

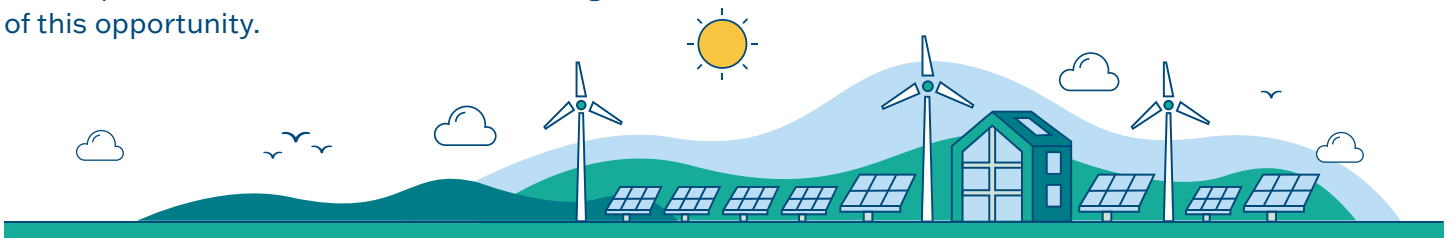
EDUCATOR ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Introduction

From wildfires to hurricanes, flooding to heatwaves, the impacts of climate change are happening now, and many educators are increasingly concerned about what the future will hold for students. But educators can work to advance solutions — solutions students can see in their schools.

Taking climate action in schools can help communities reduce and prepare for climate impacts while creating hands-on learning opportunities for students. Many students are already impacted by climate change and have shown leadership by asking adults to take climate action. Learning about climate solutions in schools can help students feel prepared to act in their communities and become leaders for a more sustainable future. These solutions can also create healthier learning spaces and significantly reduce schools' energy costs, which can then be redirected to support teaching and learning through salary raises and other supports.

Recent federal legislation, such as **The Inflation Reduction Act** and **The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act**, provide an unprecedented opportunity to fund climate solutions in schools. Educators can help schools and districts take advantage of this opportunity.



What is Climate Change?

Climate change refers to the long-term changes in average weather and climate, regionally and globally. Since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to releasing greenhouse gasses—such as carbon dioxide—by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. Our atmosphere acts as a heat-trapping blanket which has created a stable climate for life to thrive. But our greenhouse gas emissions are changing the material of that blanket, trapping more heat, and destabilizing our climate. Although it can seem complicated, there are four key messages that educators across all grade levels and subjects should know about climate change:

**It's warming, it's us,
it's happening now,
but it's solvable.**

**And the education
sector can help
advance solutions.**



What are K-12 Climate Action Plans?

One way school districts can promote climate solutions is to develop comprehensive K-12 climate action plans. Similar to the climate action plans adopted by a variety of city governments, local K-12 climate action plans use a community's local needs and strengths to inform school efforts to reduce carbon emissions, prepare for climate impacts, and educate students about climate change and climate solutions. The [K12 Climate Action Plan](#) provides more information about climate action plans, as well as policy recommendations for the local, state, and federal level to support schools and districts in this work.



Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland created a climate action plan for their district. View the plan and other resources [here](#).

How Can Federal Funds Help?

There are many funding streams currently available that schools can leverage to support the implementation of climate action plans. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and The American Rescue Plan (ARP) can be used to fund and implement climate solutions in schools. Because these resources are available for a limited amount of time, educator voice will play an important role in ensuring that school districts are aware and taking advantage of these opportunities.



What Role Can Educators Play?

As frontline leaders in schools and communities, educators have a key role to play in advancing climate solutions. Educators can:

- Advocate directly to school and district leaders for climate action and support students in doing so as well;
- Demand that school districts access funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and other federal programs to renovate school buildings, switch to carbon-neutral technologies, lower their energy costs, and improve student performance;
- Consider incorporating climate action plans into contract bargaining;
- Work with union leaders to drive conversations around building climate action plans and making climate justice a priority for their local association;
- Uplift student voice and concerns regarding climate change and ensure they are safe in raising these opinions;
- Partner with students, parents, families, school leaders, and community members — especially with those in communities most affected by climate change — to implement solutions;
- Engage students in hands-on learning about climate solutions, including career and technical education curricula; and
- Prepare for pushback on climate issues being taught in the classroom.

