

Education

"THE REPORT CARD"

School Buses — The Safest Route To School

Yvonne Atkinson



When one thinks or speaks about busing of school children, it often evokes thoughts of something very negative. Busing is such an emotional issue, that we often overlook its benefits.

Such is the case in the Clark County School District, where busing is more a product of a district-wide policy providing transportation to and from school for any student

residing two miles or more from the school they attend, than from any racial balance requirement. Students in our school system who are determined to be handicapped are provided home-to-school transportation as another special transportation service of the district.

All told, out of over 90,000 students in grades kindergarten through the twelfth grade, more than 30,000 students are transported to-and-from school daily. Contrary to popular belief, only a fraction of these 30,000 students are bused for "racial balance" reasons. In fact, less than 5,000 of the 30,000 students are bused as a result of the Sixth Grade Center

Integration Plan put into effect in 1972.

Why then all the commotion and concern about integration? It's easy to see that busing in any context is an extremely emotional issue. I'll leave this subject to concentrate on in a future column where I can more fully explore its many ramifications. For now, let's get back to "plain ol'" transportation.

The school district has the largest public transportation fleet in the state of Nevada. In fact, district buses were pressed into service to evacuate victims of the tragic MGM Hotel fire. Fire Department officials who battled that blaze couldn't figure out at first how they were going to move the more

than 4,000 hotel guests from the hotel parking lot to the disaster relief center set up at the Convention Center. To the rescue came the school district's fleet of buses. CCSD drivers volunteered, and off they went to deliver the tired, hungry and even injured hotel guests to the Convention Center. Obviously, that was an unusual circumstance. One that the school district was proud to play a role in, but it is not typical of the manner in which school buses are used.

The vantage point most people get of the school buses is often that fleeting glimpse of either a bus filled with kids, maybe even catching a glimpse of them in a somewhat unruly situation—or, of a bus "deadheading" (a term used to describe a bus without passengers) as it returns to the bus yard. It was back during the energy crisis when district officials began looking in earnest at a plan that would drastically curtail having empty buses traveling long distances. The plan was simple but complex. It involved the simple principle of less deadheading, with the desired result of saving precious fuel. The end result, still in effect, has resulted in a much more efficient routing of school buses. The district had once again proven it could "tighten its belt" and still provide quality transportation service for children.

All this is not to say that the Transportation Department is perfect. Consider that with anywhere from 315 to 350 buses operating daily, it's almost certain there will be some problems. The bottom line with transportation, though, is safety and effectiveness. Has the Clark County School District provided for the safe transportation of students, and, what is its record of performance?

According to Matt Wallace, the Director of Transportation, school district buses travel over 5 million passenger miles each year. And — THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A FATALITY involving a school bus in Clark County. In fact, school buses have been determined the safest means of transportation, bar none! They are safer than cars,

and certainly safer than trains. Statistically, buses are THIRTY TIMES safer than cars. Even so, there have been a few deaths in other parts of the country involving school buses -- but far fewer than with automobiles.

Last year, there were 40 nationwide fatalities involving school bus accidents. Compare that with over 50,000 fatalities involving cars.

With over 300 big yellow "bannanas" (as we call the school buses sometimes) on the roads throughout Clark County, they present a pretty visible sight. When you see them, consider that busing here for the most part is to transport students to-and-from school because they live more than two miles away from the school they attend -- not for racial balance reasons. Don't get caught up in the emotionalism that comes with the viewpoint that "busing is bad!"

If you have a question about the district's transportation program, I urge you to pick up the telephone and call Transportation Director Matt Wallace or his assistant Gunter Koepsell at 364-0295.

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