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South Portland School Department

South Portland School Department is located in Southern Maine. The District serves about 3,000 students and has a wide variety transportation needs. With our range of programs, special education requirements (including out of district), homeless students, English Language Learners, extra-curricular activities, field trips, and athletics trips, we have much to coordinate and track. In addition, the District employs three (3) technicians to maintain the fleet of vehicles for South Portland School Department as well as Portland Public Schools, a neighboring district.

As the current director, I have been with South Portland School Department for three years. When I first arrived, I quickly realized that the Transportation Department needed something to bring all of our data together into one source. We did have access to Transfinder, which the State of Maine, DOE offered to all school districts, free of charge.   Our office manager, Gloria Nelsen, had used the program to create some bus routes a few years ago but had not done anything with it since then. Knowing the program potentially had what we were looking for, we decided it would benefit our department to look into what this program could do to help.

Along with my office manager, Gloria, we set out to attend the three-day training program offered by TransFinder in Albany, NY in order to learn more about TransFinder. The program offered multiple different modules that would help in many areas of our department. We learned how to use RoutFinder Pro, InfoFinder i, Infofinder le, ServiceFinder, and ViewFinder. We came back ready to jump on board and get to work.

We started with RouteFinder Pro. This program helped us examine our daily routes and determine where we could make improvements. This was particularly timely and important because the School Board had decided to change the school start times for the 2017-2018 school year. We needed to figure out how to make it all happen with less time in between runs. We quickly realized that using the RouteFinder Pro program to determine routes and times would help save a lot of time and frustration. We were able to see the problem areas and keep District administrators informed of the changes needed to make it all work.

Our next challenge was to figure out the best way to inform parents of all of the new information on the many changes in bus routes. We decided to use TransFinder's InfoFinder i program, which provides a link that parents and school staff can easily access through the district website to get up to date

"We are dedicated to providing a friendly, safe and secure transportation experience to our students."

information on routes. They simply put in their home address and the school their child attends and InfoFinder i would access the information from RouteFinder Pro and provide the bussing information. Parents and school staff found it easy and quick to use and the Transportation Department had a relatively low volume of phone calls when the school year began with a brand new schedule. The program also offered an opportunity for parents and staff to sign up for a broadcast message from Transportation that would send out emails when something needed to be conveyed quickly to multiple people. This proved to be very helpful when a bus got delayed and parents were informed quickly adverting worry and multiple phone calls to the Department.

Next on our list was how to update the process of coordinating all of the extra trips scheduled throughout the day. The demand for bussing was quite high and the department was often scrambling to cover trips. Our solution was to begin using InfoFinder le. Now school staff could access this program through a link on the District web page where they could request transportation for a trip, which would generate a paper trail for the trip. The staff member could access the program and see the progress of the request because the trip would change colors during each part of the process. This was very helpful for the Athletic Department because they could easily access the calendar to see what was scheduled for each day and which driver was assigned to the trip along with other details. Teachers found it useful to confirm if their trips were all set as well.   This program gave us the ability to keep better records of costs for each trip when it came time to do billing. Detailed information was easily processed.

We still had more work to do. We wanted to help our mechanic technicians have a garage that was organized and produced consistent information on the vehicles that was easily accessed. We also had to keep accurate records on Portland School Department's vehicles and wanted Portland to have access to that information. We decided ServiceFinder was the right program for the job. We began by entering all of the vehicles' information into the program. Next, we began the data entry process of any work that was done to the fleet. Once this became part of the daily duties, we realized we could use this information to create a better process of billing Portland for the work that was being done on their fleet. Because of the detailed information, invoices could be created and became part of the billing process. Because the program is web based, we were also able to create an account for Portland to access the information for their fleet at any time. We are able to keep inventory of supplies in the shop and are able to utilize the schedule calendar to coordinate maintenance and repairs. The mechanic technicians are currently in the process of training to learn all of the tools this program has to offer. Reminders for scheduled preventative maintenance are being implemented and a driver portal is in the process of being implemented for the drivers to begin to communicate with mechanics about any issues with the vehicles that may need attention. We have found the reporting part of the program very useful when trying to find data about the vehicles when preparing reports. This program has so much potential that we are still discovering all of the uses. We plan to implement additional parts as we strive to create a department that runs at an optimal level.

Lastly, we also wanted a way to be able to monitor different information without opening all of these different programs. Because all these programs were inter-connected, we were able to utilize TransFinder's ViewFinder program. ViewFinder allowed us to create a dashboard to view real time information within any of the programs. We are currently learning how to utilize this program but I am

excited to be able to see all of the information quickly and easily right from my desk. Because it is web based, the district's business manager and superintendent can also have access to whatever information they would like to watch as well.

TransFinder has certainly helped South Portland to create a data driven department that has much information at our fingertips at any time.   Operational efficiency has improved and coordinating all aspects of the Department is beginning to take shape since implementing these programs. Our staff feels better prepared for assignments because information is more readily available. District staff is able to check on information quickly without making a phone call. We look forward to seeing what more TransFinder can help us to accomplish.