

# Moments for Climate Action

As a board member (or as a candidate for election to the board), moments of opportunity arise nearly every day where climate leadership and collaboration can make a difference. In our current moment of extreme weather and rapidly changing climate, school board members have an opportunity and responsibility to bring a climate lens and questions into the core work of governing the school district — from setting priorities for the budget, to hiring and evaluating superintendents, or updating and creating policies that align the core functions of the district with the needs of students growing up today. Some of these Moments for Action that occur throughout the school year are described below:

## INCLUDING CLIMATE MESSAGING IN CAMPAIGNS

**School Board Member Role**     **LEAD.** Acknowledge and prioritize the opportunity for school districts to equitably advance climate solutions, build resilience to climate impacts, and prepare students for success in a clean economy

**Questions To Consider**

- What climate-related concerns do community members have?
- How have climate-driven events such as extreme heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, and other weather events impacted school closures, learning and/or activities for students?

**Resources To Support**

- The [Yale Climate Opinion Maps](#) can help members better understand the climate perceptions and concerns of their communities.
- UndauntedK12's [School Closures Map](#) shows climate-driven school closures across the United States.
- The [Commitments for Climate Resilience & Sustainability](#) outlined above are a powerful framework to organize your leadership and climate action as a candidate and as a board member.

## ESTABLISHING DISTRICT GOALS

**School Board Member Role**     **PARTNER** with students, families, teachers, municipal leaders, and broader community members to draft a detailed, realistic climate policy or resolution that addresses climate mitigation, adaptation, education, and equity.

**COLLABORATE.** With district superintendents, their sustainability staff, and other leaders and decision-makers, set and evaluate goals for the superintendent aligned with the climate change agenda for the district;

**Questions To Consider**

- To what extent are the [Commitments for Climate Resilience & Sustainability](#) reflected in my district's strategic plan and multi-year goals?
- Are there current or proposed goals and priorities that can be evolved to include a climate action lens?
- What data is being collected to measure the quality of facilities available to students, and where there may be inequities?
- How is progress towards climate goals considered in the superintendent's evaluation?

**Resources To Support**

- The [K12 Climate Action Plan](#) can help determine opportunities for a district to develop a local K–12 climate action plan.
- The [Whole School Sustainability Framework](#) offers guiding principles for integrating sustainability into all aspects of a school organization.
- The [GreenPrint](#) is a framework for developing a comprehensive sustainability plan centered on curriculum and instruction, culture, facilities and operations, and leadership.

## CREATING OR RE-ALIGNING EXISTING PLANS AND POLICIES

**School Board Member Role** **IMAGINE.** Set a comprehensive agenda for climate action in schools by reimagining policies, partnerships, and conditions to ensure healthy, sustainable learning environments and prepare students for success in a changing climate.

- Questions To Consider**
- Does my district have an emergency preparedness plan and a disaster plan? Does it contemplate extreme weather impacts?
  - How might climate change impact existing district plans such as a facilities master plan?
  - How might climate impact other priorities including attendance, student health and well-being, or diversity, equity, and inclusion?
  - Are there other existing policies that can be leveraged for climate action?

- Resources To Support**
- [Questions to Help You Start Taking Action](#) can help identify what relevant policies are already in place.
  - The [Community Recovery Management Toolkit](#) can help community leaders through the long-term disaster recovery process.
  - The [Recovery and Resilience Resource Library](#) compiles the numerous programs available to the US and territories to help recover from a disaster.
  - [Climate Impacts for Schools: Overview and Adaptation Analysis for San Mateo County](#) supports leaders to consider potential climate impacts.
  - [Boulder Valley School District](#) developed a comprehensive, sustainability action plan that integrated best practices across the entire school system related to health, equity, and sustainability.

## HIRING SUPERINTENDENTS AND OTHER SENIOR STAFF

**School Board Member Role** **COLLABORATE.** With district superintendents, their sustainability staff, and other leaders and decision-makers, set and evaluate goals for the superintendent aligned with the climate change agenda for the district.

