

LEVELED BOOK • R

The Super School Bus System

MULTI
level
R•U•X

Written by Keith and Sarah Kortemartin

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

What are the benefits
of a school bus system?

Words to Know

discriminated
integration
mass transit
rural
school districts

segregated
sparsely
Supreme Court
transportation

Page 3: Children at an army base ride a horse-drawn "bus" to school in 1943. Horses and wagons helped conserve gasoline and tires during World War II.

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The Trusty Bus

Sarah shivers on her short morning walk. It's a freezing winter day, but when she reaches the school bus stop, she knows she won't have to wait for long. The yellow school bus pulls up right on time.

She greets the driver as she boards. After that, though, the bus ride is a part of her day she simply takes for granted.





Taxes to Transportation

In the United States, Sarah and many other students depend on bus service to get to school. Few people ever stop to think about how that bus system works. Yet the American school bus system is one of the most important and complex **mass transit** systems in the country. Busing students to school requires the efforts of thousands of people.

The vehicles, drivers, and everything else that makes the school bus system work are run by local **school districts**. School buses are often paid for with local property taxes. People are taxed on the value of their property. They pay that tax to local governments, which use it to pay for services such as schools. Buses support the American public school system, which promises every student an education.

Mass Transit on a Massive Scale

Planning the system of buses that move students to and from school is an enormous job. The U.S. system uses more vehicles and moves more people than any other form of mass transit in the country. In 2013, about 480,000 buses carried students to school each day. Slightly more than half of public school students, about twenty-six million of them, used school buses daily. In fact, the American school bus system has more than twice as many vehicles as all the other American mass transit systems combined.

The American school bus system is so enormous for several reasons. The country's large size, its large population, and its lack of other public transit options for students in many areas make school buses necessary. **Rural** areas often have no public transit options at all outside the school bus system. Rural American school buses tend to have very large routes. The rural school bus system in Kingman, Arizona, for example, covers an area larger than the entire state of Delaware.

Math Minute

At 1,954 square miles (5,060 sq km), Delaware is the second smallest of the fifty states. In Arizona, the Kingman Unified School District (KUSD) is more than 3,000 square miles (7,779 sq km). If KUSD is 3,000 square miles, how much larger is it than the state of Delaware?

Answer: 1,046 square miles (2,709 sq km)

School **transportation** planners try to make sure that students don't spend too much time traveling back and forth every day. They try to set up bus stops that aren't too far away from students' homes. That way, students can walk to their stop. Many districts offer bus service to any student who lives more than 2 miles (3.2 km) from school. Students who might be placed in danger by walking to school (by crossing a highway, for instance) are often offered bus service, too.



Sometimes kids make less-than-safe crossings in order to reach school.



A horse-drawn stagecoach school bus waits in front of a Colorado high school around 1910.

