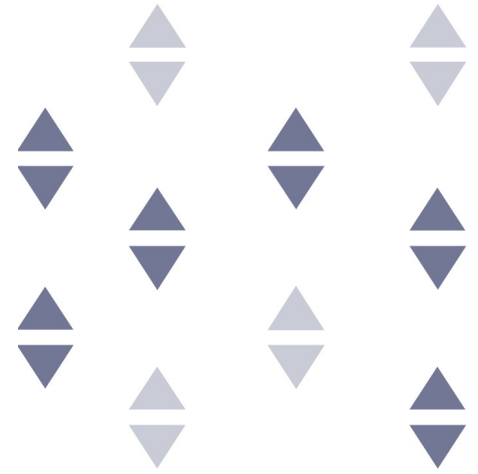


The Missing School Bus Drivers: A look at employment data before and after the COVID-19 pandemic

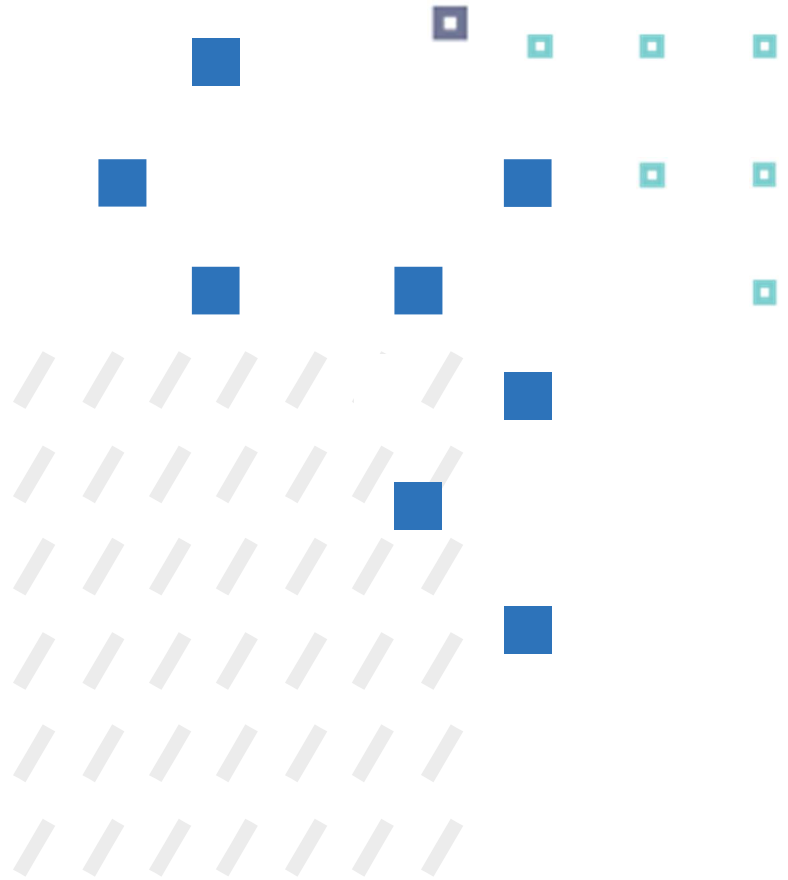
Research Note

The Missing School Bus Drivers



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Executive Summary

This fall brought school re-openings and a return to in-class learning on a wide scale. It also brought a scramble to get bus drivers back behind the wheel. While most school drivers answered the call and returned to work, we found that about 13% of them are missing in action.

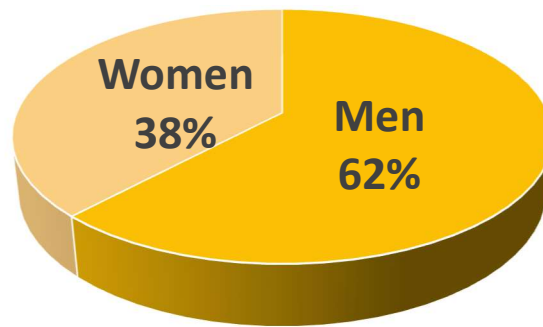
The ADP Research Institute used anonymized client payroll data to analyze school bus driver employment before and after the onset of the pandemic. We built our study sample by searching for the job title “school bus driver” at school systems and transportation companies.

