



# EPA CLEAN SCHOOL BUS PROGRAM

## Second Report to Congress Fiscal Year 2022



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Fiscal Year 2022



Credit: EPA; John Lewis Elementary School, Washington, D.C., October 2022

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<b>ARP</b>	American Rescue Plan
<b>BABAA</b>	Build America, Buy America Act
<b>CNG</b>	compressed natural gas
<b>CSB</b>	Clean School Bus
<b>DERA</b>	Diesel Emissions Reduction Act
<b>DOE</b>	Department of Energy
<b>DOT</b>	Department of Transportation
<b>ED</b>	Department of Education
<b>EPA</b>	Environmental Protection Agency
<b>EV</b>	electric vehicle
<b>GHG</b>	greenhouse gas
<b>IJA</b>	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
<b>NO<sub>x</sub></b>	nitrogen oxides
<b>NREL</b>	National Renewable Energy Laboratory
<b>PM</b>	particulate matter
<b>SAIPE</b>	Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates
<b>V2G</b>	vehicle-to-grid
<b>ZE</b>	zero-emission

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# Executive Summary

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School buses in the United States travel more than 4 billion miles each year, providing the safest transportation to and from school for more than 25 million American children every day.<sup>1</sup> While new buses meet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) tighter emission standards, most school buses on the road emit pollutants, including nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM), in diesel exhaust. These pollutants can contribute to poor air quality and negatively impact human health, especially for children, who have a faster breathing rate than adults and whose lungs are not yet fully developed.<sup>2</sup> Bus drivers and other school staff are also exposed to diesel exhaust inside and near older school buses.

EPA's Clean School Bus (CSB) Program funds the replacement of school buses emitting higher levels of pollutants with buses that emit zero or much lower levels of pollutants (i.e., zero-emission [ZE] or clean school buses). These replacement buses will ensure cleaner air for students, bus drivers, school staff working near bus loading areas, and the communities through which the buses drive each day. The reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from these bus replacements will also help address the outsized role of the transportation sector in fueling the climate crisis.<sup>3</sup> ZE or clean school buses can also cost less to maintain or fuel than the older buses they are replacing, which can free up needed resources for schools.<sup>4</sup>

In its first year, the CSB Program conducted extensive program outreach and administered a national rebate competition. In August 2022, the rebate competition received an outstanding response from school districts across the country, with nearly 2,000 applicants seeking to upgrade their school bus fleets with clean school buses. The enthusiastic response prompted EPA to almost double the funding level available for rebates to nearly \$1 billion. In October 2022, EPA announced rebate selections. More than 400 applications were selected to replace about 2,600 buses, 95% of which will be electric.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> EPA. 2021. *Clean School Bus Program: Building a Better America with the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law*. <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockey=P1013NR1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> EPA. n.d. "Fast Facts on Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions." <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

<sup>4</sup> EPA. n.d. "Benefits of Clean School Buses." <https://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus/benefits-clean-school-buses>

<sup>5</sup> EPA also awarded funding for 109 propane buses and 6 compressed natural gas buses.

# Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, into law on November 15, 2021. Under Title XI: Clean School Buses and Ferries, the IIJA provides \$5 billion over five years (FY 2022–2026) for the replacement of existing school buses with clean school buses and ZE school buses. The IIJA authorizes EPA to administer rebates, grants, and contracts to replace a substantial portion of the nation’s fleet of nearly 500,000 school buses with clean and ZE models to reduce harmful emissions from older, dirtier buses.

This historic investment in school buses will transform fleets across the United States, especially in communities that have been historically underserved. “As many as 25 million children rely on the bus to get to school each day. Thanks to the Biden-Harris Administration, we are making an unprecedented investment in our children’s health, especially those in communities overburdened by air pollution. This is just the beginning of our work to build a healthier future, reduce climate pollution, and ensure the clean, breathable air that all our children deserve,” said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan at the CSB rebate selectees press event in Seattle, Washington, on October 26, 2022.<sup>6</sup> The CSB Program also supports domestic manufacturing and American jobs. School bus manufacturers have facilities across the country that produce ZE and clean school buses.

Under the statutory design for this program, half of the CSB Program’s available funding of \$5 billion is dedicated for ZE school buses and half is for clean school buses. A ZE school bus produces zero exhaust emissions of air pollutants and GHGs, and a clean school bus reduces emissions by operating entirely or in part using an alternative fuel, such as propane or natural gas, or is a ZE bus. EPA may make awards up to 100% of the cost of the replacement bus and charging or fueling infrastructure, and EPA may award funding for bus replacement and infrastructure through grants, rebates, or contracts.

## EPA Experience Funding School Bus Projects



EPA has managed the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) Program since funding began in 2008. Although DERA funds projects in diverse sectors, over 40% of the vehicles and equipment upgraded through DERA have been school buses.<sup>7</sup> In addition to funding the replacement and retrofit of older, higher-emitting diesel school buses through the National and State DERA grant programs, EPA had a dedicated School Bus Rebate Program. From 2012 to 2021, the DERA School Bus Rebate Program awarded funds to replace more than 3,100 school buses with cleaner models. Compared to older diesel buses, these new buses offered the potential to reduce emissions of pollutants like NO<sub>x</sub> and PM by over 90% and achieve GHG reductions as well.

Separate from the DERA School Bus Rebate Program, the 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Electric School Bus Rebate Program offered \$7 million to underserved school districts, Tribal schools, and private fleets serving those schools for the replacement of 23 old school buses with new electric school buses. [Learn more about the DERA School Bus Rebate Program.](#)

<sup>6</sup> EPA. 2022. “Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$3 Million from EPA’s Clean School Bus Program for Two New Hampshire School Districts.” <https://epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-announces-nearly-3-million-epas-clean-school-bus-program>

<sup>7</sup> EPA. 2022. *Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) Fifth Report to Congress* (page 9). <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockey=P1015S8Q.pdf>

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## Eligibility

For the purposes of the CSB rebate competition, eligible applicants are defined as:

State or local governmental entities that are responsible for:

- Providing school bus service to one or more public school systems; or
- The purchase of school buses.

Eligible contractors, which may be for-profit, not-for-profit, or nonprofit entities that have the capacity to:

- Sell clean school buses, ZE buses, charging or fueling infrastructure, or other equipment needed to charge, fuel, or maintain clean or ZE school buses; or
- Arrange financing for such a sale.

