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Kalispell school buses now equipped with GPS tracking

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Posted: Monday, January 30, 2012 8:30 pm

By HILARY MATHESON/Daily Inter Lake | [1 comment](#)

With about 2,600 students in Kalispell Public Schools riding the bus each year, safety is a priority. That's why the district updated its bus routing and management system to include GPS systems.

The 57 buses that make up the district's fleet were each outfitted with Edulog and an EduTracker GPS and automatic vehicle locator system last July. The district's transportation department is in the final stages of fine-tuning the software for the district's needs.



Edulog, made by Education Logistics, is based in Missoula, and replaces the Kalispell School District's former Transfinder system, which is based in New York. Facilities and Transportation Busing Coordinator Kay Evans said the new system has more capabilities. She also noted the logistical problem of having a two-hour time difference with the East Coast if the Transfinder system went down.

Edulog allows the district to track bus locations on a map, pinpointing each pickup and dropoff. The buses, represented by little arrows, are displayed on a map on Evans' computer at the transportation building. Tracking buses is beneficial in analyzing fuel-efficient routes, emergency situations or accidents, she said.

"As with many districts in the state, our buses can be carrying students on overnight trips that travel more than 600 miles round trip, and the Edulog system's ability to track every mile of such a trip is very important to us," Evans said.

Just like cellphones, the GPS signal occasionally has no service on particular routes.

"Let's talk about the Marion school bus. It goes way out there where there's no cellphone service, but the GPS keeps its data. The minute he gets cell service, it downloads everything," Evans said.

"Everything" includes basics such as time, speed and miles, but also safety measures such as a bus making a full stop at a stop sign or before crossing railroad tracks. It also records each time the bus driver turns on the yellow flashing lights.

Evans uses radio communication a lot less to report things like estimated time of arrival, particularly useful during the winter season when weather conditions change rapidly. Now she can look on her computer and immediately know the time of arrival when fielding phone calls from parents or schools rather than the back-and-forth calling with bus drivers.

"We're trying to make buses as safe as possible; through less radio communications, bus drivers have both hands on the wheel. They don't have to keep calling to say, 'Oh, I'm five minutes late.' When the winter [weather] does hit, we get inundated with phone calls because parents want to know where the bus is," Evans said.

In other safety measures, extra video cameras were installed on 10 activity buses. Previously, activity buses had one camera placed at the front, the same as on all route buses. After an incident involving an assault between students on an activity bus, cameras were purchased and installed in the back of each bus. Evans said the district is looking into purchasing cameras to place at the back of all route buses.

"Nowadays for liability, for protection of the kids you have to do whatever you can," Evans said. "Our No. 1 goal is to provide safe transportation to the students."

Reporter Hilary Matheson May be reached at 758-4431 or by email at hmatheson@dailwinterlake.com.

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DaProfessor posted at 8:54 pm on Mon, Jan 30, 2012.



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Im sure the regular conspiracy nuts will chime in about how evil this is, but I personally think this is a great thing, not only for the safety and well being of the students, but also for the driver and the bus company as a whole.

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