We looked for changes related to demographics such as age and gender. And we tracked drivers over time to see what they did after the pandemic hit and, later, when schools reopened

Bus Driver Profile

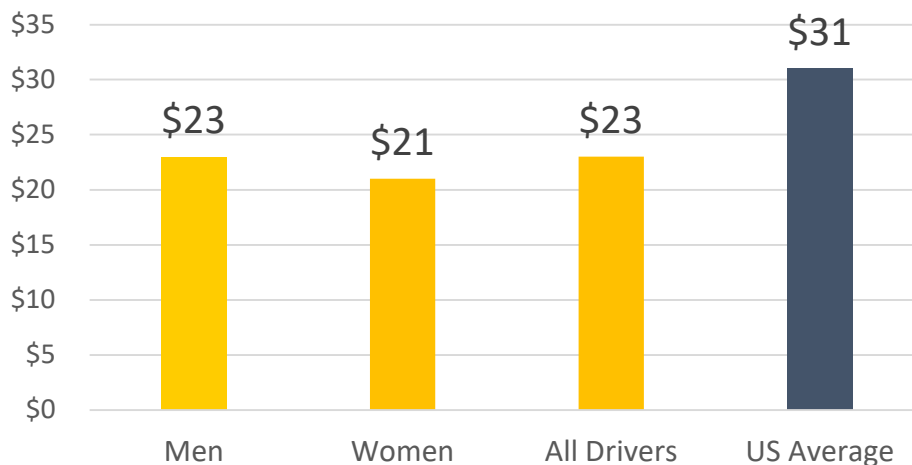
Men make up the majority of school bus drivers at 62%, compared to 38% for women.

Gender Composition of Bus Drivers



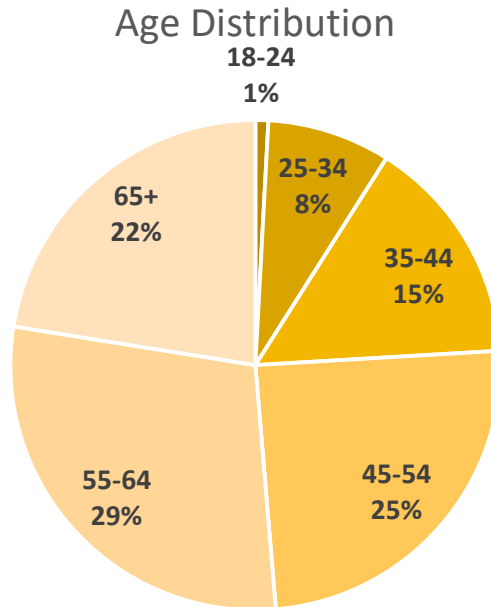
School bus drivers earn an average of \$23 per hour, roughly 70% of the national average of \$31 an hour for all U.S. workers. Women who drive school buses earn 91 cents on the dollar compared to their male counterparts.

