

The Voice and Vision for Pupil Transportation in Virginia



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2014 VAPT Conference

January and February delivered a series of snow and ice storms across the United States leaving many of us to deal with sub-zero temperatures, piles of snow and slick roadways.

Recommendations and decisions to close or delay school openings are made using every resource available to us; national and local weather services, law enforcement agencies and VDOT reports are all reviewed. It takes many people to weigh many options when it comes to school closings. Safety is the deciding factor and this winter has tested our skills to the limit. This has been a winter to remember!



Photo submitted by Stafford County
Virginia

March

2014



Let's shift gears –now that we have made it through a record breaking winter and spring is almost here it is time to start making plans for the 2014 VAPT conference in “sunny” Norfolk, Virginia.

The Norfolk Waterside Marriott will host the 2014 VAPT conference June 16–19, 2014. With additional PDS courses being offered, great workshops, technicians training and competition, along with an excellent trade show planned, this is the hottest ticket in town.

Please check the VAPT website for early details. www.vapt.org

Nine Children Killed Nationally at School Bus Stops, Kansas Report Finds

Source: stnonline.com

States reported the same number of fatalities for the 2012-2013 school year during school bus loading and unloading operations as for the previous school year, the Kansas State Department of Education released by STN magazine.

The nine student fatalities occurred in five states: Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, North Carolina and Texas. North Carolina suffered four fatalities and Texas two, while the other three states reported on each. Forty-six states participated in this year's National School Bus Loading and Unloading Survey, up from 43 for the past three surveys dating back to 2009.

The states reported that six of the children were killed by vehicles that illegally passed a school bus that had its flashing red loading lights engaged and its federally mandated stop arm extended. All four North Carolina fatalities occurred at the hands of an illegally passing motorist.

Of the three students struck and killed by their own school bus, two were killed at the rear wheels while one died at the front, and all buses were Type C conventional models. Nearly two-thirds of the fatalities occurred on the trip home, according to the KSDE, while students en-route

to school represented 22 percent.

The young victims ranged in age from 1 to 14.

Because not every state reports their number of student deaths around the school bus, the KSDE statistics were lower last year than student fatality numbers researched and compiled by STN Staff members via national wire reports. According to this research, there were not nine but 16 student deaths around the school bus or bus stop during the 2011-2012 school year.

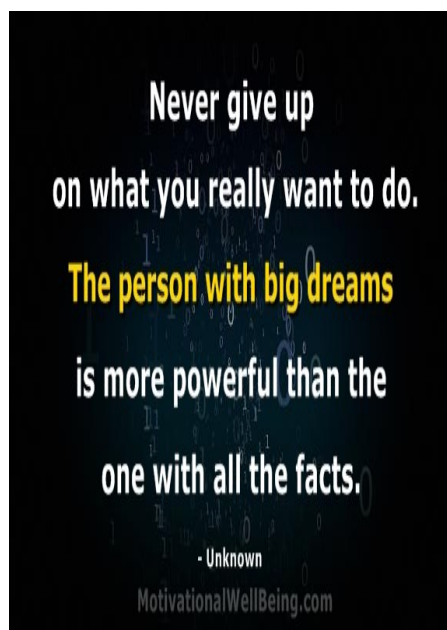
The discrepancy between the STN total and Kansas' may arise from the definition of "loading and unloading zones as related to bus stops.

The National School Bus Loading and Unloading Survey compiled by the School Bus Safety Unit has been conducted every year since 1970, when it was developed by the Kansas Department of Transportation. During that time, the department said that more than 73% of student fatalities involved students aged 1 to 9 years old.

Over the past 43 years, 65% of the fatalities, or 786 incidents, occurred during the trip home compared to 32%, or 385 incidents, on the trip to school. Another 3%, or 41 incidents,

occurred during an activity or "other" trip. The school bus was involved 57% of the time and illegally passing motorists 39% of the time. Four percent consist of an "other" vehicle.

Additionally, KSDE amended its 2006-2007 survey results after finding that there were four children killed by illegal passers while only one fatality was added to the 37-year totals at that time.