Goal: Commitment to Develop Local K-12 Climate Action Plans and Access Federal Resources

The goal of using this toolkit is to get your school district to develop a local K12 climate action plan, funded by federal resources, to address climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and education while advancing equity. A local climate action plan for a school district should be based on community needs and include student, educator, parent, and community input. This toolkit can help you to:

- Understand federal funding available to schools;
- Reduce the carbon footprint of your school district;
- Adapt and build resilience to climate impacts;
- Support teaching and learning on climate change, climate solutions, and sustainability;
- Center voices of those affected by the disproportionate impacts of climate change to advance equity; and
- Create healthy, sustainable learning environments.



MITIGATION

Climate mitigation strategies help us reduce our impact on climate change and on the environment. Schools are one of the largest public sector energy consumers, operate the largest mass transit fleet in the country, and serve 7 billion meals every year. School districts can lower their carbon emissions by using renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, transitioning to electric school buses, and reducing food waste. These efforts also promote student health, save districts money, and create learning opportunities for students.

Example: As a first step in the climate action planning process, several districts have passed clean energy resolutions. The New Buildings Institute has compiled [Examples of Carbon Neutral School District Resolutions](#), including Fairfax, Virginia; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Los Angeles, California.

ADAPTATION

Climate adaptation strategies help schools adapt and build resilience to climate impacts ahead. Climate change will bring more frequent and intense extreme weather, including flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, and high heat. These events can cause schools to close, disrupting student learning and school-based support. School districts that plan ahead for extreme weather by identifying local climate risks, creating plans for disruptions to learning, supporting the mental health of students, transitioning to green school yards, and serving as sources of energy and food during disaster will be more resilient to the impacts of climate change and can better support students and families.

Example: In [Santa Barbara Unified School District](#), the district is intentionally preparing schools to serve as community hubs in the event of power outages and extreme weather by installing solar-powered microgrids at several schools across the district.

CLIMATE EDUCATION

Teaching and learning about climate change, its causes, consequences, and solutions, can help empower children and youth to lead a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future. Districts can help teachers engage students in teaching and learning about climate change, climate solutions, and sustainability into their existing curricula, across all grades and subject areas. Districts can also support career and technical education programs that prepare students for jobs in a clean economy.

Examples: In 2022, [New Jersey was the first state to incorporate climate change standards across all grades and subjects](#). New Jersey worked with Subject to Climate to [compile state-specific resources and curriculum for New Jersey educators](#).

EQUITY

Black, Latino, Indigenous, and other communities of color, as well as low-income urban and rural students disproportionately feel the negative consequences of climate change — and these same communities are most impacted by existing education inequities. To advance equity and environmental justice, climate action should prioritize communities that are most impacted by climate change and ensure that students and families in those communities are at the center of decisions by districts and schools.

Strategies for Successful Advocacy

Collaborating with other educators, administrators, students, and families, identifying goals, taking actionable steps, and celebrating success can help advance advocacy for climate action in your school. The tips below are starting points, and the linked resources offer additional detail.



Make climate justice a part of your bargaining and advocacy platform and engage in a [Bargaining for the Common Good Strategy](#)



Create a broad coalition that includes students, parents, external partners, and others interested in advancing this work

- Identify specific roles for the coalition. These may include leadership, communications, partner engagement, local union engagement, and more.
 - Explain to potential volunteers the specific roles or supports the coalition needs and ask what makes them interested in joining the coalition.
 - Try to match volunteers to their interests as best as possible.
 - Ensure that volunteering for your coalition is an easy lift and that the actual engagement on the team doesn't create barriers for the volunteers themselves.
- Invite members to join the coalition.
 - Focus on building relationships and connecting with other educators in your school and community.
 - Include interested students in action planning and seat them in leadership roles wherever possible.
 - Connect with families, authentically, to garner interest in solution planning and build their ownership of the plan as the coalition develops, including through your local PTA chapter or other parent advocacy groups.
 - Connect with local employers. Local employers may be interested in partnering on greenhouse gas emissions reduction efforts or expanding pathways to clean economy jobs, especially through your school or district's career and technical education program.
 - Continue building relationships with community leaders (elected officials, activist groups, etc.) to find common interest.
 - Identify experts and organizations that can provide education and research related to local climate issues.



