services will host more than 550 exhibitor booths. Attendees will have opportunities throughout the event to win valuable prizes for their districts.

Each year the Capital Conference features outstanding keynote speakers. This year's Second General Session speaker on Nov. 15 is **Steven Michael Quezada**, an actor, comedian, writer and public school board member. Quezada is best known for playing Drug Enforcement Administration agent Steven Gomez on the Emmy Award-winning TV series "Breaking Bad." He received a Screen Actors Guild Award for his role.

The New Mexico native is a powerful education advocate and Albuquerque Public Schools Board of Education member. He is well-known for his charitable work, which includes raising money for Youth Development Inc. and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Quezada also has acted in more than a dozen feature films as well as several other TV series. He has taught acting classes for local children and provided on-the-job training to future filmmakers.

Information about the Nov. 14 and Nov. 16 General Session speakers will be announced once details are confirmed.

The General Sessions also highlight outstanding student performing groups and honor Ohio's top school board members, administrators, educators and support staff.

Jeff Nischwitz, who has been captivating audiences



Conference attendees network during the 2015 Collaboration Connection luncheon.

and readers on a broad range of business and personal development topics, helps kick off the conference as the Early Bird Workshop speaker on Sunday, Nov. 13. The three-hour session begins at 2:30 p.m.

A graduate of **Northmont City's** Northmont High School, Nischwitz delivers presentations to association and business leaders focusing on conscious leadership, accountable teams and personal transformation. Nischwitz provides his audiences with tools they can immediately implement to create new and different outcomes for their organizations.

The OSBA Black Caucus will host its annual dinner on Sunday, Nov. 13, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Dr. **Rodney D. Coates**, director of Miami University's College of Arts and Sciences Black World Studies program, will be the featured speaker. The professor of global and intercultural studies believes that teaching, research and service are mutually reinforcing, dynamically interacting and synergistically intertwined.

OSBA hosts two Conference Luncheons each year on Monday and Tuesday of conference week. They begin at 12:15 p.m., with doors opening at noon.

The Nov. 14 luncheon will feature a Collaboration Connection in which attendees can network and share ideas

and areas of interest or concern.

Former Ohio State University and Cincinnati Bengals running back **Archie Griffin** will speak at the Nov. 15 luncheon. Griffin, college football's only two-time Heisman Trophy winner, retired last year as president and CEO of the Ohio State University Alumni Association.

The OSBA Bookstore will be operating on-site during the conference. It's a great place to purchase books, clothing, plaques and other items. Stop by and receive a special Capital Conference discount of 10% off all items purchased.

OSBA is again offering a special school district group registration rate that, in effect, reduces the per-person cost once more than six individuals are registered. Single registration is \$295. Group registration — more than six people from a member school district — is a flat fee of \$1,850. An unlimited number of registrants can attend the conference for the flat fee. Registration details will be included in conference packets to be mailed in mid-July.

For more information about the Capital Conference and Trade Show, visit <http://conference.ohioschoolboards.org>, watch OSBA publications or contact the association at (614) 540-4000. ■

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*Something for everyone*

Perfecting your 2016 OSBA Capital Conference

Amanda Finney, senior marketing and trade show manager

More than 9,200 attendees representing 90% of Ohio public school districts, approximately 550 trade exhibition booths, over 100 learning sessions and one amazing professional development and networking opportunity — these stats clearly show what makes the OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show one of the top education

conventions in the nation.

Whether you are a veteran board member or new to the board, you know that top-notch professional development is critical to you and your colleagues' skill in leading your district. The annual Capital Conference truly has something for every district leadership team in Ohio.

This unique event, which runs Nov. 13-16 in Columbus, encompasses so much over four days. That's why, for more than six decades, the conference has been the must-attend event of the year for school district leaders.

Planning, planning and more planning

As you can imagine, an event like this requires a year-round commitment to ensure a successful conference. OSBA staff members take to heart your requests and feedback when planning the Capital Conference. The conference is *your* event prepared for you by *your* association. It is designed specifically with boards of education, their management teams and their districts in mind.

