

The Voice and Vision for Pupil Transportation in Virginia

January

2016



Statement from VAPT

On Sunday, November 8, 2015, at the National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) Summit in Richmond, Virginia, Dr. Mark Rosekind, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) emphasized that the yellow school bus is the safest way for children to get to and from school. He also called for lap and shoulder belts on large school buses and stated his agency's plans to communicate the benefits to state and local decision makers and possibly pursuing regulations requiring seat belts on all school buses.

We thank Dr. Rosekind for his thoughts and his opinions on this matter. We are happy that he acknowledged and stressed that seat belts are one area of the agency's

interest in improving the safety of school buses. Other areas of concern for his agency are loading zone safety, school zone speeding, illegal passing of school buses and school bus messaging.

VAPT supports the NAPT's stance that "absent a federal requirement for belts, NAPT continues to agree with NHTSA that it is most appropriate if the decision to order seat belts on large school buses were left to the States and local jurisdictions." We also feel that the States and local officials would be in the best position to make that determination taking into consideration all of the factors associated with making that decision.

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National Survey Reports Fewest School Bus Stop Deaths Ever

Source: School Transportation News 12/23/2015

Four students were reportedly killed nationwide at school bus stops during the 2014-15 school year, the lowest figure in the 45 years of such data being reported.

The results come from the Kansas State Department of Education, which last month published its annual National School Bus Loading and Unloading Survey that has compiled state crash reports on students killed at the bus stop since 1970.

Three of the fatalities recorded for 2014-15 occurred as motorists illegally passed the school bus. A 7-year-old boy was

killed in New Mexico after disembarking the bus, crossing in front of his bus and running across the street when the passing motorist struck and killed him. The other two incidents occurred in Arkansas, where a 12-year-old girl had also unloaded from her bus and was crossing the street on her way home when she was hit by a passing motorist, and in Pennsylvania, where a 16-year-old girl was crossing the street to her school bus at dawn and was hit by an oncoming vehicle.

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National Survey Reports Fewest School Bus Stop Deaths Ever

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Source: School Transportation News 12/23/2015

In all three instances, the school bus had its stop arm and eight-way lights activated to alert motorists to stop for children.

The fourth death was the result of a 10-year-old boy in Kentucky being struck by the rear dual wheels of his school bus after he had disembarked from the vehicle.



That's The Way Rudolph Rolls

Source: Fauquier County Public Schools, VA News Release 12/8/2015



Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer has been known to make appearances in lots of different places this time of year, and downtown Warrenton, VA is no exception. On Friday evening, Dec. 5, a very large

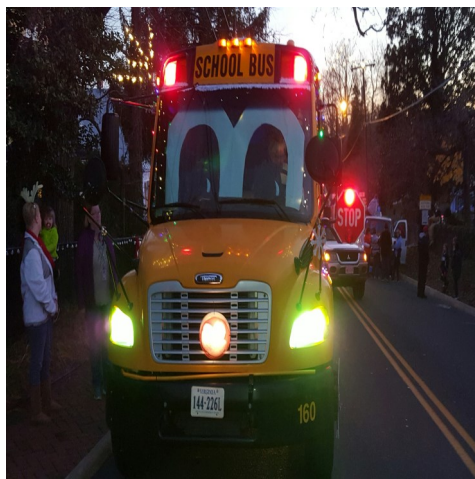
Rudolph - looking suspiciously like a school bus - rolled into town to participate in the annual Warrenton Christmas Parade.

The Fauquier County Public Schools transportation department transformed bus 160 into the most famous reindeer of all - the beloved hero of the 1939 story (recorded in song 10 years later) by the same name. School Bus Rudolph featured a "doe-eyed" front windshield, a red shiny nose on the grill, Christmas lights down the body of the bus, and a large brown reindeer tail out of the back door.

Lead bus drivers Tommy McCuin, Chanda Talbot, Ellen Lemmer, Melissa Strain, Chris Ryman and Todd Canard washed, waxed and decorated the bus before the big night. Office staff and

trainers got in on the fun by preparing the banner and handing out candy. Amy Munda and her daughter carried the banner, and elves Chanda Talbot, Norman Hoverter and Vernon Thornley also handed out candy along with several FCPS drivers and aides who brought their children and marched either out in front of the bus or rode inside waving from the windows.

