Introductory Page:

Welcome to The Climate Initiative's (TCI's) Climate Action Plan (CAP) template meant to be adopted for schools. In this document, you will find a guide for planning, developing, and assessing a CAP to meet the sustainability needs of your school. This guide provides the framework and parameters for drafting a CAP, implementation practices, and insight into monitoring the impact of your CAP. Lastly, you will find additional resources to help guide your CAP development, including sample school CAPs, potential funding sources, other organizations to draw from, and a collection of sample action projects. Although this template guide provides the foundation for CAP development, more importantly, it is meant to showcase how your school can still take action, whether it develops a CAP or not.

Title Page

School Climate Action Plan

School Name

*optional introductory pages: land acknowledgment, a letter from administration, a letter from students, etc.

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Introduction

Rationale for CAP - Why Do We Need Them?

In this section, you will begin by introducing the rationale for your school's Climate Action Plan (CAP). Climate change is an all-encompassing issue, impacting communities across the country and the world. Not only does climate change impact environments, economies, and societies, it also affects student learning and long-term education. In order to address its repercussions, action from all sectors, including schools, will be necessary.

Schools contribute to climate change in various ways, primarily through energy consumption, transportation emissions, and waste generation. The energy-intensive operations of schools, including lighting, heating, and cooling, contribute to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), especially when sourced from non-renewable energy sources like coal or natural gas. Additionally, transportation emissions from school buses, staff commutes, and student travel to and from school add to the carbon footprint. Waste generation, including paper usage, food waste, and single-use plastics, further exacerbates environmental degradation. However, schools also have the potential to play a pivotal role in mitigating climate change by implementing sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient infrastructure, promoting active transportation, reducing waste through recycling and composting programs, and integrating environmental education into the curriculum to foster awareness and action among students and staff. Incorporating climate action in schools is not only a means of reducing environmental impacts, but it is also an important way to instill a sense of 'green citizenship' in students.

Don't think your school can make a difference? Check out these resolutions passed thanks to the work of schools developing CAPs and taking climate action!

- Shoreline Public Schools - School Board Resolutions
- Examples of Carbon-Neutral School District Resolutions
- Milwaukee Public Schools - Climate Justice Resolution
- OUSD Climate Emergency Action Resolution
- Santa Clara Unified School District - Sustainability

Check out this [guide](#) to creating school climate action for further assistance in creating your introduction.

Current State of the School

In this section, you will outline the current state of your school's environment. What climate challenges does your school face? Does your school currently operate using any unsustainable practices? What improvements do you hope to see in your school moving forward? Are there any sustainability initiatives proposed or in place in your school or district?

Framework for CAP Development

This section will outline the necessary background information that explains the approach your school will take for its CAP. Your framework should clearly identify key objectives, stakeholders, strategies, and implementation processes relevant to your CAP. It will provide your readers with an introduction to what will follow throughout the CAP. Incorporating processes of community engagement, like focus groups, is important to ensure that the community's priorities and concerns are incorporated into CAP objectives. Climate Justice and Equity perspectives are also critical for ensuring an equitable approach to climate action. Not to mention, collaboration and active participation of students is a critical factor for success. Finally, your framework should present a financial impact assessment to measure the impacts and costs of intended mitigation strategies. See [Assessment & Prioritizing Action](#) for more information about setting goals and establishing the CAPs connection to the institutional mission (Second Nature).

Below is a sample one year timeline for developing your CAP:
- Month 1-2: Initial Planning
    - Week 1: Discussion of the importance and scope of the CAP
    - Week 2-3: Formation of a Climate Action Team composed of administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members.
    - Week 4: Establish team roles, responsibilities, and an overall vision & objectives.
- Month 3-4: Research & Assessment

