



Next stop, access!

BEFORE YOU READ

Plain language version

WHAT IS THE “NEXT STOP, ACCESS! BEFORE YOU READ” TOOLKIT ABOUT?

The “Before You Read” toolkit provides background information for the paper, “Next Stop, Access! An Exploratory Paper on Disability Rights and Justice Throughout the Transition to Electric School Buses.”

World Resource Institute’s Electric School Bus Initiative and SeededGround wrote the paper. This toolkit will explain “disability justice” and “environmental justice.” This toolkit will also talk about the definition of other words and language used in the research paper.

Disability justice and environmental justice are ideas that helped researchers to focus the paper on communities most impacted by climate change and environmental issues.

This toolkit is based on the original “Next Stop, Access! Before You Read” paper that was not written in plain language. The original, “Next Stop, Access! Before You Read” paper can be found at doi.org/10.46830/wriwp.23.00046.

WHAT IS WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE’S ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUS INITIATIVE?

World Resources Institute (WRI) is a research organization. The organization focuses on the environment and people. The Electric School Bus Initiative is a project within WRI and wants all school buses in the United States to switch from gas buses to electric buses. Their goal is to have this done by 2030. Electric school buses will create a healthier environment for both children and families. Electric school buses will also help lower the cost to run school buses.

WHAT IS SEEDEDGROUND?

SeededGround is an organization started by Justice Shorter. The organization focuses on the needs and dreams of people of color with disabilities.

Students with disabilities and disabled students

Doctors do many different types of testing to decide on a student’s disability. However, testing doesn’t include important parts like knowing your personal needs, family history, and life experience. Many diverse groups, like students of color and people who come from other countries, don’t have equal access to testing.

In this paper, where it says “students with disabilities,” “disabled students,” or “adults with disabilities,” it means anyone who has:

- Physical or mobility disabilities (like arthritis or a spinal cord injury)
- Cognitive or intellectual disabilities (like memory loss or Down syndrome)
- Hearing loss or deafness
- Vision loss or blindness
- Deaf-blindness (a combination of vision and hearing loss)
- Speech or communication disabilities (like stuttering or a person who is nonspeaking)
- Learning disabilities (like dyslexia or attention hyperactivity disorder)
- Mental health or psychiatric disabilities (like depression or anxiety)
- Traumatic brain injuries (an injury to the brain)
- Autism
- Chronic illnesses (like diabetes or cancer)

DISABILITY JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

What is disability justice?

Queer and disabled activists of color – including Stacey Park Milburn, Pattie Berne, Mia Mingus, and others – created the “disability justice” structure and definition after they connected through Sins Invalid (a performing arts organization).

Disability justice is a safe space for people who experience different levels of oppression (unfair actions against a group of people). People who experience different levels of oppression lead the movement for disability justice. They lead advocacy for people who experience the same problems and have similar goals. They also lead community discussions about these goals and advocacy.

What is environmental justice?

Dr. Robert Bullard and Hazel Johnson are advocates of color who helped create and define “environmental justice.” Environmental justice is similar to disability justice. Environmental justice is focused on how the environment affects the health (like physical, mental, and spiritual health) of diverse communities. The goal of environmental justice is to improve the following situations of communities that deal with discrimination:

- Environmental
- Economic
- Political
- Social

WORDS TO KNOW

Research

A way people learn new things about the world. When people do research, they collect information about a topic, use that information to answer questions on the topic, and share what they learned with others.

Marginalized

A person or group of people who are treated as if they are not important. This person or group of people may experience different levels of oppression and unfair treatment.

Accessibility

For this paper the definition of accessibility means students with disabilities are able to ride on school buses without any issues or barriers. Students with disabilities are able to use school buses with reliable equipment, trained bus operators, monitors, and aides.

Accessible school bus

A bus with a power wheelchair lift or a folding ramp. The wheelchair lift is usually at the back or middle of the bus. The folding ramp is usually located at the front. The bus includes a specific area, spaces, and tie-downs to secure a wheelchair and prevent movement while the bus is in motion.

Accessible school bus features can include:

- Adaptable seats and seatbelts
- Storage spaces
- Temperature control
- Air flow
- Clear communications related to sound and sight
- Reduced stimulation (noise, vibration, etc.)

