Conclusion

The Monroe County School District is using 14 of the 20 transportation operations best practices. The district effectively recruits and trains bus drivers, makes cost-effective fuel purchases, and ensures that bus routes operate in accordance with established routines. However, to meet the remaining best practice standards and ensure the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of its transportation program, the district should improve its bus routing, vehicle servicing, and spare parts operations. The district also should do more to discourage vehicle vandalism and evaluate to potential for privatizing some transportation functions. In addition, it should develop an accountability system for transportation.

As seen in Exhibit 2-1, the district has an opportunity to reduce transportation expenditures by implementing a recommendation in this report. Determining whether to take advantage of this opportunity is a district decision and should be based on many factors including district needs, public input, and school board priorities. If the district implements this recommendation, it would be able to redirect the funds to other priorities, such as putting more money into the classroom or addressing problem areas identified in this report.

Exhibit 9-1
Our Review Identified an Opportunity for the District to Increase Revenues in the Area of Transportation Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Practice Number</th>
<th>Fiscal Impact: Savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 2003-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Improve bus routing to reduce the number of buses and drivers needed along with reductions in the number of courtesy bus riders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background

Monroe County is a small county located at the extreme southern end of Florida. The county is experiencing a slowly declining student population. The county has 564 miles of paved and 100 miles of...
non-paved roads serving an area of 1,034 square miles. For the school year 2000-01, the district reported it provided transportation to 3,875 of its 9,371 (41.35%) students. The district served 599 students in exceptional student education programs that require special transportation arrangements because of disabilities or the need for specialized classes.

The northern part of Monroe County comprises the western half of the Everglades National Park and the southern tip of Big Cypress National Preserve and is largely uninhabited. The remainder of the county consists of islands connected by an overseas highway (U.S. 1) that was built by the state using 42 defunct railroad bridges between Key Largo (the northernmost island) and Key West (the southernmost island). The Florida Keys are separated from the mainland by Biscayne Bay, Barnes Sound, Blackwater Sound, and Florida Bay. The long distances between the three main population centers in the county (Key West, Marathon, and Key Largo) present some unique problems for district student transportation. For example, the distance between Key West and Key Largo is in excess of 100 miles.

Florida’s smaller rural school districts have the same functional operating responsibilities as larger school districts. However, small districts must accomplish these required tasks with significantly fewer personnel. The Monroe County School District is typical of a small Florida district in that its lowest and mid-level administrators have a larger range of activities to administer and supervise.

All facets of district student transportation are under the supervision of the transportation director. The department is subdivided into operations and maintenance sections with area supervisors directly supervising all of the bus drivers and attendants while the lead mechanic supervises mechanics and mechanic’s helpers (see Exhibit 9-2). The area supervisors also perform functions such as routing and dispatching buses, acting as back-up drivers, investigating accidents, and handling parental complaints. The transportation director performs a number of duties besides general supervision of the transportation department including representing the department to the district and the community, preparing and monitoring the department budget, and fielding complaints and suggestions from other district employees.

**Exhibit 9-2**

*Monroe County School District Transportation Department Organization*

```
Transportation Director (1)

  Office Manager (1)

  Lead Mechanic (1)

  Area Supervisor (4)

  Mechanic (8)

  Mechanic's Helpers (2)

  Bus Driver (57)

  Bus Attendant (6)
```

Source: Monroe County School District.
During the 2000-01 year, district school buses traveled 1,094,671 miles, of which 159,662 (14.6%) were for extracurricular activity trips. Of the 82 buses in current service, 60 are in daily service and the remaining 22 (27%) are spares. Most buses operate on two routes each morning and afternoon, with one route typically serving elementary schools and the other route serving a combination of middle and high school students. Multiple routes per bus with staggered school times helps maximize efficient use of the district’s school buses.

For the 2002-03 school year, the district employed 52 bus drivers along with 5 substitute drivers and 4 transportation employees (area supervisors) who also drive buses. Additionally, seven coaches have received training to allow them to drive school buses for activities such as field trips.

**Activities of particular interest**

The district has an innovative oil recovery system in the Key West garage that allows mechanics to “vacuum” used oil from buses and transfer it via pipes to a waste oil tank. This district-created system significantly reduces the time necessary for oil changes while reducing the risk of an accidental oil spill.
## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Summary of Conclusions for Transportation Best Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Area</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Using the Best Practice?</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning, Organization and Staffing</td>
<td>1. The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the context of district and community planning.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The district provides regular, accurate, and timely counts to the Florida Department of Education of the number of students transported as part of the Florida Education Finance Program.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide cost-efficient student transportation services for all students who qualify for transportation.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district's transportation program minimizes administrative layers and processes.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants if needs.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus-driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Acquisition and Maintenance</td>
<td>8. The school district has a process to ensure that sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet the district's current and future transportation needs.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. The district provides timely routine servicing for buses and other district vehicles, as well as prompt response for breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. The district maintains an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment needed to support transportation functions that balance the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations, Management and Accountability</td>
<td>13. The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines, and any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations are handled safely and promptly.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Measures of cost-efficient student transportation services include reasonably high average bus occupancy and reasonably low cost per mile and cost per student.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Area</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Using the Best Practice?</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>The district ensures that staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>The district ensures that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>The district provides appropriate technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>The district has reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>The district has established an accountability system for transportation, and it regularly tracks and makes public reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>9-22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PLANNING, ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

Best Practice 1: Using
The district coordinates long-term planning and budgeting for student transportation within the school district and the community.

The Monroe County School District is using this best practice. District transportation personnel are participants in the long-term planning and budgeting process involving student transportation within the district. The transportation director is a member of the district planning team. Although the district does not plan on building any new schools in the foreseeable future because of low student population growth and high land costs, the transportation director is actively involved with the planning for a future bus maintenance shop in the Upper Keys area. The transportation director and his employees make informal assessments of transportation needs including staffing reviews and present the results to district managers during the budgeting process. The transportation director is also involved in the development and presentation of information to senior district staff on issues that can impact school transportation such as school start times, transportation for a charter school, and transportation for certain after-school student activities. He is currently involved in the selection of locations for ESE programs in the district.