- Week 5-6: Conduct an audit and baseline assessment to determine the school's current environmental impact (environmentally, economically, and socially).
    - Week 7-8: Research and consider best practices for the context of your school.
    - Week 9: Survey students, staff, and community members for their input and perspectives.
    - Week 10: Analyze the data and information collected thus far to determine key areas for improvement.
- Month 5-6: Drafting the Plan
    - Week 11-12: Outline the main components of the plan (problems to address, objectives, strategies, metrics for success). See the CAP categories in this template for reference.
    - Week 13-14: Establish specific action items and a timeline for completion.
    - Week 15: Draft the initial draft of your CAP.
    - Week 16: Review and edit the CAP based on feedback from the Climate Action Team and related stakeholders.
- Month 7: Approval and Finalization
    - Week 17: Present the CAP to your school board and administration for approval.
    - Week 18: Edit the CAP draft based on feedback from the school board.
    - Week 19: Finalize the plan and first steps for implementation.
    - Week 20: Share and communicate the plan with the school community.
- Month 8-9: Initial Implementation
    - Week 21-22: Launch the first set of initiatives for implementation
    - Week 23-24: Begin educational initiatives and workshops for students and staff to explain the CAP and its objectives.
    - Week 25-26: Monitor initial progress towards achieving objectives and address potential challenges.
- Month 10-11: Full Implementation and Monitoring
    - Week 27-30: Implement the CAP's additional initiatives according to its timeline.
    - Week 31-32: Conduct a midterm evaluation to evaluate progress; adjust efforts accordingly.
- Month 12: Review and Reflect
    - Week 33-34: Collect data and feedback on the implementation process.

- Week 35: Reflect on areas of success and opportunities for improvement moving forward.
- Week 36: Prepare a progress report to share with the school community.

CAP Objectives

The objectives section of the CAP should outline clear and measurable goals aimed at fostering a culture of sustainability. Key objectives may include targets for reducing energy consumption through efficiency measures and renewable energy adoption. Objectives could also address transportation emissions by promoting alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle travel, such as walking, cycling, carpooling, or utilizing electric or hybrid school buses. Waste reduction objectives may focus on implementing recycling and composting programs, reducing food waste, and minimizing the use of single-use plastics. Educational objectives should also be included to integrate climate literacy into the curriculum and empower students to become environmental stewards. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be established to track progress toward these objectives and ensure accountability.

Putting Framework into Action: CAP Targets

CAP Categories

Your CAP and its targets will be organized into a series of categories or sections. You can group targets together to create your categories and establish a clear flow.

Environmental Objectives

Environmental objectives can include the following categories:

Built environment
- An overall goal of reducing GHGs by making changes to the built environment.
- Energy Efficiency & Generation:
    - Energy efficiency
    - SMART building

- Sustainable landscaping
    - Rain gardens
    - Permeable landscaping
- Transportation
    - Vehicle electrification
    - Increasing bus usage & alternative methods of transportation
    - Increasing walkability

Economic Objectives

Resource Management
- Improving resource management can enhance effectiveness, reduce costs, and minimize environmental impacts.
- Resource management includes: food waste reduction, waste reduction, water consumption reduction, plastic reduction, recycling, composting, local sourcing, repurposing materials

Sustainability & Resiliency
- Outline long-term, holistic solutions
- This section will describe plans to make the campus and community more resilient, including the indicators developed by the planning team to track progress over time. See Resilience for more guidance (Second Nature).

Social Objectives

Career and Curriculum

Enhancing school curriculums to incorporate holistic climate education, as well as 'green' career options, will be important for student engagement.

- Create climate & sustainability curriculum and Environmental Justice Work Groups (Prince George CAP)
- Encourage career exploration and outdoor experiences
- Incorporate climate change topics in all classes, regardless of subject
    - You can find examples of how to do this here
- For an impactful learning experience, help students learn about climate action through climate action, beginning at the school level

Culture & Leadership
- To generate lasting change, a culture of environmental stewardship will be necessary for ensuring student and community engagement and commitment. Encouraging civic engagement will be a key component to CAP implementation processes.

Implementation & Monitoring Strategies

Implementation Plans

The most important component of a CAP will be its strategies for implementation. This section will detail how exactly your school will take action to achieve its identified objectives. It will illustrate the necessary steps to achieve successful climate action.