"It was a ton of fun, and Rudolph was a real hit," said Transportation Director Cheryl Fisher. "Hopefully the judges loved us too."



Love the BUS February 2016

From the American School Bus Council Website on "Love the Bus":

Love the Bus is the American School Bus Council's ongoing campaign to raise awareness and appreciation for the hundreds of thousands of school bus drivers who safely transport children to and from school.

School bus drivers have made the Yellow School Bus the largest and safest transportation system in the country and are deserving of our thanks. By understanding the value of student transportation to our education system, Love the Bus promotes the idea that every person involved in our schools is critical to our children's success.

While Love the Bus is an ongoing campaign, every February the American School Bus Council and schools across America take time out to celebrate Love the Bus month.

Students can participate by sharing stories about their favorite bus drivers and making interactive Valentine's cards to email or print and give to their bus driver. Educators can download the Love the Bus toolkit, which provides resources for implementing a comprehensive program in your school.

The American School Bus Council hopes to make February a month where parents, students, educators, and administrators all show their appreciation for those responsible for getting our children safely to and from school every single day.



The American School Bus Council encourages schools, parents, and communities to celebrate their drivers. In essence, we have to remember that students cannot be educated unless they are first transported.

Love the Bus Campaign is a way to express gratitude to Pupil Transportation employees. What are some ways your district is celebrating Love the Bus 2016?

We'd love to hear from you and what your plans are. Perhaps provide some pictures and information regarding successful Love the Bus activities.

Email your information to: cfisher@fcps1.org

Source: <http://www.americanschoolbuscouncil.org/love-the-bus/love-the-bus>

Getting a Head-Start on Driver Physicals for the Year:

Frederick County Public Schools, Transportation Director, John Grubbs, has already begun the annual conversation with his drivers to begin thinking about their physicals NOW! Physicals are due to their department between July 1 and August 1.

He states, "Drivers need to begin planning now by setting their appointment with the doctor's office as close to July 1 as possible because if they have a thirty day hold on something like sleep apnea, there will be no delay and can get their physicals completed in time.

Last year, we had success because we communicated the expectation and time periods. We hope to have that same success again."



Driving Safety

School Transportation News November 16, 2015



2015 STN Leadership Award winner Charmaine White, Albemarle County Public Schools, Charlottesville, VA

In his 1997 book, “An Integrative Theory of Leadership,” social psychologist Dr. Martin Chemers writes that leaders are ultimately woven from the fibers of trust that a group has in him or her to accomplish the task at hand. He refers to such confidence and optimism as “mettle.”

The word conjures pictures of a sports team that, despite being against the ropes, shows resiliency and resolve to make the big play and win the game. The same certainly applies to leaders in business, education and student transportation.

“There are two sources of mettle,” said Chemers, a professor of psychology and dean of the Social Sciences Division at the University of California at Santa Cruz in an interview with the college paper. “The first is part of an individual’s disposition – your belief in your leadership ability – because a big part of

leadership is convincing your subordinates that you can do the job. And the second is the degree to which you feel that you fit in and are accepted as a leader.”

Using that definition, this year’s STN Leadership Award winner displays the necessary mettle to help lead a student transportation organization and she more than fits in with the entire staff. Charmaine White is the deputy director of transportation at Albemarle County Public Schools that serves the Charlottesville, Virginia, region.

The industry veteran got her start like most do, behind the wheel of the school bus.

She said her first career straight out of high school didn’t work out the way she planned, so she decided to go to college. What better way to make some extra money in between classes than to drive the school bus?

“A story I share with people all the time is, after my first day of driving, I said, ‘I’m not going back,’” she chuckled. “That was 22-odd years ago when I talked that way.”

But, like so many others, the job was so rewarding that it became her career.

“You get through the training, but when you get out there with students, it’s totally different,” she added. “I certainly enjoy the business, I like what I do and it’s quite rewarding the various things I’ve learned.”

