

FOSTERING TRUST THROUGH COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Syracuse City School District - Syracuse, N.Y.

Overview

Syracuse City School District (SCSD) understands the importance of trust. In order to operate a successful transportation service that provides optimum service to both the school district and the community, the right personalities must combine to transform into a single team. This is “Team Syracuse,” which is equal parts SCSD and First Student.

First Student’s relationship with SCSD supports the needs of one of the largest and most diverse districts in New York. Team Syracuse carries 80% of 12,000 transported students, riding on 200 school buses across 35 school facilities. Team Syracuse is predicated on a partnership which fosters an environment where precision training, employee engagement and community service are the core principles of a successful and long-lasting operation.

Challenge

SCSD’s urban population requires a contractor who can not only provide cost-effective solutions for student transportation, but also a partner whose team makes the ability to customize the service — be it for additional routes, new students or any other need — as easy as possible.

SCSD’s urban environment is characterized by fluctuating conditions — blocked city streets due to construction or a sudden, heavy snow fall — and employees must have the training and preparation to both drive and care for students in any situation. Always intent to seek the right person for the right job, First Student’s well-trained, committed local team transports students to school and to many other activities in the safest and most efficient manner.

Delivering the Solution

Former SCSD Director of Transportation Pat Bailey is a well-known figure in New York school bus transportation. Having worked with the district for the past 10 years — and in a variety of positions in her 30 year career, from bus driver to supervisor — she is also actively involved in passing legislation for school bus transportation safety. Pat, and Location Manager Ty Worrell, champion Team Syracuse. Pat says, “There is no difference between the district and the contractor — we are a team. We meet on a constant basis and try to figure out the best thing for the kids in Syracuse.”



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Ty is a retired New York City police officer. Having worked for First Student for the past five years, he is proud that his career is in the pursuit of public service. Ty says that the relationship between SCSD and First Student is centered on trust. Because of their relationship, they deliver to the board and the community “a service that can be relied on and a service that is constant. We provide a service that is there for the kids whether their budget is shrinking or not.”

With Pat and Ty’s commitment to trust and transparency, First Student’s core commitment to safety is well placed to provide employees with the training and engagement that makes them precision-experts in their field. Pat says, “It gives me peace of mind to know that the person behind the wheel has gone through several hours of training and knows what the expectation is.”

In fact, the First Student SCSD team — led by Nicole Dolce and Randall Price — won the State of New York Special Needs School Bus Road-E-O and came in second at the 2012 National Special Needs School Bus Road-E-O.

A Road-E-O is a competition among other school districts which tests drivers’ operational skills as well as their ability to care for the children on their bus. They have to research several developmental disabilities and then successfully engage and care for these children while maneuvering through a difficult course. Nicole knows that — whether in competition or on the road — First Student “sees a lot of different needs so we change, adapt and accommodate that.”

“First Student gives you everything you need to be a trained professional school bus driver. Not only that, but the training is on-going; they give you everything you need to be the best you can be.” - Valerie Mandara, bus driver

Team Syracuse – by virtue of First Student’s national network of corporate partners and resources – benefits from several technological advances including:

- GPS on all school buses
- Reliable camera system that records student and driver behavior on buses
- Tinted windows, air conditioning and other needed elements on the bus to accommodate children with special needs

First Student is very active in Syracuse and often works to provide additional services to SCSD and the community which includes:

- *Break Fast for Success:* Team Syracuse instituted a rapid results project so that students could arrive on time to eat breakfast. Routes were moved up 10 minutes earlier so that students would have 20 minutes to eat their breakfast. With a 97% success rate, Team Syracuse actually overtook its original 96% success goal by serving 24,070 additional breakfasts in October. The initiative is ongoing and



SCSD received a grant from the American Association of School Administrators to increase the number of eligible children who receive breakfast at school.

- *Say Yes*: An academic program sponsored by friends of SCSD, *Say Yes* funds full college scholarships for underprivileged students who maintain an 85% average. To prepare, *Say Yes* hosts a wide variety of after school sessions and First Student provides the transportation. First Student runs more than 86 routes, transporting 5,000 students, to ensure that children are present for this program.
- First Student sponsors an annual school bus safety poster contest. Students from all grades participate and receive a certificate of recognition and a monetary reward. The themes include topics such as “Stand Back for the Yellow and Black.”
- The Inter-City Educational Exchange (I.C.E.E.) program allows children from Syracuse who show a proclivity for the arts to be matched with a school in Manhattan to foster their talent. First Student provides all transportation between Syracuse and Manhattan.

Community Return

Collaboration, trust and a commitment to being the best for the students of SCSD make Team Syracuse a nationally recognized success. More important than any recognition, however, is the safety and success of the students who ride Team Syracuse buses.

When asked what additional services First Student could bring to SCSD, Pat Bailey told us that, “Our kids know you care about them, and when I see them put First Student on the side of the bus during the poster contest, that tell us how much they love their bus driver. We know you deliver the whole package.” The strength of First Student’s national network of resources is underpinned by the expertly trained and motivated staff that ensures that SCSD keeps the local expertise and local control of their operation while participating in activities that enrich children’s lives.

“When First Student talks to me and my situation, I matter. My recommendation is that if you can pick your contractor, go with First Student.” - Pat Bailey