Key Components of Implementation
- Administration & staffing
- Financing & budgeting
- Implementation of actions & measures
- Monitoring & reporting
- Public participation & social equity (City of Encinitas, CA)

The following **three climate action plan components** were identified as applicable and critical to achieving a CAP's recommendations:
- **Operational:** Action to bring about functional and systematic change within school systems to support the implementation of the CAP and transition to a carbon-neutral future.
- **Mitigation:** Action to reduce the school system's GHG emissions and overall carbon footprint.
- **Adaptation:** Action to respond to and prepare the school system for the impacts of climate change. (Prince George CAP)

Guiding Principles for Implementation (Denver Public Schools)
- Act with urgency

- Enhance and engage the lives of stakeholders, students, and community
- Prepare students for a green economy through career development opportunities and curriculum
- Promote cross-functional collaboration, continuous improvement, and innovation
- Ensure sustainability is a core value
- Go beyond reducing environmental impact to creating a regenerative system
- Ensure the economic feasibility of initiatives
- Contribute to environmental justice and healthy environments

Measurement Systems

Any implementation strategies must be supported by the proper measurement systems. This section will summarize how your school intends to evaluate the progress and impacts of all implementation plans.

- [Information](#) on measurement systems
- [Information](#) on GHG emission calculating
- [Information](#) on adaptation and monitoring
- General [information](#) on M&E systems

Collaboration with Stakeholders

School Boards: School boards are responsible for governing public schools within their district. They are in charge of policy-making, budgetary decisions, oversight of school leadership, and evaluating the performance of a school, among others. They are particularly suitable for advancing climate action by supporting and implementing climate policies and measures, integrating climate education into curriculum, and engaging stakeholders to support green initiatives. School board members can strengthen not just their school's resilience, but their community's resiliency through coordinated climate mitigation strategies.

Have your [students](#) become engaged with their [school boards](#):
- Join the school board as a youth representative
- Attend and speak at school board meetings
- Engage with school board members
- Join advisory committees

- Volunteer services or time
- Organize campaigns or petitions around an issue
- More information about getting involved with school boards:
    - [Involving Young People on School Boards is Good for Students](#)
    - [How to Get Involved in My School Board](#)
    - [Bringing Student Representatives to the School Board Table](#)
    - [Student Representation On School Boards Can Help Empower All Students](#)
    - [5 Ways to Connect With Your School Board](#)

Other Stakeholders:
- Educators and School Staff
    - Integrate climate education into their curriculum, regardless of subject or material. Incorporate civic engagement and hands-on learning experiences and/or projects that enable students to participate in climate action. Educators can teach and incorporate eco-friendly practices within their classrooms.
- Students
    - Students can start and participate in environmental clubs, campagins and events, volunteer with environmental groups, and advocate for sustainable policies both within and outside of their schools.
- Municipal Leaders
    - Can support CAPs and other climate initiatives through funding, resources, and policy guidance. They can also work with schools to align their CAPs and other climate actions with local or state wide climate goals and initiatives.
- Community Members & Parents
    - Attend school board meetings and encourage students to engage in climate clubs and initiatives. They can become involved at the school through parent-teacher organizations, attending meetings, and voting for policies that support sustainability.
- Local Businesses & Organizations
    - Local groups can support school-wide sustainability initiatives through donations, sponsorships, and volunteer opportunities. They can also provide resources and assistance for climate action projects.

How To Partner With Local Organizations To Address Community Needs:

- Reach out to local environmental organizations or volunteer groups
    - Contact local branches of national organizations like the Sierra Club
- Partner with local universities or other schools
- Collaborate with and seek resources from local governmental departments, including sustainability offices or environmental protection agencies
- Engage with local businesses that have sustainability commitments
- When seeking partnerships with these groups, establish shared objectives and define roles accordingly
    - Develop joint programs and projects that align with your CAP
    - Utilize their expertise and experience to strengthen your CAPs goals, measurement systems, and implementation strategies
    - Ensure consistent evaluation and feedback mechanisms

How To Conduct Community & Stakeholder Engagement
- Involve stakeholders in the planning process
- Establish clear methods of communication
- Invite partners to participate in joint projects and initiatives
- Provide opportunities for ongoing involvement throughout the CAP planning, implementation, and monitoring processes
- [How To Create a CAP Through Community Engagement](#)
- [Community Engagement in School-Based Environmental Education](#)
- [How To Develop a Community Engagement Action Plan](#)

Monitoring Procedures: 'We Have A Plan, Now What?'