Conference curriculum is set early in the year, and keynote speakers are confirmed in the spring. Trade show exhibitors are registered throughout the year, starting the same month the previous conference ends. Conference materials, especially the Conference Guide and App, are coordinated as early as possible to make sure no information is missed.

Down to every last detail, from signs and announcements to conference attendee bags and everything in between, conference planning is

extensive and highly detail-oriented. All of this planning and work ensure you are welcomed with excellent customer service and leave with the best knowledge and resources for your district.

Event overview

The conference offers so much, it can be hard to take it all in when reviewing the Conference Guide, App, website or other materials. Below is a list of some high-level events that attendees will enjoy at this year's conference. Of course, this is just a summary, so you will want to read more details about each of these activities and other conference events to ensure you make the most of these power-packed four days.

The conference offers:

- more than 100 learning sessions, with each session lasting 60 minutes;
- three outstanding General Sessions with nationally acclaimed keynote speakers;
- two Conference Luncheons, one featuring a keynote speaker and the other offering high-quality networking opportunities;
- the nation's largest education-related trade exhibition, providing over 550 booths filled with products and services Ohio school districts need to succeed;
- Early Bird Workshop and Spotlight Sessions for greater in-depth learning;
- Student Achievement Fair, a showcase of 100 booths of innovative student programs and five outstanding entertainment groups;



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- special committee meetings for OSBA groups;
- Region Resource Center to help you become more involved with other districts in your part of the state;
- OSBA Bookstore, offering publications, OSBA apparel and more;
- Conference Guide and App, which allow you to customize and plan your experience;
- face-to-face meeting opportunities with OSBA staff and officers;
- great networking throughout the day and during evening events with other education leaders and vendors.

New board member perspective

As a newly elected board member, you may just be learning about the conference from your board colleagues. Participating in this premier learning event is a must for any board member or school administrator, regardless of the

years spent in public education.

For those new to the conference and others seeking more information, a conference orientation is set for Monday, Nov. 14, to introduce you to the event and all it offers. An OSBA staff member will conduct this session.

Your district treasurer will register you and your fellow board members and administrators for the event, so please be sure to let them know you want to attend the conference and special events such as the Early Bird Workshop, OSBA Black Caucus dinner and Conference Luncheons.

Veteran board member perspective

If you've served multiple terms on your board, it's likely you have attended at least one Capital Conference. Although you are not new to the conference, it always offers a fresh perspective and the latest in public education trends and topics. And it continues to be a great

networking opportunity for new and veteran board members alike.

For **Marysville EV Board President Sue Devine**, the Capital Conference provides a multitude of benefits.

"The conference features top-notch keynote speakers, great networking with fellow board members and learning sessions that address both current topics and provide ongoing professional development in the area of boardmanship," Devine said.

More information

OSBA members soon will be receiving a brochure with more details on this year's conference and registration information. Further details about the conference can be found at <http://conference.ohioschoolboards.org>.

We look forward to seeing your district at the 2016 OSBA Capital Conference. ■

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Focused on the



A student mentor directs a freshman through a maze of mousetraps at Milton-Union EV's Milton-Union High School where upperclassmen lead an award-winning dropout prevention program.

Milton-Union program wins national award

A classroom at **Milton-Union EV's** Milton-Union High School resembled backstage at a fashion show. Student designers took measurements and swapped ideas about what looked good and what didn't. The laughter was contagious as others, posing as models, walked down the "catwalk" wearing — toilet paper.

It looked silly, and it was meant to be.

"It's fun to get everyone involved, and it helps build friendships," junior **Lauren Craig** said. "It really helps us connect with each other."

Craig is one of 350 student mentors who, since 2007, have been trained in leadership skills as part of the small, rural high

school's Freshman Focus, a dropout prevention program that pairs freshmen with upperclassmen in the district about 20 miles northwest of Dayton.

Student leaders, who coordinate lesson plans and play a significant role in the program's guidance, have built strong bonds with more than 1,000 freshmen who have participated in the program since it began.

Those connections are important for a first-year high school student who must confront new stresses with the rigors of more-challenging classwork and the social trials of adolescence.

"When you lose a kid, you lose them in their freshman

freshmen

*Scott Gerfen,
assistant editor*

year,” school counselor **Paula Shaw** said. “That’s what all the research shows.”

