



www.moapt.org

MARCH NEWSLETTER

2026

61st Annual Conference and Trade Show

July 7 - 10, 2026

University Plaza Hotel & Convention Center
Springfield, MO



For more than six decades, MOAPT has brought together Missouri's student transportation professionals to **learn, connect, and grow**. Since our first conference in 1965, this event has become one of the **largest and most respected state pupil transportation conferences in the nation**.

This conference is designed for **every level of your transportation team** — from **drivers, dispatchers, trainers, mechanics, and technicians** to **directors, supervisors, and administrators**. No matter your role, **everyone will benefit from attending**.

This year's conference offers a valuable opportunity to:

- Learn from industry leaders and peers
- Explore best practices and new ideas
- Connect with colleagues from across Missouri
- Engage with vendors and partners supporting student transportation

We look forward to welcoming you to **Springfield, Missouri**, for another informative, collaborative, and memorable event as we continue advancing excellence in pupil transportation.

We can't wait to see you there!

New:

Make this a family event, MOAPT has attained area discounts for your family to do while you're in sessions such as 20% off Worlds of Wonder!

| Registration Rates | | Registration | Extended Registration |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Option | | Mar 1 - May 31 | June 1 - July 7 |
| A | Full | \$ 360.00 | \$ 410.00 |
| B | One-Day | \$ 260.00 | \$ 310.00 |
| C | Guest Full | \$ 210.00 | \$ 260.00 |
| D | Guest On-Day | \$ 150.00 | \$ 200.00 |
| F | Trade Show Only, | \$ 75.00 | \$ 100.00 |

Newsletter



Contact Us

Contact: Phyllis Gebke, Sales Rep
Contact: Tom Gerdes, President

IL Phone: 618-526-4131
MO Phone: 636-825-0700

Email:
pgebke@southernbusandmobility.com

IL: 12950 Koch Lane, Breese
MO: 994 Meramec Station Rd., Valley Park

JOIN US

MOAPT Regional Meeting

Join us at the two upcoming MOAPT Regional Meetings. Southern Bus will be giving a short presentation about the school bus solutions we offer on March 26th during the region 6 meeting in Poplar Bluff and on March 31st at region 3, Francis Howell School District.

We look forward to connecting with transportation professionals and sharing more about our lineup of 10-34 passenger school buses, designed to meet a variety of school and activity transportation needs. If you're attending, be sure to stop by and say hello!



BUY TODAY!

We have several late-model pre-owned buses arriving in June 2026, including both conventional and Type A school buses. These units will offer dependable, cost-effective options for fleets looking to add capacity or replace older vehicles. Availability will be limited, so contact our team to learn more or reserve a unit ahead of arrival.

[Click Here to Learn More](#)

Lead with intention



Details:

- Dates: **April 30 & May 1, 2026**
- Location: **Special School District, Learning Center, 900 Hornet Dr, Hazelwood, MO 63042**

Schedule:

- **Thursday, April 30**
 - Academy 1:00 - 5:00 pm
 - Evening Dinner 6:00 - 8:00 pm
- **Friday, May 1**
 - Academy 8:00 am - 1:00 pm
 - Lunch is included in your registration

The NAPT Leadership Training Academy is a two day event that is a focused, high-impact professional development experience designed for current and emerging leaders in student transportation. Over the course of one immersive weekend, directors, managers, supervisors, and leadership-track professionals will strengthen their management capabilities, sharpen their decision-making skills, and refine the leadership behaviors needed to guide high-performing teams.

This Academy blends expert-led instruction with interactive group work, scenario-based training, and real-world problem solving. Participants will leave with actionable tools, practical strategies, and a leadership framework they can apply immediately within their operations. Whether you're looking to elevate your leadership style, strengthen organizational culture, enhance communication, or navigate complex operational challenges, the Leadership Training Academy Weekend offers the guidance and resources to support your success.

**Click Here For More
Information and
Registration**



Transportation Professionals,

In the world of school transportation, we often say that the school day begins and ends on the yellow bus. While our primary mission is the safe delivery of students, the "behind-the-scenes" of managing a modern fleet is becoming increasingly complex. From evolving safety regulations and the transition to electric vehicles to driver shortages and routing optimization, the landscape is shifting rapidly.

