

Mobile App Technology Demands Impact School Transportation

Elizabeth James, Director of Product Strategy, Synovia Solutions

By 2017, over a third of the world's population is projected to own a smartphone, an estimated total of almost 2.6 billion smartphone users in the world.¹ This explosive smartphone market growth has spurred a \$77 billion mobile app market with the average mobile app user spending more than 30 hours a month on more than two-dozen apps.²

Mobile app technology in education is also in high demand. Last year, the US mobile education market was around \$1.82 billion.³ Pair these statistics with the fact that 26.9 million K-12 students are transported every day by a school bus, and the opportunity for schools to establish an open line of communication with parents through bus tracking mobile apps is astounding.⁴

More importantly, such apps offer a safety measure making sure students get on the right bus at the right time, and off at the right stop. The added benefit is possible reduction in tardiness and absenteeism related to students missing the bus.

Getting a child to the bus stop can be a stressor. Parents worry, is the child late, on time, or will they be waiting in the dark, cold, or rain? On the flipside, bus drivers, transportation departments and school administrators alike are also strained with concerns around shrinking budgets, safety, maintenance, and staffing concerns.

To ensure every child makes it onto his/her bus, schools are investing in GPS tracking software that helps track the location of a child's bus. Most school systems today are already using GPS tracking software to monitor bus routes so they have the ability to increase fuel efficiency, improve safety measures and track vehicle location all while reducing costs and saving money.

As technology advances, schools can now use that same technology to provide a parent-facing mobile app that offers useful and helpful information in real-time. The bus tracking apps allow parents to connect to the transportation department's GPS platform (from a smartphone, tablet or computer) to gather data about the location of their child and his/her bus. Using the app on a smartphone and a secure ID for their child, a parent now has the ability to see the location of their child's bus, be alerted if there's a change in schedule, or even get a push notification when the bus is 5 minutes away.

Now parents and students, like transportation administrators, can have the information they need to get their child to the bus stop safely and to school on time. Schools benefit by deterring tardiness and absences related to missing the bus while transportation departments experience fewer calls from concerned parents.

MSD of Wayne Township school district in Indianapolis has 16,400 students with 10,500 students (or 64 percent) relying on buses as primary transportation. The school district recently adopted *Here Comes the Bus*, a website and mobile app that provides GPS tracking of students' buses.

"Many parents have reported that the app makes a difference in their morning routine. Parents are tracking and getting their students out to the bus stop on time. Many parents have also stated they track their child's bus from work in the afternoon so they will know when their child arrives home," Janet Petrisin, Director of Transportation for MSD Wayne Township said.

Some schools are taking it a step further and not just tracking the location of the bus, but also tracking each student boarding and exiting the bus. Point Isabel ISD in Texas recently implemented GPS tracking technology that tracks each child riding the bus by scanning his or her student ID when the student boards and exits.

"We think it's critical to keep track of the hundreds of students using our buses each day," said Superintendent Dr. Lisa Garcia. "Our newly implemented parent-facing platform is a virtual eye on all of our bus riders providing administrators important information while also giving our parents peace of mind."

As the school year progresses, consider how mobile app technology can improve the lives of students, staff, and parents by helping keep students safe and parents informed.

¹ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/203734/global-smart-phone-penetration-per-capita-since-2005/>

² <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/236832>

³ <http://www.gsma.com/connectedliving/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/landscape110811interactive.pdf>

⁴ School Bus Fleet Fact Book 2016, Vol. 61 No. 11. www.schoolbusfleet.com

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