



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Bus Drivers for all routes
(Transportation Category)

Executive Summary:

To address the bus driver shortage that was significantly impacting the school system's ability to transport students to and from school in a timely manner at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, senior leadership from Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) and Chesterfield County worked together to develop a compensation plan that would attract and retain new bus drivers. The combination of wages, benefits, bonuses, and recruiting produced an influx of applicants, who quickly filled the CCPS bus driver CDL training program. With CDL trainee numbers exceeding expectations, training processes were updated and additional trainer positions were funded and hired. The culmination of these efforts resulted in CCPS Transportation being fully staffed with bus drivers before the end of the school year, greatly improving on-time delivery of students to school, and reducing lost instructional time.

Problem or need addressed by the program:

At the start of the 2021-2022 school year, there were 133 (26%) bus driver vacancies. To compensate, multiple double-back routes were created to ensure all students were provided transportation to and from school. However, instructional time was lost daily as school routes often could not be completed on time.

Program Description:

During the first weeks of the 2021-2022 school year, senior CCPS and county leaders developed an updated compensation plan to recruit, train, hire, and retain school bus drivers. These efforts were intended to address the 26% bus driver vacancy rate which was impacting the school system's ability to

Chesterfield County, VA

Bus Drivers for all routes
(Transportation Category)

transport students to school on time and reduce missed instructional time. To have a positive impact, leaders had to move quickly in order to get candidates started in the training process.

State funding of between \$3.3 million and \$3.6 million was used to develop the plan which was announced in late August 2021. The plan included giving all Student Transportation employees, whose job required a CDL, a \$3.00 increase in starting pay, raising the minimum starting pay to \$20.21 an hour, and a bonus increase to \$3,000, paid in six installments during the school year.

Recruiting efforts were increased with the use of career websites, radio advertisements, and social media. When the first job fair was held on September 30, 2021, hundreds of applicants were interviewed, and many were hired on the spot to begin training.

While compensation plans were being developed and recruiting efforts were being discussed, many parents elected to drive their children to school which created traffic issues around most schools. Seeking to reduce the impact of long pickup and drop-off lines, CCPS worked with the Chesterfield Police Department to reduce traffic and increase efficiency.

The expected influx of driver candidates, the likes of which had never been seen, into the CCPS training program required additional positions be created and funded, as well as additional space for training. A Manager of Safety and Training was created and an additional 12 auxiliary trainer positions, with 8 hour contracts and paid at an additional \$2.00 per hour, were converted from vacant driver positions. To accommodate larger training classes, an auditorium's schedule was cleared and training classes were booked.

Chesterfield County, VA

Bus Drivers for all routes
(Transportation Category)

By the end of January 2022, 149 new school bus drivers had been trained and hired, and by the end of FY22, 244 drivers had been trained and hired. These results exceeded expectations and dramatically improved our ability to transport students to and from school on time.

Program Cost:

- \$3 per hour increase in minimum starting pay
- \$2,000 increase in year's bonus (from \$1,000 signing bonus)
- Manager of Training and Safety Position
- 12 auxiliary trainer positions
- HR advertising of approximately \$30,000 per year for radio and social media ads
- Overtime pay for hourly staff hosting evening job fairs (nominal cost)
- 30 hour contracts with benefits given to trainees

Program Results/Success:

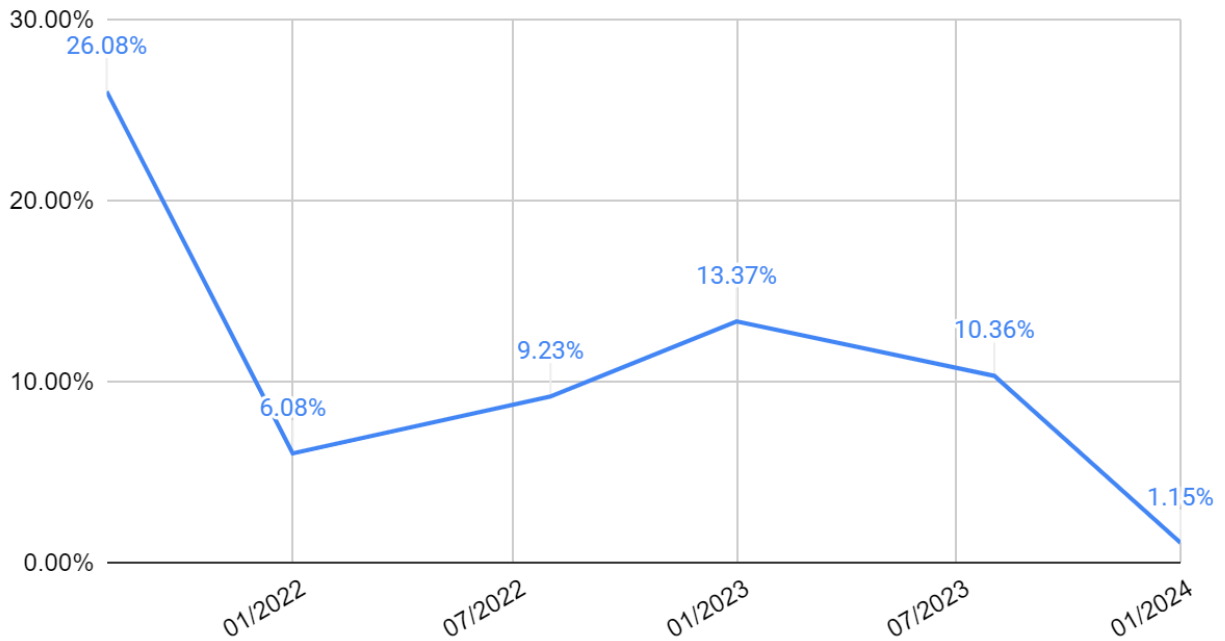
The recruiting and training initiative was a complete success with 244 new drivers being trained and hired through the course of FY22. This improved on-time bus arrivals from approximately 79% in September 2021 to 96% in May 2022.

Chesterfield County Public Schools was not the only school system that needed to hire more bus drivers. To spread the word and help other districts replicate our successful initiative, Superintendent Mervin B. Daugherty submitted an [article to Education Week](#), which was published in the fall of 2022. Education Week added to the impact of that article by [interviewing Dr. Daugherty on the topic](#). Our success was also noted by the National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT), and Dr. Daugherty and Chief

Bus Drivers for all routes
(Transportation Category)

Operations Officer Josh Davis participated in a webinar broadcast by NAPT on January 23, 2023 to share information and discuss our success.

Bus Driver Vacancy Rate



Worthiness of an award:

Collaboration and creativity come together in this successful program that solved a problem facing school districts across the country. Chesterfield County Public Schools and Chesterfield County government worked closely together to make driving a school bus more attractive to people seeking work. The Transportation Department and Human Resources Department found ways to eliminate roadblocks to hiring bus drivers and to retain current Transportation employees. Finally, Chesterfield County Public Schools sought to spread the word about this innovative program with other school districts so that students in other localities could also benefit.

Chesterfield County, VA

Bus Drivers for all routes
(Transportation Category)

Supplemental Materials:

- [Article link](#)
- [Interview link](#)

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EducationWeek article:

How My District Overcame Our Dire Bus Driver Shortage

Now, we are applying the lessons to support staff in classrooms and cafeterias

By Mervin B. Daugherty — November 10, 2022



F. Sheehan/Education Week and iStock/Getty

Mervin B. Daugherty

Mervin B. Daugherty is the superintendent of the Chesterfield County public schools, the largest district in central Virginia and among the 70 largest in the nation. Before joining Chesterfield in 2018, he served as the superintendent of the Red Clay Consolidated school district in Delaware.

Hiring school bus drivers has been tough for years, then the pandemic made it even harder. But the school system I lead cracked the code and achieved 100 percent staffing in transportation this past spring. Now, we have begun to use the techniques that worked in transportation to improve hiring in other areas.

My district, the Chesterfield County public schools in Virginia, educates more than 64,000 students and transports at least 70 percent of them nearly 9 million miles each year. (Chesterfield County is a suburb of Richmond, with urban characteristics near the city, vast suburban neighborhoods, and significant rural areas in the south and west.)

Like most school divisions in the United States, we have suffered over the past several years from a lack of bus drivers and staff to meet transportation needs. We employ more than 500 drivers—or I should say we attempt to employ that many drivers—to cover 1,250 routes in the morning and again in the afternoon. This does not include field trips, after-school events, and weekend activities.

