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23

Year in Review



Empowering young people is the answer.

The summer of 2023 — the hottest on record — witnessed heat waves and wildfire smoke that affected students and schools across the country. It is clear that the impacts of climate change are happening now, and many are increasingly concerned about what the future will hold for students. Climate change threatens to further disrupt learning, exact physical and emotional harm on young people and their families, and widen inequities in our education sector.

This year, the EPA released a report documenting the extensive effects climate change will have on young people—their health, well-being, learning, security, and economic prospects. Those from Black, Latino, Indigenous, and other communities of color are bearing disproportionate burdens. Every part of society has an urgent opportunity—and responsibility—to address these threats.

The education sector has the power to drive climate action at scale by mobilizing its leaders. Across early years, K-12, higher education, and children’s media, administrators, students, parents, researchers, content creators, and policymakers have formidable expertise and networks that can be amplified through **collaboration**.

The 73 million youth under 18 and nearly 19 million students enrolled in postsecondary institutions—together, about 25% of the total US population—can drive tremendous change. By centering solutions in their lived experiences, we can not only reduce the adverse impacts of climate change but also foster healthy development, ensuring our children and youth not only survive but thrive in a changing climate. The leaders of tomorrow deserve the knowledge and capacity to confront these challenges and advance a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable society.

Mobilizing educational leaders in the fight against climate change can help make progress towards decarbonization now and build lasting change for a sustainable future.

- **Mission:** An initiative of the Aspen Institute’s Energy and Environment Program, This is Planet Ed will unlock the full power of education as a force for climate action, climate solutions, and environmental justice.
- **Beliefs:** We believe today’s children and youth will be essential in the fight against climate change, and we must empower the rising generation with the knowledge and skills to build a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable world.

This Is Planet Ed.

Background: This is Planet Ed began in 2020 as K12 Climate Action, a commission consisting of 22 education, environment, youth, and civil rights leaders. The Commission held a listening tour to learn from students, school leaders, parents, researchers and policymakers about the opportunity to support the education sector to **mitigate, adapt, educate, and advance equity** to address climate change.

Building on the listening tour, the Commission collaboratively developed the [K12 Climate Action Plan](#) with actionable recommendations for all levels of government, as well as media, advocacy, business, and philanthropy, to advance climate action in K-12 schools. The plan also recognized that mobilizing education requires broad partnership.

In September 2022, we relaunched as This Is Planet Ed to lead an effort for broad mobilization across the education sector. This Is Planet Ed is co-chaired by former US Secretary of Education and Chancellor of SUNY John B. King and former EPA Administrator and New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman. In 2023, Planet Ed built upon and expanded each of the core initiatives - Early Years Climate Action, K12 Climate Action, Higher Ed Climate Action, and Planet Media - to scale impact and further empower young people.



Sec. John B. King Jr. (Co-Chair)
Chancellor, State University of New York (SUNY)



Christine Todd Whitman, (Co-Chair)
President, Whitman Strategy Group

This Is Planet Ed Strategy

This is Planet Ed is a catalytic effort aimed at mobilizing four action levers: the education sectors of **1) early years, 2) K-12, 3) higher education sectors, and 4) children's media.**

This Is Planet Ed will provide a backbone, framework, and narrative for broader collective action. We will:

- Foster advocates and champions for climate action within the education sector.
- Establish cross-sector frameworks for action.
- Build coalitions and secure commitments to action on climate change.
- Build the narrative for climate action and solutions across the education sector.

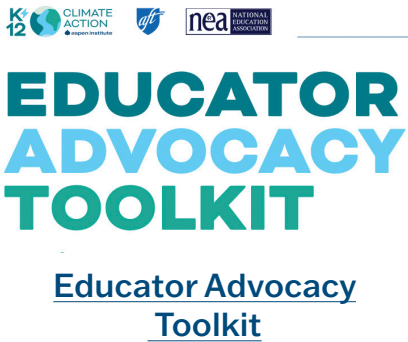
This Is Planet Ed: 2023 Milestones

K12 Climate Action

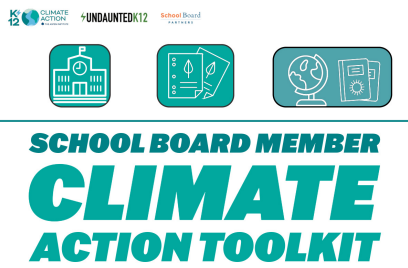
In 2023, K12 Climate Action expanded its impact by empowering education leaders, creating tools and resources for schools, and presenting information to a variety of audiences.

