



Keokuk Community School District



The Keokuk Community School District is located by the Mississippi River in the extreme southeast corner of Iowa, where the Des Moines River meets the Mississippi. It is at the junction of U.S. Routes 61, 136 and 218. The city is named after the Sauk chief Keokuk, who is thought to be buried in Rand Park. It has two elementary schools (George Washington, and Hawthorne), Keokuk Middle School, and Keokuk High School. The Keokuk Community School District Private education is provided by Keokuk Catholic Schools (St. Vincent's School) and Keokuk Christian Academy. Keokuk is also home to a campus of Southeastern Community College



Keokuk was the longtime home of Orion Clemens, brother of Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. Samuel's visits to his brother's home led him to write of the beauty of Keokuk and southeastern Iowa in *Life on the Mississippi*.

The Mississippi River lock and dam along with the hydroelectric power plant, were built in 1913. They still use most of the original equipment. When the plant began operation in August 1913, it was the largest single powerhouse electric generating plant in the world. It is part of the Keokuk Lock & Dam, both of which are visible from a park at the foot of the commercial district. Built in 1913, the old lock was too small to serve the newer, larger barges. It was replaced in 1957 with a 1200' x 110' lock. At the time of construction in 1913, this was the longest dam in the world, with the longest transmission line and the highest voltage in the world.



Dave Grogan, Transportation Director at the Keokuk CSD, pictured left with his grandson, Brooks, was hired in July of 2018, and is in his 6th year as Transportation Director and he is also the Building Grounds Director for the district. Dave is a single father of a 32 year old daughter and she and my son in law have, grandsons, Brooks-5, and Wyatt-2 He said that they call him wild Wyatt!) "I never knew my heart could be so full!, Grogan said." For hobbies, He likes to work in his yard, spend time with his daughter and my grands. He also enjoys boating with friends on the Mississippi river. He said that he is also an avid history buff, especially local history and has served on a few different boards.

Grogan said, "I had always worked in retail grocery since I was in high school, in 3 different states, Iowa, Texas, and Illinois. I had a brief stint at a car dealership here locally, then managed a Tire and Auto center for 13 years. From there I worked as a conductor for BNSF railroad, until

I had some health concerns and my doctor strongly urged me to find other employment. A good friend of mine who was on the school board at the time contacted me and asked me to apply for this position. I interviewed on a Friday and was offered the job on the following Monday, and it has been a whirlwind of learning ever since! It is a challenging job, as well as ever changing, I learn daily!"

The Keokuk CSD Transportation Department is approximately 10.5 square miles. It currently has two buildings at the Bus Garage location, one that they use for offices, the Team's breakroom, and the mechanic's area. The other one is used for storage for grounds equipment and supplies as well as the wash bay area. The Keokuk transportation department transport approximately 570 students daily. Grogan said, "That is down from last year by about 200 students as with the Bus driver shortage we had to stop offering students transportation that did not qualify according to the state guidelines. We hope to be able to offer some of these services again in the near future."

Grogan said, "The Keokuk transportation department has two special needs drivers, one van driver that transports students back and forth from the two private schools and for the districts title and ELL services. We transport to and from Pre-K at midday to help parents who work. The districts has 7 regular bus route drivers, 2 sub drivers, 4 bus aides, 2 sub bus aides, and one amazing office assistant that has been with the district over 23 years, and her knowledge of the families of our district is irreplaceable!"

"We are retaining our driving staff by making some of them full time. One special needs driver is full time, and 5 of our regular route drivers are full time, we are able to do this by sharing them with other departments in our district, grounds, kitchen, and as our district mechanic, Grogan said."



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Grogan said, “The Keokuk CSD Transportation Department has an outstanding driving staff. Without our dedicated drivers and associates, this department couldn’t operate. They are all great to work with, and I enjoy working with them and being part of this outstanding team.”