Disability justice

A movement that says diversity is important for protecting people with disabilities. Disabled people of color, Queer/LGBTQIA people with disabilities, and gender-free people with disabilities all have diverse identities. Disability justice supports:

- Accessibility
- People with disabilities making their own choices
- Interdependence (two or more people depend on each other for support)

People who experience different levels of oppression lead the movement for disability justice. They lead community discussions around similar goals and advocacy.

Disability rights

Laws that provide protections for people with disabilities. Three important national laws in the United States are:

- **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** says that local and state governments and most public places have to be accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** says that federal governments and any program receiving money from the federal government have to be accessible to people with disabilities.

- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** says that public education must be available and free to qualified children with disabilities. It also says that public education must provide special education and support services to those children.

Environmental justice

A movement that says all individuals, regardless of their background (like race, color, national origin, disability or income), should be treated as equals. Everyone should be included in equal access to environmental policies.

There are 17 values of environmental justice shown in the original “Next Stop, Access! Before You Read” paper. In this plain language toolkit, the 17 values say:

1. Mother Earth should be protected. All living beings have the right to be free from the destruction of natural resources (for example, water, air, and soil).
2. Justice for all people is based on respect for each other. Discrimination should not be included in policy.
3. The environment and natural resources must be used with responsibility and respect.
4. Everyone should be protected from toxic and unsafe waste and poisons.
5. All people have the right to make their own choices. This includes in political, economic, and cultural environments.
6. Current producers of toxic and unsafe waste must be held responsible for the effects the waste has on people.
7. All people have the right to be equal partners in decision-making and practices.
8. All workers should have a safe and healthy work environment.
9. Victims of environmental injustice have rights and protections. They should receive financial support for any damages related to environmental injustice, and they should have access to good health care.
10. Environmental discrimination violates international laws, like the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
11. Native people have legal agreements with the U.S. government. Native people have the right to make their own choices in these legal agreements.
12. Policies for cities and towns in rural areas must include clean-up. Policies must include respect for different cultures. Policies must include fair and equal access to different resources.
13. People of color must give their permission first before having medical tests. Informed consent says a person must have all of the information about a medical test before they decide if they want to participate or not.
14. Environmental justice does not support when large companies have negative and hurtful operations.
15. Environmental justice does not support military control of land, people, and cultures. This is because it leads to oppression.
16. Current and future people should be taught about environmental issues. Everyone should learn about the importance of including diverse cultural beliefs and behaviors.
17. We make choices to reduce waste. We make choices to protect Mother Nature and environmental resources. This is for current and future people.

Climate change

Weather patterns and average temperatures changing over time in ways that hurt people and the earth. It is caused by humans and companies.

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw created this word in 1989. Many people have more than one identity. Intersectionality says that those identities are combined to make them who they are as a person. Having multiple identities and being part of different social categories can change a person's experiences and opportunities.

Different social categories or identities under intersectionality might include:

- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Disability
- Class
- Social status

A person who is part of multiple oppressed or marginalized social categories might experience several types of discrimination and oppression. They might also face different challenges.

Example of intersectionality:

Irene has a learning disability and is Latine (Latine is a gender-neutral form of Latino. It refers to people of Latin American origin. Latine is sometimes referred to as Latinx).

Irene's family works shifts at a restaurant when the shifts are available. Irene's family lives in the city with other families who are Latine and have similar jobs. Irene attends a public school that doesn't receive a lot of money. The elementary and middle schools don't have a lot of resources available, like tutoring, therapy, or after-school programs.

Irene was finally tested for a learning disability in high school. The testing found that she has a learning disability. Because Irene wasn't tested earlier, she did not receive any type of accommodations during elementary or middle school. Irene had less opportunities to get support for her learning disability because of discrimination related to her intersectional identities.

Irene probably experienced this unfair treatment because she is Latine, from a family with limited resources, and attends a school with limited resources.

Person-first language and identity-first language

Person-first language puts the person before their disability. For example, person-first language says, "a person who is blind" or "individuals with spinal cord injuries."

Identity-first language puts the disability first. Identity-first language says, for instance, "a blind person" or "an autistic child."

Each person with a disability has the right to choose which way they want to use language and identify. When you aren't sure which to use, it is best to ask the person what they want. The paper uses both person-first and identity-first language.

Examples of person-first language versus identity-first language

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE	IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE
A person who is blind	A blind person
People with disabilities	Disabled people

Policy

A law or practice by governments and organizations.