- **K12 Climate Action Awarded “Moment for the Movement” Award at the Green Schools Conference**
- **K12 Climate Action Commissioner Kiera O’Brien named to the EPA Youth Advisory Council**

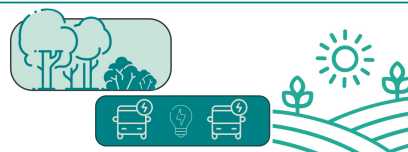
K12 Publications:



Educator Advocacy Toolkit



SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER CLIMATE ACTION TOOLKIT



School Board Climate Action Toolkit



Featured Publication: Education Uncapped

ED⁺ EDUCATION UNCAPPED

The Potential of the Education Sector in
City Climate Action Planning



This report examines the inclusion of children and youth, as well as early childhood, K-12, and higher education systems, in the climate action plans of the 40 most populous US cities.

K12 Presentations

- **Presented to Hopewell Valley School District.** Speaker: Laura Schifter. January 2023
- **Presented to Wilton Go Green and Connecticut Schools.** Speaker: Laura Schifter. February 2023.
- **Moderated Session at Green Schools Conference in New Orleans.** Speaker: Michelle Faggert. March 2023.
- **How We Talk About Climate Change With Kids.** Speakers: Laura Schifter and Anya Kamenetz. March 2023.



- **Ending Climate Silence in Schools Breakout at Aspen Ideas: Climate in Miami Beach.** Speakers: Laura Schifter, Maya Green, Naina Agrawal-Hardin, Kiera O'Brien. March 2023.
- **Presented at the CA County Superintendents General Membership Meeting.** Speakers: Laura Schifter and Debra Duardo. April 2023.
- **Presented to the National Education Association's APRA Coordinators.** Speaker: Laura Schifter. April 2023..
- **Featured at Harvard Climate Action Week.** Speakers: John King and Laura Schifter. May 2023.



Featured in a Climate Reality Project Training: K-12 Educational Provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act. Speaker: Laura Schifter. May 2023.



Presented at the Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools Event. Speaker: Michelle Faggert. August 2023.



Presented a Keynote Speech at the Local Conference on Youth. Speaker: Sophia Powless. October 2023.

Collaboration Spotlight:

School Board Climate Action Toolkit

In 2023, This Is Planet Ed partnered with UndauntedK12 and School Board Partners to create a **School Board Climate Action Toolkit**. The toolkit helps school board members understand their role in driving meaningful climate solutions. School board members can collaborate with district leaders, youth, and community leaders to pass resolutions and develop climate action plans for their districts. These local K-12 climate action plans, similar to those embraced by city governments, utilize community needs and strengths as guiding principles for schools.

These plans enable educational institutions to:

- **Reduce Climate Pollution:** Implement strategies to decrease the pollution harming student health and driving climate change.
- **Prepare for Climate Impacts:** Develop greater resilience against the challenges posed by climate change.
- **Educate Students:** Educate students about climate change, climate solutions and inspire action.
- **Advance Equity:** Prioritize communities that are most impacted by climate change and are at the center of decisions and schools.

The toolkit include resources such as:

- **9 School District Commitments for Climate Resilience & Sustainability**
- **Template School Board Climate Action Resolution**
- **Moments for Climate Action**

To learn more, visit the full toolkit **here**.

Climate Change & Environmental Justice Micro-Credentials

In 2023, This Is Planet Ed partnered with the National Education Association (NEA) and Subject to Climate to create a series of **micro-credentials** for NEA educators. The stack of micro-credentials will help educators gain the knowledge and skills they need to effectively understand how climate change impacts school communities and how to equip their classroom, their colleagues, and their students with the tools to help move toward climate justice for all.