Best Practice 2: Using
The district provides regular, accurate, and timely counts to the Florida Department of Education of the number of students transported as part of the Florida Education Finance Program.

The Monroe County School District is using this best practice. The Auditor General report dealing with the district’s compliance with provisions of the Florida Education Finance Program for Fiscal Year 1998-99 cited only one discrepancy that did not materially affect the district’s performance. This discrepancy resulted in the reduction in one full-time equivalent (FTE) student from the transportation count. Because of the minor nature of the discrepancy, the auditors did not recommend any corrective actions.

However, in the review for Fiscal Year 2001-02, the Auditor General found instances of material non-compliance involving the classification of transported students in ridership categories including special education and those students living less than two mile from their assigned schools. The auditors found that the student count eligible for funding would have to be reduced by 62 FTEs. In response to these findings, the district transportation director implemented procedures to collect and file current individual education plans (IEPs) within the transportation office for each exceptional education student documenting student transportation needs. This should help ensure more accurate counts of exceptional education students.

We recommend that the district implement recommendations in the recent Auditor General report on the district’s compliance with provisions of the Florida Education Finance Program. These recommendations included ensuring the eligibility of students being verified prior to the reporting of the student in the various ridership categories and reporting only students who were in attendance, their ridership category, and that ride a bus at least one day during the survey period.

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2 Report on Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Students and Student Transportation For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1999 (Auditor General Report No. 01-052).

Best Practice 3: Not Using

The transportation office plans, reviews, and establishes bus routes and stops to provide student transportation services for students in the district. However, the transportation office can improve the cost-efficiency of services by adjusting school bell schedules, conducting annual route audits, creating unsafe walking condition criteria, and no longer transporting students who can safely walk to school.

The Monroe County School District relies on manual processes to route its buses. The area supervisors informally evaluate routes annually to determine if changes will reduce the need for buses and drivers. Although the district has a computerized routing program, it is not currently operational. The transportation director estimates that it would cost $8,850 to fully implement computerized routing system. A computerized system would probably improve the efficiency of the routing process but, given the small size and elongated shape of the district, such a system would not be needed to improve routing efficiency.

Nevertheless the district can improve routing efficiency and meet best practice standards by addressing several issues. First, the district could enhance its operations by adjusting the bell schedule and revising bus routes. The district staggered its school start times, but transportation employees believe that adjustments to the current bell schedule would increase the on-time performance of buses dropping off and picking up students while eliminating five or six bus routes. Elimination of unneeded routes and improvements to remaining routes through an annual route audit could improve the transportation’s efficiency as measured by average bus occupancy (69 in school year 2000-01) and reduce operating costs ($807 per student in school year 2000-01). Such changes could include increasing the distances between bus stops (current policy requires stops be at least two-tenths of a mile apart) up to one-half mile apart to increase the efficiency of the routes.

Second, the district could also improve transportation operations by addressing hazardous walking conditions. The district currently reports that 150 district students at one location (Stock Island) are eligible to receive district transportation to and from school based on hazardous walking conditions as defined in Florida statutes. The determination of the hazardous walking condition was made and filed with the Florida Department of Education on September 26, 1988. In the fourteen years since this determination was made, the transportation department has not reviewed or taken any actions to eliminate hazardous walking areas in the county. In 2000, the district stated in a letter to the Florida Department of Education that it could not survey hazardous walking areas because it did not have $3,000 in funds to complete the survey. Although the transportation director believes that additional hazardous walking areas will not be found in the district, completion of a districtwide survey of hazardous walking conditions will ensure the district claims for state transportation funding for hazardous walking students have merit.

Third, the district can improve its operations by discontinuing transportation services to students who can safely walk to school. District policy is to offer transportation to students who reside within two miles of their designated school only if they are elementary school students who traverse or cross U.S. Highway 1 to reach their assigned school of attendance or who live outside the city limits of Key West. There are some problems with these unsafe walking criteria. For example, some parts of U.S. Highway 1 in Key West may be relatively safe for students to cross due to a relatively slow speed limit (30 miles per hour), traffic lights, pedestrian crossing areas, and crossing lights. In theory, these criteria also mandate the district provide transportation to elementary school students who live next to school. These criteria also do not address situations where it would be unsafe for middle and high school students to walk to school. For example, it might be unsafe for middle school students to cross narrow bridges without adequate

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4 We would expect the school board to allow the transportation department to make exceptions to one-half mile-between-bus-stops policy to prevent bus stops from being in unsafe locations or having bus stops that would require students to walk in hazardous conditions described in s. 1006.23, F.S.
walkways to separate them from automobile traffic. The district has not established written criteria to evaluate areas for unsafe walking conditions or evaluated these areas on a systematic basis.

Savings are possible through improved bus routing and discontinuing transportation services to students who can safely walk to school. The district transportation director estimates that improvements in these areas could save the district approximately $70,000 annually.

**Action Plan 9-1**

We recommend that the district assess the safety of walking conditions within the district, adjust bell schedules, and conduct annual route audits to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the district’s transportation system.

| Action Needed | Step 1. The transportation director, with the assistance of the Florida Department of Transportation, the Monroe County road department, and the Monroe County Sheriff’s Department, should formulate unsafe walking criteria for the district. |
| Step 2. The transportation director should submit the proposed unsafe walking criteria to the superintendent who, in turn, will submit the proposed criteria to the school board for approval. |
| Step 3. Upon approval of the criteria, the transportation department should use the criteria to determine the location of hazardous and unsafe walking conditions to potential bus stops and schools within the district. Using this information, the transportation department should determine what students will need district transportation and appropriate locations for bus stops. This evaluation should take place on an annual basis. |
| Step 4. To reduce the number of hazardous and unsafe student walking areas in the district, the transportation director should work with state and local agencies to eliminate these hazardous and unsafe student walking areas. |
| Step 5. Based on the determination of the need for district transportation and appropriate locations for bus stops, the transportation director with the assistance of area supervisors should develop school bell schedule options for the district along with associated advantages/disadvantages/costs/etc. These options should be developed on an annual basis. |
| Step 6. The transportation director should annually submit the school bell schedule options to the superintendent who, in turn, should submit the options to the school board for selection and approval. |
| Step 7. Using the school board selected school bell schedule option, the transportation director (with the assistance of area supervisors) should annually develop cost-efficient bus routes for the district. |
| Step 8. The transportation director should annually submit the list of cost-efficient bus routes to the superintendent who, in turn, should submit the routes to the school board for approval. |
| Step 9. Upon approval by the school board, the district should implement the approved routes. |

| Who is Responsible | Director of transportation and school board. |
| Time Frame | April  2004 |

**Best Practice 4: Using**

The organizational structure and staffing levels of the district’s transportation program minimizes administrative layers and processes.

