



School Management *News*

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Summer no vacation for transportation planners

by Pete Japikse
senior transportation consultant

How often do transportation staff get this question: What do you do with the students gone and buses parked for the summer? Transportation specialists will tell you they have the best job in the school district. They get summers off—or not.

Certainly, very few bus routes run during the summer. Student management, bus driver attendance and weather conditions are not the first thoughts of the day.

The summer gives administrators more time to focus on critical tasks districts must accomplish for a successful transportation operation next school year. Here are just a few of the summer mission-critical transportation activities.

Wrapping up the school year

Routing already should have started. The most difficult task is updating the student database by verifying grades, identifying school changes and students

who have left the district and ensuring new students are registered and scheduled for routes. For districts starting in August, routing must be finished by mid-July so information can be distributed to schools, parents and students.

Returning bus drivers need to schedule and pass their T-8 physicals before the start of the new school year. Districts should make certain that drivers take these exams as soon as possible. These forms must be filed with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to ensure drivers are valid for the next school year. Drivers who fail their T-8 physicals must reschedule the exam. When drivers fail their second exam, districts must recruit replacement drivers.

More importantly, driver recruitment should start in earnest. Historically, one or two drivers in most districts will not return in August. To prepare, districts need to start recruiting candidates at least three months prior to needing them. This allows time for candidates to complete new driver

training and certification.

New recruits must pass a background check, physical exam and drug and alcohol screening. They also must complete the Ohio bus driver training program in the classroom and behind the wheel. Many drivers also need training to acquire a commercial driver license from the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). Not every candidate succeeds, so districts need to continually recruit new candidates.

Mechanics need to evaluate and address deferred maintenance for the bus fleet. Some districts will have completed their annual Ohio State Highway Patrol bus inspections before summer starts, while others will still be cleaning and preparing buses for these inspections.

Annual inspections are more rigorous than spot inspections performed during the school year. Summer bus preparation requires more attention to detail.

Transportation office staff must complete all year-end mileage reports and cost accounting. Last school year's purchase orders must be closed and

filed with the treasurer and next year's purchase order requests must be submitted. In many districts, the transportation administrator also prepares a proposed operating budget for approval prior to the new school year.

Mid-summer

A key July task is completing the state's T-2 report, which summarizes the previous school year's transportation operating costs. Work on this report must be coordinated with the transportation and treasurer's offices as the district reconciles costs.

A major element in the T-2 summarizes special education transportation data and prior year costs. The district's special education transportation funding for the coming school year is based solely on this data.

Districts using transportation service contractors have an additional requirement. They must obtain the T-2 C report from contractors, audit the report data and include it in the district's T-2. The T-2 must be filed electronically with ODE by Aug. 1.

Effective transportation administrators will use T-2 data to calculate annual operating costs for each bus in the fleet. A fleet analysis can then determine which vehicles are cost-effective or need to be evaluated for service enhancements or replacement.

This cost data is an essential tool in

fleet management decisions, especially for vehicle replacement plans and routing assignments. Vehicles with high operating costs, including maintenance and poor fuel economy, should be scheduled on low-mileage routes to minimize fleet operation expenses.

Planning for the coming year's bus driver in-service training program should be in its final stages in July. A year-long plan for training events, including the school year startup session, should be scheduled with selected topics, speakers and visiting trainers.

Late summer

Final routing adjustments, including those for kindergarten and special education students and new enrollees, and student address updates need to be completed. The next critical routing step is reviewing route sheets to confirm bus stop times and directions. The school board must approve bus stops and routing times. It also should appoint someone to make subsequent bus stop and routing changes throughout the school year.

Safe rider training programs must be planned for students during the first 10 days of the new school year. Drivers, teachers or administrators can teach these programs, or the district can determine the most effective way to provide the training.

Staffing assignments, including hiring new trainees, must be completed.

For districts that rebid routes annually, drivers need to review new route sheets and select routes. Every district should review new routing assignments and hold a dry-run day to test routes and times.

All driver qualifications must be verified prior to the first day of school, including T-8 physicals, BMV records, preservice certification and annual in-service requirements. Documentation must be prepared for superintendents so the annual local employment certificates for drivers can be issued per Ohio Revised Code 3327.10.

In addition to these tasks, many districts hold all-administrator meetings in August to coordinate staff and district needs. These meetings will take the transportation administrator out of the office.

Once these tasks are complete, districts look forward to drivers returning to their daily routes and calls from parents who forgot to register their child, update their address or arrange alternate bus stops for day care.

Among the phone calls, athletic team trips and radio calls from drivers with routing questions, the daily school year routine returns, and summer is definitely over.

Summers may be the busiest and most important time of the year in the school transportation office. But wait — what about taking a vacation? There is always next summer.

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