Nonprofit school transportation associations.

Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, or Tribally controlled schools responsible for:

- Providing school bus service to one or more schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs; or
- The purchase of school buses.

*Private school bus fleets cannot apply directly for funding. However, eligible applicants can enter into a contractual arrangement with a private fleet that owns and operates buses to replace buses that serve a public school district.*

The IIJA allows EPA to prioritize applicants that:

Propose to replace buses that serve:

- High-need local educational agencies;<sup>8</sup>
- Tribal schools; or
- Rural or low-income areas.

Complement the assistance received through the award by securing additional sources of funding for the activities supported through the award.

## Cost Share Considerations

The IIJA allows EPA to prioritize applicants that provide cost share through public-private partnerships, grants from other entities, or school bonds. While EPA did not prioritize such applicants during the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates, the Agency will consider utilizing this option during future funding rounds.

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<sup>8</sup> The IIJA defines a “high-need local educational agency” as a local educational agency with high percentages of children counted under section 1124(c) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. See <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr3684/BILLS-117hr3684enr.pdf> for additional details.

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## Other Considerations

In making awards for clean or ZE school buses, EPA must consider the following criteria without preference to any individual criterion:

- Lowest overall cost of bus replacement;
- Local conditions, including the length of bus routes and weather conditions;
- Technologies that most reduce emissions; and
- Whether funds will bring new technologies to scale or promote cost parity between old technology and new technology, particularly for production in the United States.

After considering stakeholder suggestions, EPA identified the following goals for the CSB Program, which will guide the program throughout all five years of available funding:

- Engage stakeholders in program development.
- Evolve the program, as needed, based on successes and lessons learned.
- Promote cost parity between bus technologies.
- Allow school districts multiple opportunities to apply for funding.
- Maximize the number of ZE and clean buses that receive funding.
- Ensure a broad geographic distribution of awards.

### ***Benefits of Clean School Buses***

Electric school buses have zero tailpipe emissions, meaning that students, drivers, and members of the community are exposed to significantly lower concentrations of harmful diesel pollutants like PM and NO<sub>x</sub>. This can significantly improve public health, especially for children, whose lungs are still developing. Replacing diesel buses with electric buses also reduces GHG emissions, maintenance costs, and fuel costs. When they are not being used to transport students, electric school buses can also be used as sources of power via their battery storage. Experts are exploring advancements in bidirectional charging technologies, also known as vehicle-to-grid (V2G) technologies, that can store surplus energy and then return it to the grid during peak times of use. This will become an important function as more renewable energy sources are added to the grid.

Other types of alternatively fueled (e.g., propane, natural gas) school buses can also reduce tailpipe pollution, GHG emissions, and fuel costs, depending on the alternative fuel that is used.

Visit EPA's website for more information about the [benefits of electric and alternative fuel school buses](#) as well as bidirectional charging technologies.



# Clean School Bus Rebates Overview

The first CSB funding program EPA offered was the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates. EPA developed a new online system to facilitate a straightforward and accessible application process. The Clean School Bus Rebates online application system proved to be highly effective and will be utilized for future funding rounds.

In May 2022, EPA announced \$500 million in available funding for the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates. By the time the application window closed in August, EPA had received about 2,000 applications requesting approximately \$4 billion to replace more than 12,000 buses. Given the tremendous response, and as previewed in the program guidance, EPA decided to provide up to \$965 million through the 2022 CSB Rebates. In October, EPA announced that it was funding over 400 rebate applications to replace about 2,600 buses, 95% of which will be electric.

Applicants could request funds to replace up to 25 buses. The maximum rebate amount per bus was dependent on (1) the replacement bus fuel type, (2) the replacement bus size, and (3) whether the school district served by the buses was prioritized. Table 1 below shows the maximum funding amount for buses.

*Table 1. Maximum Funding Amount per Replacement Bus*

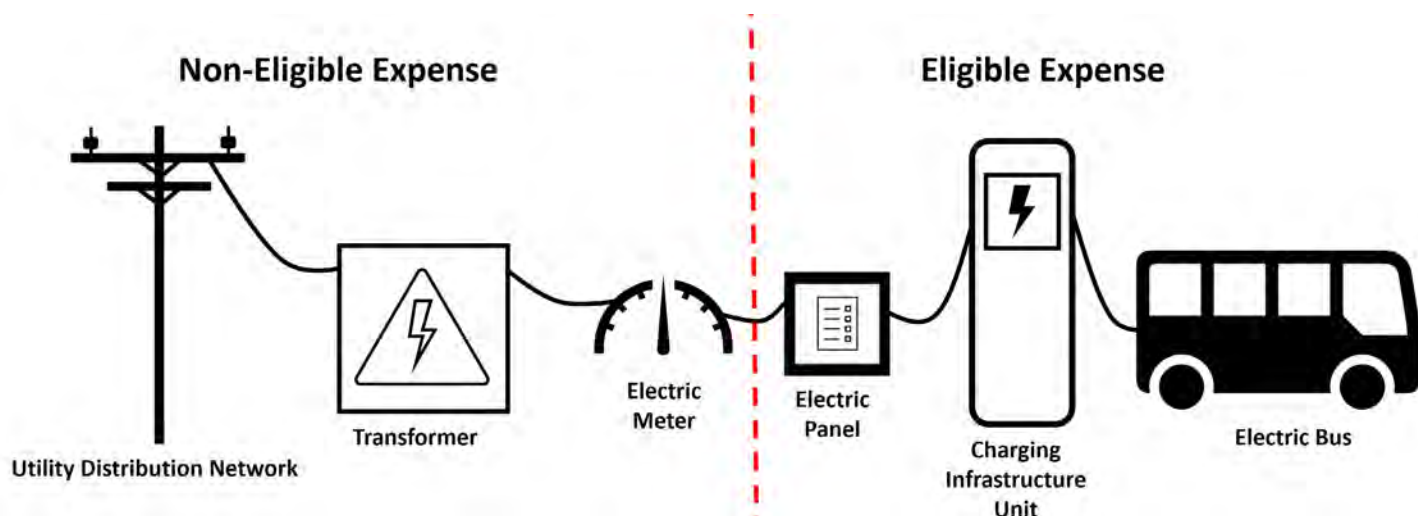
School District Prioritization Status	Replacement Bus Fuel Type and Size					
	ZE – Class 7+	ZE – Class 3-6	CNG – Class 7+	CNG – Class 3-6	Propane – Class 7+	Propane – Class 3-6
School districts that meet one or more prioritization criteria	\$375,000	\$285,000	\$45,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$25,000
Other eligible school districts	\$250,000	\$190,000	\$30,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$15,000