Baseline to gain an understanding of where your district is as it relates to climate action planning, starting with your school principal.

- These [Key Questions](#) can help guide your understanding of what is already in place locally.
- Talk to key personnel such as building administrators, facilities directors, and superintendents to develop an understanding of what efforts are already in place and what needs to be done next.



Develop goals and timelines, including your end goal, and the goals for your specific plan components and development

- Goals should follow the SMART rule (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound).
- Keep a consistent eye on your timelines, and hold regular check-ins with your coalition (particularly your team leads).
- Consider hooks like Earth Day, the county fair, or the anniversary of climate-related events.
- Ensure the work being led is connected to the climate and environmental priorities of your local union and leverage that priority work to lift the plan for the district.



Prepare an effective communications plan and take action

- With your coalition, develop common language for your advocacy efforts grounded in your local needs to help you achieve success. See the section on “Talking Points & Messaging Guidance” below.
- Begin tabling or having face-to-face and/or digital meetings, ensuring you are centering your learnings in your goal and implementation plan.
- Drive change through social media, including or perhaps led by student influencers at your school.
- Communicate with your federal, state, and local officials, such as your Members of Congress, state legislators, city council members, school board, mayors, and other elected officials. The following [strategies](#), designed for speaking with federal officials, can also be utilized at the local level.
- Meet with school board members to build their awareness of the need for a plan, of the issues students are raising, and how they can engage as local leaders. Offer public testimony or support in public meetings. Be clear in your asks and how these leaders can engage.



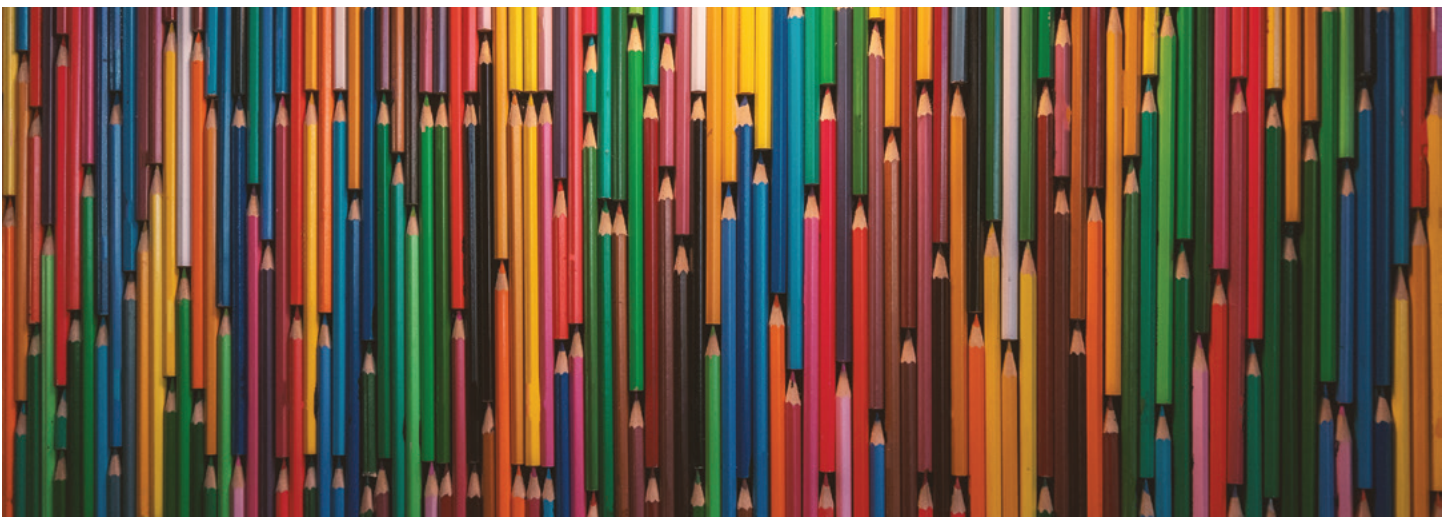
Celebrate successes as they occur, and determine follow up steps

