

# Actualizing Equity 2023

## Electric School Buses for Environmental Justice

Every weekday, the emissions from diesel school buses threaten the health of hundreds of thousands of Minnesota's K-12 students and drive up harmful air pollution in BIPOC communities. During the 2023 Minnesota state legislative session, directly impacted community members, health professionals and advocates worked to pass significant funding to electrify more school bus fleets and prioritize school districts in communities already facing environmental justice impacts and disparities. At our June 2023 Actualizing Equity event, we heard more about this campaign from Sonita van der Leeuw, Transportation Organizer, MN350; Brooke Roper, community leader, mother, asthma survivor; and Dan Trajano, professor of health care finance and economics.



### Why are electric school buses an environmental justice issue?



**25%**  
of total CO2  
emissions

Medium and heavy duty vehicles, including school buses, produce 25% of the total CO2 emissions in the United States



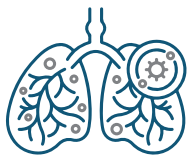
**-5 million**  
tons of CO2  
emissions

Transitioning the 500,000 diesel school buses nationwide would eliminate 5 million tons of carbon in the atmosphere every year



**15X**  
diesel  
particulates

Diesel school buses can create levels of harmful diesel particulate matter up to 15 times higher than background levels



**2,200**  
unhealthy  
MN buses

Minnesota operates 2,200 school buses that need upgrades and cause students to continuously breathe in diesel fumes



**5X**  
kids' asthma  
hospitalization

Kids living in the predominantly BIPOC neighborhoods of North Minneapolis and East Phillips experience 5 times the asthma hospitalizations rates of Minnesota overall



**achievement**  
**absence**

Studies have show that students who are NOT exposed to diesel fumes from school buses have lower absentee rates and higher test scores



**\$5 billion**  
in federal  
funding

The federal Environmental Protection Agency's clean school bus program will provide \$5 billion in funding over 5 fiscal years

**\$14.6  
million**



in funding  
for MN

Minnesota received \$1.6 million in the first year of federal funding and dedicated \$13 million in state funding for electric school buses



**Thousands**  
in financial savings  
for schools



A single electric school bus can save \$4,000-11,000 on fuel/maintenance costs annually and sell up to \$10,000 of stored energy to the grid during peak hours.

## Building a Minnesota movement for electric school buses

The Coalition for Clean Transportation organizes and advocates to eliminate Minnesota's transportation-related climate emissions through the increased adoption and availability of sustainable and equitable electrification options, centering BIPOC and under-resourced communities who disproportionately bear the impact of climate change, air pollution, and experience high rates of mobility injustice. During the 2023 state legislative session, CCT played a key role in securing millions for electric school buses statewide.



"I am a mother of a son with asthma and also an asthma survivor myself. It's really important to me because my son is really eager to ride a school bus. But he's too young to understand that he's unable to due to his safety, to protect his health. To protect the health of other students in our school systems — and also to protect our economy and our society — we need to be moving towards a zero emissions and a clean energy future."

- Brooke Roper, community leader, mother, asthma survivor



"This is a multi-generational issue. Yes, it affects our students, our children, but it also affects everyone. I live really close to a school, and I love to go on walks with my dog. But when I smell all of the school buses idling, I avoid that block completely. I have neighbors who live on that block, and that's where their home is. We have the bus drivers who are in these vehicles. We have the teachers. This is a community issue. We all have a stake in this."

- Sonita van der Leeuw, Transportation Organizer, MN350



"Some of the concerns [about electric school buses] are real misconceptions. When you look at range, these buses today are quoting more than 130 miles on a charge, and the average bus route is around 60 to 65 miles. So for most routes, even in cold climates, there is no range issue. And we've actually spoken with bus drivers in eastern Carver County, who have an electric school bus. They love this bus. And people are seeing thousands in savings on maintenance and fueling each and every year."

- Dan Trajano, professor of health care finance and economics

## Organizing matters: Minnesota vs Michigan

Building power across communities and sectors is critical to advancing equitable policies at every level. When it comes to securing funding for electric school buses, speakers emphasized the comparison between Minnesota and Michigan.

As Trajano pointed out: "Minnesota was awarded four buses, \$1.6 million, in the first year [of funding from the EPA]. That is less than 0.2% of the billion dollars that was awarded. But if you look at a state like Michigan — where they have significant engagement across multiple community groups, across all their school bus transportation directors and drivers, and their government officials — they received \$54 million for 138 electric school buses. That's 33 times as much as Minnesota."

But coalitions like CCT are building momentum. As van de Leeuw suggested: "Minnesota has the opportunity to have the biggest comeback. During the legislative session we said, 'Okay, here's how we did from the federal program. What can the state do to get more electric school buses?' That was the fuel and the passion to secure \$13 million in state resources, which is a great starting point to say Minnesota is taking this seriously — but let's keep going."

[Learn more at cctmn.org](http://cctmn.org)