February Talk to Your Drivers Topic

Source: SafePUPIL

Beware of the “most dangerous piece of equipment on a bus” - The internal overhead mirror!

Priority #1 is to safely operate the school bus transporting your students safely.

Attempting to discipline on-board students while the bus is moving or while other students are entering or exiting the bus can be a recipe for disaster!

While driving your bus, the overhead mirror should be utilized for very brief glances to assess the situation. Do not use the overhead mirror for “discussing” the situation with students, for “stare downs”, or trying to “catch” misbehavior while it happens.

If the situation is that bad - please follow your district and department’s policy for safely assessing and correcting any situation which does not provide a safe and secure environment on your bus!

Happenings

Distracted Driving Awareness

April 2014 is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

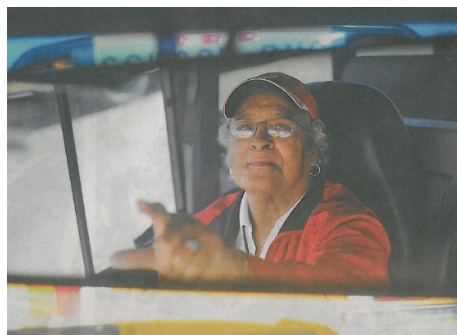
3,328 were killed in distracted driving crashes in 2012. Distracted driving is a dangerous epidemic on America’s roadways. Research shows that high visibility enforcement works because, with many distracted drivers, the fear of a citation and significant fine outweighs their fear of being injured or killed in a crash.

Delivering Precious Cargo Source: Fauquier Times

In the 45 years that Clara Sanford Christian has driven public school buses in Fauquier County the closest call she’s had is a turkey flying into her windshield.

“You’ve really got to watch the road and everybody else,” said Christian. “You’ve got to keep your eye out and you’ve definitely go to watch the kids.”

For more than four decades Christian has delivered loads of the county’s children safely to school and back each school day. “I’ve carried the kids and their parents too” she chuckled. Christian began driving school buses



after having her 9th child, as a way to make some money and spend time with her children.

I’ve had people tell me that they would not have my job for nothing. But, I like it. There are good things about the job.

“When you get a good bus load of kids, that’s the best part.” said Chris-

tian. “I have been blessed.”

School Bus Collection

Are you a school bus collector?

If you would like to share your collection, please send a photo to: cfisher@fcps1.org and it will be added to the next newsletter.



Ferron Lister of Weber School Ogden, Utah

Love the Bus

The Love the Bus program was founded in 2007 by the American School Bus Council (ASBC). The Virginia Association of Pupil Transportation, in coordination with the American School Bus Council, hosted several events in Virginia during the month of February. Events were held at Oyster Point in Newport News, VA; Loudoun County Schools Administration building in Ashburn, VA; the Virginia Museum of Transportation in Roanoke, VA and the County Fair Grounds in Chesterfield, VA.

Area events provided live entertainment such as student choral groups, drumlines and school marching bands along with key note speakers such as Mike Martin, NAPT Executive Director and Michael Brown, Virginia DOE. Student art was also on display recognizing why we “Love the Bus” and refreshments were on hand for everyone.

Without the support of our bus vendors, these events would not have been possible. Thank you to Kingmor Supply, Inc. and Sonny Merryman Inc. What a team!



VAPT Offers Scholarship in Memory of Sonny Merryman

The Virginia Association for Pupil Transportation (VAPT) is pleased to announce the availability of the SONNY MERRYMAN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP named in memory of transportation giant Floyd W. (Sonny) Merryman, Jr. who passed away on December 7, 2013 at age 89.

Mr. Merryman founded Sonny Merryman, Inc. in 1967 – a Virginia company which has grown over the years to become a widely respected and prominent bus dealership serving the transportation industry. A staunch champion of the virtues and rewards of education, Mr. Merryman provided hundreds of young Virginians with scholarship assistance. He also worked with other industry vendors in providing seed monies to the VAPT for use

in establishing the association's annual Clyde W. Morris Memorial Scholarship.

