

Case Study

Zachary Community
School District
Zachary, LA



First Student: Developing and Maintaining Transportation Partnerships

Zachary Community School District and First Student's decade long transportation partnership provides a "model of excellence": flexible service with local drivers who are invested in the District's principles.

Overview

Ten years ago, Zachary Community School District (ZCSD) made the decision to make strategic decisions to better 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 several 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.

Solution

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. After thorough research, ZCSD found that only First Student could deliver the coverage, savings and the management capabilities it sought – now and well into the future.

"I consider First Student to be a part of the number one school system in the state."

Warren Drake, Superintendent



“If we can not 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

Assessing the Situation

ZCSD’s successes begin 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.

First Student provides ZCSD with the good stewardship that they seek. By leveraging First Student corporate purchasing power and significant economies of scale, ZCSD achieves 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.

But we don’t stop there.

By hiring from the community, First Student’s location manager is a local personality who 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.

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.”





Delivering the Solution

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.

Company: Zachary Community School District

Industry: Transportation

Challenges:

- Manage 62 bus fleet
- Recreate operational structure in the wake of creating a new district
- Ensure timeliness, consistency and safety of transportation
- Contain management and fleet maintenance costs

Results:

- Implementation of business standards in management, training , routing and maintenance
- Provide service to an expanding district that prioritizes growth and excellence, including service to the new pre-K Early Learning Center
- Ensure timeliness, consistency and safety of transportation
- Provide incentives to instill drivers with a sense of ownership while keeping children safe





Return on Investment

Mr. Drake says that everyone at ZCSD is a “teacher and leader in our district” in order to make 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.

- Michelle, a Zachary bus driver, started driving for First Student in 2003. Michelle has spent a great deal of time with her students. She describes her relationship with them as such -- “I’ve had the same route for the last 4 years so I’ve gone through high school with these students and they’re graduating this year and I am going to miss them.”
- Aaron, a Zachary bus driver, started driving for First Student in 2007. First Student’s safety initiatives are important to Aaron and he makes sure that his bus – his “mobile classroom” – is an active learning environment. Of this he says “I’ve had several parents to indicate to me how well behaved their students are on my bus and also that they’re pleased because the time that I take out with their students.”
- Jeanette, a Zachary bus driver came out of retirement to drive for First Student. Not only does she love her students but she is also appreciative of First Student’s efforts to further her professional development. “It’s hard to find someone who will hire and train you,” she says, “but First Student helps us get our CDL and backs us up all the way.”





- Oliver, a Zachary bus driver came out of retirement from UPS to drive for First Student. He has been with the company since 2008. While he makes the process of driving “Baby Yellow” fun for the students with “America’s Got Talent” on the bus, he engages them and extends the learning environment while keeping safety the number one priority. Oliver describes his commitment to his students as such: “Everything that I can sow into their lives I am ready to do it because this company represents a commitment to safety first. You can teach a child to be safe -- not running when you should be walking, having on the right shoes, and making sure you grab that handrail, making sure you get in your seat and sit down and stay there until it’s your time to get up. Those are wonderful things that they can keep with them.”

First Student’s partnership with Zachary Community School District has paid off in many ways. We were able to institute positive operational structures while utilizing resources to maintain consistent, timely and cost-effective transportation services. While our tested management capabilities and our economies of scale assist ZCSD in the effort to be good stewards of community resources, our employees both engage their students in learning opportunities while keeping them safe on the school bus.

Looking forward to growing with Zachary Community School District for the long haul, First Student is committed to continue providing safe and cost effective transportation solutions that meets the needs of the students, the parents and the District.



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