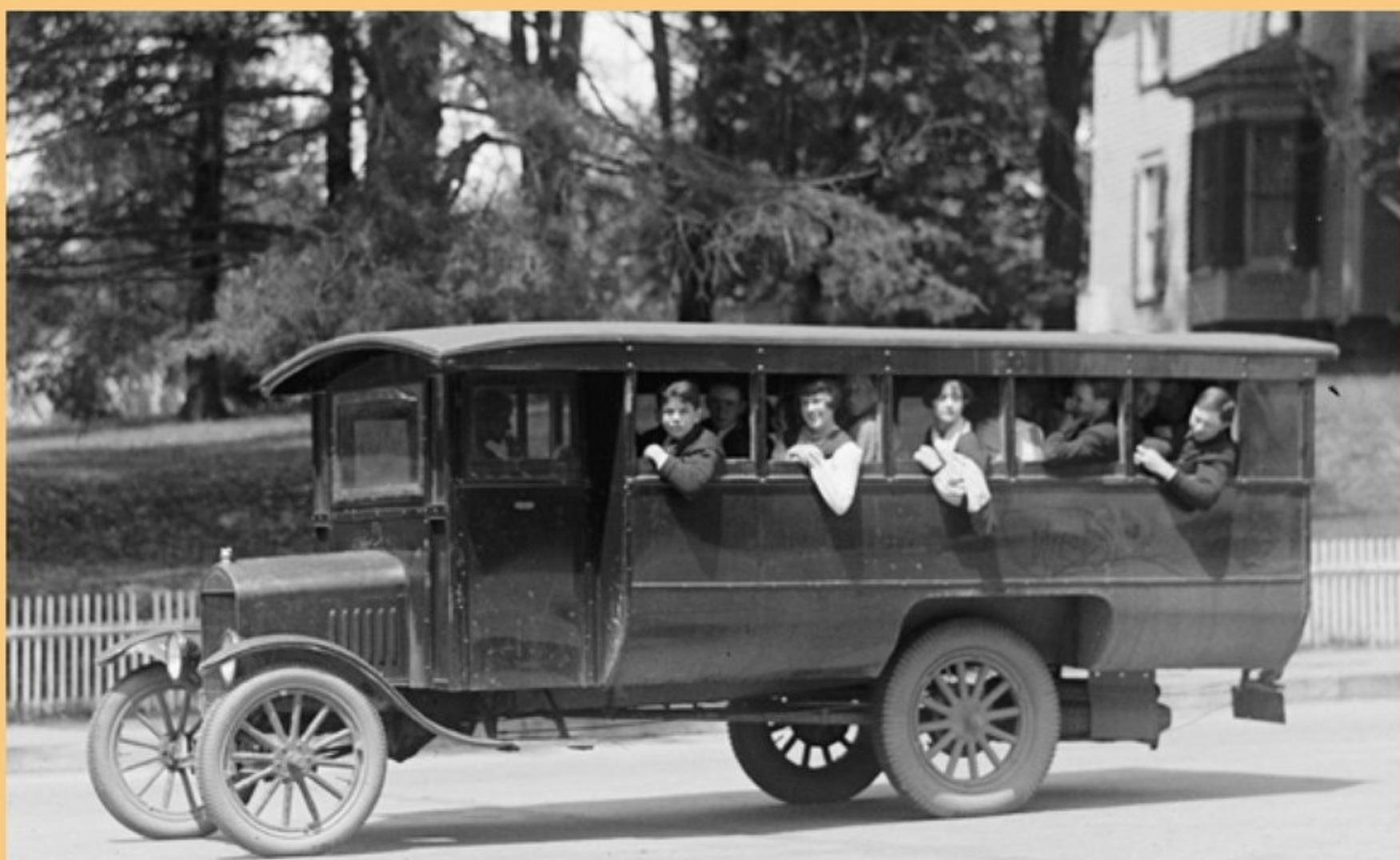
History

American public schools began mass transportation for their students long before the modern school bus existed. In the 1800s, many students attended one-room schoolhouses in **sparsely** populated rural school districts. Some students walked. Others used horses or sleds to get to school. Over time, school districts discovered that it worked well to use a system of horse-drawn wagons. These wagons would pick up students and take them to school.

In time, horse-drawn wagons gave way to motor vehicles. School districts set up routes and lined up vehicles. The vehicles picked up students before school and delivered them near home at the end of the day.

Yes to Yellow

The first vehicles that carried students didn't look much like modern buses. A school bus from the 1920s, for example, looked like a long car. Buses gradually grew larger to hold more and more students. The yellow color of modern school buses was chosen because it was easy to spot. Because buses stand out on the road, drivers see them and stop in time to allow students to board safely. Today, the law says that American school buses must be painted a color called "National School Bus Glossy Yellow." The bright color helps drivers recognize school buses in an instant.



a school bus in 1925

Then came a new goal—school **integration**, which brought African American and white children together in schools. Before 1954, many American schools were **segregated**, meaning that black students and white students were sent to separate schools. These segregated schools were not equal. White students usually received better educational opportunities and more resources than black students did. In 1954, the U.S. **Supreme Court** said that school segregation **discriminated** against African American students, and integration began.



A woman explains the decision to end school segregation to her daughter in 1954. They sit on the steps of the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.

For a time, school buses played an important part in school integration. In the 1970s and 1980s, schools worked together to bus black students to white schools and white students to black schools. By the 1990s, however, most school districts had stopped using busing to desegregate schools.



As part of integration, white children are bused in North Carolina in 1973 (left). Black children are bused in Ohio in 1979 (right).

In recent years, closing schools has led to consolidation. This involves several smaller schools combining into one larger building. Consolidation can cut education costs, but it also means that some students have to travel much farther to school. It makes bus routes larger and more complex. One school bus route in rural Texas took some students roughly 100 miles (160 km) each way in the mid-1990s. These students spent more time on the bus than they did in school!

Safety

School buses are forty times safer than private cars. Bus drivers receive strict safety training. What's more, school buses have emergency exits and reinforced roofs. They have seats that help keep students safe in the event of a crash. The seats are spaced closely together, and seat backs are made to absorb an impact.

Buses may also include flashing stop signs, which alert drivers that students are getting off or on the bus. Some buses have cameras that help drivers see what's happening inside the bus and outside.



When a school bus puts out its stop sign, traffic in both directions must stop.

Do You Know?