The 6 micro credentials are focused on:

- Climate Awareness
- Climate Justice
- Climate Mitigation in Schools
- Climate Adaptation in Schools
- Climate Change and Communities
- Climate Education

The content for each mini course was created in partnership with educators, and includes a project in which educators demonstrate their mastery of the content. NEA has also recently developed a **Climate Justice** webpage which shares climate resources with educators and highlights climate change as a prominent issue for NEA.

Higher Ed Climate Action

In 2023, This Is Planet Ed **launched** the Higher Ed Climate Action Initiative and **Task Force**. Higher Ed Climate Action, co-chaired by Commissioner of Higher Education for Louisiana Kim Hunter Reed and Chancellor of the California State University system Mildred García, convenes cross-sector leaders to develop a plan to unlock the full potential of higher education to accelerate climate solutions.



Mildred García (Co-Chair)
Chancellor of the California State
University system



Kim Hunter Reed (Co-Chair)
Commissioner of Higher Education,
Louisiana

The task force held a series of listening sessions to better understand the work currently occurring and the opportunity to scale action across the sector.

Higher Ed Listening Sessions:

- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session I:** *Why should higher education accelerate action on climate change? May 3, 2023*
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session II:** *How can higher education prepare students for clean economy jobs? June 28, 2023*
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session III:** *How can higher education incorporate climate learning opportunities for students? July 2, 2023*
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session IV:** *What are the climate-related systemic risks to climate change? September 21, 2023*
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session V:** *How can TCUs, HBCUs, MSIs, and community partners drive equity-focused action on climate change? November 2, 2023*
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session VI:** *How can public policy and organizing scale impact? Featuring Stacey Abrams, December 5, 2023*
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Listening Session Summary**

"Higher education has such remarkable institutional power and privilege that often goes unused. It's not simply the ability to affect and build strong students, faculty, and staff, it's also the ability to impact, engage, and invite communities to understand."

Stacey Abrams

Senior Counsel for Rewiring America
Former minority Leader in the
Georgia House of Representatives

"In a broader sense, it's not just doctors who need to be educated on this topic. It's college students, it's companies, it's our workforce. Everyone needs to have a thorough understanding of climate change and how it impacts our world. I urge you to recognize the wide ranging and multifaceted ways that climate impacts your students, your organizations, your missions, and your communities."

Kanika Malani

MD-MS student at Brown University.
Member and curriculum Co-Chair of
Medical Students for a Sustainable Future

"The differentness of our institutions, whether we talk about HSIs or TCUs, that uniqueness needs to come out. The mission and the goals of getting and advancing justice across the board—economic, racial, gender, land rights, sovereignty—all of that needs to flow through and not get blended as if we are just all one. That's not who we are."

Dr. Robert Bullard

Founding director of the Bullard
Center for Environmental and Climate
Justice at Texas Southern University

"Our mission to prepare students and graduates to lead calls upon us to actively address what leadership means in a changing global climate. As stewards of our communities, we serve as hubs of learning and research, and now we must incorporate climate literacy and climate action too"

Higher Ed Climate Action Co-Chairs.
Mildred García and Kim Hunter Reed

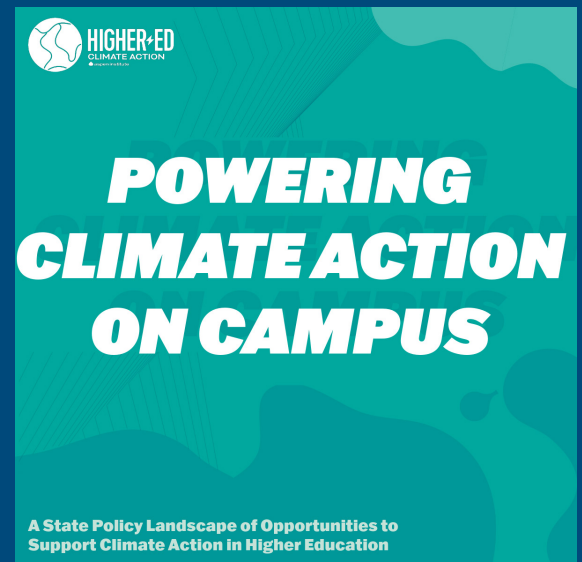
Higher Ed Presentations:

- **Presented at Second Nature's 2023 Higher Education Climate Leadership Summit.** Speaker: Laura Schifter. February 2023.