- Consistently show appreciation to all team members. Ensure they understand that their contributions are valued and valuable, and that they all have contributed to the success of the effort.

Key Questions To Help Your Team Get Started

Is your district ready to take action on climate change? These questions can help you begin to gather data and determine opportunities for your district to develop local K-12 climate action plans. For more specific questions, [please see this guide](#).

- **Sustainability.** Does my district or community have any existing sustainability plans?
- **Energy.** Does my district have a plan in place to transition to 100%, or any, clean energy in schools?
- **Transportation.** Does my district have a plan in place to transition to 100%, or any, clean transportation including zero-emission school buses?
- **Food.** Does my district support sustainable food use (for example, locally sourced food and composting)?
- **Adaptation.** Does my district have a plan in place to support students when school is disrupted due to extreme weather?
- **Teaching and Learning.** How, if at all, are climate change, climate solutions, and sustainability taught in my district currently?



Talking Points & Messaging Guidance

Climate change is increasingly affecting communities and schools around the country, yet conversations about climate change can be challenging. Many people are also unfamiliar with the connections between schools and climate change. Helping district and school leaders, community members, and other educators understand these connections in your local context and drawing connections to health and economic benefits can make advocacy efforts more effective and keep conversations focused on local needs and strengths.

The talking points below can help you explain the connections between education and climate change using key data about the environmental impact of schools and the benefits of pursuing climate solutions. While the talking points cite national data, finding similar data points for your district, county, or state can help make your advocacy more persuasive.

Key Talking Point #1: *Climate Action Plans Can Help Schools Reduce Their Carbon Footprint*

Overall: With nearly 100,000 schools across the country, schools are one of the largest public sector energy consumers, operate the largest mass transit fleet in the country with 480,000 buses, and serve 7 billion meals every year. As a result, schools have a substantial carbon footprint, which contributes to climate change.

Net-zero schools are better for our students, our health, and the environment

- School districts can lower their carbon emissions by using renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, transitioning to electric school buses, and reducing food waste. In addition to being more environmentally sustainable, these efforts can also promote student health, save districts money, and create learning opportunities for students.
- Buildings are one of the leading contributors to carbon emissions, and energy costs are among the highest costs for school districts. With schools in every community, reducing the carbon emissions of school buildings can help communities lower their environmental impacts while saving money on maintenance and operations.
- Sustainable infrastructure — including solar panels, geothermal heating and cooling, and LED lighting — can reduce schools' reliance on fossil fuels and improve energy efficiency. School buildings themselves can then be used as tools to help students learn about sustainability and clean energy. Schools that improve their energy efficiency and have solar panels or other sources of renewable energy may be able to become net-zero energy, meaning they produce as much energy as they consume.

Zero-emission school buses are better for our students, our health, and the environment

- Most school buses use diesel engines which produce air pollution that contributes to climate change, harms student health, and impacts academic performance and absenteeism. Transitioning to electric school buses eliminates diesel exhaust, which is better for the environment as well as student and community health. Electric school buses save districts money on maintenance and operations in the long run, but generally have high upfront costs. Districts that leverage federal funding can reduce or eliminate the cost barriers to purchasing electric buses.
- The nation's 480,000 mainly diesel school buses are the largest mass transit fleet in the country. Transitioning to electric school buses eliminates carbon emissions and supports student health.

