



TRANSPAR HELPS MISSOURI'S NORMANDY SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE CREATE A TOP-NOTCH IN-HOUSE STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

A successful partnership between TransPar and Normandy Schools Collaborative enabled the St. Louis-area school district to overcome serious operational deficiencies in contracted school bus service and bring transportation in-house. This case study shares highlights from the first year of the partnership and future plans.

THE CHALLENGE: PROVIDE GREAT IN-HOUSE STUDENT TRANSPORTATION AFTER YEARS OF POOR CONTRACTOR SERVICE

Poor student transportation service was just one of many problems facing the Normandy School District in 2013 when the Missouri State Board of Education yanked its accreditation due to low academic performance and a variety of other issues. In 2014, as hundreds of students left to attend neighboring school districts, the State dissolved the district and restructured it as the Normandy Schools Collaborative with a state-appointed governing board.

By 2016, the Collaborative had worked its way through many of its academic and performance issues, but serious student transportation troubles remained. When the CFO left late in the school year, the Board tapped Randal Charles, a former Superintendent, to come out of retirement to address the district's student transportation and other operational issues.

"At that time, everything imaginable was bad about our student transportation service," said Charles, now Assistant Superintendent of Operations for Normandy Schools Collaborative. "Service was very inconsistent and unreliable for local school routes as well as for students who opted for the transfer program."

In Missouri, the loss of accreditation allows students who live in a district to transfer to a neighboring district. About 580 of the 3,300 Pre-K through Grade 12 students who live in Normandy took advantage of the transfer program to attend school elsewhere.

The Normandy Schools Collaborative is located in St. Louis County, directly northwest of St. Louis City. The district, which encompasses unincorporated areas of St. Louis County and 24 municipalities, enrolls over 3,500 students in preschool through grade 12.

DAILY STUDENT RIDERSHIP

Regular Education Students
3,255 per day

DAILY FLEET LOGISTICS

Regular Education Buses
24 bus trips per day

THE CHALLENGE

- Uncontrollable Costs
- Inconsistent Service
- Lack of Transportation Expertise

THE SOLUTION

- New In-House Model
- Experienced Transportation Director
- State-of-the-Art Routing System
- Forward Thinking

THE RESULT

- Better School-Parent Communications
- More Professional Drivers
- Efficient Routing
- Safe & On-time Performance
- More Accountable Staff
- Credibility



"Parents and employees had come to expect poor bus service from our contractor. It was a given," Charles said. "When we began thinking about bringing our transportation services back in-house, a colleague suggested we contact TransPar. I had prior experience bringing a transportation system back in-house and had learned the challenges of starting from scratch, with all the inspections, requirements and other details that a non-transportation person wouldn't be aware of up front. Having a group like TransPar to do all that for you is invaluable."

A reference from a neighboring school district that also works with TransPar helped clinch Normandy's decision. "Their business official said, 'I've been in the profession for 25 years, and working with TransPar was probably the best decision I ever made.' We were sold, and became excited about bringing our transportation services in-house and contracting with TransPar to help us do it", added Charles.

"TransPar did everything to help us get started. They told us what to do, how to do it and, in many cases, did it for us. They even pulled TransPar employees from other locations to help staff phones the first week of school. We hadn't even discussed that; TransPar just did it because they knew it would make things go more smoothly. That kind of forward thinking, and the relative ease with which it all happened, was impressive. Not only do these guys know their stuff; they're good people to work with."

**- Randal Charles, Assistant Superintendent of Operations,
Normandy Schools Collaborative, St. Louis, MO**

THE SOLUTION: LEVERAGE TRANSPAR'S EXPERIENCE FOR A HOME RUN IN STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

"To successfully bring student transportation back in-house, we had to knock it out of the park," said Charles. "Merely being good was not acceptable. We had to be great! Thanks to TransPar, Day One of the new transportation system was a vast improvement over prior years."

Leading up to Day One, TransPar identified what the Normandy transportation facility needed in terms of personnel, equipment and technology. The company provided a director, office staff, dispatchers, a safety coordinator and trainer. TransPar hired new drivers, who are school district employees but are supervised by TransPar, and helped address issues with existing drivers to put in place a group that Normandy is happy with.

TransPar also leveraged its routing software to create a reliable schedule for the district's school bus pick-up and drop-off service, which has boosted confidence and reduced stress for families and school administrators.



THE RESULT: OPERATIONS TRANSFORMED, CREDIBILITY RESTORED

Like the school system itself, Normandy's student transportation system has undergone a profound transformation over the past year. Today, all school district operations and performance are guided by "Five Pillars" of critical values and characteristics against which it measures every action, mission and goal.

"I had pretty high expectations for TransPar and they either met or exceeded every one of them," Charles said. "TransPar's service delivery supports all Five Pillars and we wouldn't accept less."

FIVE PILLARS, EXPLAINED:

ACCOUNTABILITY: "TransPar steps up and takes accountability for any issues. If something comes up, you never hear someone say 'It's not my job.' Even if it's on the fringe of their service delivery, they jump right in and ask, 'How can we help?'"

COLLABORATION: "Just today I met with a group of drivers, TransPar's director and the safety coordinator to talk about student behavior on buses and how to better communicate with principals and drivers. That's the type of collaboration that's typical with TransPar."

PROFESSIONALISM: "TransPar is willing to get involved in our professional development and work with us like another arm of our organization. TransPar people are always professional; they handle phone calls with parents, deal with concerns, paperwork and behind-the-scenes issues in a professional manner."

TRUST: "I trust not only that things are going to get handled, but they will get handled well. In the past, I got up to 10 phone calls a day from parents about late buses, driver conduct, etc. Now, I don't get that many calls in a three-month period. I don't have to worry. Trust is probably the thing I value most in working with TransPar."

RESPECT: "Respect is reflected in everything TransPar does. Drivers respect the kids and other drivers. We respect one another. It's a positive work environment."

By the end of 2017, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recognized the improvements in student performance made by Normandy Schools, and effective January 2, 2018, Normandy Schools Collaborative received provisional accreditation.

"That's a huge step for us," said Charles. "Now that Normandy has provisional accreditation status, the student transfer provision will go away."

Normandy has made arrangements with neighboring school districts to transition students back to its school district over the next 3 to 4 years. To plan for that influx of students, Normandy is working with TransPar to redistrict its elementary school attendance boundaries. By the start of the 2019–2020 school year, Normandy’s middle school will be eliminated and students will attend neighborhood elementary schools through the 8th grade.

At the recommendation of TransPar, Normandy also plans to trial the SafeStop™ school bus tracking app, offered by SafeStop Inc. TransPar is arranging a webinar to introduce the service to principals, who will pilot it before they make it available to parents.

Looking to the immediate future, Charles expects to see 200 to 300 students returning to the school district next year.

“It’s a challenge configuring the classrooms and buildings to fit them in, as well as adding that many kids to our bus routes,” said Charles. “But TransPar will help us make all the necessary transportation preparations. Our relationship with TransPar is a long-term one. I don’t think anyone would dare question it.”

TransPar is a proud partner with the TransPar Group of Companies, a partnership of three leading organizations from across the school transportation industry: TransPar for Management and Staffing Services, School Bus Consultants for Advisory Services, and Transportation Services Co. for Fleet Management and Acquisition Services. These companies offer a diverse portfolio of products and services representing the most comprehensive solutions in the business. And all of this is done with keeping students safe, decreasing cost and improving the quality of school transportation operations. So no matter the needs, the TransPar Group of Companies is the all-inclusive solution to creating a successful, reliable, and profitable student transportation program.