School board members can also incorporate questions about climate action into the hiring process for senior staff including superintendents, business officers, facilities managers, and chief financial officers (CFOs).

- Questions To Consider**
- Is a candidate aligned with the district's priorities on climate? How broad is their perspective and understanding of the issues?
  - Does a candidate understand the impacts of extreme weather on student health and learning?
  - Do they have a sense of meaningful and realistic goals for district climate action?
  - Is the candidate willing to look holistically at these issues? Are they committed to learning?

- Resources To Support**
- [Managing Sustainability & Indoor Air Quality in School Districts: A Profile of Staff in the K-12 Sector](#) provides insights from a national survey on the financial costs and benefits of hiring PK-12 sustainability and environmental health staff.

## SETTING AND APPROVING BUDGETS

**School Board Member Role** **RESOURCE.** Align budget and resource decisions to advance sustainability, access funds from the Inflation Reduction Act and other federal streams, and switch to carbon-neutral technologies to lower costs.

**PRIORITIZE:** Distribute resources to advance equity and prioritize the school communities most impacted by climate change.

**Questions To Consider**

- To what degree are we allocating funds to advance these priorities?
- Is funding equitably distributed and prioritized for schools most likely to be impacted by climate change, including schools in low-income communities and communities of color?

**Resources To Support**

- [Investing in Healthy, Green Schools](#) offers district leaders an equity-focused framework for decision-making about their investment of the American Rescue Plan funds.

## SECURING FUNDING

**School Board Member Role** **RESOURCE.** Align budget and resource decisions to advance sustainability, access funds from the Inflation Reduction Act and other federal streams, and switch to carbon-neutral technologies to lower costs.

**PRIORITIZE:** Distribute resources to advance equity and prioritize the school communities most impacted by climate change.

**Questions To Consider**

- What are existing funding opportunities from the federal government for clean energy technologies, and is my district aligning spending accordingly?
- What financing opportunities can help my district avoid upfront costs and instead pay for facilities improvements over time?
- Are we proactively taking advantage of existing funding, such as the Inflation Reduction Act, to bring dollars to my district for clean energy technology, especially to the communities most impacted by climate change?
- What incentives are my local utilities or is my state providing to deploy clean energy technologies?
- If we have them, are our local school infrastructure dollars or bond funds being invested with a climate lens? Are we investing in both buildings and grounds?

**Resources To Support**

- [Schools and the Inflation Reduction Act](#) outlines the opportunity for schools in the IRA and provides timely and up-to-date resources.
- [Education and Climate Provisions in the The Inflation Reduction Act](#) outlines how schools can leverage provisions in the IRA.
- [Education and Climate Provisions in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act \(IIJA\)](#) shares which provisions in the IIJA are relevant to schools.
- [White House Guide to Direct Pay](#) walks through the direct pay process.
- [Making Clean Energy Tax Credits Deliver for the Public](#) is a user guide for governments, schools and nonprofits.
- [Carbon Neutral School Customizable Templates](#) have been developed for school districts to customize to their needs in their efforts to decarbonize.
- The [Energy Savings Performance Contract](#) shares how schools can partner with energy service companies (ESCOs) to reduce energy costs.

## PARTICIPATING IN FACILITIES AND BUILDING COMMITTEES

**School Board Member Role** **LEAD.** Acknowledge and prioritize the opportunity for school districts to equitably advance climate solutions, build resilience to climate impacts, and prepare students for success in a clean economy.

School board members can actively participate on committees related to construction, buildings, and infrastructure, and ensure that all projects, including construction and renovation of buildings and infrastructure, are designed to advance the district's climate goals.

**Questions To Consider**

- How can each building project advance energy efficiency, decarbonization, and emissions reductions?
- Where are there opportunities to leverage clean-energy solutions such as solar, energy storage, and heat pumps?
- How are we using our facilities master plan to increase efficiency, advance decarbonization, and improve resilience?
- Is the district setting goals related to energy efficiency, clean energy, and low-carbon solutions early in all construction projects?

