

12/16/22

The Honorable Judith Cruz
Houston Independent School District
4400 West 18th St.
Houston, TX 77092-8501

Dear President Cruz,

First, we write to congratulate HISD on the award of funding for the purchase of 15 electric school buses through the EPA's Clean School Bus Program. This is a positive step towards full fleet electrification, but more is needed in order to electrify HISD's fleet of over 1,000 buses.

Therefore, we write to ask you and the HISD Board of Trustees to protect children's health by setting a goal to replace all of the district's diesel school buses with clean electric buses by 2035, similar to that which was just set in Austin ISD.

Houston has long served as the Energy Capital of the World, and now has a responsibility to lead the clean energy transition. As the largest public school system in Texas, the eighth-largest in the United States, and as the school district serving most of the city of Houston, HISD has a commitment to help lead in this transition. One critical piece of this is by transitioning HISD's existing fleet of diesel school buses. This switch to electric is critical to protecting Houstonian children's health, as well as our climate.

As parents, teachers, health professionals and community leaders, we are very concerned with the daily exposure of our children to toxic diesel exhaust.

All of HISD school buses, carrying some of the most vulnerable passengers, run on diesel. Numerous studies have shown that inhaling diesel exhaust can cause respiratory diseases and worsen existing conditions like asthma. The negative effects are especially pronounced in children. According to the State of the Air from the American Lung Association, in 2021, Harris County had almost 85,000 pediatric asthma cases.

Diesel exhaust is internationally recognized as a cancer-causing agent¹ and classified as a likely carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In a study of 61 million people in 2015, researchers found that exposure to diesel soot and ground-level ozone created by diesel exhaust was linked to higher rates of mortality. New diesel still has some of these negative emissions.

A study from the Brookings Institute analyzed 2,656 school bus retrofits in Georgia which reduced harmful emissions by 95%. Approximately 750,000 students were part of this data set each year from 2007-2017. Researchers saw significant improvements in students' respiratory

¹"Cancer breakthrough is a 'wake-up' call on danger of air pollution," The Guardian, Sep. 10, 2022
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/sep/10/cancer-breakthrough-is-a-wake-up-call-on-danger-of-air-pollution>

health, with twice the benefit for elementary students, whose younger age increases their vulnerability. The study also found strong evidence of academic improvements after the change, most significantly noted in English test scores.

Getting to school shouldn't include a daily dose of toxic pollution or increase the chances that people will get sick. The good news is that HISD can clean up its buses by making them all electric. All-electric buses are here, and they're cleaner, healthier and often cheaper for transit agencies, school districts and bus contractors to run in the long-term. To clear our air and protect our health, we urge you to stop purchasing diesel buses and commit to fully transition the fleet to electric buses by 2035, as a number of school districts, including in Austin, have done.

Dramatic declines in battery costs and improvements in performance, including expanded driving range, have made electric buses a viable alternative to diesel-powered and other fossil fuel buses.

Everman ISD (near Fort Worth) purchased its first electric buses in 2020. Each electric school bus is saving the District nearly \$4,000 a year in fuel and \$2,000 a year in reduced maintenance costs, saving tens of thousands of dollars over the lifetime of a bus. A study from the University of Delaware estimates that a school district could save up to \$230,000 per bus by switching from diesel to electric.

While the total lifetime cost of an electric school bus is lower than a diesel bus because of these fuel savings, we recognize that electric school buses do have a higher upfront cost. Thankfully funding available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Inflation Reduction Act, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) locally, and other funding sources can help offset the cost of many buses and their charging stations. The district should also set aside funds in the upcoming bond election to pay for the transition to an all electric fleet.

In any future bonds, we urge HISD to earmark funds specifically for school bus fleet electrification.

Thank you for your service on behalf of the students and families of HISD. We look forward to working with you to protect kids' health, reduce climate pollution, and have a cleaner community with electric buses.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
Executive Director, Environment Texas

The Honorable Sylvester Turner
Mayor of Houston

The Honorable Abbie J. Kamin
Council Member, City of Houston

The Honorable Karla Cisneros
Council Member, City of Houston

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Texas Director, Public Citizen

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Houston Organizer, Public Citizen

Gargi Rakhade, Anika Shethia, and Brianna Gonzalez
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Chris Bell
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