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Clarksville-Montgomery County School System Becomes Largest Alt Fuel School Bus Fleet in Tennessee With Launch of New Propane Buses

Now Have 16 Dedicated-propane, Blue-Bird Vision Buses, and Are Aiming for More

Cunningham, TN – Today, the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) officially launched its 15 new propane-powered Type C school buses that will be transporting their first students beginning on August 7. The launch event was held at Montgomery Central High School and showcased several of the new buses to the community. The vehicles were funded partially through a “Reducing Diesel Emissions for a Healthier Tennessee” grant that Tennessee Clean Fuels (TNCleanFuels) manages for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC).

The event marked another step in the school system’s quest to drive down bus maintenance costs, increase fuel cost savings, and to model cleaner, feasible, and cost-effective student transportation options that aren’t powered less environmentally friendly and more costly diesel.

School system Vehicle Maintenance Manager Ricky Phillips did much of the legwork to acquire the buses, beginning with the school system’s purchase of its first propane Blue Bird bus in 2014. “We bought the first one to see how it would compare to our diesels, which have been increasing our bus maintenance costs. That first bus worked without any issues and showed us that not only can propane work as an engine fuel on larger vehicles like a school bus, but reduced our bus maintenance costs by over 50 percent - from \$0.36/mile-bus to \$0.16/mile-bus,” says Phillips. “It went so well that we are looking to further expand the fleet and we are happy to finally be getting these additional 15 buses on the road.”



*Top: Senator Mark Green speaks during the press event.
Bottom, left to right: Alexa Voytek, Coordinator, Middle-West TN Clean Fuels; Rick Warren, Account Manager, Ferrellgas; Senator Mark Green; Jonathan Overly, Director, Tennessee Clean Fuels; Millard House II, Director, CMCSS; Ricky Phillips, Vehicle Maintenance Manager, CMCSS; Jill Hall, Planner, Clarksville MPO; Chuck Harvill, General Manager, Central States Bus Sales; Jim Sumrell, Chief Operating Officer, CMCSS.*

In 2015, CMCSS and TNCleanFuels began reviewing funding options that would help the school system grow its propane bus fleet. In 2016, Phillips applied for state EPA funding for 15 buses. CMCSS won the funding, ordered the buses as soon as possible, and received them in time to put them on the road at the start of the 2017-2018 academic year. Additionally, in 2017, TNCleanFuels released a new round of State EPA Funds, and CMCSS won additional funding to assist in the purchase of seven additional propane school buses for the 2018-2019 scholastic year. **By July 2018, CMCSS should have a total of 23 propane school buses on the road – far and away the largest alternative school bus fleet in Tennessee.**

Jonathan Overly, Executive Director of TNCleanFuels noted, “Propane is growing in use in Tennessee because of its low incremental or system costs and the low cost of propane right now, which is averaging about \$1.50/gallon nationally. When you factor in its wide availability and the maintenance cost savings—especially as compared to diesel—it is easy to see why the fuel is gaining a foothold here.”

Millard House II, Director of the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System, said, “The health and well-being of our children is paramount for us, so we see the move to propane school buses as something that can truly be a win-win for us by reducing emissions and costs at the same time.”

Senator Mark Green who serves the 22nd district that includes of Stewart, Montgomery and Houston Counties also spoke and said, “It’s exciting to see Montgomery County School System continuing to lead the state. And leading in this particular area is critical, decreasing the emissions that our children are exposed to is an essential step forward. I want to thank everyone who helped bring this project to fruition.”

Last year, the CMCSS Operations Department received the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Sustainable Transportation Award. Other partners that have assisted CMCSS and other school districts in learning about propane school bus options include Central States Bus Sales (out of Lebanon, TN), ROUSH CleanTech who developed the engine that reduces the emissions, and Blue Bird Corporation, which has been developing several types of cleaner-fueled buses to provide their customers with more options.



Above: A photo of all 15 of the new propane buses as they were lined up during delivery of the buses to CMCSS. Notice the bird on the top left of the bus is green instead of black, indicating that this is an alternatively fueled school bus.

Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) emissions are the most common and persistent pollutant causing harm in Tennessee communities. With regard to emissions reductions, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) recently certified the ROUSH CleanTech engine used in the Blue Bird Type C school buses to a NOx level of 0.05 grams/bhp-hr (a unit of emissions measurement). Tennessee has more communities that are under duress from NOx emissions than any other pollutant. This emissions level is well below the current standard for school buses of this size of 0.20 g/bhp-hr, and will protect the health of the children that ride these buses and around the community. You can read more about that CARB certification and where national NOx emissions come from in a [recent article in the Fuels Fix national alt-fuel ezine](#) (pp. 9-10).

About CMCSS – CMCSS is the seventh largest school district in Tennessee, is located between Fort Campbell, Kentucky and Nashville, and serves a population of over 147,000 people. According to US Census figures, Clarksville is one of the top five fastest growing cities in the country. CMCSS serves approximately 33,700 students and employs about 4,700 teachers, administrators and support staff across its 39 schools. The CMCSS mission is “to educate and empower our students to reach their potential” and believes collaborative efforts with local government, civic and faith-based organizations and the business community are the best way to prepare its students to be college and career ready. <http://www.cmcss.net>

Tennessee Clean Fuels is the overarching name for Tennessee’s two regional nonprofit organizations—East Tennessee Clean Fuels and Middle-West Tennessee Clean Fuels—that serve and work proactively with regional fleets and partners to reduce dependence on petroleum and improve air quality and sustainability. Both coalitions are designated partners in the US Department of Energy’s Clean Cities Program. <http://tncleanfuels.org>

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