

# **Center Square: School Districts Across Illinois Grapple With Lack of School Bus Drivers, Granite City Included In List**

by Kevin Bessler  
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**THE CENTER SQUARE** - School districts across Illinois grapple with a lack of school bus drivers. Granite City School District is one in the region that is battling the problem it was announced this week.

As the school year gets underway, signs that read “school bus drivers wanted” are a familiar sight throughout Illinois. The nationwide driver shortage is being felt in the Land of Lincoln.

Numerous districts are forced to tier bus schedules, with buses making multiple rounds to prevent overcrowding.

Parents in the Granite City area are being asked to find their children other means of transportation to school because of the driver shortage. This week, the district is providing bus transportation only for students in kindergarten through 4th grades, according to a letter on the district's website.

All 5th through 12th-grade students without a ride to school will be granted an excused absence and will be allowed to make up any work.

School officials are turning to mass transit for help. The district announced Madison County Transit will offer free bus rides to students through the end of the month. The three Granite City schools affected by the school bus driver shortage are along MCT's current routes.

"Due to the driver shortage, we had to change from two-tier schedule to three-tier schedule to use drivers on multiple routes," Peoria Superintendent of Schools Sharon Desmoulin-Kherat said.

Some bus company officials attribute the shortage to mass retirements during the pandemic. Others point to Gov. J.B. Pritzker's vaccination mandate for school employees. Scores of Chicago school bus drivers have reportedly quit because of the mandate.

East Aurora Superintendent of Schools Jennifer Norrell told the Chicago Tribune that some students are missing classes while others are sitting on buses for hours during hot weather due to the problem.

"It was a catastrophe," she said. "We didn't plan to have all those children and they sat there for hours hungry and exhausted."

Decatur Public Schools are also dealing with a school bus driver shortage.

"We continue to deal with a critical shortage of bus drivers due to COVID. We know the late buses, and in some cases missing bus routes, are exceptionally frustrating, not only for parents but for our school as well," the district said in a statement.