The Monroe County School District uses this best practice. The organizational structure of district’s transportation department is relatively flat. Such a structure emphasizes personal responsibility and accountability of individuals in the program as management is reduced to a minimal level. The district assesses the transportation department’s organizational structure and staffing levels annually as part of the budgeting process.
Transportation

Best Practice 5: Using
The district maintains an effective staffing level in the vehicle maintenance area and provides support for vehicle maintenance staff to develop its skills

The Monroe County School District uses this best practice. The district maintains sufficient vehicle maintenance employees to service district-owned vehicles. It annually evaluates staffing levels as part of the budgeting process. District employees recently completed a Florida Department of Education-distributed spreadsheet that shows that the district has a small surplus of staffing (under one-quarter of a full-time equivalent mechanic) within the vehicle maintenance area.

The district provides training its mechanics. The district sends mechanics to state workshops when offered to improve their skills. Other training for mechanics is conducted in-house on an “as-needed” basis.

Best Practice 6: Using
The district effectively and efficiently recruits and retains the bus drivers and attendants it needs.

The Monroe County School District uses several techniques to recruit and retain bus drivers. It places ads in the local newspaper and lists job openings for bus drivers on the district’s web page. The transportation director believes that the newspaper ads are more effective than the district’s web page in attracting driver applicants. To retain drivers, the district recently began to pay drivers who complete driver training a $200 stipend. Drivers receive an additional $250 stipend they complete six months of work.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could enhance its operations in this area by systematically determining why it has difficulties in retaining drivers. Like many Florida school districts, the Monroe County School District has difficulty in keeping drivers to meet its needs. The district experienced a 23% turnover rate for bus drivers in school year 2001-02 and a 20% turnover in school year 2002-03. The district believes that turnover rates this high are a problem; however, the district does not have comprehensive information concerning why bus drivers leave district employment because it does not conduct formal exit interviews. The district has just begun to collect information on wages and benefits offered by adjacent school districts and the Key West City government, but needs to obtain information on wages and benefits offered by local employers that are competing for the same pool of applicants. Lack of this information prevents the district from accurately determining if it offers competitive salary, benefits, and hours of work to enable it to recruit and retain bus drivers.

We recommend that the district periodically collect information on wages, benefits, and hours of work of local employers who compete for persons interested in driving school buses and systematically conduct and document exit interviews of bus drivers who are leaving district employment to assist in devising effective strategies for retaining drivers.

Best Practice 7: Using
The district trains, supervises, and assists bus drivers to enable them to meet bus-driving standards and maintain acceptable student discipline on the bus.

The Monroe County School District uses this best practice. The district offers driver training, physical examinations, and drug testing for its bus drivers. Prospective bus drivers attend a training class that allows them to receive a class “B” (school bus) commercial driver’s license. The district provides

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5 Training normally conducted in the summer for mechanics was not offered in the summer of 2002 due to budgetary cutbacks.
Transportation

training and testing for current bus drivers and monitors their driving performance. School district policy requires drivers pass an annual physical examination, for which the district pays, to ensure that the drivers are medically capable of safely operating buses. The drivers also receive annual dexterity tests. Each driver receives eight hours of paid annual in-service training prior to the start of the school year.

The district monitors its drivers through reviews of the state’s traffic violation database for convictions or involvement in traffic accidents at least twice a year. Drivers who violate the district’s safe driving policy are subject to discipline ranging from suspension to termination of employment. Drivers’ records include documentation of their current physical examinations, driver licenses, and traffic violations.

Although the district is using this best practice, it can enhance its operations by instituting a training cost reimbursement policy. According to district transportation employees, drivers could leave district employment shortly after completing district-funded commercial driver training. The district would thus have paid for the cost of training for drivers without receiving full benefit from the investment. The district transportation director is proposing a policy that bus drivers the district trains for commercial driver’s licenses but either do not become or remain district employees for at least six months shall be required to repay the direct and indirect costs of their training. The district estimates that the cost of training, assuming five trainees per class and 200 miles of bus usage, is $430 per person.

**We recommend that the district negotiate with the drivers’ union and implement the proposed policy to obligate new bus drivers to reimburse the district for training costs if they fail to complete six months of service as a district bus driver.**

**VEHICLE ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE**

**Best Practice 8: Using**

The district has a process to ensure that sufficient vehicles are acquired economically and will be available to meet the district’s current and future transportation needs.

The Monroe County School District uses this best practice. It generally orders new buses via the Florida Department of Education’s pool purchase but most recently purchased buses using a contract originated by the Brevard County School District. This was done so the district could continue to obtain buses made by the manufacturer of the majority of buses in its fleet. The district inspects all newly purchased buses prior to placing in service and usually assigns them to the longest routes. Buses that are replaced are placed in a salvage status and turned over to district purchasing for sale at auction. The district has auctioned off 19 buses in the last two years for prices ranging from $1,830 to $5,855 per bus ($3,436 average price received per bus). The district’s bus fleet currently stands at 82 buses.