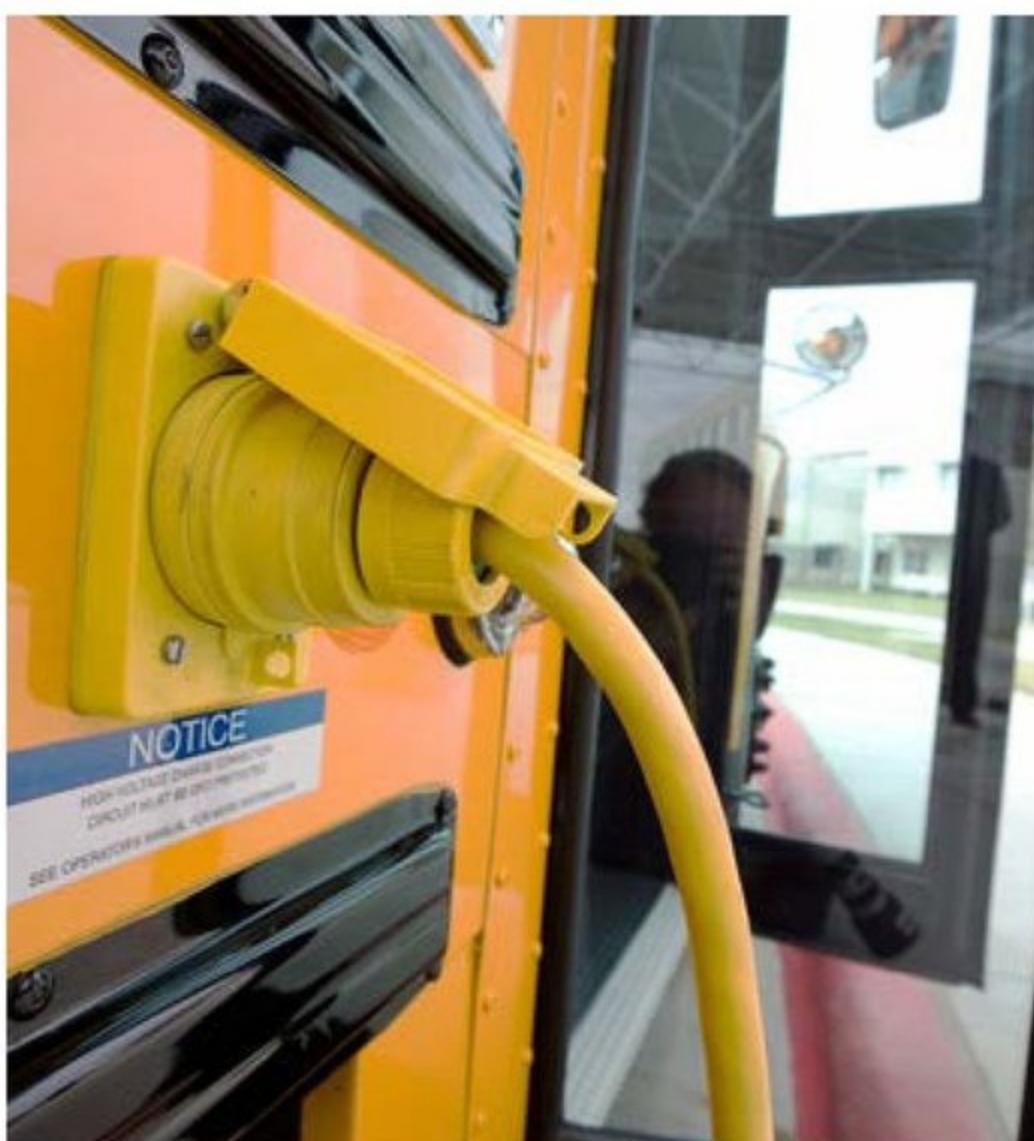
Seat belts make passengers in private cars much safer. Whether this holds true for school buses is less clear. For one thing, buses are built with much tougher safety standards. For another, buses often hold more than fifty students at a time. It's hard, then, for the school bus driver to make sure all those students are even wearing their safety belts.

Yellow Buses Go "Green"

Some school districts are also beginning to make changes to buses that help the environment. For instance, one school bus in New York has an electric engine that doesn't pollute the air. The bus can travel for about

