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Bus Tracking App for Families Piloted at Early Childhood and Kindergarten

MARCH 09TH 2023 BY DEE LOFLIN

Bus Tracking App for Families Piloted at Early Childhood and Kindergarten

The Poplar Bluff School District is piloting its new bus tracking app Here Comes The Bus at the Early Childhood and Kindergarten centers with plans to roll out the parent access tool district-wide for the 2023/24 school year.

The R-I Transportation Department began receiving its initial training followed by webinars shortly after Jon McKinney took the reins as director in July, a software technician position was created thereafter, and the associated hardware continues to be installed as the bus fleet expands.

“This is just a better way to communicate with our parents so they have a sense of security knowing their son or daughter is on the bus and when they get to school,” McKinney explained. “On our end, it should cut down on phone calls, because parents should literally be able to look on their phone and see when and where their child stepped on the bus.”

Under the pilot, parents and guardians of bus riders will soon receive letters in the mail providing instructions for downloading the app or visiting the website, then entering the unique student identification number supplied, and setting the preferred radius for receiving communication via text or email.

Students will scan their district-issued ID when entering and exiting the bus, and drivers will have access to a touchscreen with a name-based ridership module for the lower grade

levels. The geofence can be set between 750 feet and two miles eliminating wait times at bus stops, and real-time alerts will automatically be sent to caregivers when students have arrived at school.

The locator has the capacity to refresh every 15 seconds using a single primary address drawn from the district's student information system. Families of multiple children riding different buses can be tracked simultaneously. Individuals may only sign up for push notifications if they are on the student's emergency contact list.

The Board of Education approved the acquisition of the fleet management system prior to McKinney's arrival, selecting Synovia Solutions CalAmp as the low bidder, applying startup dollars from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to "create a more predictable transportation experience for kids and parents," R-I Superintendent Dr. Scott Dill stated last school year.

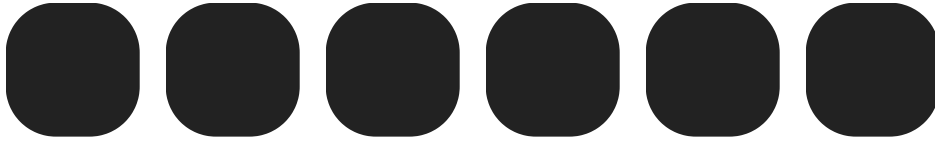
According to the proposal, the GPS-based transportation management software supports more of the top 25 largest school transportation systems in the United States than other vendors. The app was launched in 2014 and interfaces with Transfinder, the district's routing system that has been utilized for several years, along with offering other administrative features.

"Basically we are moving to a time where school buses will have the same navigation system available in cars or Google Maps on your phone, which greatly helps new drivers and substitute drivers not as familiar with the routes," McKinney continued. "Technology is pushing into this industry, making everything accessible, from arrival time to departure time of buses and the ability to live track them, hopefully making our routes more efficient, safer and consistent."

The plan is to launch Here Comes The Bus across the entire school system next academic year, after the soft rollout is completed this spring in order to troubleshoot. So far McKinney says "the technology has honestly surpassed our expectations," and he anticipates that the district's approximately 2,200 riders on over 200 bus routes built into the database will be fairly accurate in advance of the first day of school.

Article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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PBHS Students Make Missouri All-State Choir

DECEMBER 12TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

PBHS Students Make Missouri All-State Choir

Four Poplar Bluff High School students have been selected to perform with the Missouri All-State Choir in January at Osage Beach.

Emma Tinsley will perform in the alto section; Gabriel Burke and Bralin Duckett will perform with the tenors; and Dawson Vaughan will serve as first alternate bass. Alyssa Roy received an honorable mention.

The students auditioned during the All-District Concert held on Saturday, Nov. 12, at Cape Central High School. Of the 14 students who performed, the six juniors and seniors were eligible to audition, according to Joshua Allen, director of vocal music.

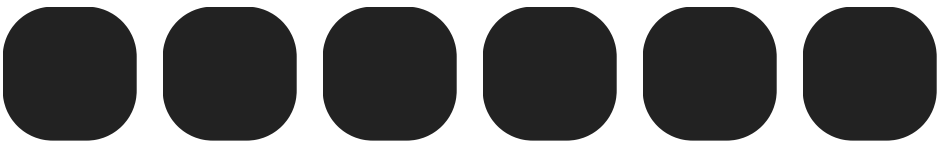
Pictured: Poplar Bluff High School is represented (in red) alongside the Missouri All-State Choir on Saturday, Nov. 12, following an audition in Cape Girardeau.

Article and photo by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Bright Futures Hosts ‘Reboot’ Event to Help Address Student Needs

NOVEMBER 09TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

Bright Futures Hosts ‘Reboot’ Event to Help Address Student Needs

Bright Futures Poplar Bluff hosted a ‘reboot’ event for community partners since the organization’s mission was impacted during the public health crisis. While visitors were limited, student needs increased, according to officials.

School site councils, giving closets and lunch buddies along with the support from the faith-based, business community and nonprofit sector were highlighted during the breakfast symposium catered by Chartwells on Friday, Oct. 21, at the Black River Coliseum.

“The two greatest needs that we are seeing are socialization for students and support for staff,” explained school social worker Carrie Booker who, along with her colleague Donna Moore, serves as Bright Futures director. Some families chose virtual education following the state stay-at-home order in 2020, leading to anxiety in social settings as schools resumed normal, she continued.

“The biggest impact we think with our kids is isolation,” Booker continued. “When they don’t want to be there, they’re difficult to engage, and that’s probably what wears on teachers to some degree.”

Poplar Bluff entered into an affiliate community agreement with Bright Futures USA in 2014 as the nonprofit’s first partnering school system in Southeast Missouri. Founded in the Joplin School District, the umbrella organization provides a framework that allows schools to match outstanding student needs with existing resources in the community through a rapid response system.