The district also owns and operates other on-road vehicles. The district’s on-road “white fleet” of vehicles consists of 109 vehicles (mostly pick-up trucks assigned to the district’s maintenance department) that range in age from 1 to 33 years old (average age 7 years old). The most recently purchased white fleet vehicles were obtained via a purchase off the Florida Sheriff Association’s vehicle purchase contract.

Although the district uses this best practice, it could enhance its operations in two areas. First, it can periodically determine how many buses it needs to efficiently and effectively transport its students and keep its bus fleet to this number. The number of buses a district needs generally can be determined by adding the number of buses needed on regular bus routes to the highest number of spare buses needed per day to replace those that are out of service for inspections, routine maintenance, and repair or are needed
for field trips that cannot be cost-effectively handled by regular route buses or charter bus service.\(^6\) The district has not determined how many buses it needs to provide transportation for field trips. Such a determination can be made by looking at the previous school year’s experience.\(^7\) The district is likely to operate more field trips during regular route hours than most other districts because of the long distances some students have to travel to reach trip destinations. For example, the Key West High School athletic teams have to travel up to Melbourne (a distance of 322 miles) for some games.

We recommend that the district acquire and retain only the number of buses necessary to meet its student transportation requirements. An analysis to determine the number of buses needed should include calculation of the number of school buses needed for field trips that cannot be met using buses available for regular route service or charter bus service.

Second, the district could revise its vehicle replacement policy. As seen in Exhibit 9-4, as of February 2003, the district has two buses that are more than 12 years old. Overall, 23% of Monroe County School District’s bus fleet is 10 years old or older.

Exhibit 9-4
Monroe County School District’s Bus Fleet Has 19 of 82 Buses 10 Years Old or Older\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in Years</th>
<th>Number of Buses</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>82</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Bus number 74 is used exclusively for transportation to and from the Boys and Girls Club and is not counted as part of the school district bus fleet.

Source: Monroe County School District.

The State of Florida has not adopted a policy on how often districts should replace their buses. In the past, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) recommended a planned 10-year replacement cycle for school buses, but it no longer does so. Florida school districts are successfully using bus replacement schedules that range from 12 to 15 years. Districts should use district-specific data and practices followed by exemplar districts to establish school bus life cycles and periodically replace older buses that become unreliable and are more costly to maintain than newer buses.

\(^6\) For the purposes of this review, “field trips” are considered all trips taken by students taken for athletic competitions, extracurricular, and educational-enhancing purposes in which the individual schools are responsible for scheduling and supervising.

\(^7\) When comparing the cost of school bus transportation versus charter bus transportation, the cost of school bus transportation needs to include all direct operational cost of operating field trip buses including fuel, driver’s salary, maintenance, and scheduling costs.
The Monroe County School District’s written policy on the periodic replacement of vehicles provides only general guidance. The district’s current policy requires the district to maintain an appropriate bus replacement programs using criteria such as bus age, mileage, and replacement verses maintenance costs. This policy does not include breakdown history of the vehicle or apply to white fleet vehicles. In addition, the district has not developed the written guidelines on how it would apply these criteria.

We recommend that the district establish more specific vehicle replacement guidelines based on district-specific data and practices used by exemplar districts to cover all on-road vehicles it purchases.

Best Practice 9: Not Using

While the district provides responds promptly to breakdowns and other unforeseen contingencies, it does not routinely service buses and other district vehicles in a timely manner.

The Monroe County School District services district vehicles (both buses and “white fleet” vehicles) at the Key West transportation facility and upper Keys transportation facility. For example, state law requires the district to inspect buses every 20 days. District mechanics repair serious deficiencies found during these inspections prior to the returning the bus to service. Minor deficiencies that do not impact the safety of the bus are repaired as soon as possible. The district has recently established an internal transportation policy that requires the lead mechanic or service manager to consult with the director of transportation when estimated bus repair costs exceed $5,000 or other vehicle repairs exceed $2,000. This enables the district to determine if making the repairs would be cost-effective using criteria such as vehicle mileage, previous repairs to the vehicle, replacement costs, and liquidation value. The final decision on such expensive repairs will be made by the head of the district department who controls the vehicle.

However, the district can improve its operations and meet best practice standards by addressing several issues. A review of vehicle maintenance operations shows the district is

- not inspecting buses in a timely manner;
- not ensuring pre-trip bus inspections are properly conducted;
- not performing routine bus maintenance in a timely manner; and
- not repairing all identified vehicle problems.

Documentation shows that the district does not always perform required inspections in a timely manner. A spreadsheet of 20-day bus inspections conducted during the period September through December 2002 showed that some buses were not inspected or that others were inspected up to 6 days late. In recognition of this problem, the district recently established internal procedures that will significantly increase the lead mechanic’s and transportation director’s oversight responsibilities for 20-day inspections thereby reducing the possibility of buses not receiving timely 20-day inspections.

In addition, the district’s area supervisors are not monitoring the pre-trip inspections drivers are to conduct before making bus runs. Area supervisors are collect completed pre-trip inspection forms from drivers on a regular basis. However, they need to periodically observe the inspection process. Even though all buses are compounded nightly, most area supervisors cannot easily observe the pre-trip inspections because they are busy with office duties such as dispatching and their offices do not have windows that directly overlook bus parking areas.

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8 Effective April 21, 2003, the State Board of Education rules now require the inspection of school buses to be scheduled at a maximum interval of 30 school days.
The district also is not routinely maintaining buses and other vehicles in a timely manner. District policy requires that all district vehicles be maintained in a safe operating condition, and makes the transportation department responsible for a planned maintenance program to keep all vehicles running safely and efficiently. District preventative maintenance procedures require mileage-based servicing on buses (e.g., change bus oil and oil filters every 10,000 miles) and white fleet vehicles (change car/truck oil and oil filters every 5,000 miles). A review of the maintenance records for 9 buses shows this schedule is not being followed and some buses are not being serviced in a timely manner.

To correct this problem, the district transportation director recently implemented a policy having certain mileage-based servicing performed on school buses as part of the 20-day inspection process. The inspector now performs needed fluid servicing (oil changes, transmission fluid replacement, etc.) while conducting the 20-day inspections.