Nine years ago, Shaw and other school leaders were focused on the district’s 84% graduation rate and searching for a way to increase it. That’s when she asked Principal **Scott Bloom**, who was an assistant principal at the time, to help find a plan or program that encouraged more students to leave Milton-Union with a diploma.

They found an idea at **Hilliard City’s** Hilliard Davidson High School.

At first, Milton-Union tried to mirror Davidson’s Freshman Focus program; however, because of Davidson’s larger student population, it wasn’t the right formula for success.

What worked at Milton-Union was giving students more and more autonomy.

“I don’t think it would work if we were in control of it,” Bloom said. “In fact, when we started ... we talked about that if we continue to be the ones who do this — just the adults — it will always be *our* program.

“It would be OK and fulfill the need we had, but it won’t be transformative for the students, and it won’t be transformative for the district.”

Students are more likely to graduate if they have bonded with one adult at the school, Shaw said. But what if that connection wasn’t possible, and a student developed a bond with an upperclassman, instead?

That is happening at Milton-Union, where the graduation rate has topped 90%, and students who had the lowest grade point averages have produced higher GPAs. Wright State University’s College of Education and Human Services examined graduation rates and GPAs before the program and after it began.

That success earned Milton-Union a 2016 Magna Award from the National School Boards Association, which recognizes school board best practices and innovative programs that

advance student learning. Each year, districts from three enrollment categories — under 5,000 students, 5,000 to 20,000 students and 20,000 students and above — receive recognition.

Milton-Union, with an enrollment of about 1,500, was the only Ohio district to receive a Magna Award.



Students work to untangle a human knot, one of the Freshman Focus team-building exercises.

“I think Milton, as a school, has become closer,” senior student mentor **Braden Smith** said. “We’re not as separated in the halls between classes. In our student sections at games, the freshmen are involved because they are comfortable with everybody. I think it’s really boosted the school morale.”

The program begins two days before the start of classes with an orientation camp, which runs from early morning to late afternoon.

Freshmen are matched with student leaders who help them get acclimated to the high school by taking them to lockers, showing them classes and going over schedules.

There are fun team-building activities and contests, such as a version of “Fear Factor,” the former NBC reality TV game show in which contestants were dared to complete stunts and other challenges.

However, the bonding begins well ahead of camp when



A toilet paper fashion show is designed to help build connections between student mentors and freshmen.

student leaders write letters to eighth-graders and meet them in their classrooms.

“We start building those relationships before camp,” junior **Riko Waymire** said. “Summer camp is a get-to-know-you. But it’s a first impression, and it’s an important time.”

Once those bonds are formed, leaders meet daily with freshmen throughout the year.

Two days a week, they go over lessons that help freshmen cope with the new challenges in their lives. Students coordinate and carry out the lesson plans, and the leaders even design some of them.

Mentors provide support in many ways, including help with homework assignments and time management.

There is constant communication.

“You build that connection with (freshmen), and you don’t want to let it go,” junior **Madeline Brown** said. “You want to see them continue to be successful. You don’t want to see them fail. You don’t want to give up talking to them.”

Current leaders, through an application process, select new student leaders every year. Typically, 50-70 juniors show interest in Freshman Focus, Shaw said.

Juniors who are selected remain leaders as seniors, unless there are infractions. Past leaders have returned to help run the orientation camp and gone on to major in psychology, social work or education.

“I think it’s really helped us grow up in a way,” senior **Ethan Dohner** said. “Going through this program, you really get your mind focused on what’s important, and you learn to work with the people around you.”

That maturity can be seen in much of the student body.

“We’re a very typical high school with all the problems that high schools have, but those problems are softened,” Bloom said. “Kids still get in trouble and do things that they shouldn’t. But they also know they have a connection with somebody.”

And those connections can be lifesaving.

Freshmen coping with thoughts of suicide or self-harm or their parents’ divorce have come to student mentors for support. Smith helped counsel a suicidal student this year.

“If I’m going to be honest, his personality was me as a freshman,” Smith said. “But it turns out he was very sad inside. I got called down to the office one day. ... He wanted to talk to me one-on-one.”

