

DEVELOPING TRANSPORTATION PARTNERSHIPS

Zachary Community School District - Zachary, La.

Overview

In 2002, Zachary Community School District (ZCSD) made the strategic decision to improve the education of their children. This desire for change necessitated a split from their traditional parish school district. As such, ZCSD became the first school district independent of a parish in eighty years. Part of this decision included contracting their transportation services to First Student. The resulting relationship between First Student and ZCSD allows their educators to focus on fostering growth in the state's top performing school district.

Challenge

ZCSD has experienced many firsts. As the first school district to separate from the traditional Louisiana parish school system in 80 years, ZCSD had to find ways to re-create several services while keeping within their operating budget. It was determined that contracting student transportation services would achieve these goals. ZCSD sought a transportation provider that would not only operate and maintain their buses but partner with them to create a consistent environment centered on fostering educational growth.

Delivering the Solution

ZCSD's successes began with the principles laid out in their mission statement. ZCSD seeks to "assist every student in reaching his or her maximum potential through high-quality instruction and good stewardship of community resources." This goal is achieved through aligning all factors of service behind a unifying ideology. After thorough research, ZCSD found that only First Student aligned with their vision and could deliver the coverage, savings and the management capabilities it sought – now and well into the future.

First Student provides ZCSD with the good stewardship that they sought with the contract. By leveraging First Student best practices, corporate purchasing power and significant economies of scale, ZCSD achieved the goals set forth in their mission statement. We provide reduced prices on parts and vehicles as well as the latest cutting edge technology implemented to keep children safe.

By hiring from the community, First Student's location manager understands the particular needs of the district. Our drivers – also local – often have their own children riding the district buses and therefore have a personal stake in student success in the district.



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Warren Drake, the superintendent of ZCSD and our location manager maintain a close working relationship to achieve a successful partnership. Mr. Drake says, "I consider FS a very important part of the team. I meet with the drivers and I meet with First Student during their safety meetings because they're the first people to see our students in the morning. It is also a friendship; I pick up the phone and talk to our location manager."

ZCSD tasked First Student with delivering efficient and cost effective transportation solutions where before there had been none. Implementing new service involves a transition process that touches on many levels (routing, fleet maintenance and upgrades, hiring and training personnel, communications and public relations, etc). To help manage the transition process, we developed a comprehensive start-up manual that we use as a guide and reference. Using this start-up manual, ZCSD and First Student began the task of setting up their services.

First Student now operates and maintains 62 buses for ZCSD — these services include driver management, routing services, maintenance services as well as the coverage of any additional routes on an as needed basis. We transport 2,092 students – approximately 40% of the student body – across the district, providing service to all seven schools, including the recent expansion of services to the new Zachary Early Learning Center.

Community Return

Mr. Drake says that everyone at ZCSD is a “teacher and leader in our district” and makes customer service their priority. First Student’s hiring policies ensure that their drivers match the characteristics sought by ZCSD. We hire local, qualified drivers who are not only integral members in the community but are also friends and mentors to the students.

If we cannot do it safely, then we're not going to do it at all. We have complete togetherness; complete teamwork in everything that we do.” - Oliver Humbles, bus driver



