

The months of December and January have seen the transportation department in a state of transition. Aaron Aquino was hired as the new transportation supervisor at the November school board meeting, contract approved by board in the December meeting, and began fulltime duties in that position as of December 16th, 2019.

The transportation department had a part-time route driver resign in December, the districts mechanic requesting to retire, and three drivers taking interest in working for the district as an evening/weekend driver, a part-time route/activity driver, and a part time route only driver. The superintendent has been very proactive in the recruitment of new employees by directing the transportation supervisor, and human resources director to build a driver recruitment flyer, advertise at Montana State University-Northern for a potential mechanic, and recruit locally in the Rocky Boy community. The superintendent has also initiated a RBCEA driver hiring incentive.

The new 66 passenger Thomas bus the district purchased was delivered, inspected and put into use in December. After two cancelations by the Montana Highway Patrol a trooper inspected and passed all route busses for 2nd semester 2019-2020. The TR-35 inspection sheets were delivered to Hill County Superintendent of Schools one month before the January 31st deadline.

During the second week of January 2020 below zero temperatures played a part in two bus breakdowns and route disruptions due to water/ice freezing in fuel filters. In the fall 2019 the diesel fuel tank at the football field was addressed by adding a water absorbing "sock" directly into tank, a new fuel filter head assembly was added to pump and the filters have been changed regularly. All drivers we instructed to use a winter fuel treatment at every fill up and to keep busses topped off with fuel. Busses are being serviced regularly including new fuel filters. More research will be needed to address this issue in the future.

Starting in December the transportation department has been able to support several extra-curricular activities. This began in December with the Native American Basketball Classics, Shop with a Cop, and basketball games in Shelby, Harlem, Great Falls, Browning, and the THIP program. The annual Ice Fishing Safety trip and Fishing at Fresno was canceled for the 2nd week in January and has been rescheduled for the last week in February. A new athletic director was hired in December and we are working on better communications, advanced planning, and procedures for all transportation requests in the future.

The transportation supervisor's office was re-located in the administration building. An inventory of all district busses and vehicles was updated as well as registrations and insurance. The same was done for Head start busses and the Toyota van. Up to date housing maps were distributed to all route drivers and are being updated for all riders and substitute route drivers. Rider lists have been requested from both the elementary and Junior/Senior high schools in anticipation of the 1st semester Bus Claim for reimbursement due in February.

There was a transportation departmental meeting held January 9th addressing chain of command, leave & notification, Classified Union, Grievances, Charter busses & activities, accidents and property damage, departmental goals, and routes. The IT department was able to install hardware in bus garage in preparation of new Time Clock Plus and district wide implementation.

January and February are always the most difficult weather months and will start early every morning with starting busses and checking road conditions. Labor issues with driver shortage and retiring mechanic may arise. Priorities will be the transportation of nearly 600 students on regular route twice a day, and support extra-curricular activities with available drivers and vehicles.