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## NEWS UPDATE

# Propane bus fleets gain momentum in U.S. schools

## A propane bus costs about \$15,000 more than a diesel vehicle, but is less expensive to operate and maintain

By Alison DeNisco — District Administration, August 2016



A 2014 study from the U.S. Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory examined five districts using propane in their bus fleets, and some saved nearly 50 percent on a cost-per-mile basis for fuel and maintenance.

(Photo: Gettyimages.com/Leekris)

**T**ransitioning to eco-friendly propane school buses may help districts save money and safeguard student health.

Nearly every top school bus market now operates propane-fueled vehicles in its fleets,

including Chicago, New York and Los Angeles.

“The strong proponents say that it is a cost-effective change that along with saving money provides environmental benefits,” says Mark A. Walsh, president of Transportation Advisory Services, a student transportation consulting advisory firm.



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With [propane buses](#), students are not exposed to harmful chemicals in diesel exhaust, which the World Health Organization considers a carcinogen.

A propane bus costs about \$15,000 more than a diesel vehicle, but is less expensive to operate and maintain. Propane buses are not as efficient, but fuel prices make up for this, Walsh says—propane typically costs about 50 percent less than diesel per gallon.

The federal government offers rebates for schools replacing diesel buses, further incentivizing a purchase. A 2014 study from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Argonne National Laboratory examined five districts using propane in their bus fleets, and some saved nearly 50 percent on a cost-per-mile basis for fuel and maintenance.

The districts recouped the upfront costs of the vehicles and infrastructure needed (such as a propane fueling station and mechanic training) within three to eight years, the study found.

Because propane buses are relatively new, some uncertainty remains regarding future value, Walsh says. He recommends administrators considering propane do the following:

- Talk with several vendors to get the best price.
- Ask administrators from nearby districts about their experience with propane buses.
- Do a cost-analysis.
- Invest in mechanic training and a propane fueling station.

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