- **Mainstage Presentation at Aspen Ideas: Climate in Miami Beach.** Speakers: John King and Dan Porterfield. March 2023.
- **Presented at the American Conference on Education's (ACE) Annual Meeting.** Speakers: Laura Schifter, John King, and Joanie Mahoney. April 2023
- **Higher Ed Climate Action Presentation at the AASCU Annual Conference.** Speaker: Kristin Esterberg. November 2023.

Higher Ed Publications:



Powering Climate Action on Campus

Early Years Climate Action

The Early Years Climate Action Task Force concluded a series of virtual listening sessions in 2023 and then convened in Aspen Meadows to develop a plan for the Early Years sector to support our youngest children in the face of a changing climate.

- **Early Years Climate Action Listening Session IV:** *How can investments in early childhood help communities build resilience to climate change? January 9, 2023*
- **Early Years Climate Action Listening Session V:** *How do existing local and state plans to address climate change include children? February 10, 2023*
- **Early Years Climate Action Listening Session VI:** *How can we support parents and early years providers in advocating for a sustainable future? Featuring Chelsea Clinton. March 20, 2023*

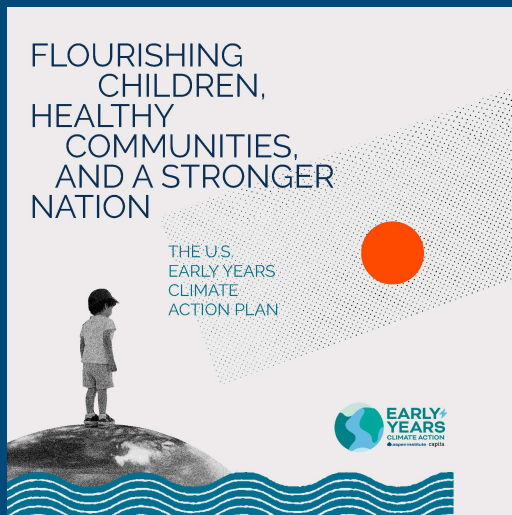
In October, the task force launched the **Early Years Climate Action Plan**, with a series of briefings on Capitol Hill, at the White House, and with non-profit partners. This Is Planet Ed is now working to support task force members as they understand their organization's unique role in the climate space.



“Our choices today will lay the foundation for future generations in America who will participate in and lead our democracy, economy, and civil society,” said Ford. “Through the Action Plan and its many solutions, we have an opportunity here and now to build on existing experiences, research, and bright spots to further support young children and their families in adapting and building resilience to climate change.”

Antwanye E. Ford

Early Years Climate Task Force co-chair & President and CEO of Enlightened



“The U.S. Early Years Action Plan is not only a catalyst for action, but also an invitation to families, caregivers, policymakers, educators and business leaders to collaboratively develop and implement solutions that give our youngest learners an opportunity to thrive.”

Diana Mendley Rauner, Ph. D.

Early Years Climate Task Force co-chair & President of Start Early

Early Years Presentations:

- **Featured in the Stanford Climate & Young Children Webinar.** Speakers: Laura Schifter, Antwanye Ford, and Anya Kamenetz. September 2023.
- **Featured in the Flourishing Children, Healthy Communities, and a Stronger Nation: The U.S. Early Years Climate Action Plan Webinar.** Speakers: Laura Schifter and Leah Austin. November 2023.

Early Years Publications:

- **Early Years and the Inflation Reduction Act**
- **Early Years Climate Action Plan**

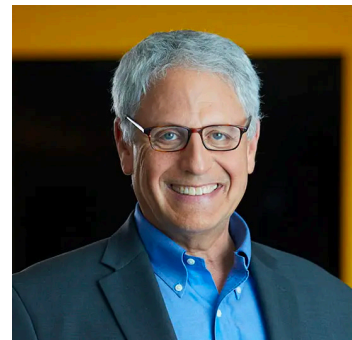
Planet Media

In 2023, This Is Planet Ed expanded on its fourth initiative: **Planet Media**. Planet Media seeks to harness the reach and influence of media to support children and their families in building scientifically grounded awareness and understanding of climate science and solutions, laying a foundation for climate literacy and empowering young people to take action.

