

ACHIEVING SUCCESS FOR A GROWING DISTRICT

Community Unit School District 5 - Normal, Ill.

Overview

On May 8, 1948, voters in a small Illinois town approved the formation of a school district that is today legally known as Community Unit School District No. 5 (Unit 5), McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois. The nation has grown and changed in leaps and bounds since then. So, too, has Unit 5.

Unit 5 is among the Top 10 growing districts in the state of Illinois and with that growth comes challenges in managing the expanding scope of student transportation. Since its founding, Unit 5 had operated its own school bus service in-house. With continuous population growth in the district, Unit 5's transportation demands became increasingly cumbersome; administrators sought a way to streamline transportation operations and lighten the management burden being placed upon school administrators. After reviewing their program and considering various alternatives, Unit 5 selected First Student to manage its transportation system.

Challenge

Unit 5 buses travel nearly 1.9 million miles annually, safely transporting more than 10,000 students to and from school each day. Each passing year, the number of children needing transportation grows and this growth left the district with a chaotic and confusing busing system.

According to Board of Education President John Pazuaskas, "When we formed, we were a very small rural school district and have grown dramatically. Over time it really became the equivalent of a mass transit department." The district needed a change. Pazuaskas explains that the decision to contract busing was not easy, "It's really hard because we've been doing (transportation) the same way for 60 years and to say 'Let's do it differently' is hard for any organization, especially something as intense and as massive as this is."

Delivering the Solution

First Student started providing service in the summer of 2012. Unit 5 benefitted from new efficiencies and cost reductions through our economies of scale, as well as our industry expertise to the operation. With a century of experience, First Student immediately knew how to pull a constantly changing operation into a streamlined and effective system of drivers, routes and buses.



Unit 5 Superintendent Dr. Gary Niehaus added, “A new management team has given us the professionalism and expertise, which gives the district the opportunity to become better, more efficient, more effective and makes us a better system overall... Having someone like First Student, who has more resources available on a national level, on a state level, a regional level, gives us the confidence to get what we need, when we need it.”

Community Return

“From a customer service standpoint, from my perspective, First Student hit the mark dead on. First Student has delivered what we’ve asked First Student to deliver,” said Pazuaskas.

First Student takes great care to deliver the highest quality transportation service, so that the administrators of Unit 5 can focus on achieving the district’s mission: “Educating each student to achieve personal excellence.”

First Student Area General Manager Bob Rutkoski reiterates, “School Districts are educators, that’s their primary function in life. They educate children. Our function is to take away their transportation problems so they can focus on their students.”

