

Climate Mitigation in Schools

WHY DOES THIS MATTER: 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. Efforts to decarbonize schools can improve student health and create opportunities for the 50 million students enrolled in schools to engage with climate solutions first-hand, helping to build our societal capacity to address climate change now and into the future.

KEY POINTS

- 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 pollution, 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, electric 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.
- 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. 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 foodstuffs before they go to waste, schools can conduct food waste audits, participate in food waste education, and collaborate with local organizations to recover and donate uneaten foods.

SCHOOL BOARD EXAMPLE: School Boards can help enable the first step in the climate action planning process by passing 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.