Finally, the district is not monitoring bus repairs to ensure that all items are addressed. For example, a bus driver found that her assigned bus that had been in the garage and was supposedly ready to transport students was missing screws securing a mirror, needed more than a gallon of water to be added to the radiator, and had a bottom light out on a student stop light. The transportation director reports that there has been a significant decrease in quality control complaints since recent implementation of the policy having certain mileage-based servicing performed on school buses as part of the 20-day inspection process.

The lack timely and thorough inspections and routine servicing coupled with the failure to repair all identified problems can lead to bus breakdowns. The district experiences frequent bus breakdowns with daily bus breakdowns averaging two in Key West (six highest daily), one at Sugarloaf (three highest daily), one in Marathon (five highest daily), and one at Upper Keys (five highest daily).
**Transportation**

**Action Plan 9-2**

We recommend that the district transportation department establish and implement procedures that ensure district vehicles receive appropriate inspections, repairs and mileage-based servicing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Needed</th>
<th>Step 1.</th>
<th>The transportation director and lead mechanic should continue to implement and monitor transportation procedures designed to improve the timeliness of the bus inspection process.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2.</td>
<td>The transportation director, with the assistance of area supervisors, should establish transportation procedures and practices that ensures area supervisors periodically monitor and document all bus drivers conducting required pre-trip inspections required by state and district policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 3.</td>
<td>The transportation director should establish procedures for the district that will ensure that all district vehicles (including buses, pickups, minivans, and other district owned on-road vehicles) receive appropriate mileage-based servicing. Such procedures should include notification to the heads of district departments on when their vehicles should receive servicing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 4.</td>
<td>The transportation director should issue a monthly report to the deputy superintendent with copies to district department heads that control district on-road vehicles showing vehicles that have not been turned in for timely servicing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 5.</td>
<td>If the transportation director observes that certain district vehicles are chronically not turned in for timely servicing on a timely basis, the transportation director should issue a memo to the deputy superintendent with a copy to the affected head of district department detailing the chronic failure to turn in these vehicles for timely servicing and requesting the control of said vehicles be taken and placed within the transportation department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 6.</td>
<td>The transportation director should establish and implement procedures ensuring an appropriate quality control review process for vehicle servicing and repair work. These procedures should ensure that vehicle released from servicing are safe, that the work performed meets district standards, and that unfinished repairs to non-safety essential items (such as leaking door seals) are documented with the vehicle subsequently scheduled for expedited repair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Who is Responsible**

Director of transportation.

**Time Frame**

August 2003

**Best Practice 10: Using**

The district ensures that fuel purchases are cost-effective and that school buses and other vehicles are efficiently supplied with fuel.

The Monroe County School District operates an automated fueling system with computerized software to supply buses and other school vehicles with fuel. The district operates three convenient fueling locations in Key West, Sugarloaf Key, and Key Largo. The district obtains its fuel through a joint contract with the Monroe County Board of County Commissioners. The agreement allows the district to use county fueling facilities and the county to use district facilities. The district refills fuel tanks twice a week. The district transportation office determines fuel levels through either the use of gauges on the tanks or manual dip sticks. The fueling system is automated with both a vehicle and a personal key required to activate fuel pumps and creates a report of the number of gallons and cost of fuel being charged to the receiving vehicle. The transportation director reviews fuel system reports to ensure that fuel is properly being dispensed and to identify any buses with excessive fuel consumption. When the district uses the county’s fuel pumps or vice versa, the gallons and cost of the fuel is billed to the entity controlling the vehicle receiving the fuel.

Until January 2003, the district received premium gasoline under its contract with Monroe County Board of County Commissioners. During our review of district fueling practices including its use of premium...
Transportation

gasoline, the district began purchasing regular gasoline for its gas powered vehicles. The district estimates that this will save it $6,000 annually.

Although the district is using this best practice, it can enhance its operations in this area by ensuring regular environmental inspections of its fueling facilities, corrections of problems found, and retention of the subsequent reports. Records of a Florida Department of Environmental Protection inspection in November 2001 indicate that the district fuel facilities are in compliance with environmental regulations, but the district needs to color code the fill ports of the fuel tanks and strap them down. The fill ports have since been color coded but the tanks have not been strapped down. The district is not able to locate a copy of the environmental inspection conducted since November 2001 and district transportation employees cannot recall an inspection being conducted since that date.

We recommend that the district ensure regular environmental inspections of its fueling facilities and retention of subsequent reports.

Best Practice 11: Using

The district maintains facilities that are conveniently situated to provide sufficient and secure support for vehicle maintenance and other transportation functions.

The Monroe County School District operates two vehicle repair facilities in the county. The main repair facility is located in Key West. The Key West garage consists of four service bays, one bay for tires, and one bay for storage and shop facilities. The facility contains specialized bus repair tools for use by district mechanics. The district also has a small facility located in the Key Largo for the maintenance of vehicles in that part of the district. This facility currently consists of a concrete slab, a tool storage shed, and part of a trailer used as an office. Repairs conducted at the Upper Keys facility are primarily minor in nature (e.g., oil changes, replacement of lights, etc.); major repairs (e.g., transmission work) are conducted only at the Key West facility. The district is in the process of drawing up plans for a covered repair facility at the Key Largo site.

The district appropriately handles hazardous waste generated through the servicing of buses (e.g., used oil and antifreeze) through contracts for collection and disposal of these items. The district has an innovated oil recovery system in the Key West garage that significantly reduces the time necessary for oil changes while reducing the risk of an accidental oil spill. Both vehicle repair facilities are fenced with security lights in place.

The parts room in the Key West vehicle repair facility is relatively small but adequate for the storage of most spare parts such as light bulbs, alternators, and radios. The mechanics stationed at the Upper Keys facility store parts in a maintenance pickup truck.

