

How to Combat Today's Unprecedented School Bus Driver Shortage

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A new nationwide study conducted by the National School Transportation Association revealed that 50% of student transportation coordinators described their school bus driver shortage as either "severe" or "desperate." New drivers cannot be hired on the spot as they need commercial driver's licenses, and many Department of Motor Vehicles were/are closed so potential drivers could not get their road tests or update their qualifications, so the process to get certified can take months.

This is leaving many school districts to turn to ride-share companies like Lyft or Uber, or even paying parents to drive their own children to school. This has caused some school districts around the country to take action. Before the school year began, some districts proposed the school year begin under a remote learning model to accommodate for the driver shortage, while other districts are offering cash sign-on bonuses in the amount of \$4,000 for new drivers, or to pay parents \$700 to transport their own children to and from school.

Here in New York State, Governor Kathy Hochul announced a multi-agency plan on Tuesday, September 28, 2021 to address the school bus driver shortage affecting schools across the state through targeted outreach strategies to more than 550,000 commercial driver's license holders. The plan also includes short-term steps to remove barriers and recruit traditional and non-traditional Commercial Driver's License holders, expand CDL testing opportunities, and enhance processes all designed to get more drivers into school buses.

As many communities around the country navigate through this shortage, some of these reactive tactics have resulted in much higher transportation expenses incurred by school districts as they offer signing bonuses, increased salaries, or even pay parents to drive their own students to school.

This bus driver shortage nationwide showcases how critical it is for school districts to operate their transportation program as efficiently as possible. The following should be analyzed and considered to increase efficiency and alleviate impact during this challenging time:

- Labor agreements - wage/benefits
- School district policies – walker distances, busing tier structure, school choice
- Routing efficiency analysis – is the district fully utilizing their available fleet of buses

If you have questions or on this topic, please feel free to reach out to our Transportation Advisory Services Team. 800- 233- 3251.

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