



Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice and Sustainable Practices Policy

Portland Public School District • Portland, Oregon



**Coalition for Climate
Education Policy**

Advancing climate literacy for a just and sustainable future



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Executive Summary

Oregon is a state where some significant strides have been made to integrate climate change education into certain school district curricula. This case study highlights climate education policy in the Portland Public School District with an in depth look at The Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice, and Sustainable Practices Policy (CCRP). It provides an overview and background on the policy, and examines the impact this policy has had to date. It also covers some specific challenges and lessons learned, and describes next steps for the Portland Public School District on their sustainability and climate education journey.

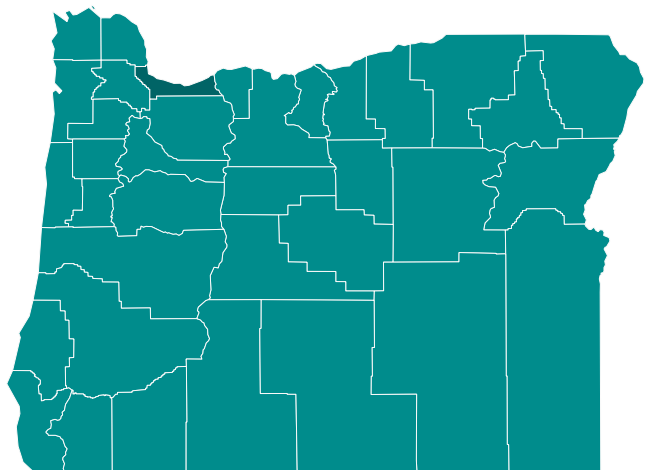
Overview

In March 2022, after years of student and community advocacy, Oregon's **Portland Public Schools District** passed a comprehensive sustainability policy. The Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice, and Sustainable Practices Policy (CCRP) has two overarching objectives: 1) emissions reductions and 2) engagement, resilience, and wellness.

Emissions Reductions

This policy commits to reducing emissions by improving energy efficiency in school facilities and transportation, phasing out fossil fuel infrastructure in existing buildings, and prohibiting the installation of fossil fuel infrastructure in new buildings. Portland Public Schools (PPS) plans to reduce their Scope 1 emissions (direct emissions from an owned source) and Scope 2 emissions (indirect emissions from purchased energy) to 50% of 2018 emissions levels by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2040. PPS is prioritizing initiatives with the most significant potential for emissions reductions, and projects with lower impacts will be longer-term pursuits.

Policy Type: Teaching and Learning,
Community Partnerships &
Facilities and Operations



Engagement, Resilience, and Wellness

This policy also focuses on engagement, resilience, and wellness by providing climate science and climate justice learning opportunities. Learning opportunities include integrating climate action into the curriculum, preparing educators to teach about the effects of climate change, and improving strategies for addressing climate anxiety for staff and students. As climate anxiety increasingly strains students' mental health, it becomes important to help students, as well as educators, see how their actions can help advance climate solutions and to explore strategies to mitigate anxiety. It is also important to integrate climate education and climate justice into school culture, recognizing that some communities are disproportionately affected by climate impacts, and the effects of climate anxiety. Through climate action and education, PPS aims to uplift student mental health and wellness, ensure students and staff can engage in climate resilience and solutions, and develop a culture of environmental stewardship.

Background

In 2015, parents, educators, students, and community members met to discuss climate change education in Portland Public Schools (PPS). This catalyzed a student-led climate literacy movement in Portland. They gained endorsements from several organizations and community partners, and in 2016, PPS passed the **Resolution to Develop an Implementation Plan for Climate Literacy**.

The resolution highlighted the importance of teacher professional development, creating climate education curricular materials, and engaging with communities most impacted by climate change. It demonstrated Portland's leadership in prioritizing climate action and justice and laid the foundation for the comprehensive Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice, and Sustainable Practices Policy.

Students and community members were proud of the resolution but felt more work needed to be done; they continued putting pressure on the school district to take more rigorous climate action. In 2019, student-led climate strikes rallied massive numbers of parents, teachers, and community members, and through hours of work and collaboration between these parties, the CCRP was developed. These stakeholders also showed up at board meetings to advocate for the policy. Twenty-five versions of the policy were drafted over two-and-a-half years, and in 2022, a final version was adopted.



Approach

While dedicated funding is not provided, PPS is finding creative ways to implement this policy's objectives, starting with coordinating a detailed implementation plan for the more than 25 PPS departments involved. In addition, a Climate Crisis Response Committee was assembled to track progress on the policy's goals and monitor its transparency. This committee comprises nine people representing diverse backgrounds and geographies, two of whom are students. PPS will also create a Climate Justice Youth advisory group in 2024 to inform the Board about student interests and concerns.