Additionally, selected applicants that applied for replacement ZE school buses were allocated funding for charging infrastructure installations on the fleet’s side of the electrical meter. See Table 2 and Figure 1. Recipients were encouraged to consider long-term fleet electrical needs when installing equipment, as installing additional electrical capacity on the fleet’s side of the meter to support future charging needs is an eligible expense. EPA is continuing to work with federal partners in the Joint Office for Energy and Transportation to develop fact sheets, webinars, and other resources for selected applicants to use when planning charging infrastructure installations. For instance, current and future informational resources cover topics such as working with utility providers, considering bidirectional charging, building infrastructure for current and future fleet needs.

Table 2. Maximum Charging Infrastructure Amount per Replacement ZE School Bus

School District Prioritization Status	ZE – Class 3+ Infrastructure Funding
School districts that meet one or more prioritization criteria	\$20,000
Other eligible school districts	\$13,000

Figure 1. Eligible Expenses for Charging Infrastructure Installations



## Prioritizing Underserved Communities

Established in Executive Order 14008, Justice40 is a whole-of-government effort to ensure that 40% of the overall benefits from federal investments, including climate and clean energy investments, reach disadvantaged communities. The IIJA allows EPA to prioritize applications that will replace buses serving high-need local educational agencies, Tribal schools, and rural or low-income areas. This prioritization helps support Justice40 goals. EPA utilized the U.S. Census Bureau’s [Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates \(SAIPE\) School District Estimates for 2020](#) dataset to determine which local educational agencies qualified as “high-need local educational agencies” for the program’s priority list. Specifically, school districts listed as having 20% or more students living in poverty based on the SAIPE data qualified as “prioritized.” The SAIPE dataset was selected because it is the most comprehensive public nationwide data on student poverty and numerous programs at both the federal and state level use the SAIPE Program to identify “high-need local educational agencies.” Nevertheless, EPA recognizes that some school districts may not be listed in the SAIPE data (including most charter schools), and therefore allowed these school districts to self-certify as having 20%

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or more students living in poverty pursuant to the federal poverty threshold in order to qualify as “prioritized.” School districts located in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands were also prioritized as “high-need school districts.”<sup>9</sup> Prioritizing districts in these territories is consistent with both the Omnibus Territories Act of 2013 and the broader Agency-wide effort to not require cost shares for the Insular Areas.

EPA increased the number of school districts that qualified as “disadvantaged” based on income relative to the school districts that qualified in the 2021 ARP Electric School Bus Rebate Program by lowering the qualifying threshold from 30% of students in poverty to 20% of students in poverty in the SAIPE dataset. The Agency continues to examine the eligibility criteria as applied under the law and may adjust as appropriate to address program goals in future funding opportunities.

EPA also focused education and outreach efforts on underserved communities, including partnering with stakeholders to reach communities that may have never applied for a federal grant or rebate (see the “Stakeholder Engagement” section for more information).

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<sup>9</sup> Puerto Rico was not included in this list of prioritized high-need school districts located in territories because it is the only territory with SAIPE data available and was already prioritized under the 20% threshold.

# 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Selection Process and Awards

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## Rebate Applications

As noted above, EPA received tremendous interest in the first round of Clean School Bus Rebates. More than 90% of applications were for ZE electric buses. Nearly 9% of applications were for propane buses and 1% were for compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. The applicant pool included submissions from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and federally recognized Tribes.



Credit: EPA; Meridian High School, Falls Church, VA, May 2022

## Rebate Selection Process

After the application deadline, EPA conducted the first round of eligibility reviews. All applications submitted to EPA by the deadline were placed in a random number generator lottery process and ranked by assigned lottery number.<sup>10</sup> EPA selected applicants for funding in the following order, working from the top (highest rank) to the bottom (lowest rank) of the list, until all the available \$965 million in funds were allocated from both the CSB and ZE funding pools.<sup>11</sup> No partial awards were granted.

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<sup>10</sup> Per Section 4 of the FY 2022 [Clean School Bus Rebates Program Guide](#), EPA did not accept multiple applications for buses serving the same district.

