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WRUSD will be purchasing 10 new school buses from Canyon State.

FT. DEFIANCE—Window Rock Unified School District No. 8 is going to purchase 10 new school buses for the upcoming school year.

Superintendent Lynnette Michalski said the district has invested about \$1.2 million to replace aging buses in the school district's fleet.

During the June 13 board meeting, transportation director Marjorie Nez said the buses were selected based on recommendations from district mechanics and drivers alike.

"The buses are 2019 Blue Bird conventional diesel, all 10 of them. The older models that we're going to trade in, they've made their distance and beyond that," she said of the 2001-2002 models in the fleet.

The Transportation Department received three quotes for the buses in accordance with procurement regulations and ultimately selected Canyon State Bus Sales for the purchase.

The 2019 Blue Bird Vision buses feature a Cummins B6.7 liter, 250 horsepower diesel engine, seven-speed automatic transmission, 100-gallon fuel tank, air brakes, and a capacity of 83 passengers.

Board member Carl Hillis spoke about Gov. Doug Ducey's initiative to replace aging school buses in the state.

He said, "I saw on the news that Gov. Ducey had indicated that he was going to deliver 100 school buses for needy districts. Did anybody else hear this comment from him?"

In early June, Ducey announced that 280 aging and high-polluting school buses were going to be replaced at no cost to taxpayers.

The bus replacements would be at an estimated cost of \$38 million, which would be paid for by the state's share of a nationwide settlement with Volkswagen. The initiative would replace buses that are more than 15 years old and have more than 100,000 miles on the odometer.

The buses are for school districts that have at least 60 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Michalski said the 100 buses would be distributed to schools throughout the state.

"When you divide those 100 buses out throughout the counties in the state, Apache County is only being awarded eight buses," she said, adding that the district met the criteria

to apply.

WRUSD has 33 buses, 11 of which are going to be traded in for new buses.

The school bus drivers and mechanics for the district provided input on the selection of the school buses and shared their concerns with Canyon State about the unique challenges of traveling on dirt roads on the Navajo Nation.

School bus mechanic Evans Jensen said the new buses will address issues the district has faced with regard to mechanical issues.

"We selected diesel engines because they have more torque. On these school buses, you have a full load and these buses have to uphill to places like the Summit," he said.

He said mechanics and drivers alike took into consideration about the need to travel through rain, snow and mud to transport students to and from school. Challenging bus routes like traveling from Blue Canyon to Sawmill were primary considerations.

In addition, the district's 2001-2002 buses have parts that are obsolete and the mechanics often had to fashion replacement parts in the shop to overcome this challenge. None of the bus dealers sold the parts and Jensen often had to call other tribal school districts for support in some instances.

"We had trouble searching for parts, even though Canyon State sells bus parts for these buses," he said.

These obsolete parts ranged from air brake hoses and valves and the fuel system. The fuel water separator was a major concern because it

was located just above the rear axle. This part separates the moisture from the diesel and is a filter with a canister.

"During the winter time when it's minus 10 degrees, you still have a wind chill underneath the bus as you're driving. That diesel just gels up, turns into jello and it doesn't get any fuel to the fuel line, the return and the supply. Pretty soon, it just shuts down," Jensen said.

The school district shared these issues with Canyon State and the new buses will be improved in these areas to provide a "Navajo bus" that can handle the unique reservation conditions.

Another concern was the heating system on the bus. Instead of just one or two heaters located beneath certain bus seats, a new and improved floor heating system will equally distribute heat throughout the new buses.

"The new buses, they will have a floor panel heating system. That's another update they will have for us.

Nez said the district has 76 bus routes that include regular school routes, pre-school, Scouts Pride and evening activity buses.

She noted that the cost of a Blue Bird Vision is about \$115,000.

If WRUSD is awarded a bus from the Ducey initiative, she would like to select a transit bus for the district.

Board member Brenda Wauneka motioned to approve and the action was seconded by board president Scott Tomlinson. The action passed by a vote of 4-1, with Hillis opposing the measure.