

## **TRANSPAR'S OUT-OF-THE-BOX THINKING MAKES NORTHERN INDIANA SCHOOL DISTRICT MORE EFFICIENT, RESPONSIVE & COST-EFFECTIVE**

An economic downturn, reduced school walk zones and a staff retirement gave Elkhart Community Schools the opportunity to change the status quo and take a fresh look at its transportation operations. The School Board and new COO tapped TransPar to lead the way to greater efficiencies and tangible savings.

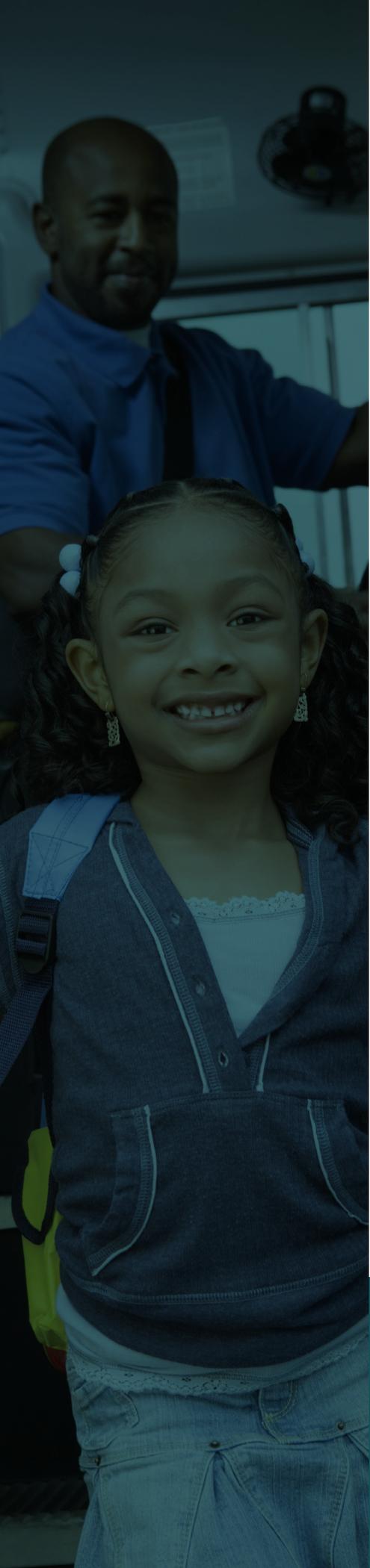
### **THE CHALLENGE: SUSTAIN TRANSPORTATION SAFETY AND SERVICE IN THE FACE OF REDUCED STATE FUNDING & INCREASED RIDERSHIP**

With over 12,600 students in 21 school buildings spanning a 90-square mile area, Elkhart Community Schools (ECS) is the largest district in Northern Indiana's Elkhart County. In 2014, with the economy lagging and newly minted state limitations on property taxes, ECS turned directly to voters to offset shortfalls in state funding. Thanks to community support for a 2014 school referendum, ECS secured additional funding that allowed a reduction in school walk zones and put new pressure on the transportation department to absorb hundreds of additional riders without adding costs.

In recent years, ECS student busing was managed by a director with dual roles -- transportation and safety. Carrying a large workload and understanding the challenges ahead, the director started looking for trusted experts to help reduce ECS' school transportation costs. That's when TransPar entered the scene. Based on its performance during previous assignments and a stellar reputation for service, TransPar was contracted in 2014 to augment the ECS Department of Transportation.

"We had two big challenges -- financing and the way we did business," said Tony Gianesi, who joined ECS as Chief Operating Officer in 2017.

TransPar jumped in to address the first challenge by conducting a comprehensive examination of the operations of ECS' 117-bus system. They looked at bell times and transportation policies, as well as school bus seat and time utilization, using RouteYield(TM). Various school bell time proposals were created, and cost estimates were prepared utilizing TransPar's databases and models proven at school districts across the country.



Addressing the second challenge was made easier when the district decided to separate the transportation and safety roles in 2016. This gave ECS the opportunity to scrutinize the way the district ran its transportation business and draw on TransPar's intimate knowledge of industry best practices to re-imagine the system.

"The previous director was very good, but his experience was weighted toward safety," Gianesi said. "Henry Lohmeyer, our resident TransPar Transportation Director, has a very strong, transportation-specific knowledge base, including a comprehensive understanding of DOT regulations that far exceeds anything we've ever had in-house."

"TransPar has been a fantastic partner. School systems tend to stick to the status quo, especially when it comes to operations. TransPar brings us the in-depth knowledge and experience that opens our eyes to what could be, so we can make the best decisions about what will be."

- Tony Gianesi, Chief Operating Officer, Elkhart Community Schools, Elkhart, Indiana

### THE SOLUTION: TRANSPAR CONDUCTS TOP-TO-BOTTOM TRANSPORTATION OVERHAUL

In addition to overseeing, managing and supervising all aspects of the day-to-day operations of ECS' transportation system, TransPar analysts and transportation industry professionals, led by Lohmeyer, developed and recommended long- and short-term plans, processes and procedures to improve the district's overall transportation system performance. They evaluated costs, policies, routing and technology.

Lohmeyer also evaluated the performance of each transportation system staff member to enhance the effectiveness and productivity of each job function, and provided system users with information that would make the system more effective and responsive. The TransPar team recommended new procedures for communication and problem solving between schools, bus managers, parents, advisory agencies and the community.

Another problem that TransPar addressed was school bus driver downtime. By refining the routing system to maximize the use of time and capacity for each bus in the system, TransPar was able to reduce the time drivers spent idle between routes and maximize the time they spent behind the wheel. Now, drivers are more satisfied and hours are down.



## THE RESULTS: SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS IN DRIVER WAGES AND OPERATIONAL COSTS

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TransPar’s recommendations have resulted in significant savings to Elkhart Community Schools. Gianesi outlined the following results:

**FEWER BUSES, MORE EFFICIENT ROUTES:** “School bell time and transportation policy changes have produced a nine-bus cost reduction or cost avoidance, reducing the ECS fleet from 117 to 108 school vehicles.”

**REDUCED LABOR COSTS:** “The new routing system means we only pay drivers for the time they spend driving, and not for sitting in the terminal between routes. Many twice-daily runs have been reduced to 4.5 hours from 6 hours, resulting in significant savings in wages.”

**REDUCED FUEL COSTS:** “We used to purchase fuel at dock prices. TransPar introduced us to contracted fixed pricing for an entire year, which has reduced our costs dramatically. We reduced our costs for diesel fuel and unleaded gas by **\$180,000** in just the first year.”

**LOWER MAINTENANCE COSTS:** “Making the switch to high-performance synthetic oil from conventional oil produced additional savings of approximately **\$32,000**. Not only do we save on the purchase price, but it reduces our maintenance costs as well. And the extending preventative maintenance intervals and improved performance have reduced the pressure on our mechanics, saving us money on parts and labor.”

**ENHANCED TRAINING:** “Our training program has been augmented with the latest safety and operations methods, as well as new materials introduced by TransPar.”

## WHAT’S NEXT? CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

“We currently run 108 regular home-to-school routes and provide transportation for nearly 22 other programs and activities,” said Gianesi. “We know the demands on our department are bound to increase, so we’re fortunate to have the TransPar team working with us to plan ahead. We’re looking at things like a three-tier bell system and regional transportation models. We could never do all this internally. TransPar keeps us up-to-speed on the latest data and the newest approaches that will continue to improve our operations.”

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