School bus types

School buses come in four different types based on their size and design. New buses that are electric use electric power. They do not use diesel or any kind of gas.



Type A

A small conversion bus using a cutaway front section with a left side vehicle driver's door.

Type B

A small school bus with the entrance door located behind the front wheels.

Type C

A large school bus with the entrance door being behind the front wheels. It is also known as a conventional style school bus.

Type D

A large bus with the entrance door located ahead of the front wheels; also known as a rear engine or front engine transit-style school bus.

Source: GAO presentation of 2015 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures. | GAO-17-209.

The four main types of school buses are:

1. **Type A:** Type A buses are the smallest school buses. They can carry 10–30 people. Type A school buses are important in the transportation of students with disabilities in a special education program. This is because Type A school buses usually go from the front door of the student’s home, directly to the school, and back. Type A buses usually use gas. Their design is similar to a big pickup truck but with a school bus body on the back. There are nine Type A electric school bus (ESB) models. Each one can have a wheelchair lift.
2. **Type B:** Type B buses are no longer made. None of these will become electric school buses. Type B school buses were made to be able to carry more than 10 people and have a van body. Not many Type B school buses are used anymore.
3. **Type C:** Type C buses are the classic school buses that most people think of. Seven out of 10 school buses in the United States are Type C. They have a long body and can carry 36 to 77 people. The front of the bus is unique because it holds the motor. The door is always located behind the front wheels. Type C buses usually run on diesel gas, but some use other types of gas. All available Type C electric school buses can have a wheelchair lift.
4. **Type D:** Type D buses are the largest school bus. They can carry up to 90 people. Two out of 10 school buses are Type D. The front of this bus is flat. The engine can be placed in two different locations. One location of the engine is in the front, under the driver’s seat. The second possible location of the engine is in the back of the bus. The door to the bus is located in front of the front wheels. Type D buses usually have storage under the bus. Because of this, Type D buses are usually used for school field trips and for sports teams and their equipment. Type D buses can have wheelchair lifts. However, wheelchair lifts aren’t usually on these buses. Type Ds usually run on diesel gas but sometimes on other types of gas. All available Type D electric school buses can have wheelchair lifts.

Universal design

Creating things that are accessible to everyone, with or without a disability. For example, creating all school buses with accessible features like wheelchair ramps and space for wheelchairs on the bus. This means both people with and without disabilities can use the same buses. Universal design can help someone be more independent. Universal design gives everyone equal access to things like buildings and activities.

Next steps

Thank you for reading the plain language version of “Next Stop Access! Before You Read.” Please continue to the plain language version of the research paper, “Next stop, Access! An Exploratory Paper on Disability Rights and Justice Throughout the Transition to Electric School Buses.” You can read the plain language version of “Next stop, Access! An Exploratory Paper on Disability Rights and Justice Throughout the Transition to Electric School Buses” here, doi.org/10.46830/wriwp.23.00046.

ABOUT ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUS INITIATIVE

In 2020, WRI was awarded a \$30 million gift by the Bezos Earth Fund to launch the Electric School Bus Initiative (ESB Initiative). In collaboration with partners and communities, WRI's ESB Initiative aims to build unstoppable momentum toward the equitable transition of the US school bus fleet to electric by 2030, bringing health, climate, and economic benefits to children and families across the country. The ESB Initiative seeks to engage with the broader constellation of e-bus stakeholders to influence and build on growing electrification momentum by offering technical assistance to school districts, convening industry experts in working groups, collecting data, providing analysis for research dissemination, advocating for policies at the federal and state level, and engaging in a variety of partnerships with environmental, equity, and community organizations.

ABOUT SEEDEDGROUND

SeededGround, formed by Justice Shorter, is an agency devoted to content creation that centers people with disabilities in general and people of color with disabilities in particular. We sow justice and harvest dreams through projects that are imaginative and intersectional. Projects are curated in consideration of community needs, creative capacities, and client requests. Our portfolio is comprised of projects that involve accessibility standards and practices, cultural work, advocacy campaigns, cross-movement organizing, multimedia productions, strategic and operational plans, research studies, generative gatherings, and archival efforts. Our work is lovingly wedded to world-building disabled dreams into fruition.

ABOUT WRI

World Resources Institute is a global research organization that turns big ideas into action at the nexus of environment, economic opportunity, and human well-being.



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