

## A SUCCESSFUL START-UP

### Central Point School District - Central Point, Ore.

#### Overview

When Central Point School District (CPSD), Central Point, Oregon, wrapped up the school year and welcomed the summer of 2011, the students and parents had no idea that their transportation system would change for the upcoming school year. CPSD had decided to outsource their student transportation and wanted to ensure the transition was smooth and favorable for the community. Thanks to the expertise, teamwork and efficient operations of First Student and CPSD, together they delivered a seamless transition over the summertime and ensured a smooth first day of school in the fall term for both students and parents.

#### Challenge

CPSD had always handled its transportation services in-house for their 4,500 students. Their 35 routes encompass a large area, from the town of Central Point to rural areas extending to Grant's Pass and Three Rivers. The rough terrain of the outlying, rural areas increases wear and tear, and shortens bus life. This led to difficulty for the district; throughout the previous seven years they had trouble keeping up with the maintenance and replacement of buses. When the district's business manager who oversaw student transportation services unexpectedly resigned from his position during the summer of 2011, CPSD was not only in need of a new business manager, but also a new plan for transportation services. The abrupt change in management and extremely short time frame before the start of the new school year forced the district to seriously consider the idea of privatizing its transportation services.

*"We were in the process of really losing control of our ability to maintain a safe and dependable transportation system," says Superintendent of Central Point School District Randy Gravon.*

CPSD appointed Mike Meunier, the district's human resources manager, to oversee the transportation services as business manager, in addition to his existing responsibilities. Meunier had no previous experience in student transportation, but quickly learned as much as he could to revise and develop a comprehensive transportation plan for the new school year. The district also enlisted the help of John Fairchild as a transportation consultant. Mr. Fairchild previously worked with CPSD and had extensive knowledge about the transportation industry in Oregon. They compiled a thorough Request for Proposal (RFP) with their list of requirements and gained school board approval to move ahead with the bidding process. Included on their requirements were newer school buses and a sufficient fleet size to accommodate all of their daily routes and extra activities requiring school bus transportation services.



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Gravon says there were some initial concerns about outsourcing the district's transportation services. "Because we are a smaller, very close-knit community, there is a lot of internal ownership of programs and people. The people work not just for the school district, but they are part of the community as well. There was some fear of losing that."

They were immediately drawn to the proposal response from First Student, which offered several attractive points, including a considerable cost savings. Five years ago, CPSD had a funding capacity of \$36 million. Since then, the funding capacity has decreased to \$31 million. The district realized the potential benefits of partnering with First Student, not only in terms of cost savings, but also through a newer, more reliable fleet, much more efficient routing plan and advanced training and management of personnel. Additionally, they would benefit from a relationship that allowed the district to turn over transportation management to a trusted partner, so they could return to their primary focus—educating students.

### *Delivering the Solution*

CPSD signed its contract with First Student in late June, and the new partners immediately began working to establish a plan for a quick, smooth, seamless transition of transportation services to begin when school returned in session. Van Criddle, area general manager, and Susan Quaintance, location manager, were pivotal in the transition, working closely with Mike Meunier to get everything up and running by the start of the new school year.

One of the first steps in the transition process was to replace CPSD's aged and discolored fleet with newer, cleaner, well-maintained buses. First Student enlisted the help of a team of bus technicians from nearby areas to assist the school district's current mechanic in preparing the buses for the new school year. "I've noticed that our buses now look clean, modern, and well cared for. They are the buses the community can be proud of when they see them driving down the streets," Gravon says.

All buses were also equipped with Zonar® GPS technology and the Child Check-Mate System®, a safety device designed to help school bus drivers locate sleeping children on an empty bus. Jolee Wallace, a board member for CPSD, says the board administration was impressed with the safety features that First Student offers on its buses. GPS allows for tracking a bus if cell service is not available in the remote areas in some of the routes. The Child Check-Mate System® also forces bus drivers to touch mechanical buttons as they walk from the front to the back of the bus, checking to make sure no students have been left on the bus.

*"Contracting with First Student has provided a huge benefit to us," Jolee says. "Not just financially or in terms of staffing needs. It has benefitted our entire school district academically . . . by alleviating a lot of the extra work for district personnel."*



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Communicating to the Central Point community was critical to their overall success. Gravon explains that once the community realized that the people who work for First Student are the same people who live in their community, who drive the same routes, and who already transport their children to and from school, the fear of losing their operation vanished. CPSD and First Student team members visited each of the schools, talked to the parents and reassured them that there would be no interruption of service and the bus drivers would still be the same drivers they had gotten to know. This open communication helped make the start-up process an invisible one to the students.

### *Community Return*

CPSD not only is proud of the improved transportation services it delivers to its students, but also is proud of the successful partnership with First Student, which has had a positive, immediate impact on the drivers, district personnel, students, parents and community as a whole. CPSD plans to explore additional technological offerings from First Student that it can utilize to continue to ensure the efficiency and safety of its operations.

Meunier and the other administrators are pleased with the level of customer service and dedication that First Student offers. “First Student has exceeded our expectations because they have approached this as a partnership. They are very easy to work with and are very honest about everything,” Meunier says.

“We are an educational organization,” Mike Meunier reiterates. “We are former teachers, administrators, and coaches. We are not trained in transporting students. We do have people to handle transporting students, but when we turn it over to an organization the size of First Student, we realize that there is so much more to it. And it can be done a lot more efficiently by someone who does it all the time and does it well.”

