

Lenoir County testing propane-powered bus



In the face of rising fuel costs, the Lenoir County Public Schools system is looking into propane power as a means of going green.

Brent Williams, LCPS executive director of operation, said at the encouragement of the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Lenoir County began looking into alternative fuel sources.

In the spring, the Lenoir County Board of Education was made aware of a chance to be a part of a pilot program for an auto gas bus. The bus is fueled by liquid propane.

In late July, the bus was delivered to Lenoir County. It has been used for summer programs at Kinston High School, a summer ESL program at Pink Hill Elementary, and most recently, for the county's early college at LCC.

After seeing the bus in action, Williams said he has walked away impressed.

“This is something we’ve seen in person as a viable option for the school system,” Williams said. “This is an important step and great starting point for us.”

According to Williams, the buses are quiet, run clean and the emissions are less damaging to the environment.

Armistead Mauck, of Cherry Energy, the company that has been supplying the bus with propane, outlined the benefits propane has for the buses.

“Because the fuel is such a clean burning fuel, there is a longer time between maintenance issues like oil changes,” Mauck said. “It cuts down on the wear and tear on the engine.”

Propane is also much cheaper than diesel. This week, the price of a gallon of liquid propane was \$2.22 compared to a range of \$3.74-\$3.99 for diesel fuel in Kinston.

Early College Principal Nick Harvey cited the lower cost as a benefit for the students, as well.

“Anything that will save dollars so we can put that money back into the classroom is a win for students,” Harvey said.

During the 2012-13 year, 141 Lenoir County buses ran a total of 1.3 million miles, Williams said.

Williams said you can't feel a difference when riding the auto bus versus a traditional bus, but there is a change in sound.

“When it first came in, you could barely hear it,” Harvey said.

The bus will remain in Lenoir County for another two weeks before heading to another district. However, the board has already received approval to bring in another auto gas bus in January.

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