

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

CCSD community members should direct their efforts to overcome the bus driver shortage to district leaders instead of targeting the drivers.



BY AUDREY ENGHAUSER
Print Editor-in-Chief

"Pardon the interruption. Teachers, please do not mark students absent, we have a few buses coming in late today," Clarke Central High School Front Office

secretary Linda Glenn announces over the intercom at the beginning of first period.

These bus riders will have missed a significant amount of instructional time when they finally arrive at school due to the shortage of bus drivers in the district.

According to an August 2021 National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) survey, 78% of respondents reported that the national bus driver shortage is getting "much worse" or "a little worse", and 51% further reported a "severe" or "desperate" shortage. Of surveyed Southerners, 66% reported altered bus services due to COVID-19.

In the Clarke County School District, students are missing instructional time and having to stay at school later due to the number of bus drivers available to work.

"In the mornings, we've had a couple buses continue to be late because of (the shortage)," CCHS Assistant Principal Summer Smith said. "Then in the afternoons, we have one bus that definitely leaves and comes back to do a double route, and then other buses are full. And then we also have a lot of bus changes, given (drivers) being out."

In the CCSD, this shortage of bus drivers has forced drivers to work longer hours when picking up more routes. A typical work week for CCSD bus drivers is 20 hours, but as employees of the district under certain overtime restrictions, they won't receive additional compensation.

"The time and a half laws are that you have to work 40 hours, not 20 hours so even though their position was a 20-hour-week position, if they worked 21 hours, that didn't count as overtime," District 4 CCSD Board of

Education Member Dr. Patricia Yager said.

Considering that drivers' overtime pay is restricted, according to Yager, the CCSD Human Resources department has employed a retention bonus for this school year, raising drivers' current pay from \$16.26 to \$19.00 per hour, and will officially raise their salary at the beginning of next year.

According to CCSD Chief Academic Officer Brannon Gaskins, the district is looking to employ drivers in another capacity.

While this is a reasonable solution to compensate driver, the district has yet to address the conditions that they will continue to endure until these ideas are put into full effect.

For now, buses remain severely overcrowded, bus drivers are still taking on multiple routes, and the pressure put on drivers is high.

"We deal with a lot! A lot of the schools show no support with conduct and bus issues. Bus drivers' appreciation is taken very light at some schools.

Everyone is burned out." a CCSD bus driver, who wished to remain anonymous*, said.

Parents are often at the receiving end of these issues, as well, if drivers are unable to cover all of their routes. While it may

While it may be frustrating for a parent for their child's bus to skip their stop, parents should consider how the shortage is affecting the drivers themselves.

"Our district is really working hard to recruit more bus drivers so bus drivers don't have double routes," Gaskins said. "We are looking at providing additional hours for our existing bus drivers to work at our schools -- to work as Hall Monitors, to work as Lunch Monitors, to work as (substitute teachers)."

be frustrating for a parent for their child's bus to skip their stop, parents should consider how the shortage is affecting the drivers themselves.

There is no doubt that this shortage is impacting students greatly, but if CCSD parents wish to create change and improve the condition of school buses, they should hold the CCSD leaders accountable for

the lack of support they've given to drivers to improve the accessibility and conditions of school buses.

"We have no support from the head. Seems kinda like we be out there alone sometimes. They keep (saying) every day it gets better. Nope, it's getting worse!" the bus driver said. "

Instead of seeing themselves in opposition to bus drivers, parents should support community efforts coming from bus drivers that target CCSD Superintendent cabinet members in order to fill the bus driver shortage and equity gaps, which will ultimately benefit both students and drivers. **O**

*A Clarke County School District bus driver agreed to interview on the basis of confidentiality due to the sensitivity of the issue.



Above: An illustrated Clarke County School District bus driver deals with a crowded bus and an angry parent while the CCSD grabs hold of the vehicle. CCSD parents and guardians should direct their concerns about the bus driver shortage to CCSD cabinet members who can help implement changes. Illustration by Antonio Starks