

A background of overlapping orange and white geometric shapes, including a large orange arrow pointing right.

TransPar Group of Companies Being Proactive, Prepared and Lessons Learned



CONTACT

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The State of Hawaii uses Transfinder software to manage routing for all the school districts in the state. TransPar is an outside consulting firm who has been hired by the state to conduct routing and work with the bus contractors. They also perform efficiency studies, bell time studies and other needs as they arise.

Hawaii's economy is largely made up of tourism. Due to COVID-19 their economy has taken a tremendous hit with 1/3 of their population out of work. As such, because all funding for schools comes directly from the state and not from any local taxes, schools are bracing for significant cuts in the next school year, at least 10%. "Everything is a spider web. It's hard to have a huge big picture. You don't realize the trickle affect decisions or changes can have."

Mark Lindstrom, General Manager of TransPar's Hawaii office and his team knowing this are currently working on an island wide bell-time study they can give to the state to get ahead of the cuts they know are coming. "Now is the time to get ahead. I recommend to any district out there to use the time they have now to come up with some plans before they're faced with a deadline and don't have ample time for thoughtful planning. Also, having an outside partner to take a look is a good thing." Mark says school districts need to take into consideration now the time they have. "You don't know if your school district is going to tell you that they've decided to conduct school over the summer to make up for being out of the classroom. If that happens, you're going to need a month to plan your routes."

Fortunately for Hawaii they have not experienced the same driver shortage issues most other districts have. Their shortage was only at 1-2%, but it's another thing they need to consider. Will that shortage increase? The state will pay their contractors some fixed costs, but many of their contractors do more than just school transportation. Their business also comes from the tourism industry, so they're facing serious challenges. TransPar just wants to be ready.

Mark is very familiar with these lessons. Often times it takes a crisis or an emergency situation to change how you do business going forward and have a plan in place for when the unexpected occurs. That was the case for him at another school district, Marietta Schools in Georgia. Several years ago, they looked at the challenge of the annual flu invasion. They partnered with a local provider and placed industrial size hand sanitizers on all the school buses because they realized that students were in close contact with each other on the bus and they wanted to reduce the likelihood that students would get and transfer the flu on the bus. "It is important to maintain those relationships during the year so that when sanitizer is needed districts can get it. By having a long-term relationship companies will be more apt to support the school district in getting the resources that are needed especially under dire circumstances."

Additionally, they used a sanitizing system twice a year for many years that was designed to sanitize the bus and reduce the threat of flu transmission. They had to train a team of employees to do the sanitizing and they ensured that the buses were sanitized before school started and at Thanksgiving break. The chemical was supposed to work for six months and

drivers cleaned the handrails and tops of the seats daily. These are the places that typically had the most contact with students. Under COVID-19, Marietta has changed chemicals and disinfects daily between bus routes. “The transition was a bit easier, because they had a sanitizing program in place with drivers who were trained, and the rest of the drivers knew that the district was already proactive in keeping the buses safe and clean. That goes a long way in building trust amongst the district and their drivers and bus monitors.”

“The key is to take this year’s challenge and be ready for next year’s. If you’re delivering food, can you reuse the routes you’re using now to be prepared for other emergencies such as fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and in Hawaii lava flows have all disrupted bus routes in the past. Having routes ready to go for future emergencies or the ability to use a routing system to help is key. Are your staff members trained to react to emergencies and if not, what software do you need, and what training does your staff need. How did you communicate with other departments, schools, and parents during this emergency? What do you need to respond better next time?”