(Left to right drivers and Bus aides) Matt Harmon, Dave Kraus, Dave Grogan (director), Jill Gull, Derek Land, Rex Widmer, Charles Sexton, Anrew Stevens, Jil McGraw, Nick Weirather (mechanic), Rita Kinkeade, Bryan Kies (lead grounds), Sandy Sanderson, Lennie Francis, Jennifer Doeshar (sub-office), Mike Hogan, and Don Capaldo missing that day is Shawn Marlin our Office secretary and dispatcher.



The drivers are standing in front of the newly completed mural in the Keokuk bus garage. The mural of a school bus was designed and painted by Corey Haner, a local artist who is a freelance artist. Grogan said, “He does a lot of things locally, grocery store windows and signs, he also is in a local band and is musically talented! He has 2 sons that graduated from our district. I contacted Corey and asked him if he could do something like this, and he stopped by to look at the project. I have known him for a long time. With us having 2 windows, I asked if he could do a whole bus and incorporate the windows. He sketched it out and I took it to our superintendent Dr. Kathy Dinger and she approved it, saying she thought it was a great idea, to help liven things up at the bus garage.



Grogan said, “Corey worked with a pencil, eraser, and a yardstick. It took him 3 days to draw, paint and finish this fantastic project. We are so pleased with the final end result.”



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School Bus inspections are an important part of the school transportation operation for any school district, and the Keokuk CSD has Nick Weirather, as their mechanic, he also works as a bus driver. Grogan said, “He does a wonderful job of keeping us moving, he always gets high praise from Joe Funk during our annual school bus inspections.”

The Keokuk CSD has looked at propane buses and even had an electric bus visit the transportation garage for several of the districts drivers to test drive. Keokuk is early in the stages of moving “green” including a biodiesel study, however, it is something that they are looking more closely at for the near future.

Dave Grogan's team perform the twice-a-year bus evacuation drills and they work closely with the elementary schools with positive behavior incentives. He said, “We strive to build relationships with our riders and it makes their ride, and our day go much more smoothly. It makes you feel good to be recognized in public by a student, as they run up and give you a hug when they see you, even some of the ones we have had to explain the rules over and over to, kids want to be successful.”



**Nick Weirather,
Keokuk Mechanic**



The district and Keokuk CSD went the extra mile and chose to purchase new buses with fully integrated car seats, after a state law in Iowa was passed requiring lap/shoulder seat belts on any new buses. The integrated car seats are included in the first eight rows of the buses and enable the school buses to transport preschool and daycare age children safely. Previously the district used the buses for students with disabilities and individually installed five-point harnesses when small children were transported, however the integrated system is faster and easier and adds transportation options to the fleet.



The new buses also feature extra storage for athletic trips and air-conditioning. “The district now has buses that include air-conditioning, which is a requirement to transport some students with disabilities, and it is an added benefit for children traveling long distances for athletic events,” Grogan said.

The buses also feature white roofs and tinted windows to aid in temperature control. Grogan said the department hopes to order a second special education bus with air-conditioning.

Dave Grogan stays very busy during the school day in regards to the transportation, and buildings and grounds, both sides of his position can be demanding at differing times. He still takes the time to remind his team that if everyone gets to school on time and back home SAFELY they had a great

day. They can adjust and work all the other pieces of the puzzle out as they present themselves in the future.

He said, “I always tell our drivers and bus aides to set their expectations high with the students as well as themselves. We won’t always achieve that but it is better than setting lower expectations and getting total chaos. I tell the students that the bus is an extension of the classroom, safety comes first at all times.”

Grogan noted that the district has like other school districts in Iowa dealt with a bus driver shortage. For anyone interested in becoming a bus driver, go to keokukschools.org/about-the-district/employment/.

School transportation requirements and student needs are ever changing, and the new special demands appear sometimes pretty fast and almost on a daily basis. It is clear that the Keokuk CSD has a great team of individuals that are working well together, and with the best interests of safety for all the students and staff in their community.