



Waterloo Schools Community,

We recognize the start to this school year has been difficult, and we want to apologize for the worry, stress and frustration our service is causing families who rely on us for transportation. We hear your concerns, empathize with your sentiment, and are focused on delivering solutions.

First and foremost, we must provide an environment on our school buses where students feel comfortable and secure. Our drivers and monitors are responsible for providing the care and compassion that ensure your children arrive to school ready to learn. Understanding this, we are providing enhanced training to our team. Additional safety meetings will be held this week with drivers and monitors to reinforce customer service and safety policies, including protocols and procedures for students with special needs.

Our Waterloo location currently has 50 drivers on staff to cover 55 bus routes, and the shortage is contributing to service issues. We are having to modify some routes daily, including making additional changes if a driver is out sick or off work for other reasons. While making these adjustments enable us to provide transportation to all students, it is causing delays.

In addition to the challenges presented by current staffing levels, this is our first year providing transportation for Waterloo Schools. Our drivers have been getting accustomed to new systems, routes and buses. Service has been adversely affected, and we regret it.

We know these disruptions are impacting your family's well-being, and we want to assure you that our company is actively working to mitigate these issues. Last week, members of the First Student executive leadership team, including our Chief Operating Officer and myself, met with district leaders to discuss how we can achieve our shared goal of ensuring that every student makes it to school safely and on time, every time. We listened to your concerns and have developed a comprehensive plan to address service now and moving forward.

Our communication and driver staffing levels must improve. Ensuring we are hiring and retaining the best drivers to serve the district is a top priority. We currently have 10 driver candidates in various stages of training and hope to add them to bus routes in the coming weeks. In the meantime, we are leveraging our network of qualified drivers to further support operations and help stabilize service. Beginning this week, 10 additional First Student drivers from nearby communities are in Waterloo to assist with route coverage.

We also have additional team members on site to help move driver candidates through the hiring process. It does take time, typically about four to ten weeks, to become a school bus driver. There are strict background checks, licensing requirements and training standards that must be met to operate a school bus.

Another key component of our plan is improving communication around service and delays. Additional staff is in place this week to update Blackboard. They will alert parents about any buses that are running more than 15 minutes late during morning and afternoon routes, so you can plan accordingly. Drivers are being reminded of the importance of reporting this information to our office team, allowing any issues to be posted in a timely manner.

We also look forward to introducing FirstView this school year, which will provide up-to-the-minute information about when the bus will arrive at the bus stop. The app allows parents or guardians to track their child's bus in real time and follow their journey to and from school. We are working with the district to develop a comprehensive rollout schedule with a goal to have it fully deployed by the end of December.

Along with communication and staffing, our attention is also focused on bus routing. We review the information daily with the district and continue to collaborate on refining routes and prioritizing timely pick-ups and drop-offs.

We recognize the profound impact reliable transportation has on families. First Student is committed to gaining your trust by delivering the safe and reliable service your children and the district deserve. As we continue our efforts to meet the expectations of the Waterloo Schools community, we also promise to maintain open communication and will keep you updated on our progress.

Sincerely,

John Billigmeier  
Senior Vice President  
First Student