

The School District 49 Challenge

School District 49 spans 133 square miles of urban and rural areas in Colorado, covering northeast Colorado Springs and the Falcon area of El Paso County. It is the fastest growing school district in the Pikes Peak region and consists of 21,000 students attending 15 schools. The District 49 transportation department is also responsible for an additional 15 special needs schools that are out of the geographic district.

Every day, 84 school buses transport 3,800 students to and from school via 54 routes. Unlike other school districts, many consisting of a single zone, District 49 includes 3 zones. This complicates matters because each zone has the autonomy to select its own school calendar and bell times.



District 49 includes 84 buses that travel across 133 square miles

Another complication is the unpredictable Colorado weather. While the average U.S. city gets 26” of snow per year, this region of Colorado averages 92” per year.

Tracking the activity of so many buses and students across such a wide range of routes and roadways presents a significant logistical challenge. District 49 required a tool to securely track school buses and offer family members timely updates as buses travel to and from school.

The district also needed a tool to keep parents and guardians informed each time a student got on or off the bus. Finally, the district sought an efficient way to inform parents about school closings, service interruptions, or delays due to bus breakdowns or poor road and weather conditions.

The SafeStop Solution

SafeStop provided a robust answer to these challenges. The system, which went live on March 1, 2017, is already helping to resolve the school bus tracking and communication issues faced by District 49.

In the past, when a bus was delayed by traffic or other issues, the transportation team had to look up each individual student in the student information system, Zonar, to determine their whereabouts. Since each bus carries 50 – 70 students, this involved hours of work, which included contacting parents about the delay via telephone or text. SafeStop’s real-time parent communication capability resolved this problem.

Explains Jack T. Pietraallo, District 49 Interim Transportation Director:

“Every parent thinks they should get a call when something happens. But that’s impossible with a small office. Our total office staff consists of 15 people, and four of those are mechanics. That leaves the rest of us to handle every call that comes in. Bear in mind that not all 15 of us work the same shift. Some start at 5:00 a.m. and some don’t start until 8:30 a.m. The buses are out between 5:00 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. If something happens then, we have a maximum of four to twelve people available to contact parents or answer phone calls. It’s a small staff to handle any situation. There’s just no possible way they can do it all.

“With SafeStop, we can get information out to parents fast, instead of needing to look up the addresses of 60 students and make 60 phone calls. SafeStop sends an immediate notification of the delay to parents, saving time, effort, and worry.”

This also applies to severe or sub-zero weather, when students stand at their bus stop in the morning, awaiting the arrival of the school bus. Rather than the transportation team physically phoning concerned parents to let them know the bus will be late, parents are now clearly notified via the Alerts & Messaging Center of the SafeStop app so they can plan accordingly.

This saves time and minimizes stress for parents, who no longer need to call District 49 about school bus transportation issues during a rushed morning, spent getting children to school and themselves to work. In addition, parents can use the free SafeStop app whenever they desire to view the location of the school bus transporting their child, along with the estimated times of arrival (ETAs) for each stop.



With SafeStop, parents can see where the school bus is, and when it will arrive.

Another challenge resolved by SafeStop was locating children who didn't arrive home on their respective school bus when expected. According to Cecelia Catherwood, District 49's Transportation Secretary, this is a common problem.

"Parents often call us trying to find their child. It happens all the time, because kids are kids. They'll get off the bus on the way home after school and go to a friend's house. Meanwhile, their parents are frantically trying to find them. But with SafeStop, we know when and where a passenger got on and off the school bus.

"In the past, we had to spend a lot of time answering phone calls from parents. Now parents can simply use the app to find out whatever they need to know [about the location of their child]. I've worked in this department for 14 years, and have never seen a tool like this before. It's great for the community because everyone can get informed immediately about the whereabouts of the school bus and their kids."

Adds Mr. Pietraallo:

"We recently had a service complaint from a parent who wanted to know why he wasn't informed about a delay. I explained how to download the free SafeStop app, and this *instantly* resolved both the tension and the issue."

Besides helping parents, SafeStop is also helping the District 49 transportation team to monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of their school bus fleet. The SafeStop dashboard reflects not only the location, but the performance of a bus fleet, including on-time performance, route deviation, and even data on bus idling and speeding. With SafeStop Analytics, school officials can create bus routes, monitor route efficiency, and address issues such as on-time history.

Notes Patrick Gallagher, Director of Operations at SafeStop:

"Our SafeStop Analytics platform is the ultimate tool for transportation directors everywhere. It's easy to use and provides reliable data that can save money, see where transportation

improvements can be made, and ultimately create a smoother running operation.”

The District 49 transportation team is very pleased with the level of support provided by SafeStop. States Mr. Pietraallo:

“Our initial trial with four buses went flawlessly. I was very impressed. We ran right away into a bad weather situation – as you can imagine, it snows a lot here in Colorado – and parents were calling because of delays caused by the snow. SafeStop enabled us to get that information out right away to those participating in the trial.”

Adds Ms. Catherwood:

“SafeStop has also been right on top of customer service. They’re very proactive and helpful.”

Whether tracking the whereabouts of school bus passengers, or delivering the analytics needed to boost performance and safety, SafeStop uses high performance technology that adds safety and convenience to the lives of District 49 parents and administrators.

CTA: Contact SafeStop today for more information.