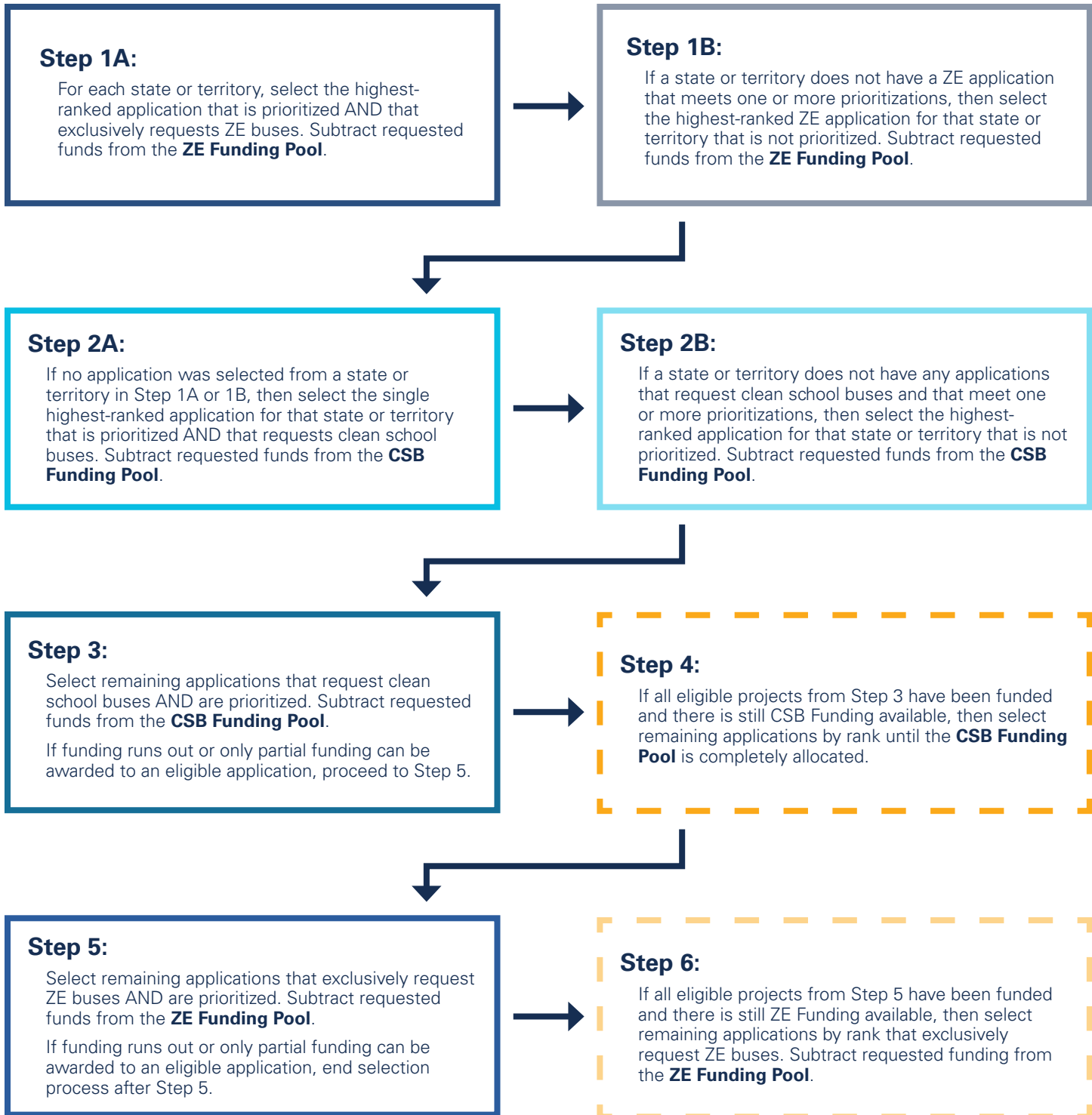
<sup>11</sup> After all selected applicants were notified of their award, a small number of selectees withdrew from the program. EPA redistributed funds from selectees who withdrew, awarding the funds to eligible applicants who had initially been placed on the program's waitlist. To complete this redistribution EPA used the process shown in Figure 2. As of January 2023, \$951 million of the total \$965 million in rebate awards has been reserved for selectees during this funding cycle. EPA is continuing to redistribute funds from selectees who withdrew to eligible waitlisted applicants; any remaining funding will be distributed to the selected applicants during future CSB funding opportunities. See the [Awarded Clean School Bus Program Rebates](#) webpage for the most up-to-date rebate selectee data.

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1. ZE Funding Pool: For each state and territory, EPA selected the single highest-ranked application in the lottery that met one or more prioritization criteria and was exclusively requesting ZE buses. If a state or territory did not have a ZE application that met one or more prioritization criteria, then the highest-ranked ZE application per state or territory that did not meet one or more prioritization criteria was selected. Location was based on the school district the buses will serve, which may differ from the location of the eligible applicant.
  2. CSB Funding Pool: If no application was selected from a state or territory in step one, then EPA selected the single highest-ranked application in the lottery from that state or territory that met one or more of the prioritizations and requested clean school buses. If a state or territory did not have any applications that requested clean school buses and met one or more prioritization criteria, then the highest-ranked application per state or territory that did not meet one or more prioritization criteria was selected. Location was based on the school district the buses will serve, which may differ from the location of the eligible applicant.
  3. CSB Funding Pool: Remaining applications that requested ZE, CNG, or propane buses, or any combination thereof, and that met one or more prioritizations.
  4. CSB Funding Pool: Remaining applications until CSB funding pool was allocated.
  5. ZE Funding Pool: Remaining applications that exclusively requested ZE buses and that met one or more prioritizations.
  6. ZE Funding Pool: Remaining applications that exclusively requested ZE buses, until funding pool was allocated.

Please see the [2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Program Guide](#) for more detailed information about the selection process. EPA notified rebate applicants of their selection status in October 2022. Once notified, selected school districts could proceed with purchasing new buses and eligible infrastructure. Selectees have until April 2023 to submit Payment Request Forms with purchase orders. After the selectees submit the proper forms, they will receive rebate funds.

Figure 2. 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Selection Process

Steps 1A to 2B in the selection process ensure CSB Program’s geographic requirements are met



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## Program Launch Event



Credit: EPA; Meridian High School, Falls Church, VA, May 2022

To open the 2022 CSB Rebates application window, Vice President Kamala Harris, EPA Administrator Michael Regan, White House Infrastructure Coordinator Mitch Landrieu, Representative Don Beyer (VA), and Representative Gerry Connolly (VA) visited Meridian High School in Falls Church, Virginia, on May 20, 2022.<sup>12</sup> They announced the CSB Program's first funding opportunity and highlighted how the program will reduce GHG pollution, provide cleaner air around schools and communities, and better protect children's health. The event was attended by more than 250 in-person attendees consisting of Meridian High School students, faculty and parents, environmental and education advocates, and EPA staff, as well as by virtual attendees through a White House livestream of the event.

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<sup>12</sup> EPA. 2022. "Biden-Harris Administration Makes \$500 Million Available for Clean School Buses Through EPA." <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-makes-500-million-available-clean-school-buses-through-epa>

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## Award Announcement Events



Credit: EPA; John Lewis Elementary School, Washington, D.C., October 2022

On October 26, 2022, EPA publicly announced the list of rebate competition selectees. To celebrate the announcement, Vice President Harris attended a press event at Lumen Field in Seattle, Washington, where she gave remarks on the success of the program and the impact it will have. She was joined by Administrator Regan and Senator Patty Murray (WA) and met with local students who received an electric bus through the program.

In the days that followed, EPA regions throughout the country coordinated amplification events with local school districts, elected officials, and other key stakeholders.

