Why 2025 has been a good year for Deer Valley Unified bus drivers

Wesley Dewitt has won statewide top honors as a driver, and has been with the school district himself since kindergarten



(Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

Wesley Dewitt attended a Deer Valley Unified school in New River in kindergarten, graduated from Boulder Creek High School in 2009, and has been a bus driver with the district for almost 10 years.

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2024-25 DVUSD SCHOOL YEAR

Buses: 174

Bus Miles Driven Annually: 2 million

Routes driven: 108

Number of students transported to and from school: 11,684

SOURCE: Deer Valley Unified School District



By Steve Stockmar

Fighting traffic, or weather, or keeping a schedule, all from behind the wheel while driving is one thing. It happens daily and all at once for most Valley drivers.

Focusing on all that *with* a bus load of anywhere from 50 to 80 kids sitting behind you? That's something else, and there's a catch — try doing it twice a day.

Wesley Dewitt — who's one of the top school bus drivers in Arizona, literally — has been behind the wheel of a Deer Valley Unified School District bus since 2016. Multitasking is an understatement on his daily routes.

“My mind’s weird,” Dewitt said Friday. “I would say I have 35 ‘tabs’ open.”

Last year Deer Valley Unified saw its drivers take 174 buses on 108 routes for almost 12,000 students over a collective 2 million miles. The numbers may be eye-popping, but drivers like Dewitt have kids of their own so, on a personal level, things aren’t *that* different.

“For me it’s easier because I have kids, so I just listen for the screaming and the ‘Ow!’ and the ‘Don’t do that,’” he laughed. “They’re kids. They’re gonna be loud and do things. My biggest thing is as long as they’re sitting down.”

It’s been a good 2025 for district bus drivers.

While the Deer Valley Unified governing board in April made the tough budgetary choice to not give staff salary raises across the board, board members did reconsider bus drivers specifically. To keep up with other bus driver salary structures around the Valley, the board voted unanimously to approve a $2.03 per hour salary bump “for all existing employees that drive a bus with students.” The $400,000 expense is funded by Medicaid in Public Schools.

In an added show of support that month, while some Arizona lawmakers were looking to get rid of the School Bus Advisory Council, the Arizona House with bipartisan support voted against dissolving the agency.

Although established to assist the Arizona Department of Public Safety in developing the state’s school bus regulations, among other priorities including bus driver safety, the council was one of many state boards, councils, commissions, and committees deemed “functionally unnecessary” by bill sponsor Rep. Alexander Kolodin, R-Scottsdale.

While seemingly facing perpetual bus driver shortages, districts hoped to get support at the federal level through the bipartisan Driving Forward Act, with Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly among the sponsors, to exempt new school bus drivers from the “Under-the-Hood” Commercial Driver’s License testing requirement to help alleviate the nationwide shortage of drivers.

The bill has been introduced in both Congressional chambers but has not yet been signed into law.

While government bureaucracy does what it does, drivers like Dewitt keep getting their students to and from school safely each day.

Speaking of safety, Dewitt in 2023 earned first place in the Arizona Association for Pupil Transportation School Bus Safety Road-eo, an annual statewide skills challenge for bus drivers that takes place in the parking lot at the Arizona State Fairgrounds. Competing against 75 other drivers representing Arizona school districts, Dewitt came out on top through all kids of driving tests, including parallel parking a school bus.

“It’s a lot easier than you think,” said Dewitt, who hasn’t competed since and jokingly talks about retiring as a champion, with a big trophy in his office to boot.

Those skills come in handy out there in the field. Navigating through traffic is one thing, but what is truly inexcusable is how often he sees motorists blow right past his bus’s extended stop sign to let students off.

“All the time. Daily,” Dewitt said. “It’s a daily occurrence.”

Motorists who are issued citations by law enforcement officers for passing a school bus when a stop arm is extended could face a civil penalty and possibly a suspended driver license under state law.

Dewitt has been with Deer Valley Unified his whole life. He went to kindergarten in New River and is a 2009 graduate of Boulder Creek High School.

Once a passenger himself on those district buses, he now finds himself taking kids to and from school. And while at times in addition to driving he can be a counselor and a teacher to de-escalate situations through special training drivers receive for managing behavioral as well as physical disabilities, Dewitt highly recommends those looking for work and looking to make a difference to apply to be a school bus driver.

“It’s worth it, as long as you care about kids,” he said. “When the kids are on my bus, they’re my kids.”

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