Sustainable school meals are better for our students, our health, and the environment

- School meals are a critical resource for many students and families. Making school food more sustainable can help districts reduce their environmental footprints.
- The process of purchasing, using, and disposing of food contributes to schools' environmental footprints. Serving sustainably grown, local food reduces carbon emissions and can support child nutrition. Districts can reduce food waste by allowing schools to donate extra unopened food and by composting food scraps.
- To support school efforts to recover surplus food before it goes to waste, schools can conduct food waste audits, participate in food waste education, and collaborate with local organizations to recover and donate uneaten foods.
- Farm to School programs have helped to reduce food waste and support the local economy. When schools buy fresh local ingredients, not only are they supporting farmers; they are also helping create better jobs for food service professionals, because preparing wholesome meals from scratch requires additional skills and work hours.

Key Talking Point #2: *Climate Action Plans Can Help Schools Adapt and Build Resilience to Climate Impacts*

Overall: Climate change impacts communities differently based on their geography. As school districts plan for climate adaptation and resilience, they will need to base decisions on local climate risks.

Schools can plan to provide support for students and families in the event of climate related learning disruptions

- Extreme weather including flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, and extreme temperatures have already caused schools to close, disrupting student learning and school-based supports. School districts that plan ahead for extreme weather will be more resilient to the impacts of climate change and can better support students and families.
 - Districts that have plans for virtual learning and other supports will be better able to continue teaching and learning.
 - Districts that build capacity to support student mental health can help students recover and build resilience to climate impacts.

Schools are centers of communities and can help our communities in emergencies

- Extreme weather can cause power outages and damage homes and other community infrastructure. Schools are already centers of the community and provide students and families with access to important resources such as food and health care. Many schools already serve as emergency shelters. Those that use renewable energy such as solar panels coupled with battery storage — also known as solar microgrids — can continue operating even during widespread power outages. Schools then have the ability to provide critical resources such as food, shelter, electricity, and healthcare to the community. Districts that adopt renewable energy and work with local emergency preparedness organizations can help adapt and build resilience to climate impacts.

Sustainable schoolyards can help reduce community heat and flooding

- Extreme temperatures impact student learning and health. Schools sit on about 2 million acres of land nationally. Ensuring schoolyards are sustainable green spaces, rather than heat-trapping asphalt, can create healthy spaces for students to learn and play. These spaces have the added benefit of reducing community heat and flooding.

Key Talking Point #3:
Climate Action Plans Can Help Schools Support Teaching and Learning on Climate Change, Climate Solutions, and Sustainability

Overall: Schools are already focused on preparing students for the future, and have the opportunity to further prepare students to be leaders in a sustainable society. Cross-curricular teaching and learning about climate change and solutions empowers students to lead a sustainable future.

Districts can help teachers incorporate climate change, climate solutions, and sustainability into their existing curricula across grades and subject areas

- As climate change continues, students who have an understanding of its causes and what they can do to advance climate solutions will be better prepared for the future.
- Districts can support teachers by providing professional development, curricular materials, and example lesson plans.

Key Talking Point #4:
Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs Can Help Prepare Students for Success in the Clean Economy

Overall: As we transition to a clean energy economy, today's students will need to be prepared to address climate change in their careers. Schools must aid in this transition.

Every job is a climate job

- Jobs in clean energy industries are some of the fastest growing in the country. Districts can ensure that career and technical education (CTE) programs help students benefit from the increasing demand for high-skill, high-wage jobs in the clean economy.
- Climate change is impacting every sector, such as agriculture, water treatment, food production, manufacturing, hospitality and tourism, marketing, energy, healthcare, supply-chain management, finance, architecture, and transportation. Integrating sustainability into all CTE curricula can help prepare students to succeed in any career path they choose.

Schools can ensure that all CTE career pathways integrate sustainability, adaptation, and mitigation strategies into the curriculum and that all students have an opportunity to learn how today's and tomorrow's jobs are changing

- For example: green buildings employ sustainable design, construction, materials, and operations that can significantly reduce emissions, energy, water, and waste. A number of CTE construction programs include sustainability in the curriculum and offer specific credentials in green building.



