

# NYC Clean School Bus Coalition 2020-2021 Agenda

**A**t the start of the 2019 school year, a group of environmental, health, and social justice activists gathered on the steps of the Tweed Courthouse to call attention to the New York City Department of Education's (DOE) decision to delay its electric school bus pilot program. Now, a year later, a broader group of advocates has come together to form the New York City Clean School Bus Coalition. This coalition is a partnership of stakeholders within the electric school bus movement who are fighting for clean and safe school busing for NYC students. We are made up of environmental organizations, labor groups, advocates for students with disabilities, transit groups, environmental justice organizations, and NYC students and their parents. We're working to permanently transition NYC away from diesel school buses and toward all-electric alternatives. We are doing this by building a broad and diverse coalition and highlighting the negative health and environmental impacts of diesel emissions on children and workers who are exposed to this pollution everyday.

## WHY ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUSES

### IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH

Poor air quality is a public health crisis, the scale of which has only been further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most school buses run on diesel fuel, which emits harmful soot, nitrogen oxides, carbon dioxide, and other pollutants that significantly worsen air quality. Air pollution is particularly harmful for the developing lungs of children, and can result in multiple health problems, the most common being asthma.<sup>1</sup> In NYC, asthma is the number one reason for school absenteeism. Continued use of diesel buses puts our children and the workers who drive these buses in danger. Replacing diesel school buses with all-electric school buses would help to improve air quality in NYC and reduce children's exposure to asthma-causing pollutants.

### FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Transportation is the number one contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in New York and nationwide. Therefore, zero emission vehicles are essential for combating climate change and reaching New York State's carbon reduction goals. If the entire school bus fleet in NYC were electrified it would prevent the release of 2.9 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year. NYC, as a coastal city, is particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change and must take all measures to address this crisis. The city made a commitment to electrify its entire municipal fleet by 2040, as part of its larger goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050. The school bus fleet must be included in this plan, even though they are not municipally-owned.

### FOSTERING EQUITY

In addition to being a climate and children's health issue, clean school buses are an equity issue. Low income communities and communities of color are unfairly and unequally impacted by the effects of climate change and poor air quality. These areas are defined as environmental justice communities because environmental issues disproportionately impact communities where racial injustice and economic disparities are also highly prevalent. Our research shows that NYC's school bus depots are located in environmental justice communities, exacerbating already pre-existing air pollution and equity issues in these areas. These communities and the children who live there deserve clean air and a clean ride to school. We will work to ensure that electric school buses are prioritized in these communities and for the bus routes that run through them. Children with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted by the harmful effects of diesel school bus pollution since on average, they spend more time on the school bus. The coalition will also work to promote electric school buses for routes that serve students with disabilities.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

### SUPPORT EQUITABLE PILOT PROGRAMS

The first step in electrifying all the school buses in NYC is to establish a pilot program. We support the implementation of the DOE's pilot program and will encourage the implementation of new pilot programs in the city and throughout the state. Pilot programs will help demonstrate potential economic, environmental and public health benefits to a

community. Emission and air quality data can be recorded to further promote the air quality benefits of electrifying an entire fleet. Electric school bus pilot programs should be prioritized in environmental justice communities and for children with disabilities.

### EDUCATE AND ENGAGE NEW YORKERS

Recruiting support from NYC residents is essential to our success. We will educate New Yorkers on why implementing electric school buses is important and how they can benefit our local communities. We also want to grow and diversify our coalition to maximize our support. This is an initiative that benefits the people, so the people must be our champions, especially parents, teachers and school administrators.

### ELECTRIFY ALL NYC SCHOOL BUSES

We want to see the electrification of all NYC school buses by the year 2040. Speaker Corey Johnson and a majority of the City Council support this goal. We need to make sure the incoming mayor and 2021 class of City Council members include this in any citywide plan and support legislation that mandates electrifying the city's school bus fleet. One proposed bill, Intro 455, would electrify NYC's school bus fleet by 2040; we support Intro 455 and will work towards its passage. We will also support efforts to regulate the purchase of new fossil fuel school buses until more funding becomes available for electric school buses.

<sup>1</sup> Environmental and Health Data Portal, *New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy*, [http://a816-dohbsep.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Subtopic.aspx?theme\\_code=2,3&subtopic\\_id=11](http://a816-dohbsep.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/Subtopic.aspx?theme_code=2,3&subtopic_id=11)