Knowing the situation was serious, Smith went to Shaw, who helped the freshman obtain much-needed counseling.

“Without this program, I think he could’ve been lost,” Smith said. “He had somebody to confide in. He’s better now.”

The administration and school board remain overwhelmingly supportive of the program and its evolution to allow student counselors more flexibility, retiring Superintendent Dr. **Virginia Rammel** said.

The board has funded travel and lodging expenses for student leaders and counselors to present at out-of-state national conferences.



Freshman Focus begins with an orientation camp where freshmen are matched with student leaders. The camp features fun relationship-building exercises and contests.

“The kids take it seriously,” Rammel said. “They respect one another, and they’re empathetic toward one another. The counselors and staff continue to tweak the program so as to better fit Milton-Union students.”

Milton-Union doesn’t want to keep the program a secret.

Along with speaking at national conferences, student leaders have trained peers in other schools.

“Here is a model that is working,” Bloom said. “Now, how can we help students outside of here?” ■

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Learning and networking at 2016 BLI

► *Wellsville Local (Columbiana) board members Thomas F. Brophay and Nancy Francis browse titles at the on-site OSBA Bookstore.*

▼ *OSBA Black Caucus President Emmett Claude Orr, Jefferson Township Local (Montgomery), left, speaks with OSBA Director of Management Services Van D. Keating.*



▲ *Wickliffe City board members Jackie Sheridan and Donald J. Marn enjoy the Board Leadership Institute's (BLI) Opening General Session. The two-day event was held April 29–30.*

► *Opening General Session keynote speaker C. Ed Massey greets Jane McGinty, Madison Local (Richland). An article covering BLI appeared in the May 23 Briefcase.*





◀ Attendees share ideas before a session. BLI included 18 breakout sessions led by top experts.

◀▼ Stow-Munroe Falls City board member Kelly Toppin, left, reconnects with his former history teacher, Closing Luncheon keynote speaker Ohio Rep. John Patterson (D-Jefferson).

▼ Linda K. Cleary, North Olmsted City, meets with OSBA Director of School Board Services Cheryl W. Ryan. Visit OSBA's Flickr page at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/91955> to view more photos from BLI.



▲ Northeast Regional Manager Reno Contipelli, left, greets Akron City board members Rev. Dr. Curtis T. Walker Sr. and Debbie Marie Walsh.

◀ Al Long, North College Hill City and Great Oaks Career Campuses, left, and Penny Kill, Spencerville Local (Allen) and Apollo Career Center, share a laugh during a breakout session.

Proud Products of Ohio Public Schools

Who I am
today began
with **public**
education

STAND UP
FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Crystal Davis, assistant editor

Everyday examples of the success of Ohio's public schools surround us as evidenced by myriad exceptional graduates who have gone on to make a difference in the world by working in the public eye or behind the scenes. Year after year, Ohio public schools win awards, competitive grants and are recognized nationally for best practices in operational efficiency and student achievement. In fact, U.S. News & World Report's 2016 Best High Schools ranking placed Ohio 11th.

The rankings evaluate data from more than 21,500 public high schools to identify which schools are best at preparing students for college and careers, with gold medals indicating the greatest level of college readiness. One hundred fifty-five Ohio public high schools won either a gold or silver award in the contest and another 724 were eligible for award consideration. And of the top 25 state rankings in the report, Ohio had the third-highest number of award-eligible high schools behind California and New York. Visit <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/91242> to read the full report.

Designed to raise awareness about the excellence and importance of public education, and as part of OSBA's Stand Up for Public Schools statewide campaign, OSBA features Proud Products of Ohio Public Schools in this special section of the Journal each year. In this sixth-annual installment, OSBA is proud to feature living examples that prove public schools are doing a fantastic job preparing Ohio students for bright futures.