Key Talking Point #5:
*Climate Action Plans
Can Ensure Community
Input and Advance
Equity*

Overall: Climate action should include communities most impacted by climate change, including students, as partners.

- **Climate action should include students as partners.** As the primary stakeholders in education, students should be included as partners in decision making about climate action. They offer critical perspectives, and meaningfully including students can help them develop agency to advance solutions.
- **Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other communities of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities, and under-resourced urban and rural communities bear the greatest burdens from negative climate impacts, from greater exposure to pollution to greater vulnerability to extreme weather.** To advance equity and environmental justice, climate action should prioritize communities that are most impacted by climate change and ensure that people in those communities are meaningfully included in decisions about climate actions and the implementation of climate solutions.
- **Climate change exacerbates existing inequities in education.** Due to inequities in education funding systems, schools and districts that serve primarily low-income students and students of color may face greater challenges accessing resources for sustainable infrastructure or other climate solutions. As districts take action on climate change, they should prioritize resources for schools in these communities to ensure that all students in the district can benefit from climate solutions and can access high quality career pathway programs.



Key Talking Point #6:
The Inflation Reduction Act Can Be Used to Support Climate Action Planning in Schools

Overall: The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) represents an unprecedented amount of funding from the federal government to advance climate solutions, and schools must take advantage of the opportunity. The IRA includes tax credits, grant opportunities, and financing mechanisms that can help schools plan and implement localized climate action plans and create healthy, sustainable learning environments for students.

The IRA includes tax credits that will support schools in mitigating their climate impact by transitioning to clean energy and transportation

- Investment tax credits can be used for energy investment and installation and can help schools reduce the cost of transitioning to renewable energy, like solar panels, geothermal heat pumps, and energy storage systems. This tax credit has the potential to fund up to 60% of a renewable energy project.
- Clean transportation tax credits can aid schools in purchasing clean light- and heavy-duty vehicles, including school buses or other vehicles owned and operated by school districts. These credits can reduce the upfront cost of electric vehicles by up to \$40,000 dollars, making electric school buses more affordable and accessible.
- These tax credits and others include a direct pay option. Direct pay allows non-taxable entities, such as schools, to directly benefit from the credit and to receive the eligible amount as a cash payment from the IRS.

The IRA offers grant opportunities that schools can either apply for directly, or work with community partners to ensure that the projects benefit students

- The grants can be used to mitigate schools' impact on the environment and to help schools and communities adapt to climate-related changes.
- Schools can use the clean heavy duty vehicle grant program to further help replace diesel school buses and other eligible school-owned vehicles with zero emission vehicles (ZEVs), including zero-emission electric school buses.
- Funding to Address Air Pollution at Schools includes grants to monitor and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants at schools in low-income and disadvantaged communities.
- Environmental and Climate Justice block grants can be used to address disproportionate environmental and public health harms related to pollution and climate change. Schools can be key partners to ensure that these grants benefit students and families.

The IRA includes a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund which will provide grants to help establish "Green Banks" across the country

- Green banks are funding mechanisms with the goal of rapidly deploying low- and zero-emission technologies and can be leveraged by schools to cover the upfront cost of renewable energy. Education leaders can research green banks in their state and region to help finance projects at their schools.



Key Talking Point #7:
The Inflation Reduction Act Can Be Leveraged Alongside Other Funding Streams

Overall: In addition to the Inflation Reduction Act, other streams of funding, including the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and the American Rescue Plan, can be leveraged to maximize investments in schools.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides billions of dollars that can be used to help schools address climate change

- Schools can take advantage of The Renew America's Schools program which provides grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements that will improve indoor air quality, save energy, and reduce energy costs.
- The Clean School Bus Program provides \$5 billion in funding to help schools transition to zero-emission school buses.

