

ONLINE OPTION FOR SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CLASSROOM TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

By Andrew Metzger

Pensacola, Florida—School Training Solutions® (STS) offers a comprehensive online school bus operator certification course organized to meet State of Florida-mandated training requirements for school bus operators. The STS program is also designed to meet the professional development training needs of transportation specialists serving Florida school districts.

STS is a division of Smart Horizons. Smart Horizons is an online training provider that offers courseware developed by experienced instructional designers, customized programs, learning management services, and superior media design. As with all Smart Horizons programs, the STS online course for Florida school bus operators is available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

The STS Florida course, combined with a county's behind-the-wheel training, exposes drivers to an ideal blended learning experience. The online course for bus drivers includes the full 20 hours of training mandated by the State of Florida's Department of Education (DOE), broken down into 13 lessons plus an end-of-course test. Students enrolled in the program are able to complete their required 20 hours of training within the total flexibility afforded by the STS online system, while also getting the hands-on experience of the eight hours of behind-the-wheel training mandated by the Florida DOE.

The STS Florida bus operator course includes the following online lessons:

- Operator Roles and Responsibilities (one hour)
- Becoming Familiar with a School Bus (two hours)
- School Bus Vehicle Inspections (one hour)
- School Bus Vehicle Operation (2.5 hours)
- Traffic Control Devices (one hour)
- School Bus Critical Situations (two hours)
- Crash Procedures (one hour)
- Loading and Unloading Students (1.5 hours)
- School Bus Passenger Management (two hours)
- First-Aid (one hour)
- Students with Special Needs (2.5 hours)
- Field and Activity Trips (one hour)
- Commercial Driver's License Pre-trip Inspection (1.5 hours)
- School Bus Operator Training end-of-course test (one hour)



Tommy Fitzpatrick, transportation operations supervisor for Florida's Clay County School District, enrolled the district's 230 bus drivers in the STS program at the beginning of the 2012-13 school year.

"The first thing I looked at is the fact that this program is recognized by the Florida DOE," Fitzpatrick says. "The DOE can audit the program, so there are no compliance issues. They know our drivers are taking the courses, paying attention, and progressing through the program. It's different from a classroom situation where someone may or may not be paying attention. This program encourages people to put effort into their training. Beyond that, School Training Solutions includes the newest materials and this is what we want to do—train and test each class of drivers with the latest information available. As the industry moves forward, there are updates, and all this is included in the School Training Solutions format."

Fitzpatrick has received very positive feedback from the bus drivers in his district. "Many of our drivers have come up to me and said the course was hard, but that they really learned something," he states. "Once I heard that, I knew this program was a big plus. Of course, the drivers also have their practical training behind the wheel and the online courses mesh well with that."

Fitzpatrick likes the "transparency" offered by the STS program. "We like being able to show the DOE that we're doing our job the best way we can do it, with the

latest and greatest training methods out there."

Larry Worth, assistant superintendent of operations for Florida's Hendry County School District, has been using the STS training program for the district's 80 bus drivers since the 2010-11 school year.

"In the past, we were pulling everyone together for eight-hour workshops in order to comply with Florida DOE requirements," Worth says, "but when I found out the STS program would meet the DOE requirements, I decided to test it out.

"I went through the program myself and was impressed with the training and the way it addressed the types of things we needed to do. When we started the program, we set up computer labs for the bus drivers so they could take the courses at school or at home, but now 95 percent of them are working from home. There was a fear factor for people who weren't used to working with computers, but everything has worked out exceedingly well and there's no fear anymore."

In addition to the STS program giving his drivers the ability to get their coursework done in their own time-frame, Worth also likes the fact that the program provides a single source for keeping up with all the documentation needed by the Florida DOE.

Flexibility, availability, and affordability are all features that make School Training Solutions the perfect solution for bus driver certification training in Florida school districts. *

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Recognized by the Department of Education (DOE) as meeting the requirements for the twenty hours of classroom instruction. Images ©2013 iStockphoto.com