



Maine Department of Education/Transportation
Case Study – September 2017
MSAD/RSU 35
Serving the towns of Eliot and South Berwick

District Profile

MSAD 35 is located in Southern Maine and serves the towns of Eliot and South Berwick. There are 2,600 students in the district and 1,400 are transported to 5 public schools in addition to several schools outside of the district for students with special needs and vocational training. The five schools consist of two pre-k-3rd grade schools, one 4th-5th grade school, one 6th-8th grade school, and one high school.

Situation

Heather Webster is the transportation coordinator and began at the district 21 years ago as a school bus driver. Heather manages all student information and assignments to bus routes, in addition to state reporting and various reporting needs by the district.

Heather started using Transfinder 7 years ago when she was still a driver, assisting the transportation director with adding routes and student information to the system. The transportation director wanted more than one person to be familiar with the software, so she had backup if needed.

Benefits

After initial technical set-up, route creation, and student stop and trip identification there were immediate benefits to using the transportation operations system. The first year of using Transfinder, drivers learnt, for the very first time, the first name of each student they were picking up at their stops. Not only did drivers appreciate knowing who they were picking up, they would know how many students should be at each stop and if anyone had not arrived. In addition, it was an added benefit to the students and parents, as an added comfort knowing that their driver was expecting each individual student and would look out for students.

In addition to the immediate benefits, Transfinder also added new functionality, as it does each year to its software, and the new overlap feature significantly benefitted Heather. It was a feature she naturally took to, as part of her background was graphic design, giving her the advantage of being visual and quickly adapting to manipulating the routing map. The overlap feature allowed Heather to visually see where original routes were overlapping, so she could make adjustments for efficiency, and reduce buses crossing each other's paths.

A significant change made to the routes for 2017-18 school opening was removing a bus run from an area of the Town of Eliot that was showing a drop in student ridership. The students were consolidated to other bus routes, and relying on the accuracy of the software for its timing calculations, were able to arrive at another location for a shuttle pickup to their school. With team collaboration which included



bus drivers, department staff, and Transfinder’s capabilities a newly created bus route in South Berwick provided aide in an area that is 15-20 minutes from district schools by cutting the original bus run in half. This transportation operations analysis and refinement made the first pickup at 6:20 AM instead of 6:05 AM, saving 15 minutes of ride time each day. For all 19 bus routes, the first bus stop pickup was no earlier than 6:20 AM for High School and Middle School students.

An additional Transfinder module used at the district Infofinder i, Transfinder’s web-based service for sharing information with the community via the district’s website. This has benefitted Heather and the other Transportation Staff as well as the school secretaries by significantly reducing phone calls to the transportation office. In addition, Transfinder Infofinder le has been implemented for paperless field trip approval process at the district. The district uses a 4-step process for approving field trips, and Infofinder le helps to notify the next person in line whose approval is needed to move the request along – ultimately improving planning and logistics.

Heather has realized benefits of using Transfinder at the district for not only improving efficiency on the road, but better reporting and accountability in the office. This has helped her to streamline processes for sharing information and scheduling extracurricular trips. Training has been vital for taking advantage of the software’s benefits and implementing the additional resources used at the district. Heather has attended training provided in Augusta, ME led by Transfinder’s professional trainer, as well as attended the company’s Annual Client Summit, held every other year in Albany, NY. Heather has also received Transfinder training at the Annual Maine State School Transportation Safety Conference held at Sugarloaf and sponsored by the Maine Department of Education.

In addition to Transfinder adding functionality to its existing software each year, the company is consistently developing new technology to help districts. The State of Maine has been on the cutting edge of technology and is known for staying up-to-date by making it available to school districts across the state. The latest Transfinder module software is Viewfinder, which allows leadership personnel to monitor the day-to-day operations of the transportation department from one dashboard, knowing what buses are on the road and where they’re scheduled to be. Heather is adding this software over the next year, and plans to include a personal invite to the district school board, superintendent and district staff to explore its possibilities as well as looking forward to keeping an eye on what’s going on in the field.

Testimonial

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