The American Rescue Plan includes \$350 billion in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to support a wide range of pandemic response and recovery efforts, including school improvements to ventilation and building energy systems that reduce energy costs and support healthy environments

Addressing Pushback & Inaccurate Information

While advocating for climate action in schools, you may receive pushback from other educators, education leaders, or community members that is based on inaccurate information. There are several strategies you can use to build support through advocacy and conversations with people in your school.

Understanding the concerns of people in your school and community and leading with shared values can help build support. Whether it is an interest in hiking, cooking, health, the economy, or a love for our children, beginning conversations about climate change with shared values and focusing on the local impacts of climate change can help you find common ground.

Below, you can find examples of respectful ways to respond to those who are skeptical about climate change and taking climate action.

What you might hear: Climate change isn't real. Look at places where it's colder!

How you can respond: Climate change is different from daily weather. Weather can change each day and some days will still be cold, but climate change is a trend overtime. These trends are also resulting in more extreme weather including many of the floods, droughts, hurricanes, and wildfires that we have seen across the country. These changes will increasingly occur and impact our children's lives into the future, and we have an opportunity to help them better understand the world they will inherit.

What you might hear: Climate change isn't caused by people or human behavior.

How you can respond: While there have been changes in global temperatures throughout history, global temperatures have increased much more rapidly since the Industrial Revolution made burning fossil fuels a widespread practice. The evidence showing that human behavior causes climate change is so strong that 97% of scientists agree that human activity is the driving force behind climate change. We've also seen that advancing climate solutions, like transitioning to electric school buses, can help us all breathe clean air and improve our children's health.

What you might hear: Climate change doesn't impact schools and doesn't belong in schools.

How you can respond: Climate change is already impacting schools and communities around the country. In 2021, over a million K-12 students missed school because of extreme weather events, and this number will only rise as climate-related incidents increase. Additionally, climate change is impacting the mental health and well-being of our students. 75% of US teens have said they feel moderate to extreme worry about climate change. Teaching about climate change in schools, with a solutions-oriented focus, can empower students and reduce anxiety. It will also help prepare students with the knowledge and skills to lead a sustainable future.

What you might hear: Addressing climate change in schools is too expensive. We have other funding priorities.

How you can respond: Funding climate action plans in schools is more affordable and accessible than ever with opportunities in the Inflation Reduction Act, the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, and the American Rescue Plan. Many of the updates to school buildings and transportation systems also result in long term cost savings for school districts, allowing them to invest in other priorities. For example, Batesville School District in Arkansas implemented facility upgrades and installed solar energy projects on their campuses. The district used the resulting energy cost savings to increase teacher salaries by up to \$15,000, becoming one of the best-paying districts in the county!



Glossary of Key Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	Prepares students to enter the workforce or pursue postsecondary education or training after high school. Components can include work-based, project-based or hands-on learning.
Climate Change	Long-term changes in average weather and climate, regionally and globally.
Climate Literacy	An understanding of your influence on climate and climate's influence on you and society. In the late 2000s, scientists and educators collaborated to define climate literacy, identify principles and concepts that should be taught, and justify the teaching of climate science.
Composting	The practice of returning natural food remains back into the the earth for the purpose of enriching soil.
Decarbonization	The process of phasing out reliance on carbon across all parts of the economy.
Direct Pay	Direct pay options, such as those in the IRA, allow non-taxable entities (like schools) to directly benefit from tax credits and receive the eligible amount as a cash payment directly from the IRS.
Eco-Anxiety	Persistent worries about the future and the prospects for future generations due to climate change.
Energy Retrofitting	An energy conservation measure in an existing building that aims to improve building performance.
Environmental Literacy	Develops students' understanding of how individual and collective actions impact the environment and prepares students to make environmentally conscious decisions.
Geothermal Energy	Energy derived from the earth's heat that is converted into thermal or electrical energy.
Green Bank	A public or non-profit entity established to facilitate private investment into domestic low-carbon, climate-resilient infrastructure.
Greenhouse Gases	Gases that contribute to global warming by absorbing infrared radiation, such as carbon dioxide and methane.
Heat Island	Areas that have an average temperature 1.25°F higher than the surrounding city or town.
HVAC Systems	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning commonly used to cool and heat residential and commercial buildings.
The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)	The Inflation Reduction Act is federal legislation that includes \$369 billion in climate and energy provisions, signifying the largest climate investment in US history.
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)	The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, is federal legislation that includes support for the education sector to advance climate solutions.
LEED Certification	Internationally recognized system for rating sustainable building design, construction, and operations. Each of the four certification tiers requires a minimum number of sustainability strategies.

