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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Yellow Buses Go Green in Independent School District 197

Voluntary efforts result in cleaner air and healthier kids

MENDOTA HEIGHTS, Minn. – School buses serving the West Saint Paul - Mendota Heights - Eagan School District are now running cleaner and greener thanks to the voluntary efforts of the school district transportation staff. **ISD 197** and the **Henry Sibley High School Environmental Club** recently partnered with **Project Green Fleet**, an effort of the Minnesota Environmental Initiative to improve Minnesota’s air quality by reducing diesel emissions.

Buses are made “green” by the installation of federally approved filters and catalyst mufflers that can reduce engine emissions by up to 50%. Buses eligible for retrofits are older buses with diesel engines that are expected to still provide many years of service—newer buses create less pollution and don’t need retrofits. Thirty-three school buses in the ISD 197 bus fleet have been retrofitted with pollution control equipment.

Students with the Henry Sibley High School Environmental Club helped encourage their district to participate in the voluntary effort. Utilizing dollars granted to the club by the Minnesota Schools Cutting Carbon program, students offered to purchase replacement filters if the district agreed to have pollution control equipment installed on school buses. Air quality in Minnesota currently satisfies the federal standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, there is no regulatory mandate in Minnesota to retrofit diesel engines to make them run cleaner. Despite the lack of mandate, fleets are still choosing to voluntarily reduce emissions. Lisa Johnson, Energy Manager with ISD 197 and the staff advisor for Henry Sibley’s Environmental Club, says, “Partnering with Project Green Fleet was a no-brainer. It’s the right thing to do for our students, staff and environment.”

Diesel vehicles contribute more than 50% of the air pollution generated by all traffic in Minnesota. Those pollutants can concentrate inside a bus: studies have shown that pollution levels inside a school bus can be up to five times higher than in outdoor air.¹ Because children breathe more air relative to their body weight than adults, they are especially susceptible to the health problems these pollutants can cause, such as asthma and other upper respiratory ailments.

Cleaner running buses in ISD 197 are part of a larger statewide effort by Project Green Fleet. To date, more than 1,600 buses have been retrofitted in cities such as Duluth, Bemidji, Rochester, and the Minneapolis and St. Paul area. Those retrofits have reduced emissions exposure for thousands of school children. Project Green Fleet plans to retrofit all eligible school buses in the state within the next several years—a total of approximately 4000 buses.

Thanks to Project Green Fleet's sponsors, retrofit equipment and installation are completely free to participating bus fleets. In ISD 197, clean buses have been made possible through a federal grant from the U.S Environmental Protection Agency. Donaldson Company Inc., a Minnesota-based manufacturer of clean diesel technologies, provided the pollution control equipment installed on school buses in ISD 197.

Project Green Fleet began in 2005 when the Minnesota Environmental Initiative partnered with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, and numerous businesses, state government agencies, and nonprofits to create the project. Project Green Fleet is one of many partnership-based environmental projects coordinated, managed and implemented by the Minnesota Environmental Initiative, a local environmental nonprofit organization.

For more information about the Minnesota Environmental Initiative's Project Green Fleet, contact Emily Franklin at 612-334-3388 x114 or efranklin@mn-ei.org, or visit www.projectgreenfleet.org.

For more information about Minnesota Schools Cutting Carbon contact Patrick Santelli at 612-625-3759 or SchoolsCuttingCarbon@CleanEnergyResourceTeams.org or visit <http://www.schoolscuttingcarbon.org/>

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ⁱ Wargo, J., L. Wargo & N. Alderman (2006). The Harmful Effects of Diesel Exhaust: A Case for Public Policy Change. *Environment and Human Health, Inc.* www.ehhi.org/reports/exhaust/exhaust06.pdf.