The monitoring section of a CAP should detail systems for tracking and evaluating progress toward the plan's objectives. This includes establishing clear metrics and benchmarks for key performance indicators such as energy consumption, transportation emissions, waste generation, and educational outcomes. Monitoring mechanisms may involve regular energy audits to assess building efficiency, tracking fuel consumption and mileage for school vehicles, implementing waste audits to measure diversion rates and identify areas for improvement, and evaluating student and staff engagement in sustainability initiatives. Additionally, the monitoring section should outline procedures for data collection, analysis, and reporting, ensuring transparency and accountability. Regular review meetings and progress reports can facilitate ongoing evaluation of the CAP's effectiveness and inform

adjustments or enhancements to strategies as needed to achieve long-term sustainability goals.

Other things to consider as part of your monitoring processes:

- What will you do with the resulting cost savings? How will you reinvest them in the community?
  - Identify where your savings could be best applied (whether in your school or broader community)
- How is your CAP meeting community needs and how are you monitoring the progress toward meeting these needs?
  - What are the associated cost savings for meeting these needs?
  - What is the state of the problem following your CAP implementation?
  - What changes is your community seeing following CAP implementation?
- How do you include the community in CAP efforts?
  - How does your plan fit into your larger community?
  - What opportunities for community engagement have you identified?
    - Check out [TCI's Community Conversation](#) framework for impactful engagement with your community
    - Identify how changes in your school will impact the larger community
  - How can community engagement be strengthened?
  - How is your community contributing to CAP implementation and monitoring?

Conclusion

Summarize the main findings, goals, and strategies of your CAP.

Extra Resources

What are CAPs?

Explore the following resources to better understand the purpose of CAPs, how to write a CAP, and planning guides to get you started on your climate action journey:

[Writing School CAPs](#)
This article provides an overview of the key components of a CAP for schools.
[Schools Climate Action Planner](#)
This tool provides educators with personalized programs to have the most impact on their schools.
[Key Questions to Get Started](#)
This checklist and series of review questions serve to help determine ways in which school districts can develop CAPs. These guiding questions can assist in planning conversations and strategies.
[Climate Action Pathways for Schools](#)
If your school isn't ready to take on an entire CAP, consider sharing opportunities for your students to work on CAP-related action projects in conjunction with Climate Action Pathways for Schools.
[European Union Examples of Action Projects](#)
These teaching materials provide examples of climate action projects being implemented in classrooms globally.
[UNESCO Guide for Climate Action In Schools](#)
This guide introduces the concept of a whole-school approach to climate action in schools. It provides planning guidance, guidelines for incorporating climate action into school governance and curriculum, example actions, and monitoring mechanisms for evaluating actions.
[Climate Action Planning Guides](#)
A step-by-step planning guide to developing climate-smart communities, including frameworks, strategies, and plans for implementation.
[Climate Smart Schools](#)
This article provides insight into federal legislation and potential sources of funding to support climate action initiatives in schools.

Examples of School CAPs and Projects

[Denver Public Schools](#)
   - [Tracking Progress](#)
[Prince Georges County](#)
[Batesville School District- Arkansas](#)
[Nanaimo School District](#)
[Examples of CAP Structures](#)

The New School
Chicago Public Schools
California Local County CAPs
Lions Live Green- St. Mark's School
Example School Board Climate Action Resolution

Potential Funding

- The Inflation Reduction Act and Schools Overview
- Financing guide to understand financing and mitigation strategies for CAP financial planning.
- EPA Climate Action Funding Resource Guide
- IRA Funding Updates & Federal Funding Opportunities
- US Climate Resilience Toolkit - Funding Opportunities
- Climate Action Funding & Technical Resources
- Renewing America's Schools - Department of Energy
- For States and Local Governments - Climate Pollution Reduction Grants