The amount of this **scholarship is \$2,500.00.**

To be eligible for this scholarship, a student must be a Virginia public school senior who has a parent or grandparent currently or formerly employed in the public school pupil transportation field in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Applications must be submitted to the VAPT Scholarship Committee no later than **April 30, 2014.**

Mutual Respect Strengthens Driver-Technician Relations

Source: SchoolBus Fleet Magazine

Maintaining a harmonious relationship among employees can be difficult in any industry. Different personalities and opinions, individuals' work habits, pressures of the job and many other factors can contribute to a tense work environment if team members don't have respect for one another and an effective way to communicate.

Pupil transportation managers face a unique challenge, in that they often oversee (among others) two groups of employees: school bus drivers and technicians. Both groups are dedicated to their mission of transporting students safely, but getting them to work as a team to accomplish this mission is not always easy.

Officials say that a lack of communication and mutual respect are the biggest obstacles that prevent bus drivers and technicians from working together well, and it can be destructive. As an example, "Technicians think

drivers don't do thorough pre-trips or catch/report obvious mechanical issues, and drivers think technicians don't always fix things correctly," says Will Rosa, director of transportation at Parkway School District in Chesterfield, Mo.

Robert Matheny, director of maintenance, operations and transportation, at Goleta (Calif.) Union School District, adds that two of the biggest challenges his operation has faced have been getting both groups to understand that each driver or technician knows what his or her job is, and getting everyone to communicate on a level that both drivers and technicians can understand.

Create opportunities for respectful communication

Regular meetings with these employees can go a long way in developing and maintaining positive driver-technician relations. Matheny says

that along with this, he practices an open-door policy.

"I will listen to both sides and get each side to understand the other's level of knowledge on the issue," he explains. "I also always find a way for everyone to walk away without feeling as though they lost, and I keep the communication lines open about each problem until it is solved."

Matheny adds that it's important for everyone involved to remember that no one is always right or wrong.

"Each driver or technician has to respect the other — if this doesn't happen, you will have no confidence in the driver or technician being able to accomplish his or her tasks, and you will be putting out fires all the time," he says. "Be the boss and guide people to do the responsible thing and learn to respect each other. Also, give accurate answers and reliable information to keep the confidence level high."

Mutual Respect Strengthens Driver-Technician Relations Cont.

Rosa agrees that mutual respect is crucial. He also says that the drivers and technicians at his operation have been successful at not buying into the notion that each group doesn't do their job thoroughly or correctly, and they "channel their energy toward the problem, not the person."

At Prince William County Public Schools in Manassas, Va., recurring maintenance issues are routinely identified and discussed in driver in-service meetings twice each year. In addition, the operation has implemented measures that have helped in clarifying information shared from drivers to technicians about their school buses, and have strengthened techs' ability to diagnose problems.

Director of Transportation Services Ed Bishop says that sometimes, the user of a vehicle (in this case, a school bus driver) may be unable to accurately describe the vehicle's faults or concerns he or she has, and the technician may have difficulty diagnosing the cause of the fault, which can cause frustration and friction between the two individuals.

"The school district pays for automotive technicians to get Automotive Service Excellence certifications and recertifications so they are better able to diagnose issues with school buses," Bishop says. "Service writers have been assigned to each maintenance facility with the primary duty of improving and maintaining communications with bus drivers. Service writers also relieve technicians from administrative duties, which allows them to concentrate fully on diagnosing and effecting repairs."

David Anderson, director of transportation and fleet services at Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Thornton, Colo., kept communication between drivers and technicians in mind when he was designing the operation's new transportation facility. "I put in a drive-through lane so that drivers/buses can pull in the shop and get

what repairs they need while they wait," he explains, noting that this provides "ultimate customer service," and he found that "by doing this, the time for repairs on preventive maintenance inspections dramatically dropped, as drivers feel encouraged to seek repairs and not delay them."

In addition, every six months, the operation holds in-service meetings, and the technicians set up stations in the shop where drivers can go to learn about their bus. The stations cover topics such as air brakes, suspension and retarders. "It seems to bring the level of knowledge for the drivers up, and the technicians seem to enjoy sharing the knowledge — essentially a win-win!" Anderson says of the stations/instruction.

