



Mr. Tom Ariola
Chief Operating Officer
Hamden Public Schools
60 Putnam Avenue
Hamden, Connecticut 06517

September 2, 2021

Dear Mr. Ariola,

We recognize the start to this school year has been incredibly challenging, and we want you to know that this is not representative of the level of service Hamden Public Schools or your families should expect from First Student, nor is it reflective of the service levels we want to provide.

Our full focus remains on transporting your students in a safe and timely manner. To help ensure every bus route is covered, we have transferred drivers from our other locations in the area to support operations.

Unfortunately, until we can increase our pool of drivers, we will not have as much flexibility to manage the various needs that can develop on a daily basis, including covering the routes of drivers who call out from work.

Locally the shortage of qualified school bus drivers extends well beyond Hamden and is affecting many other locations across the State with 80% of Districts Nationally reporting significant driver shortages.

Our current staffing levels for Hamden, as of today, are 64 drivers for morning routes and 62 drivers for PM routes and we are currently bringing in an additional 5 drivers from surrounding locations which puts us at 69 drivers for AM routes and 67 drivers for PM routes. With the consolidation of bus routes Hamden currently operates 72 daily routes. Depending on daily staffing levels, we may have to double bus routes, which means drivers will have to cover multiple routes, completing one before beginning the next. While this allows us to provide transportation to as many students as possible, it could result in significant delays.

We understand what an inconvenience a delayed route is for families and school administrators. Our team will work diligently to minimize the impact. We will notify the District as soon as possible about any route adjustments, so schools and parents can be contacted, allowing them to plan accordingly.

The student transportation industry was already managing a nationwide bus driver shortage before COVID-19, and the pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. Unfortunately, 18 of drivers at our Hamden location decided not to return to work this school year, which led to these staffing challenges. We also have an additional 4 drivers who are out on leave and we currently

have 6 people in our training pipeline for Hamden. We are no different than so many other job sectors that are struggling to fill openings right now, including retail, restaurants, gas stations, freight and cargo, and hotels.

At First Student, we recognize the importance of what we do, which is why we continue to actively recruit, hire and train drivers to serve the District. We offer a competitive compensation package which includes paid medical benefits for drivers and are offering other significant incentives, including sign-on bonuses up to \$5,000 for each new driver.

It does take time to move an applicant through the hiring process to become a qualified school bus driver. There are strict background checks, licensing requirements and training standards that must be met to operate a school bus safely. It can be up to 15 weeks before a potential driver is credentialed and licensed to take the wheel. Pandemic-related bottlenecks within the state certification process have significantly increased these timeframes.

In the meantime, our current drivers will be going to great lengths to cover as many bus routes as possible. We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge them for showing their ongoing commitment to the community. We truly appreciate it.

Thank you, too, for your patience and understanding during this time. We look forward to returning to a level of service the District expects of us, and we expect of ourselves, as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Anthony L. Pacheco
Location Manager
First Student