Although the district is using this best practice, it can enhance its operations by ensuring the security of parked buses. The district has four compounds for bus parking. The Key West, Marathon, and Upper Keys compounds are fenced and lighted. However, the Sugarloaf Key bus compound is not. According to transportation employees, this facility has not been fenced to allow county vehicles to access the fuel pumps located in the rear of the compound. Lack of a secure facility at this location has resulted in numerous incidents of vandalism such as broken windows and destroyed stop arms on buses. Further discussions of bus vandalism are contained in Best Practice 16 of this chapter.

We recommend that the district enhance the security of buses parked at the Sugarloaf Key facility to prevent damage to the vehicles by fencing the rear of the Sugarloaf facility while establishing a separate fenced and lighted bus parking compound at the facility.
Best Practice 12: Not Using

The district needs to maintain an inventory of parts, supplies, and equipment that supports transportation functions while balancing the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs.

The Monroe County School District obtains parts and supplies through a number of methods including discounted purchase orders from local vendors and competitive bids. Transportation employees compare parts coming into the district parts room to invoices prior to placing the items on a computerized perpetual inventory system.

However, the district can improve its operations and use this best practice by addressing two issues. First, the district’s is not using cost-effective parts inventory practices. A review of district purchasing by the Office of the Auditor General shows that the transportation department kept approximately 10.5 months of inventory on hand (inventory turnover ratio of 1.13). The transportation employees of the Florida Department of Education recommend that the inventory turnover ratio should be at least 1.4 (an average of 3 months of inventory on hand). According to district employees, the district needs a large parts inventory because of the long distance between Key West to bus parts depots and the lack of uniformity in the manufacturer and models of buses the district uses. While the Key West transportation maintenance garage is a considerable distance from the mainland of Florida (approximately 150 miles), parts can be ordered and received in two weeks or less in most cases. The district is attempting to reduce the size of its parts and supply inventory as evidenced by increasing standardization of additions to its bus fleet.

The district could also improve its operations in this area by conducting independent audits of its vehicle parts inventory on an annual basis. To ensure the accuracy of perpetual inventory systems, periodic and independent audits of the inventory need to be conducted. Currently transportation employees who are responsible for the receiving and distribution of vehicle parts are also conduct the inventory audits. A better practice is for such audits to be conducted by persons not directly involved in the receiving and distribution of parts such as district finance department or internal auditor employees. Audits conducted by independent parties increase the confidence of the district in the reliability of audit results.

Action Plan 9-3

We recommend that the district maintain an inventory of vehicle parts that supports transportation functions while balancing the concerns of immediate need and inventory costs. We also recommend that the district annually conduct an independent audit of its vehicle parts inventory.

Action Needed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The transportation director, with the assistance of the district finance director and the lead mechanic, should conduct a review of district vehicle parts. This review should examine the current vehicle parts operations and propose recommendations to reduce the size of the average vehicle parts inventory while balancing the need for parts to repair vehicles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The transportation director should implement the proposed recommendations to reduce the size of the district’s vehicle parts inventory. The transportation director should monitor size of the inventory by periodically reviewing the inventory turnover ratio and incidents of lack of parts significantly impacting the ability of the district to repair vehicles to operating condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The district finance director or his representative should conduct annual audits of the district’s vehicle parts inventory. This information should be presented to the transportation director for actions as necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who is Responsible | Director of transportation and district finance officer. |
Time Frame | August 2003 |
Best Practice 13: Using

The district ensures that all regular school bus routes and activity trips operate in accordance with established routines and that any unexpected contingencies affecting vehicle operations are handled safely and promptly.

Bus routes in the Monroe County School District generally function well with few problems. District area supervisors indicate that they do not have a problem with absentee drivers. The district’s absenteeism rate for its bus drivers averaged 9% with a high absenteeism rate of 23% in school year 2001-02. Overcrowding on buses is rare and usually occurs at the beginning of the school year. When this happens, the transportation department will allow the bus to continue its run if it can proceed safely or will split the run into two runs. The drivers of vehicles that experience breakdowns can communicate with area supervisors via two-way radios. District mechanics respond to breakdowns with equipped pick-up trucks. The district does not track the effects of driver absenteeism or bus breakdowns have on the on-time performance of its buses.

The district presently (school year 2002-03) has 7 elementary students and 24 middle and high school students who ride buses for longer time periods than recommended by the state. This occurs because these students live long distances from school and the sparsity of student population, especially in the case of exceptional education students requiring specialized transportation.

District policy states that no students shall leave the school buses on their way to or from school without the parents and a principal’s written authorization unless it is either at the school or regular bus stop. During field work, there was one incident in which a bus driver let out a student at a bus stop other than the student’s regular stop. The bus driver was disciplined for this action.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could enhance its operations in this area by recovering the full costs of field trips. District school buses were driven 134,507 on field trips during school year 2001-02. The district field trip manual says costs associated with the field trip should be billed to the sponsoring school or organization. According to the transportation director, schools pay the transportation department for the salary costs of field trip drivers and non-profit groups like the Boys and Girls Club directly employ the drivers for the trips they make. However, the district bills schools and non-profit groups only $.15 per mile when the true cost per mile between $1.50 and $1.60. The district estimates approximately $188,300 (using mileage cost of $1.55) in field trip costs were not charged to schools and non-profit groups in school year 2001-02. Having schools fully pay for field trips encourages principals to ensure that the trips are cost-effective, while having non-profit groups fully pay increases the resources the district can use elsewhere.

| We recommend that the district charge schools and other organizations using district buses for field trips the full cost of such trips. Such costs should include driver costs (salaries and benefits), operational costs (fuel, maintenance, etc.), and administrative costs (costs to schedule field trips, etc.) If the district wishes to continue subsidizing school field trips, the transportation department should report to the school board on an annual basis the full cost of such trips by school and activity and the cost impact on the transportation department’s budget. |

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9 The state recommends that elementary student bus route times to limited to no more than 50 minutes with secondary student bus routes to no more than 60 minutes.
Best Practice 14: Using
The district provides efficient transportation services for exceptional students in a coordinated fashion that minimizes hardships to students.

