

## **The School District of Lee County Bus Stop Safety – Division A – Category 1A (Community Relations)**

**Research/Situation Analysis:** Serving a student body of 95,600+ students, The School District of Lee County focuses on providing a safe, secure and healthy environment for all. The District works closely with local, state and federal agencies to ensure it follows preventative safety measures, and it is important to the District for families to know safety for children, employees and the community is the priority. The District has 6,958 bus stops with 753 routes on which it transports 49,231 riders, making 35,599 stops a day. In early 2019, two families each lost a child in tragic accidents at a bus stop or while walking to a bus stop. While these accidents were caused by inattentive drivers, they rightly raised questions about the safety of school bus stops and walking areas. In the weeks following these accidents, hundreds of residents reached out to The District, asking how to make stops safer. According to an annual Licensed Driver Report from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, Lee County had a total of 578,528 licensed drivers as of Jan. 1, 2019, and Cape Coral/Fort Myers was ranked the 8<sup>th</sup> most dangerous metro area for walking in the U.S. by Smart Growth America's annual [Dangerous by Design](#) study. In April 2019, The District hosted a Bus Safety Town Hall to hear from concerned citizens, also encouraging citizens to submit their ideas for improvement. From this informal primary research at the town hall, the District learned that there was a need for greater awareness of bus stop safety procedures and more accessible bus stop safety information. With education at the core of its mission and with multiple communication tools under its control, The District leveraged its existing partnership with Priority Marketing to develop and execute a communications program that would educate the community on bus stop safety tips with the overall goal of student safety. Target audiences included the 578,528 Lee County residents of legal driving age; 95,600+ District students in grades K-12; parents of District students and parenting groups; 13,000+ District employees, including members of the transportation team, teachers and employees; law enforcement, EMS, Safe Kids Southwest Florida, Lee Health, Lee County Injury Prevention Coalition, MADD, and other safety partners; area businesses; and local media. **Objectives:** 1) To educate target audiences on back-to-school safety by generating attendance of more than 500 people to the District's Back-to-School Block Party, to be held before the start of the new school year Aug. 12, 2019; 2) Use multiple communication channels to reach target audiences with bus stop safety tips between May-August 2019 with the focus on back-to-school safety; 3) To leverage relationships with media in order to educate the community about bus stop safety through at least 10 positive media stories generated between May-August 2019. **Planning:** Priority Marketing and The District began planning in May 2019, working closely via phone and email to discuss and develop key components of the communications program. Content for the Bus Stop Safety and Back-to-School Block Party flyers were developed in June. Also in June, a date was set for the Back-to-School Block Party – to be held Aug. 3, 2019 – and Priority Marketing coordinated an initial site visit at the venue on June 25. A final in-person planning meeting was held July 15 at Bell Tower with The District, Priority Marketing and representatives from all key event partners including Bell Tower, Safe Kids and the Lee County Sheriff's Office. **Implementation:** Priority Marketing developed a communications plan designed to educate students and parents on bus stop safety procedures in the four months leading into the new school year, which began Aug. 12, 2019. Strategies included creating content to be shared via The District's owned communications' channels – website, email and social media – as well as with community safety partners. The content included a video, a landing page on The District's website, a social media plan with graphics and flyers – one for elementary students and parents and another for middle and high school students and parents – in both English and Spanish. A content schedule for social media posts was created and implemented. A bus stop safety video was developed, generating 768 total views on YouTube. Media relations was an influential strategy, and a guest opinion was authored by District leadership and placed in local newspapers and in Parent & Child magazine. Through media pitching, Priority Marketing secured multiple

stories on local TV, online and print. To reach a mass audience with hands-on safety activities, Priority Marketing and The District partnered to execute a back-to-school safety event. While the event was focused on bus stop safety, it was important that the event concept was full of fun to drive interest and attendance among target audiences so a variety of pedestrian, motor vehicle and bike safety activities were offered. Additionally, local performers and a DJ entertained attendees. Priority Marketing developed the event theme, “Back-to-School Block Party: Get Ready to Roll for Straight-A Safety!” Priority Marketing leveraged its relationship with Bell Tower to donate the venue for the event and partnered with Safe Kids Southwest Florida to bring in 12 safety experts to execute the educational, hands-on activities. Event graphics, a flyer, webpage and a Facebook event were created and launched, and a news release was distributed to more than 30 local media outlets. Additionally, Bell Tower donated their billboard space along U.S. 41, as well as paid radio spots, to promote the event. The District also sent an event announcement through its ParentLink electronic notification system for families of District students, a total of 95,000 recipients. Additionally, to ensure guests visited the interactive and educational booths located throughout Bell Tower, Priority Marketing developed a “Report Card” that served as a map and participation incentive. Students were encouraged to show their Report Card map at each station to receive an “A+” stamp. Once they collected five A’s, they could turn in their Report Card to the Dave & Buster’s table for a chance to spin and win a prize and be entered into a grand prize drawing. Lee County’s largest back-to-school block party was free and open to the public, offering family-friendly fun for all ages, including a “Safe-to-School” Safety Zone, interactive games, a bounce house, giveaways, music and a visit from the Lee County Sheriff’s Office to include Sheriff Carmine Marceno, multiple school resource officers and Deputy Dogs. The “Safe-to-School” Safety Zone helped get K-12 students ready to roll for straight-A safety, highlighting important safety tips for pedestrians, bicyclists, bus stop safety, driving and other student-related safety recommendations. The morning of the event on Aug. 3, 2019, Southwest Florida was hit with inclement weather. With safety the main focus of the event, it was important that safety of guests was the top priority. The decision was made to postpone the event, rescheduling for Aug. 10, 2019. This required a hefty undertaking of rescheduling with participants, notifying the community and media, updating District channels with the new date and sending an announcement through The District’s ParentLink. **Evaluation:** 1) Despite rescheduling, the event exceeded expectations. The rescheduled event doubled original attendance goals, reaching an estimated 1,000 attendees, exceeding the attendance goal by 100%. Students turned in 750 completed report cards and more than 400 swag bags filled with safety information and giveaways from partnering safety organizations were distributed. The Lee County Sheriff’s Office distributed 200 backpacks, and more than 300 bike helmets were given away by the Pilot Club. 2) Safety communication materials reached 24,600 on Facebook, 95,000 students via email and 12,000 employees via email during the May-August 2019 period. 3) Onsite coverage from all local TV news stations was secured for the event, along with the local newspaper, The News-Press and at least 65 favorable stories on bus stop safety and the back-to-school safety event were published by media between May-August 2019, surpassing its goal of 10 stories by 550% and attaining a total estimated reach of 5,562,997. **Budget:** The District leveraged its existing professional services retainer to cover Priority Marketing’s fully integrated scope of marketing, public relations and digital services. For the campaign running May 2019-August 2019, Priority Marketing spent 178.45 hours totaling \$18,025.70 (avg. \$104/hour at a discounted rate). Activities completed by District staff were covered under their normal compensation. Hard costs for stock images and printing of 1,200 flyers = \$520, 600 report card maps = \$75, stock images for digital graphics = \$25, facepainting vendor = \$320 and foam board and markers = \$40.46, totaling \$980.46. Bell Tower covered the costs for the venue, DJ, paid advertising tactics and copies of 150 additional report card maps printed onsite.