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School gets Kentucky's first propane-powered school bus

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CRITTENDEN COUNTY, Ky. - This could start something across the state of Kentucky. A local school system got a green light from the state and are part of a pilot program that could lead to big changes to school buses across the state.

Your children could soon be riding in a propane-powered school bus.

Friday, the lead bus mechanic for Crittenden County Schools showed off Kentucky's very first propane powered school bus.

School officials, local leaders and people from the propane industry learned more about the bus at a reception.

The bus will be the only one of its kind allowed in Kentucky for at least a year. Why can't other school districts get a ride like this? In Kentucky, there are strict safety requirements for school buses.

While the bus is safe, it wasn't allowed because it was different and didn't meet the specifications.

It took a lot of persistence to get just one propane bus.

With so many budget cuts, the district needed to save money and says this is how to do it.

A brand new diesel bus is a little cheaper than the liquid propane one and the miles per gallon is about the same, but the price per gallon for liquid propane is only \$1.28 per gallon.

The superintendent thinks the bus will save the school \$4,500 a year.

At first glance, bus number 1403 looks like all the rest.

Lead bus mechanic Wayne Winters is amazed by how quiet it is.

He says safety is a top priority.

"The safety of the bus is better than that of our other buses, the fuel cell that contains propane is listed and rated to be 40 times safer than that of a regular fuel bus," Winters said.

Superintendent Doctor Rachel Yarbrough said the kids who board the bus will be the ones who benefit from the money saved.

"This shows us a school district can also be energy efficient and reuse those dollars for student learning purposes," Yarbrough said.

The bus is powered by propane, just like the kind you put in your gas grill.

They'll use a pump and 500 gallon propane tank, that's now installed on school grounds.

Pump and tank would've cost the district \$10,000 but United Propane Gas donated it, seeing that this bus could lead to more propane business in the future.

When Yarbrough looks at this big yellow bus, she can't help but see all the green her schools will save.

As part of a pilot program, for one year Winters said he'll send the state detailed information about the buses performance including fuel economy, required maintenance, and even give the driver a chance to provide personal feedback.

The bus will be assigned to the driver with longest route because it costs less to operate per mile. Students of all ages will be on board.

Winters said a district in Chicago just added 25 to their fleet. Currently schools in Arizona, Indiana, and Nebraska also have buses similar to bus 1403. The Crittenden County Superintendent says she got a Kentucky Clean Diesel grant to pay for a portion of the bus. The school was out \$75,000.