



Enhancing Education Through Contracting in Xenia, OH

Xenia, Ohio is a small city of roughly 25,000 residents. Its school district, however, is one of the largest in the state in terms of land area, and much of it is somewhat rural.

The Xenia Community School District stretches across 126 square miles of southwest Ohio's Greene County — nearly double the statewide average size — making reliable, efficient student transportation essential.

Until 2009, the school district was self-operating its bus system along with other services. In that year, Xenia Community School District was faced with a sizable reduction in state funding. Assistant Superintendent for Business Operations Christy Fielding recalls, "We were going through a financial crisis. We had cut over 100 employees and cut \$10 million from our budget." The school district and, ultimately, Xenia Board of Education, had to make many tough choices.

In order to eliminate such a large portion of its budget, the school district determined it had to look at contracting all non-education services — including student transportation. Xenia Community School District was looking for more than a contractor. They were looking for a transportation partner who could provide expertise and professionalism as well as communicate effectively through the difficult work ahead.

The school district could no longer afford to self-operate transportation given the mounting list of needs: drivers were in short supply; inadequate technology was becoming a safety issue; and there was no available capital for replacing aging vehicles. These were major problems that could not be resolved without greater capacity.

There often were gaps in Xenia Community School District's transportation staff due in part to limited recruitment channels. "We did not have the money to advertise in the way we needed to find drivers. We also didn't have the financial resources to do all the proper training that really needed to happen with our drivers and our mechanics," says Fielding.

This left the school district hard-pressed at times to find drivers. This was all too familiar to Superintendent Denny Morrison, who prior to joining Xenia Community School District, had over 15 years of experience in three school districts that had self-operated transportation systems. "It seems like we [could] never find enough drivers and we [would] have to worry about the substitutes and the quality of the substitutes."