During the summer of 2021, we experienced an extreme shortage of bus drivers: 150 fewer than we needed. Like most school systems, we held job fairs and advertised throughout the region and state. We also increased the availability of driver-training sessions, starting new cohorts of candidates as often as every Monday. (All new school bus drivers require some training, even if they already possess a commercial driver's license with all endorsements. Many candidates need a full four weeks to earn their learner's permit and, subsequently, their commercial driver's license.)

But when schools opened in mid-August, the district still had a severe shortage of drivers. Our first solution was to ask parents ([via this video message](#)) to drive their children to and from school. Our hardworking bus drivers took on double runs at assigned schools, bringing some students to school early in the morning and taking them home late in the afternoon. We opened our schools earlier each morning to accommodate early arrivals and used county police officers for traffic control.

This was only a temporary solution, so we met with county government officials for help resolving this problem. In Virginia, the county government controls local funding for school divisions. We did not have the funding needed to move forward with our long-term solution: increasing driver salaries by \$3 per hour to make starting pay more than \$20 per hour and offering \$3,000 bonuses. Under this proposal, the raises and bonuses would be implemented immediately—and for all drivers and transportation staff, current and new. The bonus would be paid in six installments throughout the school year to encourage drivers to stay the full period.

County officials approved the funding for immediate implementation. This supplemental appropriation was a big lift for the county and the school system that happened quickly after the pain of operating with too few drivers became apparent during the first week of school.

We hired 263 drivers in the past 13 months.

By the end of August 2021, we announced the plan to our community. We made it very clear that, while we believed the plan would work, the driver shortage would not be

resolved immediately because finding and training drivers takes time. To help everyone better understand the process, we committed to ongoing transportation updates via weekly newsletters to staff, families, and the greater community.

We expanded our job advertising. Previous advertising was in local newspapers and on school websites. Revamped advertising included radio and social media packages, newspapers, digital flyers promoted to PTAs and the parent community, enhanced use of the school district's social media platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn, and job boards like Indeed. We also contacted anyone who had applied for a position in transportation over the past several years.

The process to become a school bus driver is extremely challenging; at each step in hiring, some potential drivers are eliminated. Applicants must complete application paperwork and an interview, undergo background and driving-record checks, pass medical and drug screenings, and when classroom work is completed, pass the commercial driver's license test and take behind-the-wheel training.

To streamline the process, we changed our recruiting practices and procedures with job fairs, where we handled fingerprinting, background checks, Department of Motor Vehicles checks, applications, and interviews on site. We moved away from panel interviews and in some cases interviewed by phone. Taking care of these hiring aspects all at once cut down on phone tag and simplified the process for applicants and for recruiters. We also consolidated applicants' medical appointments into one trip for a medical exam, drug screening, and a TB test.

As soon as applicants pass their background checks and screenings, we now begin paying their full salary for several weeks while they train to drive a school bus.

By the middle of the 2021-22 school year, the district was operating transportation in the mid-90 percent staffing range and running normal services to all schools. During one period in the spring, the school system's transportation department was 100 percent staffed! We announced this good news in a [video message](#).

While I wish I could say that 100 percent achievement was permanent, it was not (even though we hired 263 drivers in the past 13 months).

But we absolutely proved that we can achieve 100 percent staffing and we are working to climb that mountain again.

Using our formula for hiring bus drivers, we have adopted similar procedures for hiring custodians, cafeteria workers, and classroom assistants:

- We improved pay in each of these areas and provided bonuses throughout the year.
- We created a cafeteria worker career plan in which there is a clear progression from part-time food-service associate to manager-in-training, assistant manager, and manager, and we added benefits to more food-service job roles.

The improved approach is working. Our custodial vacancies, for example, have been reduced by more than two-thirds.

One thing we learned through this experience is same-old thinking will not do. Success comes from reshaping the way jobs are filled and, even more important, the quality of the jobs themselves.

SEE ALSO



[RECRUITMENT & RETENTION VIDEO](#)

[**One District's Transformative Solution to Its Staffing Shortage**](#)

[Jaclyn Borowski](#), November 16, 2022