



Environment and Climate Action Resolution

Dallas Independent School District • Dallas, Texas



**Coalition for Climate
Education Policy**

Advancing climate literacy for a just and sustainable future



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Executive Summary

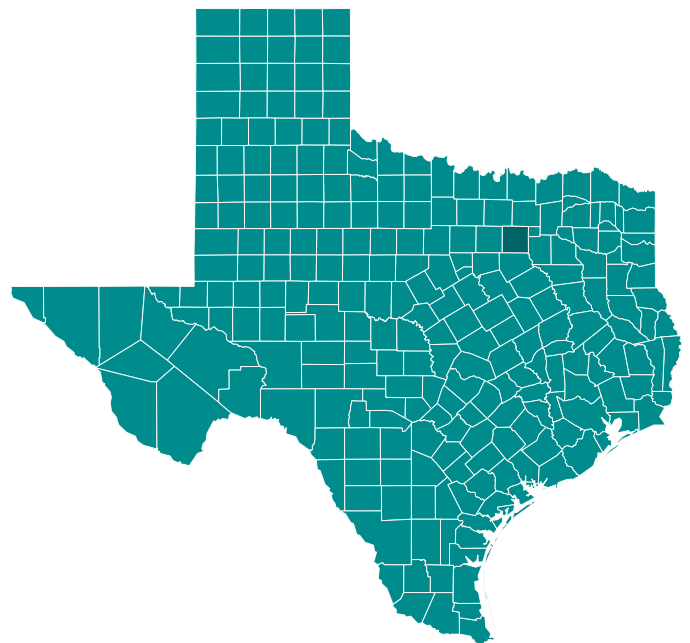
Texas is experiencing some of the most dramatic impacts of climate change in the United States – from floods to droughts to extremely hot weather and pollution. This case study highlights climate education policy in the Dallas Independent School District with a look at The Environment & Climate Action Resolution and its ensuing programming. It provides an overview and background on the resolution, and dives into the impact this resolution has had on the ground. Finally, it covers some specific challenges faced, lessons learned, and next steps for the Dallas Independent School District on their sustainability and climate education journey.

Overview

The **Dallas Independent School District (ISD)** Board of Trustees voted unanimously to pass a climate resolution on February 27, 2020. The **Environment & Climate Action Resolution** recognizes climate change as a “generational justice, human rights, and equity issue” and establishes measures to take action against climate change. Dallas, Texas, is one of the most significantly polluted cities in the U.S., with severe air quality concerns. Disenfranchised communities are especially vulnerable to poor air quality and climate change, often showing the highest childhood asthma rates. This resolution is a step toward combating these issues and ensuring a healthier, cleaner Dallas for future generations.

Through this resolution, Dallas ISD committed to pursuing systemic improvements in its policies and practices to enhance sustainability. Furthermore, the district established an Environmental and Climate Committee to recommend goals and progress measures for curricular and educational opportunities, transportation, food services, and facilities and operations.

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



Background

Student activists spearheaded the push for this resolution. Molly Rooke, a [350Dallas](#) and [Dallas Sierra Club](#) member, had been working with Dallas ISD to transition their fleet toward electric buses. At the same time, the city of Dallas was working on moving a [Climate Action Plan](#) forward, but progress had been slow. Rooke felt a climate resolution would encourage and strengthen these sustainability efforts.

Rooke teamed up with a small group of high school students to craft the Environment & Climate Action Resolution. Student activists and community volunteers assembled a website and a petition; they spent months organizing and garnering petition signatures. A high school senior also created an environmental club, Earthlings, that advocated for the resolution through their “Turn DISD Green” district-wide campaign. When the resolution was presented to the board, four students testified, speaking passionately about the impacts of climate change on Dallas youth and communities. The efforts of these students led to the board’s unanimous decision to pass the resolution, and board members thanked the students for their relentless pursuit in advocating and gaining support for the resolution.

Approach

An Environmental and Climate Committee was established to drive this policy’s implementation and evaluation. The Committee is open to participation by board members, administrators, staff, parents, students, and community members, and will also seek advice from outside experts on specific issues. They track policy progress and recommend specific goals and actions to the school district.

In a [presentation](#) by the Committee in 2021, they outlined some of the specific goals and board policies that the resolution should encourage in several categories: food and child nutrition services, construction services, transportation, grounds, maintenance/ custodial, and energy. A few examples of these goals and policies are highlighted in the table below. The presentation also included suggestions for improving sustainability in other school district areas. Two of these suggestions emphasize climate education: 1) to build and utilize curricular units at various grade levels that bring awareness and learning to climate issues, and 2) to join Green Schools Alliance or other organizations.