To navigate these challenges effectively, we must move beyond the "silo" mentality. Here is why networking and continuous learning are no longer optional, but essential:

1. The Value of Networking

No one understands the unique pressures of student transit quite like a fellow professional. Networking allows us to:

- **Share Best Practices:** Why reinvent the wheel when a peer in a neighboring district has already solved a routing or scheduling bottleneck?
- **Build a Support System:** Having a directory of trusted colleagues means you're only a phone call away from a second opinion on a difficult policy decision or a mechanical mystery.

2. Learning Through Shared Experiences

When we engage with others in our field, we gain perspective on industry trends before they become mandates. Learning from the successes—and the hard-earned mistakes—of others allows us to proactively improve our operations rather than simply reacting to crises.

3. The Power of Training Webinars

In a profession where time is our most precious commodity, webinars offer a high-impact, low-barrier way to stay sharp. Participating in school transportation management training ensures we are:

- **Compliant:** Keeping up-to-date with federal and state safety standards.
- **Efficient:** Mastering new technologies and management software that can save the district significant time and money.
- **Inspired:** Hearing from industry experts can reignite our passion for the vital role we play in a student's educational journey.

The Bottom Line: Our commitment to professional development is a direct investment in the safety and well-being of the students we serve. By staying connected and informed, we ensure that our department isn't just "getting by," but is leading the way in excellence.

Let's commit to being lifelong learners in this vital field. Whether it's joining a state association, attending a monthly webinar, or simply reaching out to a peer, every connection strengthens our fleet.

Tony Hatfield, MOAPT Region 4 Director

Director of Transportation

Camdenton R-III School 573-496-0216 Cell/573-346-9292 Office



MAPT AWARDS & RECOGNITION

★ Help Us Shine a Light on Missouri's Best! ★

We all know someone in student transportation who goes above and beyond — the quiet hero, the problem-solver, the encourager, the “gets it done” person.

Now's the time to lift them up.

Nominate a standout for a 2026 MOAPT Award

Celebrate their hard work and impact

Help us honor the people who keep Missouri students safe every day

[Click the links below:](#)

[Administrator of the Year](#)

[Distinguished Service Award](#)

[Continuing Education Grant](#)

[School Bus Driver of the Year](#)

[Heroism Award](#)

[Hall of Fame](#)



The Official Publication of the National Association for Pupil Transportation



Click here to
read the
March 2026
Issue

MARCH 2026 | CONTENTS

SCHOOL BUS Ride

schoolbusride.com

COVER STORY

12 Official School BUS Ride Road Test: The Next Generation IC Bus CE Series

IC Bus has reshaped its flagship Type C conventional mechanically and philosophically around safety, driver comfort and real-world performance

FEATURES

9 Advocacy Alert: March 2026

Significant federal policy developments are underway that could impact driver testing requirements and clean school bus funding
By Peter Mannella

10 Driven Together: A National Commitment to Every Ride, Every Child, Every Day

In January 2026, the NAPT launched an ambitious 16-month public awareness initiative designed to elevate the story of student transportation across America
By Molly McGee Hewitt, PhD, CAE

16 The Trust Proposition in Student Transportation

This month, we begin a column series on the leadership skills and attributes of successful transportation professionals
By Molly McGee Hewitt, PhD, CAE

18 Exclusive Interview: Justin Meyers, BusPatrol President & Chief Innovation Officer

Meyers discussed the company's role in the student transportation ecosystem, going beyond enforcement, reasons for optimism, and more

23 How Indian River Central School District and Transfinder Don't Compromise on Safety

At Indian River Central School District, student transportation is defined by a simple but uncompromising goal: no fatalities and no missing children

24 From Vision to Voice: The Launch of NAPT Influencers

A new chapter of NAPT, told by those who live the work
By Angela Kelly, CMP, Director of Marketing and Events, NAPT

SCHOOL-BUSRIDE.COM | MARCH 2026



26 Interview: Heather Free, NAPT Region 3 Director

Free earned the trust of her peers in Region 3 and will bring her experience in policy, training, and cross-stakeholder collaboration to the national stage following her election

DEPARTMENTS

7 DISPATCH

COLUMNS

6 FROM THE NAPT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO

By Molly McGee Hewitt, PhD, CAE



**ALL MODELS AVAILABLE
FOR IMMEDIATE DELIVERY**



CONVENTIONAL | TRANSIT | SMALL | SPECIAL NEEDS | ACTIVITY



CONTACT YOUR REGIONAL SALES MANAGER TODAY!