Proud Products of Ohio Public Schools tells the story of graduates who have achieved great success in their chosen fields — people like Epic Records Chairman and CEO **Antonio "L.A." Reid**; Broadway, film and TV actress **Sydney Morton**; world-renowned cystic fibrosis researcher Dr. **Mitchell L. Drumm**; Baltimore Ravens' Defensive Coordinator **Russell Dean Pees**; and Ohio State Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. **Paul A. Pride**. More Proud Products, including Baltimore Medical System's Chief Medical Officer Dr. **Janene Renaye Washington-Stepter** and Columbus-based Virtue Salon owner **Melanie Guzzo** are posted at www.standupforOHpublicschools.org/proudproducts.

The Proud Products profiled in the Journal and online are just a few examples of many Ohio students who have built extraordinary careers using the foundation laid by public education. ■

Dr. Mitchell L. Drumm

Professor and genetics researcher

Marching to his own drum leads to landmark gene discovery

How many people can claim they discovered a gene? Not very many, but Dr. **Mitchell L. Drumm** became the co-discoverer of the gene that causes cystic fibrosis as he was working on his doctorate in 1990.

Drumm's parents are extremely proud of their son, a graduate of **New Philadelphia City's** New Philadelphia High School.

"My mom and dad were both teachers and their main style of helping me along was to simply allow me to follow my interests," Drumm said. "After fourth grade I brought home some mice. One was black and white and the other brown. Turns out, one was a boy and one wasn't. I eventually learned how to tell them apart ... those two mice had pups of varying colors and their pups had pups, and so I tracked what colors came from which mice. So started the interest in genetics, and this became my fifth-grade science project."

To this day, he still has the documentation from his project, which his mother had laminated.

"I have very fond memories of my school years," Drumm said. "Our education was a balance of classroom and textbook lessons, along with life lessons ... we had time to learn from experiences, both positive and negative."

Drumm earned a bachelor's degree in genetics from Ohio State University and a doctorate in human genetics from the University of Michigan. He earned his doctorate in the laboratory of Dr. **Francis Collins**, with whom he co-discovered the cystic fibrosis gene.

Drumm joined the Case Western Reserve University faculty in 1992 and now is a professor in the departments of Pediatrics and Genetics and Genome Sciences. He continues to work on cystic fibrosis and has authored or co-authored scores of peer-reviewed manuscripts and several book chapters on cystic fibrosis. In 2007, he was appointed director of basic research at the university's Willard A. Bernbaum Cystic Fibrosis Research Center and became vice chair for research in the Department of Pediatrics in 2011.

He also is passionate about mentoring and directs a Department of Pediatrics summer internship program, which provides laboratory experience to undergraduates from around the country. In 2009, he was awarded the Bruce M. Jackson Award for Undergraduate Mentoring for his work with Case Western students.

Education inspiration

"It would be hard to single out one teacher, with so many excellent and dedicated ones from which to choose. Math teachers **Jim Watson**, **Rebecca Masten** and **Bud Winn** all had the teaching style that challenged one to learn more and apply what was learned. Possibly most influential was **Richard Bassetti**, my fifth- and sixth-grade science teacher who simply made all of science, particularly biology, something I just couldn't get enough of. That passion has never left me, and I can say with certainty that Mr. Bassetti poured gas on my fire."

Giving back

"A personal mission of mine is to make our young people aware of the importance of math and science and careers in those areas. I give presentations to science classes at both public and private schools. These include elementary, middle and high schools in Brecksville-Broadview Heights, Nardon, Cuyahoga Career Center, New Philadelphia and Cleveland schools. Additionally, I have high school students shadow me and my lab members and carry out research projects for their biology classes." ■

"Education does not have a single recipe. It requires teachers who can recognize what excites and motivates each student, but it also requires an educational system in which the teachers are permitted to personalize a student's education accordingly. I was fortunate to have those teachers in that system."



Col. Paul A. Pride

Ohio State Highway Patrol superintendent

Franklin Local grad serves, protects all the way to the state's top post

When Ohio State Highway Patrol Superintendent Col. **Paul A. Pride** speaks to a school audience, he often thinks back to the formative years he spent in **Franklin Local (Muskingum)**.

"Mrs. **Donna White** was the first teacher that I remember making me think, 'I could really make something of myself,'" Pride said. "(She) was my fourth- and later my sixth-grade teacher. Many of my teachers poured themselves into me and spoke words of encouragement into my life. My schoolwork was monitored closely by my parents and report cards were normally a good experience for me ... and I still managed a B average. Had I applied myself like I was being encouraged, my grades would have been significantly better."

