

## Perspective

### Why Don't We Share More?

by Mark A. Walsh

After working with school districts of all sizes and profiles over the past 14 years, it is still perplexing why more school districts do not share services and infrastructure resources. In some areas of the country, school districts are very large, complex entities that are managed or operated by the local governmental entity. In these situations, it is not uncommon to find shared facilities, shared fuel sites, or shared support services between the school district and the local municipality. However, in other areas, school districts operate their own transportation systems without interfacing or sharing with any other entity.

There's more to sharing than just buildings and fuel sites. Many programs are required to provide services to students who travel out of district to attend specialized programs or services. Although riding times and routing considerations must be taken into account, it would appear that some sharing efforts might prove valuable.

Unfortunately, there are also situations where "turf" appears to be the prime issue. Districts and other entities are reticent about sharing because of a perceived loss of control. Supervisors have developed a well operating system and they do not want to risk modifying the program, or creating extra work, by cooperating with other entities.

For example, how many systems aggressively evaluate, revise, and change routes on an annual basis? We certainly are not recommending that any district make routing changes just for the sake of change, but periodic reviews of mileage, ridership, vehicle use, and program costs are the basics for a well-managed program.

We have witnessed several very successful shared programs and some excellent examples of school district cooperation (see *Trends & Innovations*, page 4).

In many cases, the integration of programs grew out of a demonstrated need by one or both parties. For example, a district found that it needed to replace its transportation facility and this effort resulted into the development of a

facility that provided services to the district, the local ambulance and fire corps, and the sheriff. Not only did these other entities help to support the cost of the project, but they offered intangible benefits to the program. The sheriff department's use of the fuel site provided 24 hour police activity in the transportation yard, thereby reducing vandalism. The ambulance and fire service was a highly recognized community program that generated community support in the bond referendum that was necessary for the construction of the facility.

We encourage districts to think about ways to share any time program changes that are necessary. Here are some examples:

- \* If a facility change is required, is there another alternative to building a new location, or expanding the existing location?
- \* Are there local resources that can be used to provide services that were historically provided by the district?
- \* Could a commercial bus washing location, or a regional paint booth, be utilized instead of developing your own?
- \* Can a neighboring district help with transportation to a remote location?
- \* Can a regional transit service provide any support for a certain designated student group?

Sharing requires thinking "out of the box," but it can be a very effective direction for student transportation systems.

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