The Monroe County School District identifies specialized student transportation needs in staffing meetings in which an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is drawn up for each exceptional education student. Upon notification of specialized transportation requirements, transportation employees will adjust bus routes to provide needed services. The district transported a total of 599 of these students in school year 2000-01. Generally, only students whose IEPs require special transportation ride ESE buses. All other ESE students ride regular buses. The district makes claims for the reimbursement of transportation of Medicaid-eligible students who receive transportation for certain services. A Medicaid program summary report dated September 24, 2002, shows that the district collected $31,244 in reimbursement for specialized transportation.

Although the district meets this best practice, it could enhance its operations in two areas. First, the district should ensure that the reason for providing specialized transportation to students is adequately documented. Failure to do so can result in inappropriate transportation, additional expense to the district, and possible reduction in available funds when audited. Specialized transportation should be provided only to those students who need such services. A review of 19 exceptional students’ individual educational plans (IEPs) showed that 6 of the plans did not adequately document why the students were receiving specialized transportation. Florida Department of Education Technical Assistance Paper ESE 311094 (Fiscal Year 2001-13) states that the IEP team must describe in specific detail the need for an aide on a bus for particular student(s). The district’s own manual for the admission and placement of exceptional students states that the staffing team is to be specific on the IEP about the type of specialized transportation needed such as the medical condition the student has and specialized equipment needed. Without such documentation, it is possible for students to be inappropriately assigned to receive specialized transportation that is more expensive than regular school transportation.

We recommend that the district adequately document the need for specialized transportation in the individual education plans (IEPs) for exceptional education students. We further recommend the Exceptional Student Education department establish and implement quality control procedures ensure that IEPs contain appropriate documentation.

Second, the district should improve guidance to IEP staffing participants on when it is appropriate to assign students to specialized transportation. Improved district guidance to IEP staffing participants will assist these participants in appropriately determining the need for specialized transportation. District transportation employees do not participate in IEP staffings. This is contrary to Florida Department of Education guidance which recommends that transportation employees participate in staffings whenever decisions regarding special transportation provisions as a related service are being made. Such participation can often be accomplished via telephone (conference call).

We recommend that the district improve its guidance to IEP staffing participants when making specialized transportation decisions. We further recommend that the district ensure that transportation employees participate (such as by conference call) in staffings for IEPs whenever decisions regarding the need for specialized transportation services are made.
Best Practice 15: Using
The district ensures that transportation staff acts promptly and appropriately in response to any accidents or breakdowns.

No matter how competent bus drivers are and how well buses are maintained, accidents and breakdowns occur. Districts need written procedures to guide employees when these situations occur to ensure that activities are carried out in a safe, efficient and effective manner, proper officials are notified, and the district complies with federal and state laws. The Monroe County School District uses this best practice. It has taken various steps in order to minimize problems arising from accidents. The district had seven accidents involving its school buses during school year 2000-01 (latest reporting year). School bus drivers were reported as the causal factor in four of these accidents. All buses on routes are equipped with two-way radios that are monitored by the transportation personnel during normal bus operating times. Bus drivers are given phone numbers of designated transportation personnel to call in the case of an emergency while on out-of-county trips.

Best Practice 16: Not Using
The district needs to ensure that appropriate student behavior is maintained on the bus, with students being held accountable for financial consequences of misbehavior related to transportation.

The Monroe County School District has a policy that allows the principal of a school to delegate to any bus driver transporting students responsibility for the control and direction of students as deemed necessary and in accordance with state and local rules. Bus drivers drop off written disciplinary reports to principals or other designated school staff. School staff then inform bus drivers either verbally (for drivers in the Key Largo area) or by e-mail what disciplinary actions were taken.

The district can improve its operations and meet best practice standards by establishing and implementing additional policies and procedures to detect vandalism on school buses and increase reimbursements for damages. A review of bus files along with fieldwork observations found a number of incidents of vandalism on school buses such as damage to bus seats. The district transportation office does not know how much damage was caused by vandalism in school year 2001-02 as this information was not tracked. Recently the district transportation director has instructed mechanics to note on work orders any vandalism being repaired.

Although district policy states that students or their parents must reimburse the district for repair costs for vehicles resulting from negligent actions, student misconduct, or vandalism, the district is not able to determine how much money was assessed and collected to reimburse the district in school year 2001-02. The district should establish and implement additional policies and procedures that will increase the detection of vandalism on school buses and increase reimbursements for damages. These policies and procedures should require students to use assigned seats and drivers to check buses for vandalism after completing each bus route. The district should hold students responsible for any damage to their assigned seats unless it has evidence that the damage to the seat was caused by another student.

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10 For example, under Florida law, accidents involving damage of $500 or more or having student injuries must be reported to the Florida Department of Education.
Transportation

Action Plan 9-4

We recommend that the district should establish and implement policies and procedures that will increase the detection of vandalism on school buses and increase reimbursements for damages.

Action Needed

Step 1. The transportation director, with the assistance of the district legal counsel, should draft school district policies that will increase the detection of vandalism on school buses and increase reimbursement for damages. Such policies should include requiring use of assigned seats, checking buses for vandalism after each bus route, and holding students responsible for damage to assigned seats unless there is evidence that the damage to the seat was caused by a non-assigned student.

Step 2. The transportation director should submit the draft school district policies to the district superintendent who should, in turn, submit the draft school district policies to the school board for approval.

Step 3. The school board should approve the draft school district policies.

Step 4. The district superintendent should implement the policies including taking actions to collect for vandalism damage such as using third party collection agents, making claims against the responsible parties in small claims court, and suspending responsible parties from district-provided transportation until damage claims have been paid.

Step 5. The transportation director should periodically report on the effectiveness of the adopted vandalism district policies to the superintendent and school board. This report should include changes in the amount of vandalism on school district buses (as measured in cost of repairs), amount of restitution collected, and proposed changes in district policies and procedures that would reduce the cost of vandalism occurring on school buses.

Who is Responsible

Director of transportation.

Time Frame

August 2003

Best Practice 17: Using

The district provides additional technological and computer support for transportation functions and operations.