Pride graduated from Franklin Local's Philo High School in 1979 and earned a degree from Ohio University. He served seven years in the U.S. Marine Corps before joining the Ohio State Highway Patrol in 1989 as a member of the 118th academy class. Pride received his commission in November of that year and was assigned to the Marietta post, where he received the Superintendent's Citation of Merit Award in 1990. Two years later, he was named post and district Trooper of the Year.

In 1996, Pride was promoted to sergeant and transferred to the Jackson post as assistant post commander. As a sergeant, he also served at the Marietta and Gallipolis posts. In 2000, he was promoted to lieutenant and served as the Jackson post commander.

In 2002, he was promoted to staff lieutenant and transferred to Jackson district headquarters to serve as the assistant district commander. Pride moved up to the rank of captain and transferred to Cambridge district headquarters to serve as the district commander in 2006. A year later he transferred to serve as commander of the Jackson district.

In 2011, he became Maj. Pride and served as commander of the patrol's Office of Special Operations in Columbus. He was promoted to the second-highest rank of lieutenant colonel in 2012 and served as an assistant superintendent. In 2013, Pride was appointed as the 18th superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

A 27-year veteran of the Ohio State Highway Patrol, Pride is married with two adult children and two grandchildren.



Education inspiration

"Mrs. White was my fourth-grade and later was my sixth-grade teacher. She later went on to become a very successful principal at the schools in a neighboring town. Mrs. White was a very good teacher and was very well liked by all of the students. I remember her passion for her students, and she was always making positive comments as she provided guidance, direction and confidence."

Giving back

"Over the years, I have participated with my children in their school functions and activities. My wife and I have served on band boosters and soccer boosters clubs as well as the wrestling club. I have assisted with youth events and coached many years of youth soccer. I served a number of years as the soccer field maintenance director, ensuring the fields were properly maintained and prepared for games. I served as coach and a board member of the local youth sports program.

"I presented and organized a great number of speech details with all K-12 grades in regards to safety, mock crash demonstrations and addressed numerous driver's education classes." ■

"To be successful as an individual or an organization there are three characteristics that must be embraced: strength, courage and character. Throughout my life and my career I have often reflected on these values to guide my actions."

“I live for opening doors for the young generation of creators. If we do nothing else with our success, let’s open up some doors.”

Antonio ‘L.A.’ Reid

Epic Records chairman and CEO

Teacher’s encouragement helped create a music legend

As the head of Epic Records — which has three singles on iTunes’ top 10 — **Antonio “L.A.” Reid** knew since he was young he was bound for greatness. As it turns out, transferring to a new public school where he met a special music teacher struck the chord that began his epic rise in the music industry.

“When I entered (**Cincinnati City’s**) Hughes High School in 1969,” he said, “my music class ... became the greatest thing in the world ... (the) school was like the TV show ‘Fame.’ It wasn’t a performing arts school, but it felt like it.”

At Hughes, talented musicians, including Reid’s music teacher, challenged him to become the best drummer and overall musician that he could be.

“**Terry Brown**, a cool young guy who sang in a group of his own called the Mystics, was our music teacher,” Reid said. “He was an inspirational figure to all his students but especially to me. Mr. Brown took a special interest in me, encouraged me greatly and started me down the path.”

So great was Reid’s love for music that he walked around school every day with drumsticks in hand. Teachers often would take them away if he made noise in class, but his strong-willed mother, **Emma**, would always demand the teachers return them, he said. A single mother of four who worked two jobs to support the family, Emma never missed a school talent show, which Reid proudly played in every year.

After high school, Reid entered the music world as the drummer for the R&B band The Deele. Along with bandmate **Kenny “Babyface” Edmonds**, he went on to found LaFace Records, where he broke ground for African-American pop artists and helped establish the now-famous Atlanta music scene. At LaFace, Reid produced some of the industry’s top performers, including **Usher**, **TLC**, **Outkast**, **Pink**, **Toni Braxton** and more. His songwriting credits include the soundtracks to “Ghostbusters II,” “The Bodyguard” and “Boomerang.”