Local Food Procurement	Sourcing food from local growers or producers to decrease emissions associated with transporting food. Also includes choosing sustainably produced food products.
Local K-12 Climate Action Plan	Comprehensive plan by a school district to reduce carbon emissions, prepare for climate impacts, and educate students about climate change and climate solutions based on the community's local needs and strengths.
Net-Zero Energy School	Produces enough renewable energy to meet its own annual energy consumption requirements, thereby reducing the use of non-renewable energy in the building sector.
Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V)	The primary source of federal funding for career and technical education programs in public K-12 schools. The law was most recently reauthorized in 2018.
Renewable Energy	Energy produced from resources that are easily replenished and do not have detrimental effects on the health of humans or the environment. Examples include solar, wind, and geothermal energy. Also referred to as clean energy.
Resolution	School boards adopt resolutions to declare the board's sentiment towards an issue and set forth general standards that the board agrees to fulfill.
School Gardens	Gardens on school grounds that provide an interactive opportunity for students to learn the science of sustainable food growing practices outside the classroom.
Solar Energy	Energy derived from sunlight that is converted into thermal or electrical energy.
Solar Microgrids	System of renewable energy that is separate from the main power grid in a given area.
State Standards	Statements that define what students should know and be able to do by the end of a certain course in a specific grade. Standards for public schools are generally set at the state level.
Sustainability	Meeting present needs without risking the health and environmental wellbeing of future generations.
Sustainability Director	A school or district staff member who manages a variety of sustainability efforts.
Sustainable or Green Schoolyards	Redesigning school grounds to replace asphalt with green spaces or other native vegetation. Sustainable schoolyards mitigate flooding and reduce heat islands.



Useful Resources

RESOURCES FROM THIS IS PLANET ED:

- [K12 Climate Action Plan](#)
- [Questions to Get Started](#)
- [Menu of Solutions](#)
- [K12 Education and Climate Provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act](#)
- [Education and Climate Provisions in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- The White House Toolkit: [Federal Resources for Addressing School Infrastructure Needs](#)
- The New Buildings Institute: [Decarbonization Roadmap Guide for School Building Decision Makers, including Examples of Carbon Neutral School District Resolutions](#)
- The US Green Building Council: [Webinar Series](#) — Getting Schools to Zero Carbon
- Center for Green Schools: [School Facilities Funding in the Pandemic](#)
- The World Resources Institute: [Electric School Bus Program](#)
- Trust for Public Lands: [Transforming Schoolyards](#)
- Generation 180: [Solar for All Schools](#)
- UndauntedK12 and RMI: [HVAC Choices for Student Health & Learning](#)
- Subject to Climate: [K12 Climate Change Lesson Plans](#)
- Rewiring America: [Rewiring Schools](#)
- The U.S. Department of Education: [Green Ribbon Schools](#)

About Us

K12 Climate Action is a part of This Is Planet Ed at the Aspen Institute, an initiative that intends to unlock the power of education as a force for climate action, climate solutions, and environmental justice to empower the rising generation to lead a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future. This Is Planet Ed works across Early Years, K-12, Higher Education, and Children’s Media to build our societal capacity to advance climate solutions. www.thisisplaneted.org

The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families, and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do. www.aft.org

The National Education Association (NEA) is the nation’s largest labor union, representing educators across the country. NEA is more than 3 million people — educators, students, activists, workers, parents, neighbors, friends — who believe in opportunity for all students and in the power of public education to transform lives and create a more just and inclusive society. www.nea.org



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