

Board has shortage of bus drivers

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He said the board is asking for "parent and student understanding" until they get through the shortage situation, adding about 10 per cent of the 450 bus routes board-wide do not currently have a driver designated to them full-time.

"The driver shortage situation in Halton is exacerbated by the strong local economy and competition for part-time jobs," said Parfeniuk. "People who used to think about driving a bus as a great option are now thinking about working at a big box store or a Tim Hortons."

He added the shortage issue is not new, but has gotten worse over the last couple of years.

Jane Seaborne-Davies, the Georgetown branch manager of First Student Canada, a school bus company that serves Halton Hills and Milton, said they are currently in need of 10 more drivers.

Seaborne-Davies said the bus driver shortage has been ongoing now for several years and they have had to be "very creative" in covering routes—making use of spare drivers, dividing routes differently, and relying on office staff who are licensed to drive buses when needed.

Currently she said they have three open routes available in Milton and one in Georgetown.

Their roster of drivers include retirees, firefighters, police officers and other shift workers, as well as parents of young children who can bring the kids along with them on their routes.

Angela Tyler, operations manager of Tyler Transport contracted to provide busing to schools mostly in north Halton said, "each day provides another challenge for us in regard to covering runs," especially now during flu/cold season and when many drivers are taking winter vacations.

"We do the best we can to maintain our schedules and make sure our passengers are

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—HDSB Superintendent Steven Parfeniuk

transported safely," said Tyler, adding they too are at times having to rely on administrative staff (who are licensed bus drivers) to take a route.

"This is province-wide, especially for the Golden Horseshoe," she said.

Tyler said their company has a large number of seasoned drivers and while they are fortunate they don't have any open routes, they need more drivers.

Both companies can work with a driver's schedule and some can be hired just to do morning routes, afternoon routes or both. They are also needed at times to do charter runs.

Bus drivers must be 21 years old and full licensed drivers and not have accumulated more than three demerit points.

The bus companies provide extensive training in defensive driving and so drivers can obtain their class B license. First aid training is also provided and drivers must go through a criminal background check.

Interested potential drivers should contact First Student Canada at 905-877-2251 or Tyler Transport Ltd. at 519-853-1550.

(Lisa Tallyn can be reached at ltallyn@independentfreepress.com)

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