In 2000, Reid was hired to lead Arista Records, where he discovered **Avril Lavigne** and worked with superstars like **Carlos Santana**, **Aretha Franklin** and **Whitney Houston**. He later moved to The Island Def Jam Music Group and discovered and developed **Justin Bieber**, **Rihanna**, **Ne-Yo**, **Fall Out Boy**, **Kanye West** and others. He joined Epic Records in 2011, and agreed to judge “The X Factor” through 2013. Today, Epic is topping charts with artists such as **Meghan Trainor**, **Fifth Harmony**, **Future**, **Zara Larsson** and **Jidenna**.

Reid has won three Grammy Awards and The Recording Academy’s President’s Merit Award for his significant contributions to the industry. His memoir “Sing to Me: My Story of Making Music, Finding Magic, and Searching for Who’s Next” hit bookstores in February and is a New York Times best-seller. The book tells the inspiring story of his struggles and success with an inside look at the glamorous and hard-hitting music industry.

Education inspiration

“I didn’t sing, but Mr. Brown let me stay (in his class) all day and soak it in. ... (I)t was a traditional choir class, but we used to do all kinds of music in there ... I would play drums, bongos, piano, whatever was around. That class was the seed from which I first grew some practical knowledge about music beyond simply loving it. Because he was borderline successful with his group, everyone looked up to Mr. Brown. He stressed good work habits, always telling us to practice, practice, practice ... and don’t ever go onstage unrehearsed. He taught us everything about music ... He wasn’t only a teacher, he was a friend.”

Giving back

Reid gives speeches and mentors youngsters as often as possible. In February, he spoke at Cincinnati City’s School for Creative and Performing Arts. Afterward, Artistic Director **Angela Powell Walker** said, “The students were beyond excited to have him visit. The fact that he is from Cincinnati and is so accomplished was truly inspiring to the staff and students.” ■



Sydney Morton

Broadway, film and TV actress

A Sycamore Community City star shines all the way to Broadway

Sydney Morton, a 2004 graduate of **Sycamore Community City's** Sycamore High School, credits a tough teacher with providing the push she needed to shine all the way to Broadway.

"Ms. **Leslie Knotts**, the former director of the theater department at Sycamore High School, really stands out for me as having such a profound effect on my life and on the lives of so many of my classmates," Morton said. "Ms. Knotts was not the type to coddle. She was often gruff, with a dry sense of humor, and she expected a lot out of us ... but what she may have lacked in bedside manner she more than made up for in devotion to her students.

"She spent her evenings at the school running rehearsals and her weekends helping us build our sets ... but most importantly, she showed us that we could be taken seriously, no matter that we were teenagers. She expected a lot from us, and we rose to the challenge."

During high school, Morton danced with the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music Preparatory Department, Cincinnati Ballet, Cincinnati Studio Cloggers and Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, including a performance at Carnegie Hall.

She graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in musical theater. After moving to New York City, Morton was in the Broadway casts of "Memphis," "Evita" and "Motown" and is now performing in the new Broadway show "American Psycho." She also performed in the Chicago company of "Jersey Boys" and "High School Musical" at New Jersey's Paper Mill Playhouse and starred in "Flashdance" on tour. She also has made numerous TV and film appearances, including NBC's "The Sound of Music Live"; "The Intern"; the Netflix series "Jessica Jones"; indie films "Love," "New York" and "Emoticon;"); and many commercials.

Her mother, **Mary Woode Morton**, and father, **Stan Morton**, still live in the Cincinnati area. Her brother, **Will Morton**, works in Seattle for Microsoft on the popular video game "Halo."

"I was able to participate in a multitude of artistic programs during my days (in Cincinnati), and I could attend events, concerts and museums in my down time. I saw professional artistry at a world-class level, and never once did I understand the stereotype of the small Midwestern town. I know that the culture I was exposed to in Cincinnati made my transition to big city life fairly easy for a girl from Ohio."

Education inspiration

"Ms. Knotts gave us all a safe place to create and escape — a haven for misfits, loners and theater geeks to belong, because she never made us or the work we did feel small.

