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NYC KIDS LEARN TO DRIVE IN FLEET ELECTRIC CARS *KEITH T. KERMAN/MAHANTH JOISHY*



To start the 2015 school season, DCAS has partnered with the Department of Education (DOE) to introduce electric cars for use in DOE driver education programs citywide. For the first time, NYC high school students are developing skills for their future while also driving the vehicle of the future.

As part of a citywide investment in electric vehicles, DCAS is replacing five older gas sedans at DOE with 2015 all-electric Nissan Leafs. These vehicles are being used for driver education programs at three NYC high schools: South Richmond High in Staten Island, Automotive High in Brooklyn, and Thomas A. Edison High in Queens. An additional car will be added at Leon M. Goldstein High School in Brooklyn. The older traditional gasoline sedans that were replaced include models such as the Ford Taurus, Chevrolet Corsica, Saturn

SL, and Mercury Sable.

These new Leafs run purely on electrical charge and produce zero emissions. They are the first zero emission vehicles tasked for NYC high school driver's education, so far, and are the first exposure many of these students have had to any electric vehicles, much less the opportunity to learn how to drive in one of them.

These classes are taught by teachers with years of experience, such as Roger Dacey at South Richmond who has instructed driver's education for 46 years (pictured above with his 2015 fall semester class). "The very first car I taught on was a 1971 Ford Galaxy lent from the dealer," said Dacey, who has used numerous different models in his career, none of which were electric until now. Courses are attended by either work-study students or special needs students, sometimes traveling from afar. Every student receives on-road driving training at parking lots, local roads, and highways, along with in-class instruction, to prepare them for the NY State DMV licensing tests.

All participating students are Juniors or Seniors of driving age. Students earn their way into the class through criteria such as good attendance, high grades, and strong performance records both at school and outside of school. Although the class is hands-on, students are required to take notes and complete homework assignments as with all of their coursework. The course is rigorous, and passing is not guaranteed.

What do the kids think of the Nissan Leaf? "They love and enjoy the car. Kids often comment that it's like driving a computer," says Dacey in reference to the high-tech displays, buttons, and widgets. "Electric motors are a lot more responsive than gasoline vehicles. I'm astounded at how powerful it is for such a small car. I have to be more alert with the kids, especially on the turns, and educate their feet." Fortunately, the car has been outfitted with an extra right-side brake for the instructor just in case. Several students have wondered if they could ever afford an electric car like the one they are learning on, and this gives us the chance to let them know how quickly prices are declining for EV vehicle models such as the Leaf.

Thanks to Sherry Lee at NYC Fleet, Ronald Bundick and the team at DOE Facilities Management, and the school instructors for pulling together this great new effort in both driver and environmental education.