DORCHESTER RETAIN DRIVERS AND IMPLEMENT NEW TECHNOLOGIES WITH DURHAM PARTNERSHIP

Dorchester County School District 2, located in South Carolina, first considered outsourcing its transportation department in an effort to trim budgets and bring efficiencies to its transportation operations. When the district’s transportation director retired, the School Board decided it was an excellent time to consider other partners that could provide a high level of safety and customer service to the district.

Only the third district to privatize school bus operations in the state, this was a unique choice for a South Carolina school district since the state owns nearly all public school buses.

The district assembled an evaluation committee to select a transportation partner that would bring the greatest value to the district. Safety expertise, cost, and customer references were some of the main reasons the committee chose Durham School Services. Durham’s local focus means that its team is prepared to handle issues specific to the regions it serves.

CHALLENGE #1: Transitioning the Transportation Department

When Durham first began to oversee the district’s bus operations, many of the district employees worried for their jobs. Drivers wanted to remain district employees in order to receive retirement benefits.

CHALLENGE #2: Aging Fleet

Because South Carolina owns the majority of school buses in the state, District 2 has an older fleet that experiences frequent breakdowns and problems with equipment. This means that school administrators and parents need to be alerted of breakdowns.

SOLUTION #1: Accommodating Qualified Employees

In order to ease the transition, Durham offered employees that were within five years of retirement—or that had been with the district for 10 years with benefits—the option to stay employed by the district. This flexibility helped retain district employees that had served the community and were well-qualified to continue as part of the transportation team for District 2. Durham believes that having employees that are not only qualified, but highly-trained is essential to ensuring the safety of the students it transports.

“[We selected Durham largely because of its history in South Carolina and strong customer references. We are only the third district in the state that has outsourced transportation.]”

Allyson Duke, CFO for District 2

By the Numbers

- Partnership start: 2011
- Student enrollment: 23,000+
- Student ridership: 12,250
- Number of buses: 118
- Number of routes: 137
- Special Education buses: 40
**SOLUTION #2: Improved Communication**

Technology is an important part of Durham’s mission to get students to school safely, on time and ready to learn. Durham brought to the table $500,000 worth of equipment in digital cameras and GPS technology that the district did not have before. These technologies improve communication to principals and parents throughout the district, allowing everyone to feel confident that the students are in the best hands possible.

“There were some issues during the transition period since a lot of drivers wanted to stay district employees, but Durham’s staff has done a great job. They have retained workers from the district and are quick to resolve any situations that come up,” Allyson Duke, CFO for District 2

“Durham came in having to manage what was already a tight budget and they have done a lot to tighten things up.”

“Some things I thought were being handled under district operation were not. Durham has made our transportation office very efficient.”

To further enhance communications, Durham began the implementation of a parent link software service in 2012 that contacts parents if a bus breaks down. Durham plans to eventually have the software on every bus in the district. According to Duke, communication with parents is critical since the district experiences a lot of breakdowns with state-owned buses.

**RESULTS: Efficient Operations and Reliable Customer Service**

Duke noted that a major benefit of the partnership is that District 2 no longer has to worry about workers compensation issues or bus breakdowns. They know that Durham is prepared to handle any issue that arises. This gives the district more time to focus on its primary business—educating students.

Additionally, the drivers and staff have built strong relationships with the schools which gives administrators and parents peace of mind. Duke said that Durham’s staff makes continuous efforts to be involved in the community.

Although the district had already trimmed its budget significantly before selecting Durham to run its transportation, the company was still able to save.

According to Duke, since partnering with Durham, the district has been able to identify where some of the inefficiencies were in the district operations. The district also found that they were losing money on field trips because school groups were not being charged for the use of the buses.

“Durham is working well because Durham handles all the issues.”

“Our partnership with Durham is working well because Durham handles all the issues.”

“Call us today!”