"As a result of lessons learned and our resulting self-confidence, a surprising number of us went on to pursue careers in the performing arts world, performing on Broadway, film and TV, opening theaters in Cincinnati and throughout the country, even creating successful careers as producers and directors and agents, just to name a few.

"Ms. Knotts has passed on, but the lessons we learned in her presence live on in all of her students. She never felt the need to entertain us; she had full faith that we could do the entertaining ... as long as she was there to expect it of us."

Giving back

"Over the years, when I have come back home to Cincinnati, I reach out to my theater and performing arts educators and their students. Whenever possible, we schedule master classes and/or panels where students can ask questions about life as a professional in New York City.

"I know from my own experience that the insights that I pass on are often crucial to survival ... my hope is that the insight I can provide is informative and will provide the confidence that is necessary to succeed." ■



"Being a person is hard, but seeing a person is harder."

Russell Dean Pees

Baltimore Ravens defensive coordinator

Public education provided winning game plan for world champion coach

Russell Dean Pees is one of only eight defensive coordinators in NFL history to coach in a Super Bowl with two different teams — the New England Patriots and Baltimore Ravens. The 2015 Ravens team ranked No. 8 in total defense, marking the 11th time in 13 seasons the unit was among the league's top 10 defenses.

Pees has many more impressive coaching statistics, but it may surprise you to find out that his focus wasn't always on football.

"I had a wonderful high school experience," the 1967 **Hardin Northern Local (Hardin)** Hardin Northern High School graduate said. "I was fortunate enough to go to a small public school where I could participate in everything."

In high school, he earned varsity letters in basketball, football and track and held three school records in track. Pees was a class officer all four years and class president his junior year. He also was heavily involved in other extracurricular activities, including concert band, choir and drama.

"Because of the music background that my high school provided for me, I have the copyrights to over 36 songs that I have composed on the piano," Pees said. "Also, because of the athletic background that my high school provided for me, I became a teacher and a coach."

Pees graduated from Bowling Green State University, then became an English teacher and head football coach at **Elmwood Local's (Wood)** Elmwood High School. Six years later, he became defensive coordinator at the University of Findlay, helping the team win a national title and two conference championships. In all, he coached 25 seasons at six universities.

In 2004, he became linebackers coach and then defensive coordinator for the New England Patriots. In 2010, he was hired as the Ravens linebackers coach before taking over as defensive coordinator. While in the NFL, he has been a part of seven divisional championships, three AFC championships and three Super Bowls — 2004 and 2007 with the Patriots and 2013 with the Ravens.

Education inspiration

"I had so many wonderful teachers that I feel all of them had a great influence on me. I not only received such a wonderful education in terms of knowledge in the classroom, but I experienced so many different ways of life such as athletics, theater, music and, most of all, how to treat people and to realize that we all have different interests in life and that there is a place for all of us."

Giving back

"I have been an educator in the Ohio system (for) 24 of my 44 years in coaching and teaching. I have given a number of speeches to high school students about the importance of education. I recruited across the state of Ohio for over 25 years, providing scholarship opportunities for Ohio students through football.

"I started and have established a fund at my Hardin Northern High that helps students with any type of financial burden that they may have. The fund has been used for such things as a cap and gown for graduation, athletic shoes, books, music instruments and many other needed items. I also donated a Clavinova (digital piano) to the music department at the high school in honor of my mother and father and to also thank Hardin Northern for the opportunities that it gave me." ■

"I am so fortunate and blessed to have been provided such a great public educational experience by Hardin Northern High School. Growing up in Ohio and being educated in Ohio, both in high school and college, has not only provided me with the skills for my profession, but has also provided me with the work ethic and values that it takes to be successful in life."

When Violence Strikes at School, You **CAN** Be Prepared!

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HOW IT WORKS:

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- **NO-COST TRAINING** – This is a nonprofit program sponsored by Buckeye Firearms Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity. There is no cost to your school district. Since 2013, thousands of educators have applied for this specialized training.
- **COMPREHENSIVE PREPARATION** – Training also includes crisis management and hands-on emergency medical training for life-threatening injury.
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