

Kickstarting the 2nd Semester: **Leadership Practices for K-12 Transportation Teams**

The second semester is here, which is the perfect time to refocus, strengthen your leadership practices, and ensure your team is set up for success. Whether you're tackling operational challenges, managing new hires, or navigating leadership transitions, you'll find this guide packed with practical suggestions and real-world examples from your peers in K-12 transportation.

Elevate Your Team and Culture

1 Navigating the Transition as a New Transportation Leader

- **Start with Observation**

- Spend time listening and observing to make sure you understand team dynamics before making significant changes.
- Introduce changes gradually to build trust and avoid overwhelming your team.

- **Focus on Trust-Building**

- Keep an open-door policy and encourage open communication at all levels.
- Schedule one-on-one or small group meetings to understand team members' concerns and needs.

- **Empower Existing Leaders**

- Identify informal leaders within the team and involve them in decision-making to foster collaboration.

2 Recruiting and Retaining Talent

- **Leverage Internal Training Programs**

- Identify experienced drivers who can train new hires, compensating them with extra trip opportunities or recognition.
- Offer flexible roles, such as substitute or activity trip-only drivers, to attract part-time talent.

- **Create a Culture of Recognition**

- Start the day with personal greetings and quick check-ins to build morale.
- Organize monthly appreciation activities, such as a breakfast “doughnut day” or lunchtime “pizza day,” low-cost contests, or shout-outs.
- Use small incentives, like district-branded hats or gift cards, to reward high-performing staff.

- **Innovative Recruitment**

- Partner with local colleges or technical schools to create a driver pipeline.
- Reach out to parents who might be available to drive routes.
- Offer a referral bonus to current drivers to help recruit new ones.
- Highlight community impact, flexibility, and other unique job perks in recruitment efforts.
- Address the root causes of turnover (e.g., pay, job demands, or culture) to create a tailored retention strategy.

3 Maintaining Professionalism in High-Pressure Situations

- **Listen First, Respond Later**

- Use mirroring techniques to repeat back concerns to demonstrate to parents or staff you understand their issues.
- De-escalate tense situations by first acknowledging emotions before offering solutions.

- **Empathy Is Key**

- Acknowledge parents’ frustrations as stemming from care for their children, not a personal attack.
- Train staff to respond empathetically and professionally when handling complaints.

- **Clear Escalation Policies**

- Create a system for addressing concerns at the appropriate level (e.g., dispatchers, supervisors) to avoid unnecessary escalation.
- Regularly review and update escalation procedures for effectiveness.

4 Building a Culture of Appreciation and Community

- **Daily Engagement**

- Dedicate 15 minutes each morning to check in with staff, greet them, and offer quick support.
- Make yourself visible and approachable to strengthen relationships.

- **Pulse Check Meetings**

- Host small-group feedback sessions to assess team morale and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Implement practical changes based on feedback to show staff their voices are valued.

- **Celebrate Your Team**

- Organize monthly team-building activities, such as potlucks or coffee breaks.
- Recognize milestones like birthdays or work anniversaries with personal notes or small gifts.

- **Highlight Impact**

- Share stories of how drivers positively impact students and families to reinforce their sense of purpose.

5 Effective Communication and Team Meetings

- **Monthly Meetings**

- Use meetings to reinforce team goals, address concerns, and celebrate successes.
- Share updates on policies, safety protocols, and district priorities.

- **Clarify the “Why”**

- Explain the reasoning behind decisions to build trust and buy-in from staff.
- Use real-world examples to make messages more relatable.

- **Encourage Open Dialogue**

- Create an environment where staff feel comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and feedback.

6 Student Safety as Priority #1

- **Act Immediately on Safety Concerns**

- Address hazards like poorly placed stops, unsafe routes, or accidents as top priorities.
- Conduct site visits with staff to identify and resolve safety concerns.

- **Empower Your Team**

- Train drivers to recognize and report unsafe conditions proactively.
- Foster a culture where raising safety concerns is welcomed and addressed promptly.

- **Consistency**

- Apply safety policies uniformly to ensure compliance and maintain trust.

- **Adopt a “Case-by-Case” Mindset:**
 - Evaluate route changes individually to balance flexibility with consistency.
 - Before saying no, consider alternatives and assess the feasibility of the request.
- **Collaborate on Solutions:**
 - Visit the site in question with your transportation director or staff. Walk or drive the area to evaluate its safety and feasibility.
 - Ride along with drivers to better understand their challenges.
- **Ensure Safety and Consistency:**
 - Prioritize safety in all route decisions.
 - Maintain fairness by applying route policies consistently across the district.
- **Communicate Decisions Effectively:**
 - Clearly explain the rationale for decisions, emphasizing safety and fairness.
 - Always follow through on promises to review requests or make adjustments.
- **Encourage Driver Input:**
 - Create an open channel for drivers to flag concerns or suggest route improvements.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your routing system?

If your answer is lower than 10, it's time for an upgrade. Learn more about [EZRouting](#), part of our [EZTransportation](#) transportation management platform, and be sure to [complete our request form](#) to schedule your personalized tour!