This has translated into her current role of overseeing training and operations for James Foley, Albemarle County’s director of transportation, who refers to White as his “right hand.” Foley was new to student transportation when he joined Albemarle County five years ago, coming from private industry where he specialized in operations and plant management. But as school busing is a different beast, he said he’s relied heavily on White’s experience as a driver and trainer.

“She’s been in the business a long time. She’s very well respected by the staff. She’s a senior leader, the most tenured of the key leaders as far as bus operations go,” he explained. “She just has a very open approach with people. People will come to Charmaine with issues because they respect her and her experience.”

Driving Safety

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Jennifer Green, the lead driver for one of the elementary schools, said the advice White gives is always spot-on because she's been there and done that.

"She can relate to what goes on, on the buses. Having that experience behind the wheel, it let us know that you understand that it is not easy being out there," Green added. "Leadership is letting you know when you're doing right and wrong and that is what she does."

Admittedly, White tries to stay clear of disciplining, leaving that to Foley. "I have to correct drivers from time to time," he laughed, "but we do have a very good staff," he added.

Instead, White said she focuses on being fair and consistent in enforcing the district's training policies while keeping an open door policy and regularly seeking feedback from staff.

"You really need to know the people you are working with. I give a lot of credit for that to Jim in terms of being open," she explained. "I'm of the mindset that if people are aware and informed and you are transparent about what it is you do, then you get buy in."

At Albemarle County, transportation is about being a part of the process, and that, White added, makes it easier to implement department goals. This especially was the case recently with the implementation of a new bus purchasing specification that White spearheaded and is projected to save the district about \$250,000 a year.

At the request of Foley's boss, Albemarle County COO Dean Tistadt, White set out to reverse the old way of going out to bid each time the district needed to purchase a new bus. While transportation did refer to the state contract, White said Albemarle County often found itself restricted to buying whatever bus model or options the dealer happened to have in stock rather than the exact features it wanted and needed.

White formed a committee of transportation department team leaders and a sub-committee that included bus drivers to select features that not only added to the comfort of the ride for all but also increased safety. Driver roundtables discussed the importance of heated mirrors, air ride seats and adding a second handrail to the step well.

"The feedback from the drivers helped us design the specifications," White added.

It was a process that took months, as White brought together the committees and included the director of purchasing.

The result was a spec that was sent out to vendors, and White scheduled meetings to evaluate the various presentations.

The district team's comparison looked at such aspects as oil usage, fuel economy, camera systems and service and vehicle warranties. In the end, the district chose Blue Bird, specifically diesel-powered Visions.

"Some of (the choice) was based on cost, some of it was based on design features, how responsive they were," explained Foley. "For the cost piece of it, we looked at a five-year operating plus capital costs. For example, a 100-gallon fuel tank would be more economical to us than a 65-gallon because we'd spend less money on labor for fueling. We looked at warranty, trade-in values, projected maintenance costs, upfront capital costs to determine least costly vendor over five years."

"Charmane is tenacious when she wants something accomplished," said Bill Morse, a district transportation management analyst. "She drives a hard bargain with vendors and expects a high level of competence from those she supervises."

Pat Hunt, a lead driver for Baker Butler Elementary School, transportation staff from drivers to maintenance staff respect White not only for her experience behind the wheel but for the oriented values she espouses and her openness.

Driving Safety Continued from page 5

The savings from the new specification is hardly chump change for an operation that features a fleet of 222 buses, 157 of which operate routes each day in service of 8,500 students, roughly two-thirds of the total enrollment.

“Working with Charmane I have learned so much, like what is involved in dealing with vendors, what questions we should be asking and what type of buses you need to accommodate your school division,” Hunt added. “Charmane plays a big part in safety, training and buses.”

In addition to identifying big-time savings for the district, she said her “repertoire” is safety. In addition to serving as the district’s lead trainer and is certified in both the 10- and 30-hour OSHA guidelines, as well as being a certified CDL third-party tester in the state of Virginia.

She prides herself in not only looking at what the district can do “mechanically” to increase safety for students, but making things safe for the employees. She said the various training opportunities the district provides staff with helps to look at the “bigger picture.”

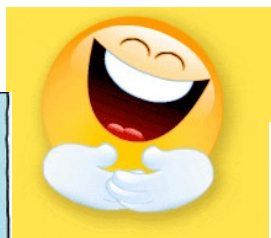
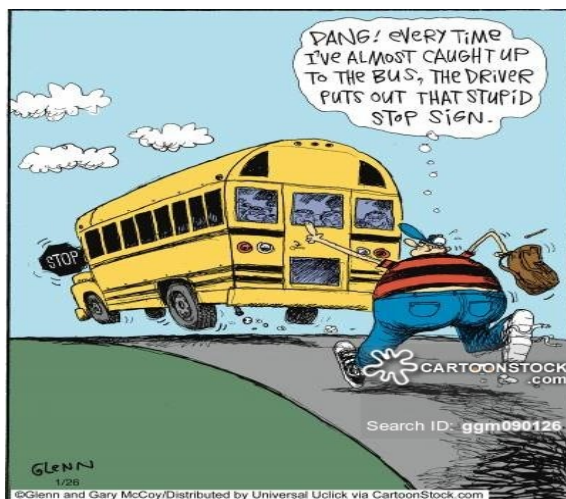
“Charmane is familiar with what types of issues that may occur with us because she has been a contact person with testing program,” explained Hunt. “She is aware of all the paperwork and procedures we must follow as a third party tester. Because of Charmane’s knowledge with DMV (regulations), she is able to make connection with right individual when asking questions.”

Taking such a collaborative approach has spelled success for White, who added that she likes to be open with people and to seek engagement. Those were learned skills, and as she said, she wasn’t always comfortable with those traits. Certainly obtaining her associate’s degree in business administration while she continued working during the day helped. But she also credited Foley for instilling an environment of transparency.

“I see the fruit of that approach,” she continued. “People are more open, they embrace the concepts better and that lends itself to a really good working relationship. If my answer was no, you’ll understand why I said no. You might not agree but you’ll understand.”

“Leaders influence. It takes having an open mind and listening and leading by example. I really do want to lead by example. I don’t want to say one thing one day to an employee and another thing to someone else.”

Laugh Often!



How to Hire the Right Driver

Hiring a bus driver takes time, effort, and skill. For many counties in Virginia, finding quality individuals who want to drive the bus is challenging. Training departments are busy recruiting and hiring; however, the time it takes to finally put that employee behind the wheel driving a bus with wonderful little human beings takes a while. Strategies to hire good, quality individuals vary throughout organizations. You cannot judge a book by its cover, for sure. But, how does a school district find great people who will produce quality work?

- 1) It's important never to stereotype. Just because the employee is small or large in stature does not mean they would not make a great employee. Be careful in stereotyping and focus on the skills. Of course, the physical is an integral part of the process in hiring in the State of Virginia; however, stereotyping is not something you should ever do.
- 2) Ask good questions. Having a list of questions during the interview process is crucial. Organize the interview prior to meeting with any potential candidate. What are you looking for? Track School Bus website article says, "Qualities you should prefer in school bus drivers should: 1) great positive attitude, 2) has responsibility and accountability, 3) transparency in providing proof of work history and documentation, and, 4) a person who can hold concentration and has the ability to multi-task.
- 3) Metro Magazine for Transit & Motor coach Business website states in their August 2013 article that "Personality is Everything". In pupil transportation, personality is a must. An adult who has the understanding of children and how to handle stressful situations is a must. If a person has deficiency in this area, discussions in how to handle these tense situations are crucial. Some may need additional training in diversity, culture and customer service. Do not be afraid to offer such assistance to drivers/attendants.

It's important to plan ahead and hire the right people. Having quality interview questions, ensuring you are gathering all the correct information to make informed decisions on whether or not to hire a person. Remember, parents are sending everything they have on our buses: their children. We must do a good job at hiring only the best to transport our Virginia students.

We Need You!

VAPT is always looking for articles to include in the newsletter. The goal is to provide a newsletter every three months. Please share what is happening in your school division.

You can submit your articles to Cheryl Fisher at cfisher@fcps1.org.

Thank You!