Organizations to Draw From

- This Is Planet Ed.
    - An initiative of the Energy and Environment Program of the Aspen Institute seeking to unlock the power of education as a force for climate action, climate solutions, and environmental justice. Their K-12 Climate Action Commission released an action plan that outlines policy recommendations for the local, state, and federal level to support the education sector to mitigate, adapt, educate, and advance equity to address climate change.
- New Buildings Institute
    - Offers Carbon Neutral Schools Resolution Templates that provide a starting place for establishing formal district policy regarding carbon-neutral facilities. It includes instructions on how to successfully adapt the resolution to declare the district's commitment to healthy, carbon-neutral facilities. NBI has published a series of templates that can be customized to meet school needs.
- Take Action Global

- The Climate Action Schools Program is a paid, year-long project allowing schools, districts, and networks with students ages 5-18 to collaborate at local and global levels on environmental topics. They provide a 10-month-long climate education experience that culminates in certification.
- School Board Member Toolkit
  - School board members play a critical role in advancing climate solutions that empower young people and their communities by passing resolutions to develop comprehensive climate action plans for their districts. This guide describes the role of school board members in advancing climate action.
  - Also check out the Aspen Institute's Commitments for Climate Resilience and Sustainability, Template School Board Climate Action Resolution, and the Role of School Board Members in Climate Action.
- START Sustainability Program
  - Created by schools, for schools, the START program provides a strategic framework for schools to methodically track, plan, and collaborate on their Sustainability Journey in order to make measurable progress. They offer a step-by-step roadmap for schoolwide sustainability.
- Climate Action Pathways for Schools
  - Climate Action Pathways for Schools (CAPS) partners with under-resourced schools to lower operating costs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and advance climate literacy. They provide a project-based learning program to prepare students for green jobs and high-skill career pathways by helping them develop and execute projects that mitigate climate change, resulting in more equitable, sustainable, and resilient schools and communities.

Sample Action Projects

Environmental
Built Environment of a School
- Energy Efficiency & Generation:
  - Renewable energy audit
    - Renewable energy transitions
    - Solar panel installations
    - LED light installations

- SMART building
- Sustainable Landscaping & Natural Environment
  - Rain gardens to reduce water usage
  - Native plant and pollinator gardens
  - Plant trees
  - Permeable landscaping
  - Green roofs
  - Wildlife habitats
  - Floating Wetlands for Eutrophication
- Transportation
  - Vehicle electrification
  - Increasing bus usage & alternative methods of transportation
  - Increasing walkability

Economic
- Resource Management
  - Presentations to school boards
    - Students can outline proposed climate action projects and provide a cost-benefit analysis to their implementation. While projects might require an upfront cost, they can also bring long term benefits.
  - Implementing eco-friendly purchasing policies
    - Ensure schools are purchasing environmentally friendly school supplies, equipment, and services. This can include purchasing recycled products, energy efficient appliances, non toxic-cleaning products, etc., which will enhance a school's sustainability and result in economic savings over time.
  - Community gardens and composting systems will not only help reduce waste but will help reduce school costs for produce.
  - Food waste reduction → composting/biodigesters
  - Waste reduction and recycling
  - GHG inventories
  - Carbon footprint calculators and reduction initiatives
  - Completion of green or sustainable certification programs

Social
- Human Health & Education

- Volunteer in your community and school to support sustainability projects
  - Partner and collaborate with community organizations working to achieve climate action
    - Collaborate with city and school board officials to implement sustainable initiatives.
  - Advocate for your school to join a nationwide campaign, work for a climate or [sustainable](#) [certification](#), or partake in local or regional climate actions.
  - Work with students to get them connected to school or organizational boards to ensure youth voices are represented in policy decision-making processes
- Schools should Incorporate climate topics into all curriculum
  - Climate policy is an [interdisciplinary climate topic](#) that holds clear implications for climate action. Ensuring students understand its processes, implications, and applications will be an important factor for empowering students to feel like they can make a change.
  - Student led leadership and involvement: [environmental clubs](#); climate projects, student action
- Incorporate civic engagement or climate action projects into classes
  - Art projects and installations
  - [Photojournalism](#) project
  - Create climate change awareness posters
  - Create crafts and projects out of school waste

Incorporating Youth Perspectives

- [Giving Students a Seat at the Table](#)