Sustainability Focus Area

Goal

Board Policy

Food and Child Nutrition Services	Recycling program at 100% of schools to divert at least 50% of the district's nonorganic waste from landfill by 2025 and increasing diversion to 75% by 2030.	Require use of compostable bags, plates, utensils, etc. in cafeterias.
Construction Services	One elementary school, middle school, and high school built or remodeled to net-zero energy standards by 2030.	Schools built moving forward should aim to be net zero ready where applicable.
Transportation	Pilot zero-emissions school bus in Dallas ISD in low air quality areas by 2025.	There are no policies that need to change currently.
Grounds	Utilize native or adaptive plants for landscaping projects by June 2030	Require the planting of native or adaptive shrubs and herbaceous plants on Dallas ISD school grounds.
Maintenance/ Custodial	Add Custodial certification for Green Cleaning	Establish and maintain regular schedules for replacement of HVAC filters
Energy	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030.	100% renewable sources required in District electricity contracts.
	Build on current electricity contract with 100% renewable energy certificates, adding on and off-site renewable generation to new buildings at the end of the current contract in 2030.	District to appoint a person to determine baseline energy usage at all schools and identify ways to reduce consumption. Share usage monthly

Of these specific goals, the district is placing priority on a few specific projects:

- Replacing its fleet with electric buses.
- Switching to renewable energy.
- Making new schools more energy efficient (or net zero).
- Increasing recycling and reducing food waste.

No funding is included in the resolution for these activities, but there are financial incentives for some of these green initiatives. For example, switching to 100 percent renewable energy saves the district \$1.5 million annually.

Evaluation

The Environmental and Climate Committee is the main evaluator of the resolution's progress. The Committee will provide regular reports about its activities and progress. In 2021, the Committee recommended that Dallas ISD establish a position within Dallas ISD Operations responsible for tracking goals and progress brought forward by the Committee. In addition, the Committee recommended that Dallas ISD conduct a Greenhouse Gas inventory using 2015 as a base year for comparison and assessment.

Outcomes

Dallas ISD has already made significant progress in reducing its carbon footprint and increasing education about its sustainability efforts. The Dallas Independent School District has approximately 153,000 students that these initiatives will impact. The district was recently selected for the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean School Bus program, giving Dallas ISD 7 million dollars to purchase a fleet of new electric buses and EV charging infrastructure. These tangible and intangible outcomes resulting from the Environment & Climate Action Resolution are formidable advancements in Dallas's push for climate action and sustainability.



Source: <https://www.dallasisd.org/energyandsustainability>

Lessons Learned & Next Steps

There have been a few challenges during the implementation of the resolution's initiatives and programs. Some of the solutions to these challenges and lessons learned are highlighted below:

1. Student leadership and activism are critical to moving climate education policy and initiatives forward.
2. To strengthen a resolution, consider developing and advocating for a climate action plan with goals that are aligned with those stated in the resolution.
3. Prioritize projects that are most relevant to your local context. Dallas air quality is notoriously bad, so the school district prioritized transportation projects that combat this environmental concern. The electric school bus pilot program was the result of these efforts and has gained lots of support from the community because of its local relevance.
4. The resolution established an Environment & Sustainability Committee to make recommendations for the resolution and evaluate its progress. In the resolution, there was no specified commitment period. The Committee has since recommended that Dallas establish a more permanent standing Committee.

 The cover of the report "Mapping the Landscape of K-12 Climate Change Education Policy in the United States" features a collage of nature-related images: a white owl, a monarch butterfly, a fish, a forest, and a wind turbine. The title is prominently displayed in green and black text. Below the title, it says "Full Report" and "May 2022". Logos for MECCE (Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Change Initiatives and Education Project), naaee (National Association for Environmental Education), and WOKA (World Organization for Knowledge Advancement) are included. A small note thanks the World Foundation for their generous support.

Does the Environment and Climate Action Resolution 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.
- Include a stronger focus on climate justice, climate action, and Indigenous knowledges in all education policies.
- Providing policy support, such as funding, professional development, and staffing to help advance climate change education policy.

Resources

- Environment & Climate Action Resolution
- *Mapping the Landscape of K-12 Climate Change Education Policy in the United States Report*

Contact

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