## Rebate Selectees

For the 2022 CSB Rebates, EPA increased the award pool to \$965 million.<sup>13</sup> As a result, 415 school districts are receiving a total of about 2,600 clean school buses (Table 3). Included among the selectees were school districts from each of the 50 states (Figure 3), along with districts from Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and federally recognized Tribes. As shown in Figure 4, half of the selected school districts requested between 1 and 3 electric buses, while 29 districts were awarded 25 buses each, the maximum number a district could request. About 40% of the total rebate funds will be awarded to projects replacing ten or fewer buses, while nearly 35% of funds will go to projects replacing a larger number

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<sup>13</sup> As previously noted, not all funds in the award pool may be distributed during this funding cycle due to a small number of selectees withdrawing from the program. Any remaining funds will be distributed to selected applicants during future CSB funding opportunities. See the [Awarded Clean School Bus Program Rebates](#) webpage for the most up-to-date rebate selectee data.



of buses (Figure 5). EPA credits the considerable number of applications received to the significant outreach conducted by stakeholder organizations and program staff in each of the Agency’s 10 regions.

*Table 3. Summary of Awards for the CSB FY 2022 Rebate Program*

School District Type	Number of Selectees	Bus Information				Awarded Funding
		CNG	Propane	Electric	Total Buses	
Prioritized	412	11	146	2421	2578	\$944,715,000
Non-prioritized	3	5	1	25	31	\$6,325,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>415*</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>2446</b>	<b>2609</b>	<b>\$951,040,000</b>

\*Numbers reflect selectees as of January 6, 2023.



Credit: EPA; John Lewis Elementary School, Washington, D.C., October 2022

Figure 3. Total Number of Clean School Buses Awarded During the FY 2022 Rebate Program, by State

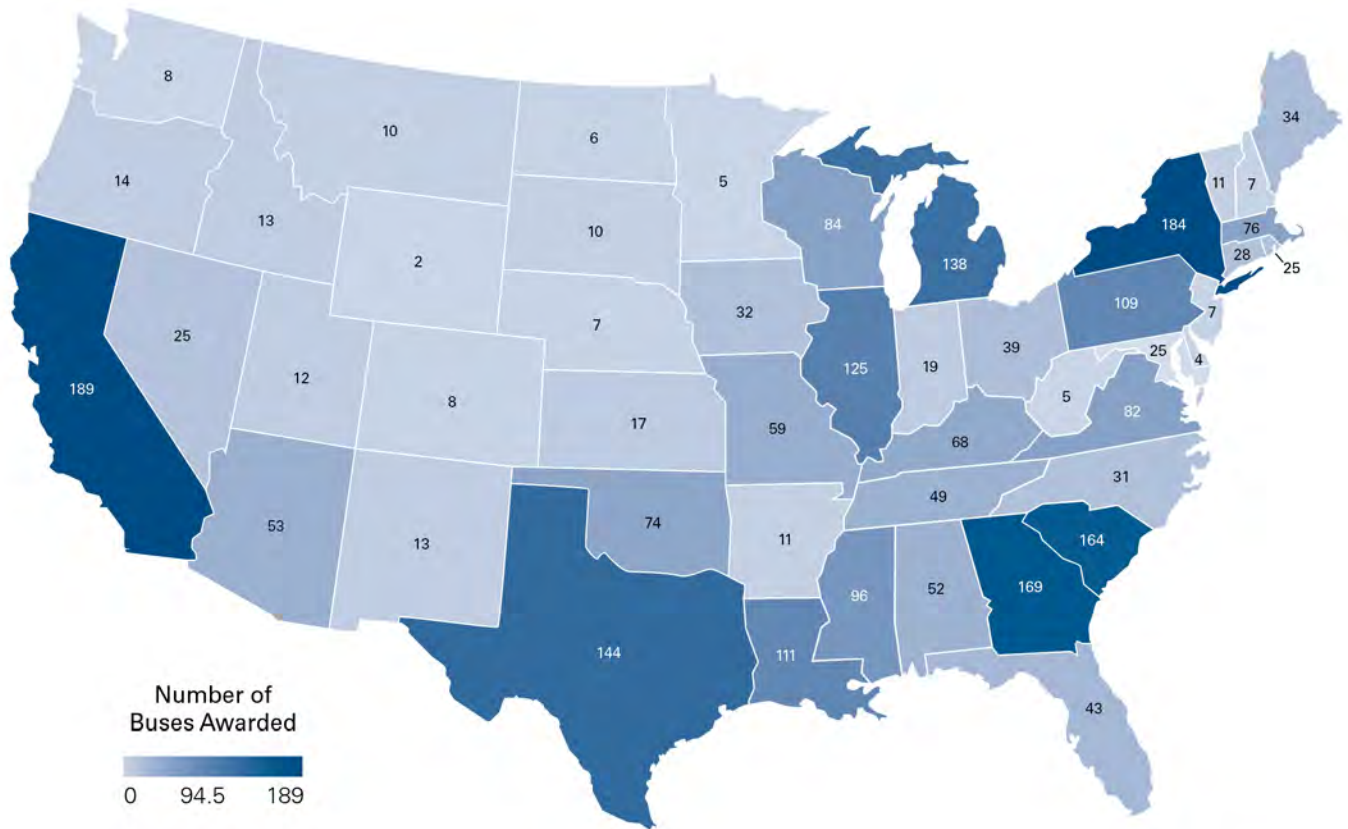


Figure 4. Distribution of the Number of Electric School Buses Awarded to School Districts