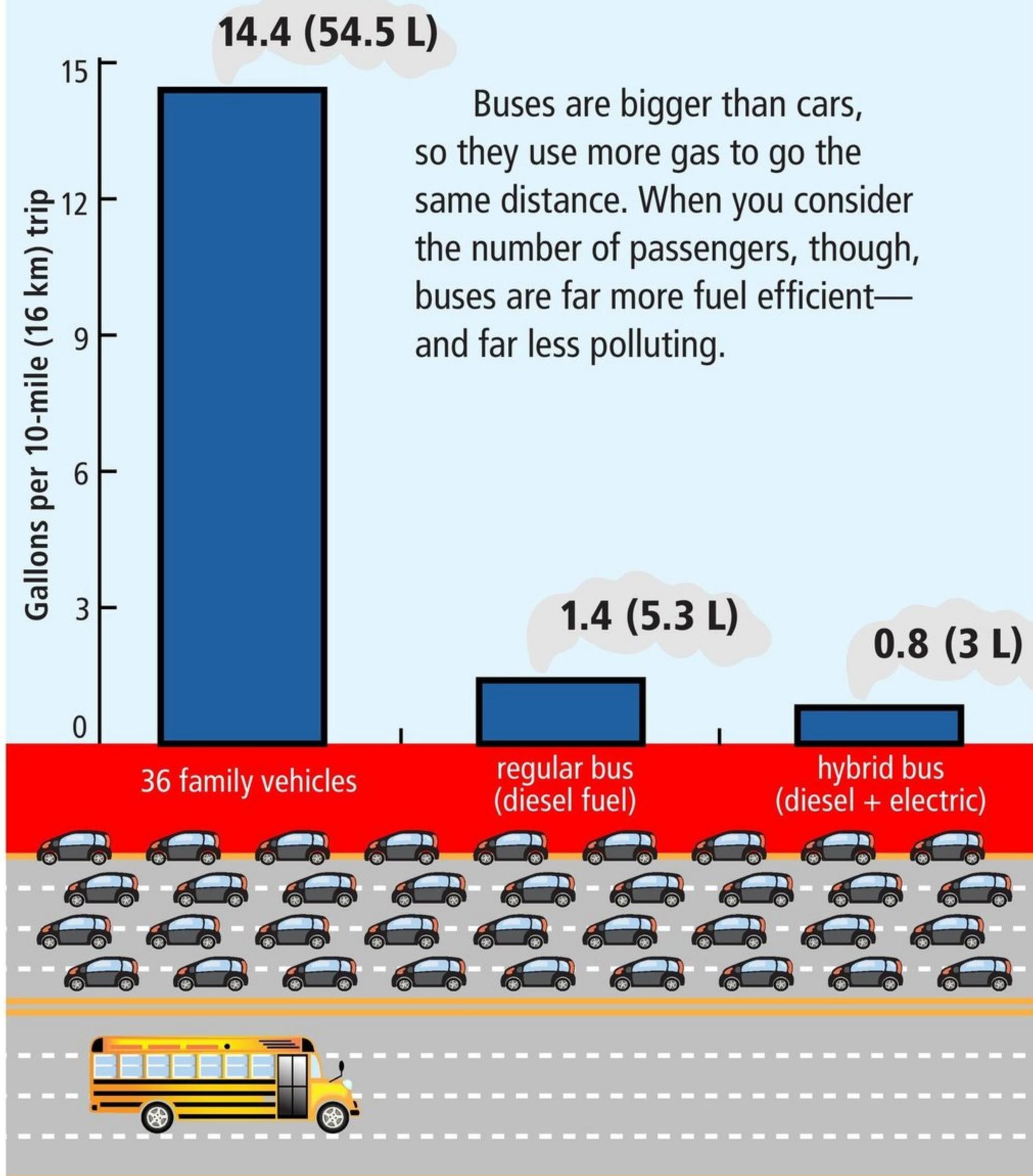
120 miles (190 km) before it needs to be recharged.

Another "green" trend in school buses is the use of propane fuel. Propane is much less expensive than normal bus fuel and less polluting.



Hybrid buses like this one use both electricity and fuel. As a result, hybrid buses get better mileage than regular school buses.

On the Road: Fuel Efficiency



School buses can also cut down pollution by replacing private vehicles. The average school bus can drive fifty-four students, which keeps about thirty-six private vehicles off the road. This fact, along with newer, greener technology, can help keep the air cleaner.



Conclusion

The school bus slows to a stop. Sarah gathers her things and follows the other students off the bus.

The bus pulls away from the curb, its job done for now. At the end of the day, it'll be waiting for them, ready to start the whole journey again in reverse.

Glossary

discriminated (v.)	treated a person or group unfairly because of gender, race, age, religion, or other differences (p. 10)
integration (n.)	a process that allows all races to have equal access to facilities, schools, and other parts of society (p. 10)
mass transit (n.)	a public transportation system that moves large numbers of people using buses, subways, or trains (p. 5)
rural (adj.)	of or relating to the country rather than the city (p. 6)
school districts (n.)	areas or regions containing all the schools managed by local school authorities (p. 5)
segregated (adj.)	kept apart based on group differences, such as race (p. 10)
sparsely (adv.)	in small numbers or amount; thinly spread out (p. 8)
Supreme Court (n.)	the highest court of law in the judicial system of the United States (p. 10)
transportation (n.)	the act of moving things or people from one place to another (p. 7)

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Connections

Writing

Research a system that another country uses to get students to school. Use a Venn diagram to compare that system with the U.S. system. Then, write a paragraph about how they are the same and different.

Social Studies

Create a timeline about the history of the school bus in the United States that includes facts and pictures. Use the book and outside resources.

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