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Business 101



View larger image School buses sit idle in the parking lot of Strasburg High School on Tuesday. An Edulog software program is credited for saving Shenandoah County Public Schools nearly \$100,000 last year by reducing the number of bus miles traveled. Rich Cooley/Daily

New software, stimulus money saves school system more than \$500,000

By Preston Knight - pknight@nvdaily.com

WOODSTOCK -- Technology has put Shenandoah County Public Schools miles ahead on cost savings, according to transportation supervisor Marty Quigley.

The School Board received a report last week that detailed how much the system is benefiting from the implementation of new bus routing software. Last academic year, which was the second using the Edulog system, there was nearly \$100,000 in savings by reducing the number of bus miles by 58,747 from the year before, Quigley said.

When \$410,000 of stimulus money used to purchase 12 vans and three special education buses is factored in, the transportation department's budget had savings of more than \$500,000, the report states.

With mileage reduction, Quigley, an Air Force veteran who joined the division in 2006, said it's all been a matter of shifting away from an "archaic" manual process to an automated one that, in addition to increasing accountability of drivers and safety for students, provides instant data analysis. The savings come in the form of things such as less research for someone seeking to shift pupils from an overcrowded bus and being able to absorb the loss of two drivers through budget cuts.

In 2007-08, using the old manual system, the report states there were 1.12 million miles driven, including 685,642 "regular" miles, which are the everyday bus routes taking pupils to and from schools. Special education mileage, field trips and "deadhead" miles, which tabulates the time spent with no children on board, are also part of the data.

Last year, total mileage went down to 956,406, and 485,341 regular miles were logged, the report states. To run 956,406 miles, the cost was \$3.43 million, while three years ago the expense for 1.12 million miles was \$3.52 million.

In a follow-up interview, Quigley said there is now a cultural shift in employees to focus on cost savings.

He said the implementation of the automated system has yet to occur in about half of the state's school divisions, whether it be out of fear of technology or skepticism of

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the new system.

"This did not come about easily," Quigley said. "Now, we couldn't live without it."  
 There remains room for improvement, he added. One driver on the southern campus runs two routes, unloading and picking up children at Ashby-Lee Elementary School before moving on to the middle and high schools each day, while another at the central campus has a double route in the afternoon.

Continued cost savings may remedy that, Quigley said, especially if it means the ability to purchase 77-seat buses, as opposed to those with a capacity of 65.

Yet how much money there is to spend falls to the School Board, not Quigley.

"You work really hard to save money," he said, "and typically the first place cut is transportation and buses. That's across the state."

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