School Bus Driver Pay Rises as Shortage Worsens

More districts are dealing with bigger shortages of drivers, our School District Fleet Survey finds. Meanwhile, most districts have raised driver pay, with the average starting rate jumping nearly $1 per hour compared to last year.

*By Thomas McMahon*

Our 2018 School District Fleet Survey found an average school bus driver starting wage of $16.62 per hour, which is nearly $1 higher than last year’s average.
Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the districts surveyed increased their starting hourly pay for school bus drivers this year.

Our 2018 survey suggests that school bus driver shortage has worsened since last year. Fewer districts this year fell into the “none” or “mild” categories, and more were in “severe” or “desperate.” The categories are defined as: none, 0% short of drivers; mild, 1-5% short; moderate, 6-10% short; severe, 11-15% short; and desperate, at least 16% short.

The majority of respondents (61%) reported that their level of school bus service stayed the same for the 2018-19 school year compared to the previous year. Nearly a third (31%) increased service.

Fast facts: averages

- Driver starting pay: $16.62/hour
- Director salary: $80,245/year
- Students transported per route bus: 62
- Annual miles per route bus: 12,649

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Drivers unionized?

Yes 39%

No 61%

At the majority of the school districts surveyed (61%), school bus drivers are not members of a labor union.

Have a bus app for parents?

Yes 15%

No 85%

Fifteen percent of the school districts surveyed offer an app for parents and students to check the status of their school bus.

Buy any new buses?

Yes 73%

No 27%

Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the districts surveyed purchased new school buses for the 2018-19 school year.

Which fuels did you choose for new buses?

81% Diesel

25% Gasoline

13% Propane

2% Compressed natural gas

1% All-electric

1% Other

Districts that did purchase new school buses this year (see chart on pg. 25) were asked what fuel types those buses are. Not surprisingly, the top answer was diesel, with 81% of respondents selecting that mainstay fuel for some or all of their new school buses. The responses in the “other” category were renewable diesel and biodiesel, both of which can be used in regular diesel engines.
For the transportation directors surveyed, annual salary rises with fleet size. The average salary for all respondents is $80,245, which is lower than last year’s average, $84,883.

This survey was emailed to transportation directors and managers at school districts with various school bus fleet sizes (with spares and contractor buses included in this chart). We received 230 useable responses.