Our annual Maintenance Survey finds that the average starting wage for school bus techs rose 5 percent since last year. We also uncover data on bus retirement age, maintenance software use and bus-to-tech ratios.

BY THOMAS MCMAHON, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Average fleet age

8.5 Years

The average of respondents’ average fleet age is 8.5 years, just slightly below last year’s figure, 8.6 years.

Average starting wage

$17.36 per hour

The average starting wage for school bus technicians is $17.36 per hour, an increase of about 5 percent compared to the 2010 survey average, $16.51. In 2009, it was $16.07. Some reported starting wage as an annual salary, with the average being $34,978.
Respondents maintain a wide variety of school bus fleet sizes. The survey was e-mailed to managers at school district transportation departments and contractors. A total of 190 usable responses was received.

Smaller fleets tend to have a lower ratio of school buses to technicians. The average ratio for all fleet sizes is 21 school buses per tech, which is the same figure as in the past two years.

Just over half (56 percent) of respondents said that their operation uses some type of maintenance software. When this question was asked in the survey two years ago, 63 percent said they were using software.

Close to two-thirds (62 percent) of operations surveyed said that some or all of their technicians have ASE certification.
Salt on the road?

About four-fifths (81 percent) of respondents said that some type of salt (sodium chloride, calcium chloride, magnesium chloride, etc.) is used on their local roads in the winter. The salts eat at buses’ sheet metal and chassis components. The percentages were the same last year.

### Average bus retirement age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ROAD SALT</th>
<th>NO SALT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years for large bus</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years for small bus</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among those in areas where road salt is used, bus retirement age is significantly lower. Compared to last year, the averages for salt areas stayed close to the same, while the averages for no-salt areas each increased by more than a year.
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Only 12 percent of respondents said that, on average, their buses are putting in fewer miles per day this school year than they did last year.

On average, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of the vehicles that respondents’ operations maintain are school buses. Examples of other vehicles are maintenance trucks, school district cars and motorcoaches.

Mileage compared to last year

- Fewer 12%
- More 30%
- Same 58%

Ratio of vehicles

- Other vehicles 31%
- School buses 69%
- Same 58%