The Monroe County School District transportation department uses a management information system for capital inventory and budgeting purposes. This system is used by all departments in the district. The district includes the transportation department in its plan for the replacement and upgrading of computer equipment. The transportation department, in consultation with the information systems department, makes decisions about the software and training the district needs to acquire to meet transportation needs. The district personnel office is currently computerizing staff training, physicals, and driver license records. The transportation department has a separate but limited computerized management information system for performance information. Other transportation functions are performed manually.

Although the district is using this best practice, it could enhance its operations by improving its transportation performance management information system. The transportation director would like his performance management information system to be able to list repair records and cost by vehicle, perform analyses of common or frequent causes of vehicle breakdowns, produce records of hours spent on repairs, produce data on field trip requests, driver assignments, and billings for field trips, and the automated importing of mileages of vehicle into maintenance records. The current transportation performance management information system does not provide this information needed to help the transportation manager evaluate his department as not all transportation-related work performed in the district is entered onto the system. For example, work orders for the Upper Keys and field trip information are not entered into the system. The district is currently evaluating possible acquisition of a commercially available computerized system to better meet management needs. Another option available to the district to improve its computer support to transportation is the adoption of another maintenance management
information system, such as the system developed by the Hernando County School District. This system is being offered to other school districts free of charge.

| We recommend that the district evaluate and acquire additional management information system resources to provide additional performance information to the transportation department. |

**Best Practice 18: Using**

The district monitors the fiscal condition of transportation functions by regularly analyzing expenditures and reviewing them against the budget.

The Monroe County School District meets this best practice. The district’s transportation department monitors its expenditures in an adequate manner. The transportation director coordinator reviews transportation expenditures at least once a month. These expenditures include items such as bus repair parts and bus towing. As a result of these reviews, the district is increasing standardization of bus bodies and engines to improve the efficiency of its operations.

The district is in the process of improving information used to conduct transportation budget review. Presently, small repairs such as light bulb replacements are often not documented resulting in incomplete maintenance records. The transportation director is in the process of correcting this situation. Proposed improvements to the department’s performance management information system coupled with complete maintenance records will permit the transportation director and others in the transportation department to easily identify cost concerns within the department.

**Best Practice 19: Not Using**

The district has not reviewed the prospect for privatizing transportation functions, as a whole or in part.

The Monroe County School District has not privatized any of its transportation functions. District employees do not believe that private vendors are available to perform transportation functions. During fieldwork for this report, the transportation director for Monroe County School District met with the transportation director for Miami-Dade County School District and selected employees. The meeting was held to discuss the possibility of Monroe County School District buses needing major repairs and located in the Upper Keys area being repaired at the south Miami-Dade bus compound or by vendors located near the bus compound. Repairing Upper Keys-stationed buses in Florida City (located 25 miles away) instead of in the Key West garage (located more than 100 miles away) has the potential of saving the district time and money.

However, the district can improve its operations and meet best practice standards by formally reviewing the potential for having other private or governmental entities perform various district functions such as maintenance work on district buses and white fleet vehicles. Districts often find that having specialized functions such as rebuilding bus transmissions, engine overhauls, and window and seat repairs performed by either private firms or government agencies can save them money by avoiding the need to buy and maintain equipment and skills for a job that will only be used a few times a year. In some cases, districts have achieved cost-savings by having their entire school bus operations run by private firms while other districts have all maintenance work (such as paint and body work and oil changes) on white fleet vehicles performed by outside vendors. There are vendors within the district that can perform some district transportation functions such as changing oil in white fleet vehicles and changing and mounting tires on
Transportation

buses. Only after a systematic analysis can the district accurately evaluate if privatization would reduce district costs and/or improve quality. 11

Action Plan 9-5

We recommend that the district systematically evaluate if privatization of some or all of the district transportation functions would reduce district costs and/or improve quality.

| Action Needed | Step 1. The transportation director, with the assistance of district purchasing employees, should canvas private vendors and governmental agencies in the district and those in nearby counties to determine costs and quality of transportation functions that private vendors and governmental agencies can provide to the district.
|              | Step 2. The transportation director, with the assistance of district accounting employees, should then determine the unit costs (both direct and indirect) and quality for the district to provide these functions on an in-house basis.
|              | Step 3. The transportation director, with the assistance of the district finance officer, should compare unit costs and quality of district transportation functions performed on an in-house basis to the costs and quality of similar functions that can be performed either by private firms or other governmental entities. In cases when such privatization can reduce district transportation costs and/or improve quality, the district transportation director should notify the superintendent of the cost savings/improvement in quality and request permission from the superintendent to privatize these functions.
|              | Step 4. The superintendent should then approve privatization of these functions and notify the school board of such.
|              | Step 5. In cases when privatization can reduce district transportation costs and/or improve quality, the district should privatize the function. The district should explore options of having certain repairs for buses in the Upper Keys area performed either by the Miami-Dade County School District or its private contractors.

Who is Responsible

Director of transportation

Time Frame

December 2003

Best Practice 20: Not Using

The district needs to improve its accountability system for transportation by regularly tracking and making public reports on its performance in comparison with established benchmarks.

The Monroe County School District transportation department does not have selected performance or cost-efficiency measures that are presented to either the district administration or the school board. The district also does not compare its performance to “peer” districts. It currently does not believe that it has any peer districts because of Monroe County’s geographic distance from the mainland of Florida.

The district can meet best practice standards by establishing an accountability system for its transportation department. The transportation department should develop a set of measures that allows it to routinely monitor and evaluate performance. The measurement set should include both short-term internal measures to evaluate day-to-day transportation operations, such as driver absentee rates, and long-term measures for major aspects of the transportation department, such as the operating costs per student, age of its bus fleet, and the on-time performance of buses. The transportation department should also use the performance information to provide district management and the board with an annual report summarizing program results and making comparisons to peer districts and past performance. Action Plan 3-1 provides steps the district should follow to establish a accountability system for each of its programs and use performance information to improve operations.

11 See our Review of the Potential for Privatizing Student Transportation, Report No. 97-44, published February 1998 for additional information on this subject.