



Schools try to cut bus costs

By Wendy K. Kleinman
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Lawton schools lost 500 bus stops this year to fuel hikes, and the district is not alone. Guthrie, Shawnee and Blanchard also are cutting stops and routes.

Nationwide, 99 percent of superintendents say rising fuel and energy costs are affecting their school systems, according to a survey released last month by the American Association of School Administrators. Many of the 546 superintendents surveyed said they will consider or are considering eliminating and consolidating bus routes this year.

The Oklahoma City School District, however, will add five routes. The new routes are necessary because Centennial High School is moving, and the distance to the new location means every student is eligible for bus service, district Transportation Director Stephen Foster Jr. said.

Still, the district condenses routes so they are more efficient, Foster said. He estimated the department saves \$1 million every year by doing so.

The city district's transportation budget, which also covers maintenance, salary and related costs, is \$7.2 million, he said.

The Lawton School Board announced Aug. 4 that the district would save about a quarter of a million dollars by moving the boundary for bus eligibility from one mile from school to a mile and a half for middle and high school students.

Mitigating costs

Oklahoma districts likely will spend about \$58 million on gasoline this year, according to the state Education Department. That's at an average cost of \$4.25 per gallon of diesel.

At the end of last week, diesel cost \$4.23 per gallon, about 47 percent higher than the same time a year ago when it was \$2.87, according to AAA.

But the Oklahoma City district is looking for other ways to cut fuel consumption.

Foster said if all drivers can keep their idling times below five minutes, it would probably save 10 percent on fuel each day.

Field trips

Oklahoma City Schools will not be cutting field trips because of fuel prices, spokeswoman Kathleen Kennedy said.

That's in part because of money the district receives from the Foundation for Oklahoma City Public Schools, she said.

The foundation gives school organizations up to \$1,000 to go to academic or artistic competitions through a program called Student InCENTives, spokeswoman Melissa Milligan said.

Last year, the maximum was \$500, but Milligan said the foundation doubled the amount specifically because of rising costs.

A little more than \$7,000 was doled out last year, she said.

Separately, some places such as the [Gavlord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum](#) as well as the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History offer help covering transportation costs for school groups.