

Fowler Unified's New Yellow School Buses Are Also 'Green'

By Kerry Klein

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Fowler Unified School District is upgrading its bus fleet, and possibly the air its students breathe. The newest bus model was unveiled Tuesday afternoon at Malaga Elementary School.

It looks like any other school bus: It's yellow, with dark bench seats and a little stop sign that swings out into traffic. But, as San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Director Samir Sheikh announced at the press conference, it's electric. "It's absolutely zero emissions," he said. "Zero air pollution coming out of that bus."

It's the first of nine electric buses coming to the school district, all produced by bus manufacturer Blue Bird with a capacity to hold up to 78 students and run 100 to 125 miles on a single charge. Over the next ten years, the air district estimates the upgrade will save 16 tons of emissions.

That's important in an air basin that consistently ranks among the most polluted in the country, and in light of research that increasingly links particle pollution to respiratory issues, immune dysfunction, and cardiovascular problems.

Malaga Elementary School Principal Luisa Custodio Lopes said she's excited about the new buses because she's been seeing an uptick in asthma in her students. "A few of our students have even been severely affected with asthma to the point where they've needed to be hospitalized for a few days," she said at the press conference.

The nine buses cost nearly \$4 million, most of which was funded by the Valley air district and state grants. The project is a result of AB 617, a state Community Air Protection Program guided by a steering committee of mostly south-central Fresno residents.