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County school buses adding Wi-Fi



Apollo High School sophomore Taryn Ferguson, left, demonstrates along with fellow sophomore Hunter Wilson, using Wi-Fi on or near a Wi-Fi equipped school bus on Thursday. Ferguson is a member of the school's volleyball and basketball teams, and Wilson a member of the football team. The student athletes said they look forward for the opportunity to use the Wi-Fi for schoolwork while traveling to away games and on field trips.

By Keith Lawrence Messenger-Inquirer

By next year, Daviess County Public Schools hopes to turn roughly a fourth of its fleet of 117 school buses into mobile study halls.

The school system has already installed wireless Internet access on buses that are being used for extended field trips and to transport students to and from school activities.

Soon, it hopes to have them on regular routes.

Anthony Sparks, the system's director of instructional technology, said the goal is to equip all the buses with Wi-Fi.

"But we have more than 100 buses," he said. "We're hoping to get Wi-Fi on 25 to 30 of them within the next year. Some of them would be on regular bus routes. We would probably start with buses that have the longest routes."

Lora Wimsatt, the school system's public information officer, said the longest bus route is between 60 and 75 minutes.

The buses transport about 7,000 students over 11,000 miles of city streets and county roads each day, she said.

The Wall Street Journal, in a 2008 story, traced the use of school buses as mobile study halls to early 2007 and the Aspinaut Initiative, which gave some high-performing students in rural Arkansas laptops or video iPods and set them up with online courses and educational videos during their long bus rides to and from school.

"Our goal is to expand instructional time by providing filtered Internet access to students when traveling on a school bus," said Steve Burton, DCPS' computer operations manager.

The system's technology staff worked with AT&T vendors to resolve encryption and routing issues to make certain that "inappropriate websites" were blocked, Wimsatt said.

Sparks said, "Daviness County Public Schools is a technology-rich district where students in grades 9-12 have 24/7 laptop access."

It was the first school district in Kentucky to implement a student laptop program, he said.

"The availability of technology is significantly increasing for elementary and middle school students," Sparks said. "Students on all levels are encouraged to bring their own technology devices to school to enhance learning."

He said the Wi-Fi connected buses will benefit students even when school is out for the summer.

The school system plans to place buses in strategic locations around the county during the summer so students will have "hot spots" for Internet access.

"We want to encourage students to continue to access and read both literary and informational texts, use the Internet to research topics of interest and utilize digital resources to maintain literacy and numeracy skills and engage in thinking," Sparks said.

Two buses already have Wi-Fi, paid for with the system's technology funds.

Equipping 25 more buses with wireless access is expected to cost about \$30,000 for the equipment and \$8,000 for the monthly cost of Internet access.

Wimsatt said the first use of the Wi-Fi equipped buses was by band students from Apollo and Daviness County high schools on a trip to the Morehead State University Band Clinic.

"Whether on a 30-minute bus ride to school, a 90-minute ride to an evening competition or an extra-curricular journey across the state, students will be able to better maximize their time for learning," Sparks said. "Because the system is designed to work reliably in almost every area of the state, students can easily complete teacher assignments, research particular topics, collaborate with friends on projects and create meaningful digital products."

In 2012, [Governing.com](http://www.governing.com) reported: "In an effort to increase student learning time by roughly 26 days a year, a school district in Huntsville, Ala., has voted to equip 20 buses with wireless Internet routers. In the rural district, students on these bus routes spend an average of two hours per day going to and from school."

It added, "Each system is equipped with filters that block students from inappropriate websites, and parents can track the location of the bus through the router. The program follows a similar model that has been tried in approximately 25 other school districts in at least six other states."

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