

How Gulf Shores Schools Use Bus Routing Software to Improve Parent Communication

When enrollment growth and school upgrades made planning difficult, Transportation Director Marcus Early sought a better way to optimize routes.



Marcus Early

Transportation Director

A way to communicate with parents more quickly and transparently.

[TravelTracker – Routing](#) (TT-R) is routing software designed to provide transportation directors with a more accessible and efficient way to build school bus routes and communicate with parents and drivers. Early says he was impressed with the routing process's flexibility within TT-R, especially the tools he now has for communicating with parents, drivers, and other transportation stakeholders.

Situated on the Gulf Coast, the public school district in Gulf Shores, Alabama, serves 2,500 students from elementary, middle, high, and virtual academy campuses. Gulf Shores has 23 school buses that travel almost 130,000 miles annually.

"Before (TravelTracker), you had to go out and do everything old-school. You would have to draw the routes, have everything on paper by the fall, and the biggest thing was it was difficult to communicate with parents."

Now that Gulf Shores transportation staff have access to TT-R, they can:

- Consolidate routes based on different scenarios or a bus driver calling in sick
- Accelerate route changes without extra admin time
- Communicate to parents if a bus is running late

Before (TravelTracker), you had to go out and do everything old-school. You would have to draw the routes, have everything on paper by the fall, and the biggest thing was it was difficult to communicate with parents."

Human Support Alleviates Concerns About Complicated Onboarding Process

Early says every transportation coordinator is tasked with building the most efficient transportation system, from both a budget and routing standpoint. He adds that when you're doing everything manually it's almost impossible to share information with parents quickly. However, one of the significant obstacles to a district's decision to upgrade from a manual process is the misconception that training staff on new systems will take up a lot of admin time. That's not the case with TT-R, he says.

"If you go with the wrong company, you basically have to do everything on your own. Working with TravelTracker, we've had one-on-one support. The biggest challenge, I think, is you build your route through a tablet. I would ride with each bus. We would tag each of our stops with a GPS location so they would have a physical address."

Early estimates that the entire onboarding process took about a month, and at that point, everything was ready for them to use going forward.

“Working with Travel Tracker, we’ve had one-on-one support”

Engaging and Informing Parents on Bus Schedules

Late buses happen, and when that occurs, parents and guardians make the early morning phone call to their school or transportation department to find out what’s happening. Early says communication is key to keeping parents notified of changes.

“The safety of every child is paramount for any transportation and school system.”

Thanks to the TT-R routing software’s ability, particularly the parent portal, Early communication is better and parents have more peace of mind knowing where their student’s bus is in the morning or afternoon.

The parent portal allows parents to request new route assignments for their student, and email or text messages can go out to all contacts listed for the student. Early relays, phone calls, and parent comments are positive regarding how Gulf Shores is engages and informs them.

“We get constant emails, phone calls; people will show up to the board meetings, and they’re so complimentary of the safety and security aspect from the parent portal.”

Parents can access an interactive map that allows them to set up a radius with notifications for when the bus is approaching, removing the need for long wait times at the bus stop.

“With the app on their phone or their computer, they can follow the bus and when the bus is going to be there to pick up their child. Same thing in the afternoons.

They know when the buses are getting within a 2-mile or 5-mile radius, whatever you draw your circle at.”

Unlimited licensing provides administrators at school locations access to view routes and assignments, avoiding phone calls back and forth to transportation. Automatic notifications can also go out to other transportation stakeholders, such as district administrators, school principals, cafeteria staff, and bus drivers.

Transportation departments can also send single notifications for new route assignments or mass notifications for bus breakdowns or delayed buses.

“The safety of every child is paramount for any transportation and school system.”

Investigate Options, Checking Off Boxes

Early initially took a scan of companies offering routing software and checked off items on his list of must-have features. After his research, he found that TT-R sat at the top of his list.

“I was just really, really drawn to you guys. It was absolutely a no-brainer to go with you and your company. I would tell anyone thinking about buying software do your research, but you will find it very hard to find a better product with better support staff.”

To learn more about Travel Tracker, go to www.app-garden.com/travel-tracker