Gabe Thompson, O’Neal counselor, spoke at the gathering about how the elementary school has utilized its building site council to partner with Mossy Oak Properties, Southern Bank and West Side Church to successfully increase parental engagement over the past several years. He noted how sometimes educators may forget to ask for help, when they are rarely—if ever—turned down.

High School librarian Marci Priest was the district’s first to start a Giving Closet in 2016, followed by Junior High and the Middle School. She reported how her volunteer team serves 10-20 students daily, providing food, clothing, personal hygiene items and school supplies. When the needs are greater, she said, she leans on Bright Futures.

The Bluff Church co-pastor Dave Elledge shared a story about attending a Bright Futures conference in Kansas City with Moore and Booker in 2019, and exiting a breakout session a changed man upon learning about bedlessness which, according to information presented, affects 3-5 percent of school children. He soon launched a local chapter of Sleep In Heavenly Peace with his wife Luann, Junior High counselor, and has helped build and deliver 530 beds.

Melanie Hamann, registrar at Three Rivers College, shared about being involved in the R-I lunch buddies program for seven years, having mentored two siblings since the youngest

was in kindergarten. She said it has taught her to empathize with people from different walks of life.

Attorney Rebecca Hester, who serves as guardian ad litem for the court system, advocating for the child's best interest, pointed out how students that need the most help often conceal it well. She was also involved with a Bright Futures school in her previous community of Holden.

“Our job as a community is to inspire hope in kids,” Hester stated. “Sometimes that will be the only way if the [poverty] cycle is broken.”

Bright Futures aims to meet a child’s basic needs within 24 hours primarily via social media so students are better able to focus on education. To become involved, follow along on Facebook at Bright Futures Poplar Bluff, or email Booker at **carriebooker@pb.k12.mo.us** or Moore at **donnamoore@pb.k12.mo.us**.

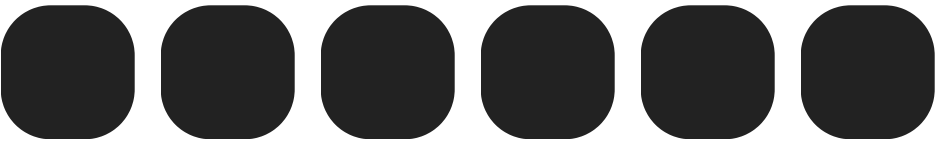
Pictured: Attendee Stacey Clark reads literature about the Bright Futures organization during the reboot event held recently at the Black River Coliseum.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Mark Twain Installs Chicken Coop with Grant Funds

SEPTEMBER 28TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

Mark Twain Installs Chicken Coop with Grant Funds

Mark Twain School incorporated a chicken coop into its non-traditional learning environment on Friday, Sept. 23, for students to work in shifts and tend after.

“We’re expanding our alternative way of learning,” explained Darla Nunn, Jobs for America’s Graduates specialist.

The prefabricated kit was the first of a series of project-based learning activities that the campus was able to pursue with the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds, of which Missouri Gov. Mike Parson allocated \$12,825 toward Poplar Bluff’s JAG program at the end of last school year.

A group of JAG students assembled the structure under Nunn’s supervision, and placed it beneath a canopy next to a tree in the outdoor recreation area. The goal is to introduce a rooster and two hens to the enclosure this week, with contributions from farmers.

“We’re open to any possibility of potential learning, from operating power tools to following instructions – these are life skills,” Nunn continued. “It’s not just about chickens; we’re building those relationships with kids, and it’s a process.”

Nunn hopes to one day have eggs for the school community to enjoy “theoretically,” she says. She also may look to acquire an incubator to teach a unit on embryology. “Maybe some kids will be excited to come to school just to take care of our chickens,” she commented.

Mark Twain Principal Aaron Burton added: “They’re putting connections together about caring for an animal that is gonna provide eggs that maybe we can share.” If a single student can apply the knowledge outside of school, he said, he will consider the project a success.

“Who would have ever thought at an alternative school, students would be excited about raising chickens,” asked Burton, noting that he had already heard a freshman discussing

the activity at the bus stop the morning prior.

Mark Twain was founded in 2020 on North Main Street as a non-traditional school, serving grades 4-12. In addition to offering the credit recovery services of the former Graduation Center, Mark Twain houses the district’s JAG program through which students receive career exploration opportunities.

Pictured: Mark Twain students (from left) Jayden Bowler, Shawn Politte, Za’Riasis Cody, Mathew Reynolds and Aaron Barber pose behind the chicken coop they helped assemble.

Article and photo by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Poplar Bluff Rotary Club Updates District’s CPR Manikins

SEPTEMBER 23RD 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

Poplar Bluff Rotary Club Updates District's CPR Manikins

The R-I Health Department was able to replace two sets of adult and infant manikins, plus an additional standalone adult, for purposes of teaching CPR, through a \$2,000 grant from the Rotary Club of Poplar Bluff.

Poplar Bluff maintenance administrative assistant Dawn Hicks, the current Rotary Club president, said she reached out to nursing staff earlier this year to see if the funds would be of benefit. The health awareness grant program features a 50/50 match between the community-based organization and Rotary International.

In addition to updating its training manikins, manufactured by PRESTAN, the Health Department acquired 150 face-shield lung bags. Health Director Bailey Hester, who is certified through the National CPR Association, reported that three different training opportunities were offered over the summer for district staff, followed by the bus garage and Poplar Bluff Technical Career Center culinary arts students.

Pictured: R-I administrative assistant Dawn Hicks (left), also the Rotary Club president, presents Poplar Bluff Health Director Bailey Hester with new CPR/AED training manikins.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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