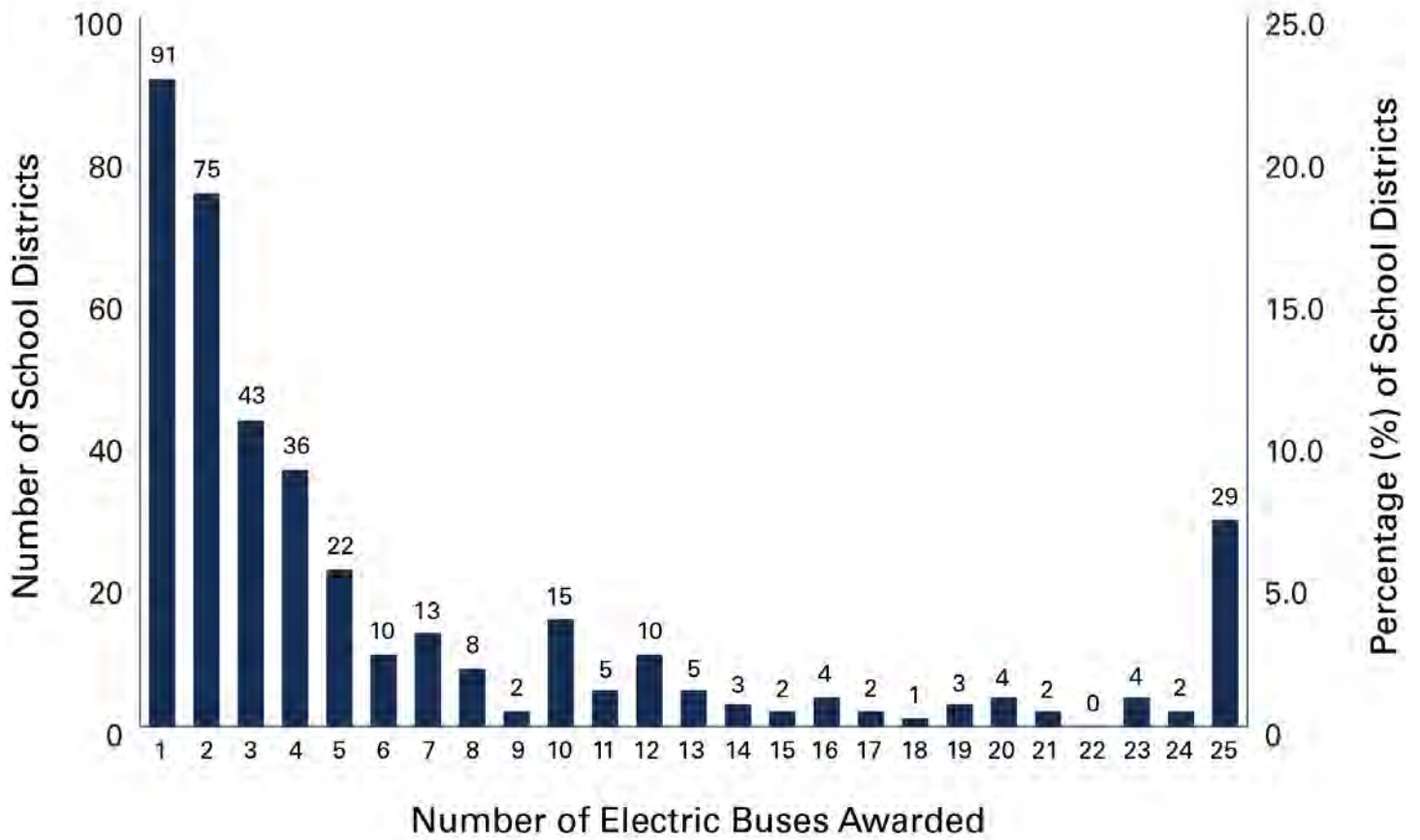
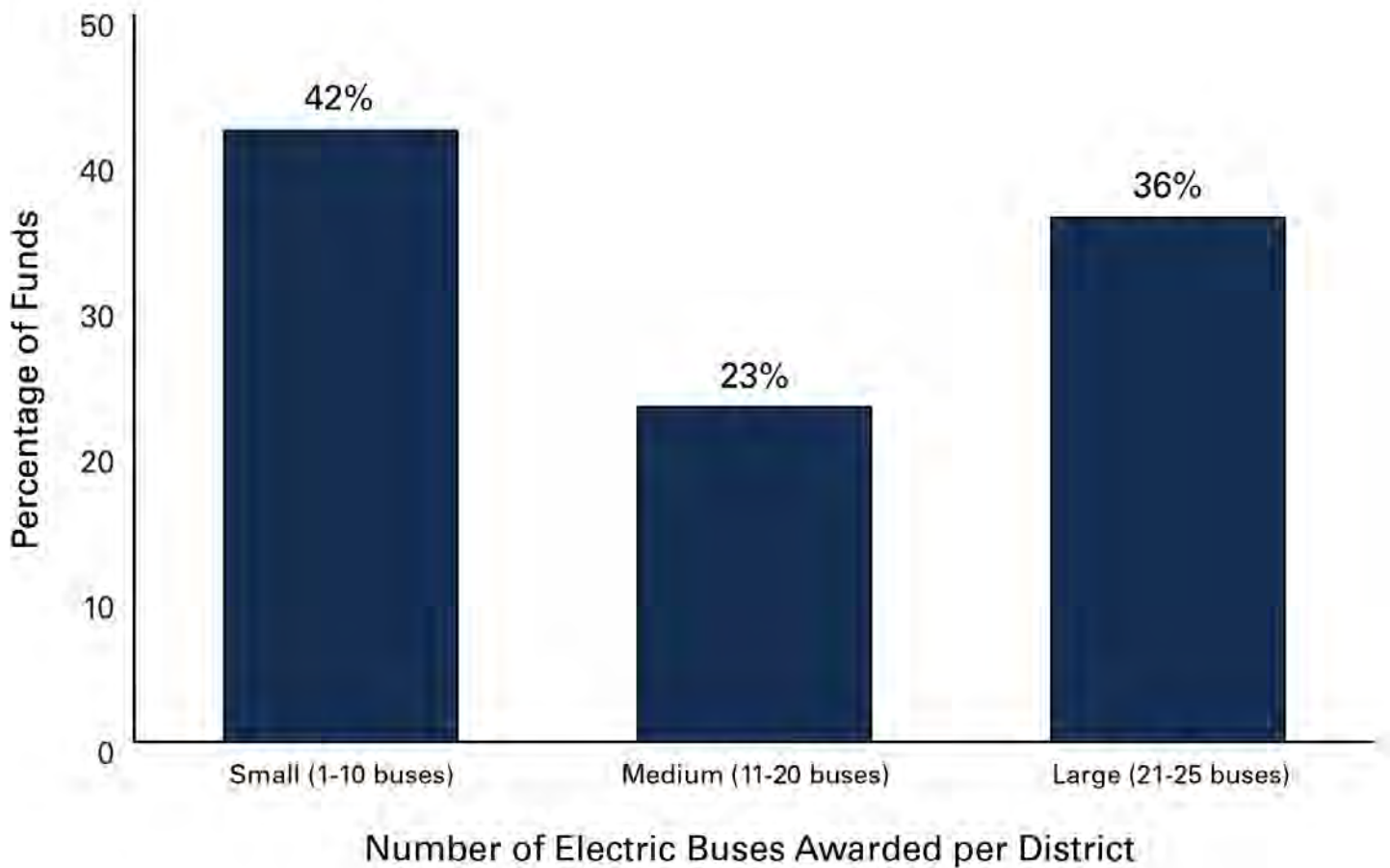


Figure 5. Distribution of the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebate Program Awards



The 2022 CSB Rebates prioritized low-income, rural, and Tribal school districts. Over 99% of selectees met the priority definition under the 2022 CSB Rebates criteria, resulting in access to more funds for buses and electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure for schools in areas that need them the most. The program also delivered on President Biden’s Justice40 commitment. Table 4 summarizes funding to Tribal school districts awarded through the program.