**Resources To Support**

- [Decarbonization Roadmap Guide for School Building Decision Makers](#) outlines achievable goals that result in healthy, affordable, all-electric facilities, and explains common actions taken by leading districts to operationalize their carbon neutral ambitions.
- [HVAC Choices for Student Health & Learning](#) makes a case for transitioning to all-electric, high-performance HVAC systems in America's schools.
- NREL's [Plowing through the Cost Barrier: Zero Energy K-12 Schools for Less](#)
- [A Sample RFP for Architectural/Engineering Design Services](#)
- Model Electrification and IAQ Master Plan from Arlington, MA [[RFP](#) and [Schools Master Plan](#)]
- [Schoolyard Forest System Resource library](#) is filled with practical resources to support schools and school districts as they plan, develop, use, and manage school greening projects.

## PARTICIPATING IN MUNICIPAL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CLIMATE ACTION

**School Board Member Role** **PARTNER** with students, families, teachers, municipal leaders, and broader community members to draft a detailed, realistic climate policy or resolution that addresses climate mitigation, adaptation, education, and equity.

Many cities have responded to climate threats by developing comprehensive climate action plans (CAPs) to mitigate, adapt, and build resilience. The K-12 education sector has the opportunity to play a greater role in the development and implementation of these plans. School boards can track municipal climate efforts and advocate for the K-12 sector to be an active participant and partner in the process.

**Questions To Consider**

- Does my local municipality or county have a climate action plan (CAP)?
- Are the K-12 schools in my district represented in my community's CAP?
- How can I advocate for the K-12 sector to be an active participant and partner in the process?

**Resources To Support**

- [Arlington's Net Zero Action Plan](#) is an example of a municipal plan that incorporates schools.
- San Mateo County [example](#) to support local school districts to align initiatives within city and regional climate action plans.

## SHAPING A PUBLIC NARRATIVE

**School Board Member Role** **COMMUNICATE** and monitor progress, address obstacles, celebrate progress and keep district stakeholders and community members engaged.

SBMs can also keep district staff, stakeholders and community members engaged and inspired by regularly acknowledging their effort, celebrating advances, and bringing attention to challenges.

School board members can use a diversity of language and platforms to reach their audiences. For example, Sacramento USD is leading a social media campaign to increase their impact.

### Questions To Consider

- How can I incorporate talking points on mitigation, adaptation, education, and equity into my speaking opportunities?
- How can I share our district goals and convey a sense of urgency with our work, and how it impacts student health and learning with a variety of stakeholders?
- How can I emphasize the return on investment for clean energy projects at schools to communicate to a wider, business-minded audience?
- How can I elevate and amplify the voices and views of young people in my community regarding climate action?

### Resources To Support

- Talking points on climate [mitigation](#), [adaptation](#), [education](#), and [equity](#) in schools
- [Addressing Pushback and Misinformation](#)
- [Key Messages for Communicating about Carbon Neutral Schools](#)
- The [Climate Change and Children's Well-Being in the United States Report](#) conducted by the EPA quantifies how climate change is projected to impact children in the US.
- [Yale Center on Climate Communication](#) includes tools and interactive resources to help build the case for climate action.

## MONITORING PROGRESS AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

**School Board Member Role** **COMMUNICATE** and monitor progress, address obstacles, celebrate progress and keep district stakeholders and community members engaged.

**PRIORITIZE:** Distribute resources to advance equity and prioritize the school communities most impacted by climate change.

### Questions To Consider

- Do we have metrics related to climate action as part of our district's key performance indicators?
- Are we actively monitoring our progress and communicating wins, challenges, and learning?
- Are we considering the experiences of historically marginalized and systemically disadvantaged groups of students, and examining disaggregated data to inform goal setting and progress monitoring?

### Resources To Support

- [Denver Public Schools Sustainability Website](#) includes tabulation of average annual avoided costs due to sustainability measures.
- Parkway School District (Missouri) has a clear set of sustainability goals that include quantitative metrics and activities that are tracked and shared publicly in an [online dashboard](#).