

DELIVERING SAVINGS AND EXPERIENCE

Port Huron Area School District - Port Huron, Mich.

Overview

Port Huron, Michigan, is located on the banks of Lake Huron, just yards from the Canadian border. It's a diverse town focused on the success of its children, its schools, and its way of life. When they chose to contract their school busing, the district approached it seriously, seeking a transportation partner that would keep their jobs local while saving money to reinvest back into the classroom for their 11,000 students.

When First Student submitted their proposal to Port Huron Area School District (PHASD) they committed to a quick and smooth transition, customer control, cost containment, enhanced technology and consistency for drivers. For PHASD, what that amounted to was a transportation provider who sought to carefully guide their transition process in order to make sure the students reaped the benefits of the partnership in all the ways that mattered.

Challenge

Being the first time the district contracted with an outside company, the challenge to First Student was delivering the savings and experience to the community without interrupting the community's faith in the district and drivers. With a short transition period of 60 days, First Student had to develop a plan which could implement our outstanding technological and safety programs before the start of school without overwhelming the staff, drivers and students.

Delivering the Solution

First Student and district officials went to great lengths to ensure the community had all the information necessary to implement a successful startup. Because of the quick transition period, all drivers, parents, students and school administrators were kept abreast of the changes and challenges. In fact, First Student quickly organized a driver/monitor meeting so that all questions from the staff could be answered, instilling understanding.

First Student had to focus on a few key points during the 60 day startup. First, 75 drivers had to be informed and trained in First Student operations. First Student commissioned trainers from all over the nation to help the legacy and new drivers review and learn new procedures, technologies and to help



answer any questions the drivers may have had. Open communication between the drivers and First Student was key in keeping the routes simple and the students safe and comfortable with a new busing company.

PHASD driver, Martha Grubbs, says “First Student did an excellent job. The training process was quick, but it was thorough. All our questions were answered. There were always trainers. They brought in people from all over this state and from different states in the country. So there was always someone here to help us new drivers, to be with us, to ease our anxieties.”

Secondly, First Student had to tap into our national resources to develop a new operations location from scratch. New maintenance technicians and dispatchers needed training, new technology needed installation and many other tasks had to be completed to have a fully functioning and successful location.

The best way to deliver a smooth transition is to develop a thorough plan. First Student met with the drivers, parents and school officials to determine what the biggest issues could be during the transition. During that time, First Student was honest about expectations. Luckily, First Student’s national resources and experience helped to fulfill all the needs and desires of the district and turned PHASD’s busing system into a national model and success story.

“I don’t think that there is a better company out there that spends more time in relationship to safety and customer service than First Student,” says Assistant Superintendent Eddie Kindle about First Student’s dedication to the operation relationship.

Community Return

Utilizing our national resources and sticking to a dedicated transition plan helped First Student create a successful startup by the beginning of the school year. By taking over the transportation operation and saving the district money, First Student allowed administrators the ability to completely focus on the growth and education of the students.

Location Manager Amy Wolfe believes in bus contracting, “One of the things that I’ve always felt is a benefit for a school district to contracting is they’re no longer in the bus business at that point. The drivers become the concern of the company — the vehicles become the concern of the company. It allows the district to put those funds, and those monies into education, where it truly belongs.”