This Is Planet Ed assembled the Planet Media task force, co-chaired by Gary Knell, formerly of National Geographic, and Katharine Hayhoe, Chief Scientist of The Nature Conservancy, who will guide the strategic direction of Planet Media and lead a campaign focused on hope, humor, and solutions that can help to minimize future misconception and worry and build knowledge essential for future understanding, well-being, citizenship, and economic success.



Katharine Hayhoe (Co-Chair)
The Nature Conservancy



Gary Knell (Co-Chair)
Boston Consulting Group

To encourage creative development of innovative, climate media for children, This Is Planet Ed announced the **Planet Media Call for Pitches**, a project to generate ideas for short-form content to support children ages 8-12 in understanding four essential climate principles.



Planet Media Presentations:

- **Climate Solutions in Stories at Aspen Ideas: Climate in Miami Beach.** Speaker: Gary Knell. March 2023.
- **Featured on the CMA Kids and Climate Action Panel.** Speaker: Laura Schifter. April 2023.

News Stories

- [**Education Week:** The Missed Opportunity for Public Schools and Climate Change](#) Nov 29, 2023
- [**Greenwire:** Biden’s climate, infrastructure laws revitalize aging schools](#) Nov 16, 2023
- [**USA TODAY:** Many US schools aren’t teaching about climate change. Students aren’t happy about that](#) Sep 25, 2023
- [**CNN:** Are heat days the new snow days? Schools are canceling class as temperatures soar](#) Sep 6, 2023
- [**The Hill:** Summer weather takes bites from school calendars](#) Aug 28, 2023
- [**Education Week:** Disrupted Learning and Health Woes: Climate Change Impacts Educators Should Brace For](#) May 9, 2023
- [**Hechinger Report:** Are the challenges of Puerto Rico’s schools a taste of what other districts will face?](#) Apr 3, 2023
- [**Diverse Issues in Higher Education:** Aspen Institute Launches Effort to Support Higher Ed’s Role in Climate Action](#) Apr 19, 2023
- [**Harvard Gazette:** Talking with kids about existential threat of climate change](#) Mar 14, 2023
- [**Maryland Matters:** Campaign for rooftop solar goes to school](#) Feb 28, 2023
- [**Christian Science Monitor:** First fire, then floods. How a school district helps students recover.](#) Jan 27, 2023
- [**WBUR:** More Massachusetts districts are switching to electric school buses](#) Jan 23, 2023
- [**San Jose Spotlight:** Dewan: Our youth need climate resilient schools](#) Jan 16, 2023
- [**Education Week:** Steal These Resolutions: 7 Experts Share How Schools Can Tackle Climate Change in 2023](#) Jan 12, 2023
- [**Getting Smart** On To Greener Pathways: The Future of Work Has New Opportunities for Students](#) Jan 9, 2023
- [**US News and World Report:** How to Talk to Your Kids About Climate Change.](#) Jan 5, 2023

Op-Eds:

The Hechinger Report: [Higher education must take the lead on climate change, beginning on our own campuses](#)

by Higher Ed Climate Action Co-Chairs Mildred García and Kim Hunter Reed
September 26, 2023

CNN: [How I talk to my kids about climate change](#)

by Laura Schifter
June 10, 2023

Hechinger Report Columns by This Is Planet Ed Senior Advisor Anya Kamenetz:

COLUMN: [A creation story for Indigenous and nature-based learning](#)

Dec 1, 2023

COLUMN: [Little kids need outdoor play — but not when it's 110 degrees](#)

October 18, 2023

COLUMN: [Is A/C the new ABC? As the country gets hotter, schools need upgrades](#)

Sep 6, 2023

COLUMN: [Want teachers to teach climate change? You've got to train them](#)

Aug 2, 2023

COLUMN: [What does it look like when higher ed actually takes climate change seriously?](#)

Jun 7, 2023

COLUMN: [How student school board members are driving climate action](#)

Apr 18, 2023

COLUMN: [New climate legislation could create 9 million jobs. Who will fill them?](#)

Feb 9, 2023

Thank you to our partners: the students, educators, parents, schools, communities, and organizations who are leading this work on the ground across the country. We look forward to the work ahead of us in 2024 to build a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future for all young people.