DOUG MESSER

x1494 | C: (816) 518-6047
doug.messer@midwesttransit.com

JOE CRABTREE

x1330 | C: (417) 343-1078
joe.crabtree@midwesttransit.com

KEN PEARCE

x1497 | C: (314) 712-7535
ken.pearce@midwesttransit.com

MidwestTransit.com | (800) 933-2412

**CLICK HERE
to visit MTE**

When Conflict Escalates: Staying Grounded, Consistent, and Defensible

Session Summary Written by: Jackie Turnage-Ferber, MUSIC Training and Technology Manager



School leaders today are facing more frequent—and often more intense—conversations with parents. At the 2026 MUSIC Conference, attorneys Jessica Bernard and Anthony McDaniel of Guin Mundorf LLC shared practical guidance to help school teams navigate these moments with professionalism while staying mindful of the legal considerations involved.

These situations often follow emotionally charged events, such as injuries, disciplinary actions, or student safety concerns. When tensions are high, district risk can rise quickly. As discussed in the *Leading Through Polarization: Effective Engagement with Today's Complex and High-Conflict Parent Dynamics* session, what staff say—and how they say it, in writing and in meetings—can shape whether a situation escalates or moves toward resolution.

One clear takeaway: written communication matters. Emails and letters should be concise, factual, and grounded in policy, focusing on what is known and what comes next. Emotional language or detailed rebuttals often increase risk, while consistent documentation is far easier to defend.

That same approach applies to conversations. Effective responses acknowledge concerns, stick to confirmed facts, reference policy, and outline next steps. Staying calm, rather than matching emotion, helps keep discussions productive and supports staff.

Meetings are most effective when expectations are set upfront with an agenda, time limits, and ground rules, followed by a written summary. When requests go beyond policy or legal authority, districts need to know when to shift to formal appeal processes. Consistency, documentation, and early administrative or legal support can help keep conflict from becoming a loss.

Top 5 Risk-Reduction Practices in High-Conflict Situations

1 Treat Every Message as Exhibit A

Assume emails, letters, and meeting notes may be reviewed later. Keep all written communication brief, factual, and procedural. Focus on what is known, what policy requires, and what happens next.

2 Use Process, Not Emotion

Avoid real-time fact debates, emotional language, or point-by-point rebuttals. Calm, consistent application of policy is harder to challenge than improvised or reactive responses.

3 Follow a Structured Response

Acknowledge the concern, state limited known facts, reference applicable policy or process, outline next steps with timelines, and define clear boundaries. Match intensity with calm—not volume.

4 Control the Meeting Space

Pre-frame meetings with an agenda, time limit, and ground rules. End with a written summary of decisions, next steps, and follow-up timing—sent within 24 hours.

5 Know When to Stop and Escalate

When demands exceed policy or legal authority, shift to formal appeal processes. Use district leadership or legal counsel early to prevent repeated conflict from becoming a loss.

**Registration
Now Open**

Certified School Bus Driver Trainer Program

“Train the Trainer”



MOAPT is excited to offer the Certified Driver Trainer Program this Spring!

The MOAPT program is in collaboration with DESE and NAPT

More details are on the way.

With the Missouri Safety Center no longer providing this program, MOAPT is stepping in to ensure our districts still have convenient, flexible, and accessible training options across the state.

About the MOAPT Program:

- It's split into **three phases** to cut down on travel and lodging costs
- Offers **multiple session options** so participants can choose dates, times, and locations that fit their schedules
- Combines online learning, live webinars, and in-person instruction

2026 Timeline:

- **Phase 1 – Online:** March / April
- **Phase 2 – Webinar:** April / May
- **Phase 3 – In-Person:** May / June

[MOAPT Certified Driver Trainer Website](#)

MAPT AWARDS & RECOGNITION

MAPT is proud and honored to recognize our members who have gone above and beyond with the awarding of special recognition and grants. Each award has its own criteria and qualification for how the candidate not only served their own community but how they have served or will serve the MAPT community.