Table 4. Summary of Tribal Awards for the CSB FY 2022 Rebate Program

Tribal School District Type	Number of Selectees	Bus Information				Awarded Funding
		CNG	Propane	Electric	Total Buses	
Bureau-Funded	3	0	0	15	15	\$4,845,000
Impact Aid	24	0	25	165	190	\$65,295,000
Poverty Rate >20%	1	0	0	4	4	\$1,580,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>\$71,720,000</b>

EPA created a [webpage](#) that uses an interactive dashboard to provide up-to-date information about the awarded rebates. The dashboard features a map and data display showing the locations of selectees, the number and dollar figure of new buses funded, and their priority applicant status. All applicants not selected for funding in the initial lottery process were placed on a waitlist, which is also included on the webpage. If any 2022 CSB Rebate selectees are deemed ineligible, drop out of the program, or otherwise reduce their funding request, EPA will offer the remaining funds to previously unselected applicants, provided sufficient time remains in the project period.<sup>14</sup>

### *Clean School Bus Program and Build America, Buy America Act*

Enacted as part of the IIJA, the Build America, Buy America Act (BABAA) requires the application of domestic preference requirements to infrastructure projects funded by federal financial assistance. The BABAA directed EPA to enforce the requirements of the Act when implementing the CSB Program, meaning that EPA was compelled to include a Buy America preference in CSB Program awards issued on or after May 14, 2022.

To avoid undue increases in the time and cost of some school bus replacement projects, as well as to allow selectees and EPA to transition to new rules and processes, EPA solicited public comment on issuing a time-limited waiver applicable to a narrow portion of CSB Program awards (i.e., certain electric charging infrastructure equipment). After considering input from public comments, EPA issued a final waiver on July 29, 2022. EPA encouraged charging infrastructure suppliers to take steps to meet the BABAA requirements. EPA continues to work jointly with the Department of Energy (DOE) and Department of Transportation (DOT) to develop a common approach to applying Buy America provisions to vehicle charging and fueling infrastructure.

<sup>14</sup> At the time of the announcement of rebate awards, some applications remained under review. As their selection status was updated, those applicants either were added to the selectee list or withdrew.

# Stakeholder Engagement

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To support development and implementation of the CSB Program, EPA utilized a variety of tools to engage with stakeholders, receive feedback, and transparently share information. These efforts involved staff and management in headquarters and regional offices.

## Before the Launch of the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates

### *Development of the Clean School Bus Education and Outreach Strategy*

The IIJA directs EPA to coordinate with stakeholders and develop an education and outreach plan that explains to potential grant and rebate applicants how to apply, describes eligible technologies and their benefits, and shares information on best practices and lessons learned.<sup>15</sup>

To develop the education and outreach strategy, EPA gathered information, suggestions, and feedback on program design from stakeholders using a combination of public listening sessions, a Clean School Bus mailbox, and discussions with the Agency's 10 regions and other program offices, such as the Office of Environmental Justice, that work closely with the prioritized applicants.

After considering stakeholder input, EPA identified the following outreach goals:

1. Maximize the number of applications and increase program adoption by educating prospective applicants and stakeholders about the CSB Program and the benefits of clean school buses.
2. Reach underserved populations through meaningful and intentional outreach to increase the number of prospective applicants who would most benefit from reduced emissions through the replacement of buses in their communities.
3. Explain the award process and program to prospective applicants in a simple and straightforward manner that will encourage application completion.
4. Empower, engage, and support clean school bus stakeholders throughout the implementation of this outreach program by equipping them with the information and data they need to develop their own outreach plans, amplify key messages, increase applications, and collaborate with the other members of the clean school bus community beyond EPA.
5. Improve the CSB Program and associated processes year-to-year by collecting stakeholder feedback and conducting internal "lessons learned" activities.

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<sup>15</sup> The IIJA also states that EPA may use up to 3% of program funds on administrative costs. EPA obligated a portion of those funds for contractor support to carry out communications, outreach, and technical assistance work.

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## *Achieving Outreach Goals*

To achieve the CSB Program outreach goals, EPA utilized several communication channels (e.g., listserv/ newsletter, social media, website) to inform and educate the clean school bus community. EPA's communication channels included CSB stakeholder networks that helped amplify program messaging, including webinar dates, the application open and close dates, and other program announcements. These key stakeholders included other federal agencies, organizations working with priority applicants, associations related to schools and school buses, and other EPA offices. In addition, EPA hosted a series of public webinars from December 2021 through October 2022. These listening sessions provided overviews of the program, as well as opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback and suggestions to aid in the development of program guidance. Attendees represented a wide swath of stakeholder groups, including Tribes.

## *Coordination and Outreach with Stakeholders to Inform Applicants and Develop Program Design*

EPA program and regional offices worked collaboratively to reach as many potential applicants as possible, especially those in underserved communities. EPA established an Agency workgroup to share tools and resources to support outreach efforts throughout the country, including informational flyers and talking points with key messages.

In addition, EPA program and regional offices met with external stakeholders to gather suggestions and feedback on program successes, challenges, and lessons learned. These external stakeholders included nonprofits, manufacturers, school associations, and other federal agencies. For example, EPA consulted with the Department of Education (ED) to develop applicant eligibility and prioritization criteria for the rebate program.

## *Coordination and Outreach on Technical Assistance*



In addition to working with stakeholders to reach potential applicants and develop the program design, EPA worked with several stakeholders to provide technical assistance on clean school buses. For example, EPA partnered with the Joint Office of Energy and Transportation ("Joint Office") and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) to offer clean school bus technical assistance to school districts, including information and tools to successfully plan for and deploy clean school buses and associated infrastructure.<sup>16</sup> EPA and the Joint Office also intend to develop resources for CSB Program funding recipients.

