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## **Prince George County Public Schools Leads Commonwealth in Outfitting School Bus Fleet with HEPA Filtration Systems**

PRINCE GEORGE, Va. - Prince George County Public Schools has become one of the first school divisions in the commonwealth to outfit nearly its entire fleet of school buses with state-of-the-art air filtration systems that can remove contaminants from the air protecting students and drivers.

According to Prince George County Public Schools Transportation Director Dustin Nase, 70 percent of the school division's 70-bus fleet have had new Webasto Air Filtration Systems installed. The remaining vehicles will have their units installed and operational by the beginning of November.

The units provide public transport vehicles with medical-grade air filtration using high-efficiency particulate air or HEPA technology to remove 99.995 percent of airborne infections and particles. Each device is installed at the front of the county's school buses, deemed to be the best placement for the units. According to Nase, when the bus is operational, the air filtration systems are active, but they can be turned off via each buses' noise cancellation functionality, which is used when buses approach and traverse railroad crossings.

Regarding noise, the devices emit sound at approximately 65 dB level, which is equal to the volume of a typical conversation at a normal vocal level.

As the school division prepared to safely welcome students back to campus this year after March's closure, Nase said his department was looking for as many ways to keep drivers and bus riders safe as possible on their journeys.

"We started researching other public transport apparatuses, like ambulances and fire units, to see how they were approaching things. That is how we came across Webasto and their air filtration system and their use inside ambulances," he explained. Following conversations with Sonny Merryman, Inc., PGCPSS' vendor for Thomas Built Buses, and the Virginia Department of Education, Nase learned interest in the

devices was growing as some private schools purchased units for their activity buses. After consultations with PGCPD Division Superintendent Dr. Lisa Pennycuff and Assistant Superintendent of Support Services Dustin Menhart, the school division moved forward purchasing dozens of units for the county's bus fleet.

"Our vendor noted we were the first school system in Virginia that had ordered this many Webasto air filtration units to get started," the transportation director detailed. At a total cost of \$59,960, the devices were purchased using federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, or CARES Act funding. This funding can be used to cover necessary expenditures related to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency, including personal protective equipment, sanitization, technology for distancing learning, and other needs.

Additionally, PGCPD Transportation Department mechanics led the installation process after being trained by vendor Sonny Merryman. That decision resulted in a \$12,000 savings by the school division.

"It was great to know we had the opportunity to prepare this information and get to the point where we could ask for the funding needed to purchase these units, but to know the funds were there through the CARES Act made it all better," Nase said. "We have all taken impacts on our budget this year, but to know we could move forward at this level was a big plus. Thanks to our Finance Department who helped ensure we would quickly have the funding to get this done."

As the school division's transportation mechanics continue to roll out the air filtration units across its fleet, Nase said other localities have reached out to Prince George County Public Schools to learn more about the devices and see the installation process first-hand.

"We have had Goochland County visit with us to observe our install process, along with two other school divisions calling us to learn more about the filters. I think this idea is taking off across the state," he shared. "Our Transportation Department and Wayne Moore, who has been here for 35 years, are continuously told by our vendors that his maintenance program has been top-notch. It feels good to know that we are being proactive.."

"This is just another step Prince George County Public Schools is taking to provide clean air for our students and drivers and gives us another opportunity to make sure we are doing all we can do to make sure everyone is safe," Nase closed.

For more information on the Webasto Air Filtration System, visit their website at <https://www.webasto-comfort.com/en-us/hepa/>. To learn more about Prince George County Public Schools' efforts to protect our school community's health, visit our website at <http://pgs.k12.va.us/ReturnToLearn>.