Consider nominating someone for one of the following:

Administrator of the Year

Distinguished Service Award

Driver of the Year

Continuing Education Grant

Heroism

Hall of Fame



**Click Here for
More
Information
and
Nominations**

Submit by May 1st

School Bus Evacuations: Preparing for the worst. Hoping for the best.

School bus evacuation drills are one of the most important safety practices we do—and they're required twice each year.

- Applies to **all students**, not just daily riders
- Why? Even non-riders may ride a bus for **field trips or activities**
- Required for **grades K–6** under state regulations

These drills help students and staff know what to do when seconds matter.

One of the best parts of being involved with MOAPT is the willingness of members to share what works.

This month, **Jared Richmond (Carl Junction School District & MOAPT President)** shared a great evacuation training video his district created.

- Helps students **see and understand** the process
- Gives new drivers a chance to **visualize a real evacuation**
- Reinforces safe, consistent practices

Big thanks to Jared and the Carl Junction team for supporting the MOAPT community and helping keep students safe.

[Click the Link or Video to watch](#)

[Carl Junction Schools Bus Evacuation Procedures](#)





MIDWEST
bus sales

Your Fleet. Our Focus.

Full-service bus sales,
parts, and maintenance
across Missouri

***The Midwest's Largest
Thomas Built Bus Dealer***

Since 1979



What Sets Us Apart

Multi-State Support Network

Family-Owned Values

Committed to Every Ride

Factory-Trained Expertise

Ready to talk buses?

913-422-1000

midwestbussales.com

info@midwestbussales.com



Click Here to Learn More

Transportation Formula:

This calculation is based on 2024-25 school year data submitted by the district on the state transportation aid documents included in Part IV of the Annual Secretary of the Board Report (Application for State Transportation Aid, School Bus and Facility Depreciation Schedules). Calculation documentation can be found linked on the payment transmittal.

The percent of reduction to the calculated entitlement computed for the FY 2026 calculation is shown below. This reduction percentage represents the amount the entitlement exceeded the appropriation and will fluctuate from month-to-month as revisions are made to individual school district data. The A and B factors are reflected on each district's Summary Transportation Report found on the payment transmittal.

The percentage reduction and the A and B factors are as follows:

A Factor = 5.448835

B Factor = -1.418166

Reduction Factor = 5.463184%

Proration Percentage = 94.536816%

Important Clarification on 10 Passenger Vans

Per 5 CSR 30-261.045, after July 1, 2001, no LEA can use a vehicle to transport students that has a rated capacity to transport more than ten (10) including the driver unless the vehicle meets the state and federal specifications and safety standards for school buses. Contract common carriers meeting Federal Department of Transportation standards may be used for field trips as outlined in section (3) of this rule.

This applies to newly purchased, newly leased, newly placed into service, newly contracted vehicles, or vehicles replaced under contracted services. In short, unless the vehicle that transports 10 or more was owned by the LEA prior to July 1, 2001, it is in violation of state rule to use it today to transport students unless it is a yellow school bus.

It is important to note that the use of vans that have been converted to and rebadged as 10 passenger vans are not to be used per state statute, state rule, as well as federal provisions.

The passenger rating of the vehicle must be tied back to the original Vehicle Identification Number, not a rebadging that reduces the rating of the vehicle to 10 passengers. If you have questions please contact David Tramel, david.tramel@dese.mo.gov.



Illegal Passing Survey

Please take time to fill out the annual [Illegal Passing Survey](#). This is very important data that is collected each year to protect our students.

Parking Changes that will Impact School Bus Parking in Jefferson City

Parking Changes will impact school bus parking in Jefferson City due to the closure of the Madison Street Parking Garage, East State Street near the Governors Mansion has been re-zoned as permit parking only in order to accommodate those who have paid for parking in the now closed Madison Street parking garage.

School buses may park on the 400 blocks of Broadway, Washington, Jefferson, Madison or Monroe. These are metered spaces, but if the driver remains with the bus they do not need to pay the parking fee.

