

INTRODUCTION

A shortage of qualified school bus drivers is a critical issue facing school districts today. Public school pupils, nonpublic students, and special education pupils are all affected by this acute scarcity of drivers, finding their rides to school lengthy, delayed, or, in some cases, non-existent. This shortage has an especially detrimental impact on the State of New Jersey, which is one of the most densely populated states in the nation.

An opportunity to address this serious challenge to our educational system arose when monies became available through a joint program of the Departments of Education and Community Affairs entitled the Regional Efficiency Development Initiative (REDI) Program. The REDI Program is one result of recommendations made by the Property Tax Commission, which was signed into law in 1999. The Commission found that sharing services is one of the most effective ways of reducing local government costs and property taxes. The REDI Program is providing grants and loans for local officials to explore or enact new shared service agreements.

With funds provided by the REDI Program, the Union County Educational Services Commission in partnership with the Educational Services Commissions in Camden, Middlesex, and Monmouth/Ocean Counties, conducted a feasibility study of all 21 counties in the State of New Jersey to survey and analyze factors contributing to the critical shortage of qualified school bus drivers with the goal of finding creative solutions that include shared services.

The Commissions retained Transportation Advisory Services (TAS), a nationally recognized consulting firm, to conduct the study. This document is the result of one and one-half years of concentrated effort, from conception to publication. Private bus companies, school district transportation professionals, school district business officials, professional organizations, and bus drivers throughout the state received and responded to the survey. Not only were written responses considered, but personal interviews were conducted as well. Although this study is not the first of its kind, it is by far the most comprehensive in its attempt to reach the broadest spectrum of participants and viewpoints.

Our hope is that this report will motivate and enlighten those in the pupil transportation industry who struggle daily with the demands of providing a bus ride for every student who needs one.

We have attempted the widest possible distribution of this study to all those who participated or have an interest in its results. The complete report, including all appendix items and statistical analyses, can be accessed at the following website: www.TransportationConsultants.com/NJreport. It can be downloaded to be printed in part by chapter or in its entirety. Direct contact can also be made to TAS or the Union County Educational Services Commission at the following locations:

Mark A. Walsh
Transportation Advisory Services (TAS)
20 Flamingo Court
Palm Coast, FL 32137
(800)-233-3251
(386)-445-0861 (fax)
www.TransportationConsultants.com

William C. Schaarschmidt
Union County Educational
Services Commission
45 Cardinal Drive
Westfield, NJ 07090
(908)-233-9317 x11, 12, 13
(908)-518-1669 (Fax)

The Camden, Middlesex, Monmouth-Ocean and Union County Educational Services Commissions would like to thank the participants in the study for their valuable insights and candid opinions. Sincere and profound appreciation must also be extended to the State of New Jersey, particularly the Departments of Education and Community Affairs, for affording us the opportunity to conduct the study, and to Linda Wells, Director of the Office of Student Transportation, for her many valuable contributions, both in time and knowledge, throughout the course of this effort. A final debt of gratitude is owed to Transportation Advisory Services, and, in particular, Mr. Mark Walsh, whose professionalism and comprehensive knowledge of the pupil transportation industry is largely responsible for making this the unique and valuable resource that we believe it to be.

Sincerely,

Frederick J. VanderSlice, Superintendent
Camden County Educational Services Commission

Mark J. Finkelstein, Superintendent
Middlesex County Educational Services Commission

Timothy P. Nogueira, Superintendent,
Monmouth-Ocean County Educational Services Commission

Edward M. Hartnett, Superintendent
Union County Educational Services Commission

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER AVAILABILITY STUDY

Regional Efficiency Development Incentive (REDI) Grant

Grant Agreement Number: 00-3815-00

A Feasibility Study Surveying and Analyzing Factors Contributing to the Critical Shortage of Qualified School Bus Drivers in the State of New Jersey

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by
Transportation Advisory Services

20 Flamingo Ct.
Palm Coast, FL 32137
(800) 233-3251

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