In addition, EPA worked with DOE's Clean Cities Coalition Network ("Clean Cities"), which consists of nearly 100 coalitions located across the country that work to advance affordable, domestic transportation fuels, energy-efficient mobility systems, and other fuel-saving technologies and practices. EPA regional offices utilized their existing relationships with their local Clean Cities Coalitions to direct rebate applicants' locally

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<sup>16</sup> The IIJA established a joint office between DOE and DOT to achieve the law's EV goals.

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specific technical questions to the appropriate point of contact. Additionally, Clean Cities hosted a series of public webinars on a wide variety of topics, including: Introduction to Electric School Buses, Infrastructure Planning and Solutions, and Driver and Technician Training.<sup>17</sup> EPA is also partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development Office to support the CSB Program’s rural applicants and selectees.

## **During the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Application Window**

### *Clean School Bus Public Webinars to Provide Information to Potential Applicants*

During the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates application window, EPA continued to conduct broad stakeholder outreach. For example, EPA hosted 11 public webinars on different topics (e.g., an overview of the CSB Program’s goals and application process; available infrastructure funding in the rebate program). Webinar attendance ranged from several hundred to more than 2,000 stakeholders. EPA developed the [2022 Clean School Bus Rebates: Questions and Answers](#) document to capture key questions from webinar participants and share the information with other interested stakeholders.

Throughout the rebate application window, EPA staff also presented on the CSB Program at external conferences and webinars hosted by transportation and environmental nonprofits, Tribal and environmental justice organizations, education and school groups, and other external stakeholders. EPA received a significant volume of speaking requests to discuss the program and accepted as many offers as staffing capacity allowed.

The post-2022 CSB Rebates listening session began with an overview of the CSB Program and a summary of the feedback collected thus far from stakeholders, public comment letters, and emails. It concluded with an opportunity for the more than 350 attendees to share their additional suggestions and input about ways to improve the program during future rounds of funding. Some of the common topics discussed included the program’s application process, requirements and application window, eligibility, funding levels, prioritization criteria, and outreach activities.

Given the success of the CSB listening sessions and EPA’s goal to continuously improve the program, EPA will host future listening, information sharing, and feedback sessions before and after rebate and grant cycles.

## **Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Education and Outreach**

To reflect and improve upon the 2022 rebate applicant experience and application process, EPA hosted a public listening session titled “EPA Clean School Bus Rebates: Feedback and Next Steps” on August 24, 2022. The session’s attendees represented a diverse pool of professionals, which resulted in a fruitful listening session where positive and constructive feedback was shared. EPA evaluated all collected feedback to determine how future rebate funding opportunities could be improved.

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<sup>17</sup> All webinar recordings were made available to the public on [DOE’s website](#). The Joint Office also established a [clean school bus email form](#), which the public can use to request technical assistance for clean school buses, and co-hosted a public CSB Program webinar on EV infrastructure.



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After considering stakeholder input on the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Program, CSB Program staff identified several successful education and outreach activities that could be used as best practices for future funding rounds:

EPA created an education and outreach strategy to guide efforts and ensure that all intended audiences were reached. EPA's internal workgroup met weekly to provide detailed guidance and ensure that all efforts, messaging, and resource materials were consistent with the strategy.

EPA identified a group of key community-based organizations who were focused on implementing program goals. EPA staff held a series of planning/coordination calls with them to determine how the Agency could best empower, engage, and support them in their efforts to amplify key messages within their communities and drive prospective applicants to apply.

EPA staff attended large conferences that many potential applicants (including prioritized applicants) commonly attended, such as pupil transportation, superintendent, and Tribal conferences, to raise awareness about the program, answer questions, and collect feedback.

EPA created resource materials that made the application process easy to understand and accessible, and that educated and informed prospective applicants about clean school bus technology, infrastructure, and associated benefits, including energy/cost savings, reduced health risks, and mitigation of climate change. These resource materials were especially helpful in reducing barriers for first-time adopters and school districts that have unique situations.

EPA provided multiple opportunities for stakeholder feedback throughout the planning and implementation phases to improve the program and application process. Feedback was collected via Q&A at webinars, through the [cleanschoolbus@epa.gov](mailto:cleanschoolbus@epa.gov) inbox, during stakeholder engagement meetings, and from regional connections.

Despite being the first funding opportunity from a new EPA program, the 2022 CSB Rebates provided successful stakeholder outreach and achieved a high degree of interest and buy-in, laying the groundwork for the program to achieve its goals through future funding opportunities.

# Looking Ahead

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The 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Program was the first of several funding opportunities for the multi-year CSB Program. EPA anticipates running both a grant and rebate competition in FY 2023. The Agency encourages school districts not selected in the first round of rebates and those that did not apply in this funding cycle to participate in future rounds.

EPA intends to open the first competitive Request for Applications for Clean School Bus grant funding in early 2023. EPA will post program updates as they become available on the [Clean School Bus Program webpage](#).

EPA expects to continue utilizing the education and outreach best practices outlined in this report, and will continue to improve upon them by inviting additional stakeholder feedback. The CSB Program's education and outreach strategy is a living document that EPA intends to update annually to reflect these improvements. Additionally, EPA plans to continue utilizing its communication channels to share information with stakeholders throughout the implementation stage of the CSB Program. As CSB Program projects begin, EPA will work with stakeholders to document successes through testimonials and pictures that can be shared publicly.

Additionally, EPA intends to continue working with interagency partners to develop clean school bus resources. For example, future resources might include information regarding bus and fueling infrastructure deployment, operations and maintenance, and workforce development and training as outlined in the IJA. These types of resources would provide assistance to CSB Program selectees and future applicants as they carry out the process of transitioning their fleets to clean school buses.

The replacement of older school buses with newer, cleaner buses not only substantially reduces harmful emissions that increase the risk of asthma and other respiratory illnesses, but also reduces GHG emissions in the transportation sector. The CSB Program is a critical step towards protecting the health of students, bus drivers, school staff, and surrounding communities, and towards addressing climate change and environmental justice. The program will also bolster American manufacturing and create good-paying U.S. jobs, all while making electric school buses the American standard.



Credit: EPA; John Lewis Elementary School, Washington, D.C., October 2022