Hourly Wages

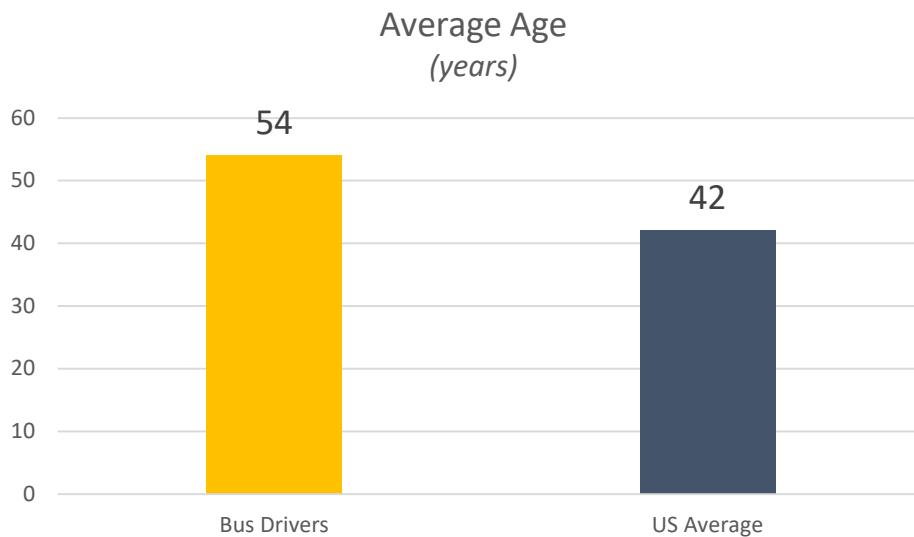


Bus Driver Profile

More than half of school bus drivers are 55 or older.



The average age of drivers in our sample was 54, or 12 years older than the average age of 42 for all U.S. workers.

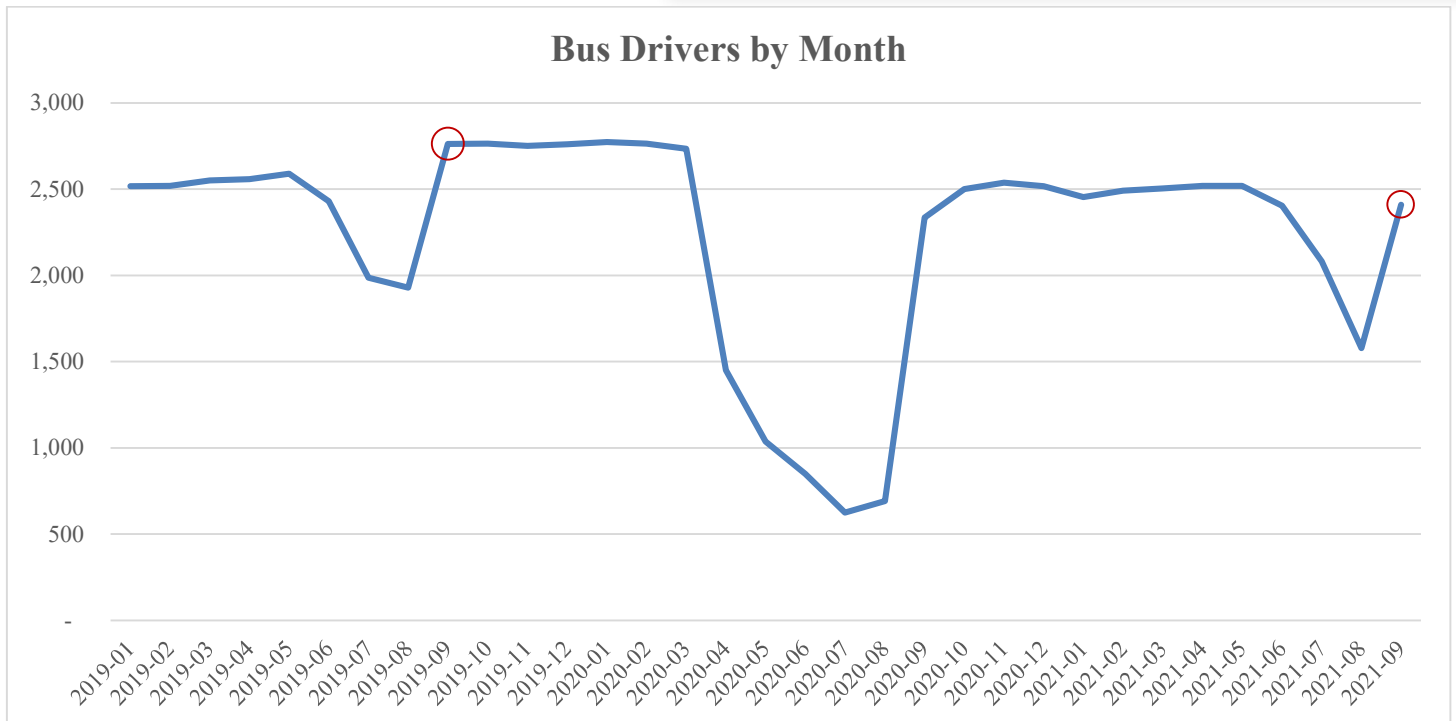


Employment Trends

Bus drivers took a big hit from the COVID-19 shutdown. Schools were shuttered and workers were furloughed. After classrooms re-opened, employment levels rebounded, but school bus driver ranks were 13% smaller in September 2021 than they were in September 2019.

