

Brockport scraps school due to lack of bus drivers

No word on social media of what action it will take on Friday

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The Brockport Central School District announced early Thursday that it was canceling school for students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade because of a bus driver shortage.

A brief statement posted to its social media accounts did not say what led to the shortage or indicate whether any classes would be held remotely, as has become a regular practice during the coronavirus pandemic, or whether schools would reopen Friday.

Monroe County school districts have faced acute bus driver shortages during the pandemic but prior to the Brockport announcement, none had resulted in school cancellations.

Partial returns from a recent series of Freedom of Information requests based on Nov. 1 staffing levels show that hundreds of additional hires are likely needed to get school buses fully back on track. Greece reported needing 24 drivers and 18 attendants, while Pittsford said it needs 32 drivers. Rochester needs 21 drivers, not counting shortages with its contract providers.

On its website, the Pittsford district wrote that it anticipates driver availability becoming “even more limited during the winter months and flu season, compounding an already difficult situation. Families may feel the impact of this in delayed bus runs to and from school, as well as the cancellation of extra-curricular and athletic bus runs.”

Travis Anderson, public information officer at Rush-Henrietta, said that district is working hard to recruit drivers, “but it continues to be a struggle.”

However, the problem predates the pandemic, he said. “One of the reasons school districts were having trouble before was because the economy was so good,” he said, meaning that job seekers had many other options.

Others have noted that bus driver jobs combine relatively low pay, unusual hours, the stress of controlling dozens of children, some of whom are disruptive, and the ability to safely operate a large vehicle.

Like everyone else, drivers have suffered physically and emotionally during the pandemic.

But there is another trend in play here.

For a long time, Eastman Kodak retirees who wanted to continue working provided a “hugely reliable source of new bus drivers,” Anderson said. “But Eastman Kodak doesn’t turn out retirees like it used to. That’s really dwindled over the past 20 years.”

Of course, driver shortages are not unique to Monroe County, he said. “It’s a problem all across the country,” Anderson said. “But it certainly has caused people who haven’t been paying attention to sit up and take notice.”

About a month ago, Scott Donnelly, assistant superintendent for business in the Bloomfield, Ontario County, district, told the *Democrat and Chronicle*, “This year’s the worst year for us” for driver shortages.

“We have 10 (drivers) and we’re short three,” Donnelly said at the time. “We have two mechanics that can drive, and they drive every day.”

This story includes reporting by Justin Murphy.

Reporter Marcia Greenwood covers general assignments. Send story tips to mgreenwo@rocheste.gannett.com. Follow her on Twitter @MarciaGreenwood.



The Brockport Central School District announced early Thursday morning it was canceling school for students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade because of a bus driver shortage. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE /ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

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