

August 26, 2021

Dear Forest Hill Families,

Welcome to the 2021-2022 school year! It has been wonderful to see our students fill our schools once again.

The start of the school year has not been without its challenges in our transportation department. We continue to face a shortage of bus drivers. The shortage is not just a Forest Hills issue. Across our country, school districts are struggling to fill these important positions. We have read article after article and viewed story after story about school districts across the country that have had to cancel routes, change their eligibility criteria, and even shut down due to lack of bus drivers.

In Forest Hills, our entire office team and all of our mechanics are driving bus routes on a daily basis in both the morning and afternoon to ensure we can operate as many of our scheduled routes as possible. As a result, our response time for phone calls and emails regarding bus stop questions, concerns, and changes is taking longer than we would like.

We are extremely grateful for our bus drivers. In Forest Hills, our school buses are an extension of the school day. For many of our students, the bus driver is the first school person they see each morning and the last staff member they see each afternoon. It is such an important role in our school system. But our bus drivers are people too. They face unexpected challenges like all of us such as an unexpected death of a family member or a family member who is hospitalized. These examples of life's challenges have a big impact on our transportation system, especially with the bus driver shortage crisis.

To become a bus driver, an individual goes through extensive training and licensing. They are also required to attend continuing education courses. This is a wonderful job and our drivers consider it a calling to do this work. If you have an interest in serving, please contact our Human Resources office at 616-493-8805. We would be delighted if you or someone you know would be interested in beginning the process of becoming a certified school bus driver. The rewards of working with our students are endless.

We are also experiencing a technical challenge with our Versatrans bus routing software and MyStop app. Versatrans is a product of Tyler Technologies. We have had someone from Tyler Technologies on site since August 20 working with us to correct the technical issues. We sincerely apologize as the technical issues have caused confusion and frustration for our families.

We are very appreciative of the support, patience, and understanding of our families as we deal with the technical issues with our transportation technology and as we face the challenges of the national bus driver shortage crisis. We will continue to strive to service our families as best we can as we partner with you to keep our students safe.

Best Regards,

Julie Davis
Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations