

# EDUCATION AND CLIMATE PROVISIONS IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT

There are 98,000 public schools in the U.S., serving over 50 million students. These schools are community assets that provide critical resources for students and their families. As much-used buildings and transportation hubs, schools are a source of greenhouse gas emissions. However, schools also have the potential to be centers of climate action and resilience for their communities.

Schools can lead on climate by reducing their carbon emissions and helping communities build resilience to climate impacts, all while preparing students to be leaders in a more sustainable future. The Aspen Institute’s bipartisan K12 Climate Action commission recently released an Action Plan with policy recommendations to help schools comprehensively address climate change through mitigation, adaptation, and education.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) includes support for the education sector to advance climate solutions. Now enacted law, these investments will be operationalized by relevant agencies. Each agency will provide greater detail on how states, local education agencies, and local communities can access these funds. Below, we outline an expansive, but not exhaustive, list of provisions that can support climate action in schools, sorted into mitigation and education.

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# Mitigation

The education sector has substantial resource needs that impact the environment, including land, energy, buildings, food, water, and transportation. Schools are one of the largest public sector energy consumers, operate a fleet of roughly 480,000 school buses, and serve 7 billion meals each year. By making their buildings more efficient, transitioning to clean energy, and electrifying school bus fleets, schools can reduce their carbon footprints while saving money and supporting student health. The provisions below will provide funding or other financial benefits that can help schools pursue these goals.

## SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT

### Grants for Energy Efficiency Improvements and Renewable Energy Improvements at Public School Facilities (IIJA Sec. 40541)

This competitive grant program can finance the use of clean energy and improvements in energy efficiency and indoor air quality in schools. These enhancements to school buildings can support lower carbon emissions and promote student health.

**Lead Agency** Department of Energy

**Funding** \$500 million

- Details**
- Eligible improvements covered by these grants include those that result in school energy cost reductions, energy savings, and health improvements; involve the installation of renewable energy technologies and electric vehicle infrastructure; and, the purchase or lease of alternative fueled vehicles to be used by a school, including school buses, fleet vehicles, and other operational vehicles.
  - Priority will be given to schools serving low-income communities that have the greatest renovation, repair, and improvement funding needs, and that can leverage private sector investment through energy-related performance contracting.

**Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries** A consortium of at least one local education agency and at least one school, nonprofit organization, for-profit organization, or community partner.



## SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

### Clean School Bus Program (IIJA Sec. 71101)

This new clean school bus program provides funding to help schools transition to zero-emission school buses.

<b>Lead Agency</b>	Environmental Protection Agency
<b>Funding</b>	\$5 billion
<b>Details</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The \$5 billion in funding is available for electric, zero-emission school buses, with \$2.5 billion specifically set-aside for electric, zero-emission school buses.</li><li>• Use of funds include up to 100% of the costs for replacement of an existing school bus, and charging or fueling infrastructure.</li><li>• Priority will be given to high-need local educational agencies, Bureau-funded schools, education agencies serving children who reside on Indian land, and rural or low-income areas, and applicants leveraging additional funding (grants, public-private partnerships, or school bonds).</li><li>• Total funding under this program to recipients in a given state cannot exceed 10% of the funding available for this program in a fiscal year.</li></ul>
<b>Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries</b>	Contractors, state and local governments responsible for school bus service or purchasing, nonprofit school transportation associations, Tribes.

### Support for State Energy Programs and Reducing Transportation Emissions (IIJA Sec. 40109)

State energy programs can use this funding to help schools transition to electric school buses.

<b>Lead Agency</b>	Department of Energy
<b>Funding</b>	\$500 million
<b>Details</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding supports plans to develop and implement clean energy programs and projects.</li><li>• Features of a state energy plan are modified to explicitly include programs that help reduce carbon emissions in the transportation sector and accelerate the use of alternative transportation fuels, including the electrification of school buses.</li></ul>
<b>Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries</b>	States (State Energy Offices).



## ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE

### Grants for Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (IIJA Sec. 11401)

State and local transportation agencies can use this funding to install electric vehicle charging stations, including at schools, which can support the use of electric school buses and electric passenger vehicles.

