



Communication and Consistency in Wichita, KS

In 2009, Wichita Public Schools (WPS) made the decision to transition their 600-bus operation to First Student after 13 years with their previous provider.

Each new school year brings change - whether it's routes, boundaries, technology or tiers. WPS faced the added challenge of ensuring a smooth transition during school year startup.

First Student's primary focus was to ensure WPS received safe, problem-free transportation from the beginning. They started with a solid plan to transform the district's current systems, buses, and location to make it a true First Student operation. WPS Operations Division Director Darren Muci says of the early days, "We saw very clearly that they (First Student) had done their homework. They understood Wichita Schools, but also the community and what went into being able to provide those services for Wichita Public Schools. They were ready to go to work. We could see that during the RFP interview process, unlike many of the other companies who really hadn't spent a lot of time investigating what it would mean to provide services to the Wichita Public Schools."

First Student Vice President John Billigmeier says of the startup, "The logistics of running 600 buses every day is no small feat, but starting up the location for the first time was a huge undertaking. The logistics going into that were very complicated, and very challenging."

Within the First Student organization, staff communicated with each other — if any staff member noticed a problem during startup or in the normal course of the school year, they brainstormed on how to fix it. Because of the extensive First Student training, staff knew what to look for and how to cut off potential problems and staff also spoke up on ways that might enhance services.

With First Student as a partner, the district achieved its transportation goals and built the strong partnership they desired; and the students and parents of Wichita have the safe, reliable service they deserve. In addition to meeting the district's high service expectations, First Student delivered an entirely new fleet of buses with advanced technology, as well as hired and trained over 750 bus drivers and monitors.

The biggest return on investment for the district was to have a successfully-operated, smoothly-run student transportation system built together through a solid partnership. First Student's Billigmeier says, "Communication, honesty and transparency all along the way were the keys to our success until we developed the relationship that we have now. And now, it's developed into a true partnership."