We are working with the City to create a map showing the allowable parking areas for buses and will forward that in future memos. If you have any questions, you can contact the Municipal Parking Division at 573-634-6473 or email at ParkJCMO@municipalparking.com.

Minimum Standards of School Buses

All school buses in the state of Missouri must meet the [minimum standards](#) for the year they were manufactured. When bus bids are solicited, be sure to include a statement to this effect so that vendors know that their buses must meet these standards and be sure to inspect the buses when taking delivery. [RSMo 304.060](#), outlines the responsibility of the state board to enforce the regulations regarding the design and operation of school buses. These standards apply to all school bus including electric, propane and diesel buses and it is imperative that districts remain diligent regarding the minimum standards for all buses they purchase.

FREE Opportunity: Electric School Bus Training for Missouri Districts

Missouri school districts have a new opportunity to explore the future of student transportation—at no cost.

The Metropolitan Energy Center (MEC) has been awarded a grant from the World Resources Institute to participate in the **Electric School Bus Academy**. This national program provides hands-on learning from industry experts, covering everything from purchasing electric buses to installing charging infrastructure.

After completing an intensive training in Washington, D.C., MEC is bringing this knowledge back to Missouri to support local school districts.

Why consider electric school buses?

- Cleaner air for students and staff
- Lower fuel and maintenance costs
- Improved community health

What's included?

- Free training and support
- Help identifying and applying for funding
- Technical guidance and implementation planning
- Connections to trusted partners like Evergy, ChargePoint, and Blue Bird Corporation
- Opportunities to see electric school buses in action through demonstrations


The only requirement is participation in training sessions, which must be completed by **June**.

MEC understands that electric buses may be new territory for many districts—but they're ready to help every step of the way.

Interested in learning more or scheduling a training?

Reach out to Drew Arends at Metropolitan Energy Center:

 drew.arends@metroenergy.org

 660-202-7141

This is a great opportunity to explore innovative, cost-saving solutions while continuing to prioritize student safety and efficiency.

School Bus Driver Safety Competition

June 18th-June 19th, 2026

Jackson MO

Hosted by: Jackson R-2 School District

Check-in: South Elementary, 1701 S Hope St, Jackson, MO 63755

Driving Course: Jackson High School, 315 S Missouri St, Jackson, MO 63755



2026 Theme
NASCAR

For more details and registration Click the links below

[*Safety Competition Website*](#)
[*Registration Site*](#)

or contact

Keith Henry
Chris Dew
Carol Woods

816-806-0226
314-704-3863
573-243-9507

maptboard@gmail.com
cdew52@yahoo.com
cwoods@jr2mail.org

Register by May 15 to ensure you get a competition Shirt

MOAPT Board Elections

The MOAPT Nominations Committee is accepting nominations for the following positions on the MOAPT Board of Directions that are up for election at our summer conference”

Director Regions 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6: 3-year terms
Director at Large/East Area: 1-year term

If you are interested in serving on the MAPT Board and meet the qualifications to serve. Email the following:

- Name
- District
- Resume
- Statement on why you would like to serve on the Board

Send the above to the NAPT Nominations Committee:

- Jared Richmond, President: jrichmond@cjr1.org
- Cindy Bultemeir, President-Elect: cindy.bultemeier@nkcschools.org
- Scott Spears, Past President: sspeer@hannibal60.com
- Keith Henry, Executive Director: maptboard@gmail.com

Any questions please contact MOAPT (816) 806-0226



Board Meeting Dates

April 9, 2026

July 10, 2026

All Members are Invited!

For details on attending,
please reach out to MOAPT.

2026 School Bus Safety Poster

- Over \$3,000 in prizes; overall winner receives \$500!
- Link: [MO Safety Poster Contest](#)
- Must be received by MOAPT by April 3, 2026



2026 Missouri School Bus Safety Competition

- June 18 & 19, 2026
- Jackson MO
- Revised Schedule – Check it out [Click Here](#)

61th Annual Conference and Trade Show

- July 7 – 10, 2026
- Springfield MO
- Registration will open by January 1, 2026 – watch for more information

MO Technician and Inspector Summit

- July 7th through 9th, 2026
- Held in conjunction with the annual Conference and Trade Show