<b>Lead Agency</b>	Department of Transportation
<b>Funding</b>	\$2.5 billion
<b>Details</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides grants to deploy publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure along designated alternative fuel corridors or in certain other locations that will be accessible to all drivers. Public schools are included as an eligible location.</li><li>• 50% of this funding is for community grants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to expand or fill gaps in access to publicly accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure.</li><li>• Funds are prioritized for rural, low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, and communities with a low ratio of private parking spaces to households or a high ratio of multi unit dwellings to single family homes.</li></ul>
<b>Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries</b>	State, metropolitan planning organization, Tribe, territory of the U.S., special purpose district/public authority with transportation, State or local authority with ownership of publicly accessible transportation facilities.

### National Electric Vehicle Formula Program (IIJA Division J)

States can use this funding to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure, including at or near schools, which can support the use of electric school buses and electric passenger vehicles.

<b>Lead Agency</b>	Department of Transportation
<b>Funding</b>	\$5 billion
<b>Details</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Program provides funding to States to strategically deploy electric vehicle charging infrastructure and to establish an interconnected network to facilitate data collection, access, and reliability. Funding is distributed through a formula to state departments of transportation.</li><li>• Funds are for projects that establish electric vehicle charging infrastructure that is open to the general public, or to authorized commercial motor vehicle operators from more than one company, and along a designated alternative fuel corridor (unless it is determined that the designated alternative fuel corridors in the States are fully built out).</li><li>• Priority is given to rural, low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, and communities with a low ratio of private parking spaces to households or a high ratio of multi-unit dwellings to single family homes.</li></ul>
<b>Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries</b>	States (State departments of transportation).

### **Safe Routes to School (IIJA Sec. 11119)**

This provision seeks to increase access to safe routes to school by creating opportunities for students to walk or bike to school, which both decreases reliance on vehicles and benefits the environment and community health.

**Lead Agency** Department of Transportation

**Funding** No additional funding beyond baseline.

**Details**

- The Safe Routes to School program is expanded to include high schools.
- Program encourages students to walk and bicycle to school and to facilitate the planning, development, and support implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

**Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries** States will receive funding which they can use to support state, local, Tribal, and regional agencies, including non-profit organizations.

## **Education**

*Schools are focused on helping students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be engaged citizens and successful members of the workforce. As we transition to a clean economy, understanding climate change, sustainability, and climate solutions will be increasingly important. By including these topics in teaching and learning, schools can help students develop agency to take climate action in their communities, prepare for jobs in a clean economy, and become leaders in a more sustainable future.*

### **Consumer Recycling Education and Outreach Grant Program (IIJA Sec. 70402)**

Schools can use this funding and technical assistance to teach students about best practices for recycling.

**Lead Agency** Environmental Protection Agency

**Funding** \$75 million

**Details**

- The competitive consumer recycling education and outreach grant program is established and the EPA is directed to review (and if appropriate revise) its procurement guidelines on recycled materials.
- The grant program will support efforts to improve the effectiveness of residential and community recycling programs through public education and outreach.
- As part of the program, the EPA is directed to provide assistance to the educational community to promote the introduction of recycling principles and best practices into public school curricula.

**Relevant Eligible Beneficiaries** States, local governments, Tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations and Hawaiian departments/offices, nonprofit organizations, and public-private partnerships.

# Other Provisions

## LEAD CONTAMINATION

**Context** Clean water is essential for children’s health — even low levels of lead can be harmful to children, with lead exposure resulting in health issues and disability. Yet, many students are still exposed to lead in the drinking water at their schools.

- Relevant Example Provision**
- Lead Contamination in School Drinking Water (*IJJA Sec. 50110*)
  - Reducing Lead in Drinking Water (*IJJA Sec. 50105*)

## BROADBAND ACCESS

**Context** Extreme weather caused by climate change has already caused schools to close, leading to lost learning opportunities. Expanding access to the internet can help schools adapt by allowing more students to continue learning remotely when extreme weather strikes.

- Relevant Example Provision**
- Equity, Access and Deployment Program (*IJJA Sec. 60102*)
  - State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program (*IJJA Sec. 60304*)
  - Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program (*IJJA Sec. 60305*)
  - Rural Utilities Service—Distance Learning, Telemedicine, and Broadband Program (*IJJA Division J*)
  - Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (*IJJA Division J*)

# Acknowledgements

**The Aspen Institute** is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org)

**K12 Climate Action** within the Aspen Institute Energy and Environment Program seeks to unlock the power of the education sector to be a force toward climate action, solutions, and environmental justice. The K12 Climate Action commission is developing an action plan and building a coalition to support the education sector in moving toward climate action, solutions, and environmental justice. [www.k12climateaction.org](http://www.k12climateaction.org)

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