



Managing District Growth

One of the nation's top growing districts breaks tradition to usher in a new age of student transportation and management services with First Student.

In 1948, the nation saw Harry Truman win his second presidential term, the broadcasting of the nation's first network nightly news, the death of Babe Ruth, and the establishment of NASCAR; but in a small Illinois town, 1948 gave birth to the school district known as Community Unit School District #5. The nation has grown and changed in leaps and bounds since then, and so too, has Unit #5.

Unit #5 is one of the top 10 growing districts in the state of Illinois and with that change comes struggles with efficient student transportation. Since its founding, Unit #5 always used in-house busing to guarantee the safe arrival of their students. With substantial growth in the last few years, the Unit #5 transportation operation became cumbersome and administrators wanted to streamline efforts to get rid of the struggle that can be school transportation. After reviewing their program and what First Student had to offer, in the summer of 2012, Unit #5 chose First Student to help manage its busing system.

Unit #5 awarded the contract to First Student not only for the cost efficiencies and our economies of scale, but for the experience and consistency First Student can bring to the operation. With a century of knowledge, First Student knows how to pull a constantly changing operation into a streamlined and effective system of drivers, routes, and buses. Board of Education President, John Pazuaskas points out the decision to contract with First Student was difficult, "It's really hard because we've been doing it the same way for 60 years and to say 'Let's do it differently' is hard for any organization, especially something as intense and as massive as this is."

Unit #5 buses travel nearly 1.9 million miles each year, making sure more than 10,000 students arrive to school safely.

Each passing year, the number of children needing transportation grows and this growth left the district with a chaotic and confusing busing system, "When we formed, we were a very small rural school district and have grown dramatically. Over time it really became the equivalent of a mass transit department," says Pazuaskas. The district wanted a change; Unit #5 Superintendent, Dr. Gary Niehaus adds "A new management team has given us the professionalism and expertise, which gives the district the opportunity to become better, more efficient, more effective, and makes us a better system overall. . . . [H]aving someone like First Student, who has more resources available on a national level, on a state level, a regional level, gives us the confidence to get what we need, when we need it."

"From a customer service standpoint, from my perspective, First Student hit the mark dead on. . . . [F]irst Student has delivered what we've asked First Student to deliver." - John Pazuaskas, Board President

"Educating each student to achieve personal excellence" is the motto for School District Unit #5, and because the administrators of Unit #5 can focus on education and leave the transportation to First Student, parents, school staff, and students can focus on achieving that goal. First Student Area General Manager, Bob Rutkoski reiterates, "School Districts are educators, that's their primary function in life. They educate children. Our function is to take away the problems they have."

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