

Thomas Built Buses Opens Essay Contest to Identify School Bus Driver of the Year

Written by Ryan Gray

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Last fall, Dawn LeMasters was taken aback after learning she was selected as the 2012 Thomas Built Buses Children's Choice School Bus Driver of the Year. In fact, she said the award was a complete shock.

"I didn't even realize how much of a difference I made," said the 16-year veteran for Lake Orion Community Schools, which serves a small village community about 40 miles north of Detroit. "I always felt like the kids were giving me a gift ... until I read the words Charlotte wrote, I had no clue."

Charlotte is the fourth grader at Carpenter Elementary School who rides on LeMasters bus and whose essay was selected by five industry representatives from the media as well as NAPT, NSTA and NASDPTS. *Editor's note — This article's author is voting representative for School Transportation News.*

Students in the U.S. and Canada in grades kindergarten through six who ride on Thomas buses are once again invited by the manufacturer to submit essays of 90 to 200 words as well as pictures that describe why their school bus drivers are special. Specifically, Thomas asks: Does your driver help you feel safe on the bus? Does the driver know your name or start each day with a smile? Or encourage a spirit of sharing by organizing food, toy or book drives? Does the driver celebrate special occasions?

"Getting students safely to school and home again is a school bus driver's primary responsibility. Many drivers do this and go the extra mile," says Kelley Platt, president and CEO of Thomas Built Buses. "The essay contest lets us hear directly from children whose bus drivers have made a meaningful impact in their lives by being role models, champions, mentors and friends."

In LeMasters case, wrote Charlotte, that includes an on-board library of books, a reading buddies program and interactive games, one in particular inspired by the television show "Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?" Read the full article on LeMasters in [the February edition](#) of

School Transportation News magazine.

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First prize for the student is a laptop computer and a Thomas jacket, while the driver also receives a jacket and a \$1,000 Visa gift card.

Entries for this year's contest must be postmarked by May 31. Complete rules and entry forms are available [online](#) .