Drivers should be proactive in reporting concerns

Officials say that drivers can help keep relations with technicians positive and smooth by properly pre-tripping their school bus and promptly reporting maintenance issues or concerns they have with the vehicle.

Rosa's drivers are reminded throughout the school year about the importance of a proper pre-trip inspection. Also, bus maintenance and operation are covered in safety meetings, on driver trainer ride-alongs and through electronic bulletin board messaging.

"When drivers understand how the bus operates and why it is important for the safety of children, they are more inclined to not only work with but proactively support our technicians," he says. At both Goleta Union School District and Prince William County Public Schools, drivers are asked to complete a work order when there is a problem with their bus, and there is follow-up with or by the technicians.

At Goleta, drivers fill out the work order

and then communicate the problem verbally to the technician.

"The technicians have been told to listen to complaints and work order needs, to not pre-judge what they are being told and to find the common ground so that the problem can be fixed in a timely manner," Matheny says.

Prince William County Public Schools' technicians keep drivers fully apprised of repairs made to their buses by recording the faults they found and what was corrected on maintenance report forms they receive.

How the operation benefits

There are multiple benefits when bus drivers and technicians work together and communicate respectfully and clearly.

As Anderson indicated earlier, the time for preventive maintenance repairs at Adams 12 Five Star Schools has been reduced, which suggests that workflow can improve. He also says that driver satisfaction has increased.

Rosa says that teamwork builds bonds among staff members and ultimately leads to resolving issues more quickly — key components to a professional operation.

It's important to remember, however, that solid driver-technician relationships are often a work in progress. Rosa says his operation is "not perfect," but his employees have gotten "much better at not playing the 'blame game.'" Bishop says that "the result we seek is to reduce driver frustration, reduce vehicle down time and maximize instructional time in the classroom for our students. To these ends we have been moderately successful, but we are nowhere near perfect."

2014 Scholarship Opportunities

VAPT sponsors directly or supports several scholarship opportunities for our Transportation Community. These include the following Scholarship Awards:

Scholarship	Amount	Deadline
Sonny Merryman Inc. (5 VA Tech Scholarships)	\$2500 each	March 2, 2014
** Clyde W. Morris Memorial Scholarship (1)	\$2500.00	April 30, 2014
** Buster Bynum, Southeastern States Pupil Trans (1)	\$2500.00	April 30, 2014

** The Clyde Morris and Buster Bynum scholarship applications must be submitted in each school system or district for local selections before being submitted to the Scholarship Committee for final selection no later than April 30, 2014.

Application forms can be found on the VAPT website at www.vapt.com

2014 School Bus Driver Instructor & New Director/Supervisor Training

Following is an update of the 2014 School Bus Driver Instructor Training Schedule. As with previous years the certification classes are 3 days and re-certification are 2 days. Classes are filling up quickly so please register early.

Reminder: New behind the wheel driver trainers are now required to have maintained a Class B CDL for at least two years prior to taking the training class per the following regulation:

8VAC20-70-411. Driver trainers.

How Do I Register for the Classes?

Registration must be done through VDOE's "SSWS" web service. Users must have access to the "School Bus Driver Instructor Certification" applica-

tion in order to complete registration. www.doe.virginia.gov

There is a \$25 non-refundable registration fee for each individual who will be attending the Certification "Train the Trainer" class. A check made payable to "Treasurer of Virginia" should be sent to the Pupil Transportation Services, Department of Education, PO Box 2120, Richmond, VA 23218.

There is no fee for those persons attending classes for the purpose of re-certification

New Director/Supervisor Training

Per the Regulations Governing Pupil Transportation (8VAC20-70-350.3) new directors/supervisors employed by school divisions shall complete the New Director/Supervisor training conducted by the Department of Education within a year after being em-

ployed in this position since September 28, 2012.

This is a two day course which will be offered at the VAPT conference this year.

As always, sign up early - space is limited.