The CCRP also incorporates three pillars that are aligned with goals in the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools Program, an initiative for school sustainability that is structured as a federal recognition award. Under **Pillar 1**, PPS committed to designing and renovating schools to be energy-efficient, resilient, and adaptable; long-term, PPS plans to reduce the environmental impact of all school infrastructure. Additionally, they plan to minimize greenhouse gas emissions from transportation by transitioning to electric and low-emission vehicles. These steps are crucial for reducing PPS's overall carbon footprint.

Pillar 2 focuses on improving PPS students' and staff's health and wellness by supporting and building resilience in frontline communities. By preparing for the adverse effects of extreme climate events, PPS is taking a proactive approach to protect the well-being of its community.

Finally, **Pillar 3** recognizes the importance of providing students and staff with effective environmental and climate education. Empowering staff as allies for a healthy climate and creating opportunities for students to engage in hands-on climate learning is critical to building a more environmentally literate community. These commitments to climate action and sustainability are steps towards creating a healthier, more sustainable future for PPS's students and staff.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Evaluation

To ensure the successful implementation and expansion of the policy, the Portland Public School District has a monitoring and evaluation plan that includes regular data collection and progress tracking. The plan involves measuring the district's Scope 1 and Scope 2 greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, waste management, and transportation, among other factors. The district's evaluation plan also includes tracking progress on the policy's goals and pillars, including reductions in environmental impact and costs, improving health and wellness, and providing effective climate justice education. Regular data collection and tracking will give the district the information to make informed decisions and adjustments as necessary, ensuring that the policy is implemented and expanded over time.



Outcomes

Adopting this policy is a significant step forward for PPS, but it will take time to see the full results. There are several ambitious policy outcomes and next steps; acquiring funding is critical for moving these forward. Some examples include:

- Developing resources and a curriculum to engage students and staff in climate science and climate justice education.
- Achieving net-zero buildings and phasing out existing fossil fuel infrastructure.
- Standardizing waste-prevention mechanisms.
- Increasing the number and quality of “green” schoolyards and spaces.
- Minimizing greenhouse gas emissions in the public school fleet and infrastructure by adding bike racks and EV charging stations and adopting low-emission vehicles in the school fleet.
- Annual reporting on progress by the Climate Crisis Response Committee.

Mapping the Landscape of K-12 Climate Change Education Policy in the United States

Full Report
May 2022

MECCE
MONITORING AND EVALUATING
CLIMATE COMMUNICATION
AND EDUCATION PROJECT

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Thank you to the Willis Foundation for their generous support of this report.

Does Climate Crisis Response Policy support any of the recommendations from the *Mapping K-12 Climate Education Policy Report*?

Yes!

- Increasing the quality and quantity of climate change content in education.
- Providing policy support, such as funding, professional development, and staffing to help advance climate change education policy.



Lessons Learned & Next Steps

The implementation of this policy has seen several challenges. A few of these challenges and their solutions are highlighted below, and many are still a work in progress.

- Integrating climate education across all subject areas is difficult to push forward because it needs to be more defined and measurable. To push for climate justice and climate education, it is helpful to make a case for climate justice and climate education as strategies for increasing student achievement (reading, math, etc.) overall.
- Proactively creating an advisory or leadership group to make policy priorities, recommendations, and decisions is crucial. This requires thoughtful stakeholder mapping and PPS is still in the process of defining these key roles to build an internal leadership group.
- Communities play a critical role in advocating for bold, comprehensive policies. Subject matter experts' input on feasibility and achievability should complement this community advocacy.
- The policy should have clear, measurable objectives. For example, "minimize disposable materials" is more of a value statement than a goal, making it harder to move this priority forward.
- It is essential to recognize tradeoffs between conflicting policy goals or statements. For example, increasing air conditioning to cope with higher temperatures can conflict with reducing PPS's GHG emissions. These tradeoffs add a layer of difficulty in making decisions around the policy goals. Public conversations and transparency about how these decisions are made help demonstrate that PPS is making these decisions thoughtfully.
- PPS is backtracking to collect emissions data and information that will enable them to meet their GHG emissions targets. Collecting and analyzing this data could have been done before to increase efficiency during policy implementation.
- PPS has had many conversations about the tradeoffs between using the most current and best technologies (i.e., battery generators), and the high upfront costs of these technologies. These considerations are difficult to reconcile because the prices of these technologies are expected to decline in the near future, but Portland needs to purchase and adopt these technologies now in order to meet their goals.

Resources

- [The Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice, and Sustainable Practices Policy \(CCRP\)](#)
- [Climate Crisis Response Policy Annual Report](#)
- [Mapping the Landscape of K-12 Climate Change Education Policy in the United States Report](#)

Contacts

- PPS Energy & Sustainability Office: Sustainability@pps.net
- PPS Advisor for Climate Justice, Kat Davis: climatejustice@pps.net