As a whole, schools had **13%** fewer drivers in September 2021 compared to September 2019

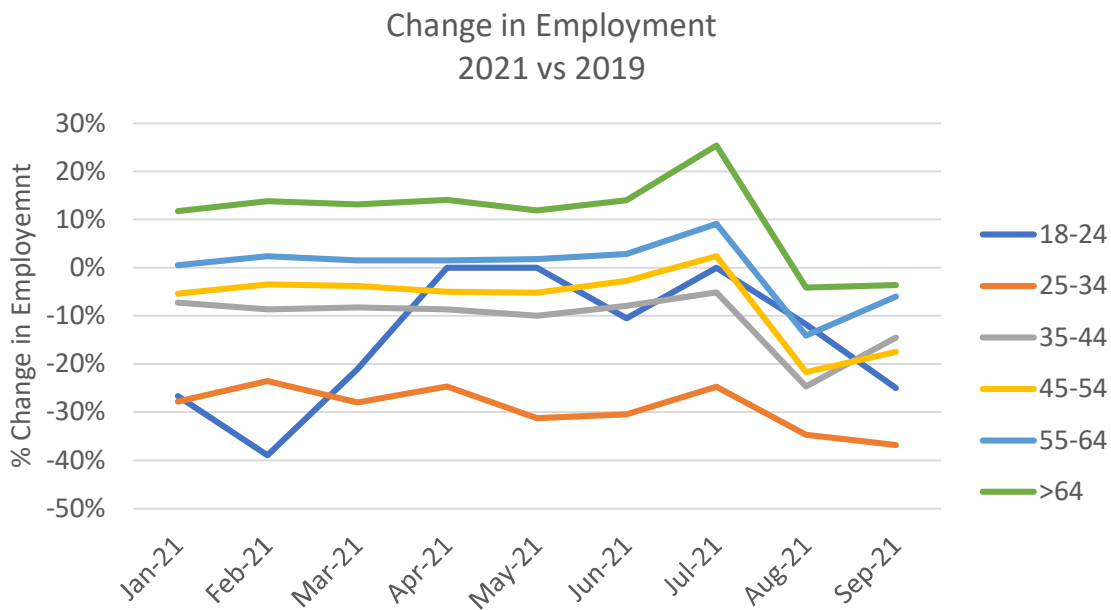
Bus Drivers by Month



School bus driver employment follows a seasonal pattern that coincides with the typical school year, peaking in the months of September through June, then waning during the summer.

Employment Trends

Employment dropped most significantly for 25- to 34-year-old drivers. Workers in this age group fell by nearly a third in 2021 from 2019 levels. Drivers 55 and older had the lowest drop in employment, falling less than 5% in September 2021 compared to 2019. In fact, these older drivers had modest increases in employment year over year prior to September.



Are bus drivers quitting to take better jobs? It's not likely. Only about 1% of drivers in our sample switched jobs. The other missing drivers seem to have left the workforce altogether, at least from the perspective of this study of the ADP sample.

Conclusion

Like many other workers, school bus drivers were hit hard by the pandemic as schools pivoted to remote learning. As in-person learning has returned, demand for drivers is up, but they're in short supply.

Relatively low wages, combined with health concerns, could be leading drivers to find better-paying and safer jobs. That might be especially true of drivers in the 25-to-34 age range, who have left in greater proportion than any other age group.

Schools typically have tight budgets, and workers with a commercial driver's license probably can command better pay elsewhere, especially in today's post-pandemic labor market.

Schools and other transportation contractors will need to entice drivers, especially their younger generation of drivers, with higher wages or other incentives to keep the wheels on the bus turning.



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