

# **ITHACA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

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## ◆ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ◆

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## ◆ TABLE OF CONTENTS ◆

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Structure</b> .....	3
<b>Operations</b> .....	4
<b>Healthy Schools</b> .....	6
<b>Education</b> .....	7

## ◆ INTRODUCTION ◆

This CAP is the next step in the realization of the following Climate Action Plan Resolution, which was adopted by the Ithaca City School District Board of Education on June 25, 2024: ***Whereas the climate crisis is a social justice and equity issue primarily caused by human behavior, the Ithaca City School District, therefore commits to taking accelerated action to reduce district greenhouse gas emissions, incorporate sustainability measures, and support climate education throughout the school community.***

As a living document, the CAP will be reviewed annually by the CAP Advisory Council to guide our collective actions aimed at addressing energy use, fostering healthy schools, and integrating education for a sustainable future. The CAP will work to mitigate the impacts of climate change and help to create a more sustainable future for our students.

The CAP is prompted by international climate reports and how they ought to inform our operational and educational decisions to create healthy schools. In the Sixth Annual Assessment Report released in 2022 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an intergovernmental body of the United Nations, the IPCC stated that, “It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.”<sup>1</sup>

It is essential for the Ithaca City School District to reduce district greenhouse gas emissions in an ambitious manner. These goals are in harmony with the 2015 Paris Agreement, which has a central aim of keeping the global temperature from rising beyond a 2° C increase.<sup>2</sup> These goals are also aligned with the 2019 New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act as well as the sustainability goals of many of the municipalities in which our schools are located such as the City of Ithaca Green New Deal. In a 2021 global survey<sup>3</sup> of 10,000 respondents ages 16-25, nearly 70 percent said they were either extremely worried or very worried about climate change. As a school district dedicated to preparing students for the future, we need to be responsive to their growing awareness of the climate crisis and concerns about how it will impact the challenges they will face in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Pörtner, Hans-Otto, et al., editors. Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2022.

<sup>2</sup> “What is the Paris Agreement?” United Nations Climate Change <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Hickman, Caroline et al. “Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey.” The Lancet. Planetary health vol. 5,12 (2021): e863-e873. doi:10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3

## ◆ STRUCTURE ◆

The Structure component of the CAP will formalize the participation of all stakeholder groups and provide support to ensure that the goals of the CAP are achieved across the school district. The Structure component enables the implementation of the Operations, Healthy Schools and Educations components of the CAP.

### **Goals:**

- Continue the Sustainability Advocates positions with a minimum of one representative from each school.
- The Board of Education will establish annually a CAP Advisory Council that includes Sustainability Advocates, Students, Administrators, Board Members, and Community Partners. This group will assess the progress of the CAP and set annual goals.
- Explore the future creation of school district positions that ensure the implementation of the CAP goals.
- Central administrators and building leaders will incorporate the CAP goals into their vision, planning, and leadership.
- Each district department director will develop at least one annual goal which supports the CAP.
- Future capital projects must have sustainability components aligned with the CAP.
- When developing the annual budget, consider sustainability opportunities that are aligned with the CAP.

## ◆ OPERATIONS ◆

Operations refers to all aspects of facility operations, maintenance, construction and transportation within the Ithaca City School District. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with Operations, the CAP includes goals specific to assessing building energy performance, updating HVAC systems with more efficient technologies, improving landscaping and grounds maintenance, integrating additional renewable energy into the district electricity supply, continuing to decarbonize district transportation services, improving active transportation infrastructure, and reducing waste across the district.

### **ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF BUILDINGS**

#### **Goal:**

- The district will prioritize conducting energy audits on all buildings with a target of completing this work by the end of 2030.

### **HVAC SYSTEMS**

#### **Goal:**

- The district will continue the work of transitioning away from the use of fossil fuel-based heating and cooling systems toward sustainable HVAC systems, aligning with NY State greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals. The district will prioritize the replacement of fossil fuel-based boiler systems with HVAC systems as they age out.

### **ENERGY BENCHMARKING**

#### **Goal:**

- Reinstate annual district building energy usage and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions data analysis.

### **LANDSCAPING AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

#### **Goal:**

- Protect and enhance ICSD's natural areas and minimize environmental impacts.

### **ELECTRICITY SUPPLY**

#### **Goal:**

- Increase renewable sources for district electricity to align with New York State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

### **NEW CONSTRUCTION**

#### **Goal:**

- All new construction projects will prioritize climate impacts when choosing materials and designing facilities. In addition, the district will prioritize repurposing existing assets and materials and incorporate renewable energy sources such as solar panels if at all possible.

## **BUSES AND OTHER DISTRICT VEHICLES**

### **Goals:**

- Continue the transition to fully electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter from tailpipe emissions.
- Meet the expectation of New York State to transition to a fully electric bus fleet by 2035.

## **EV CHARGING STATIONS**

### **Goals:**

- Expand the district electric vehicle charging infrastructure to support a larger electric bus fleet.
- Pursue the installation of EV charging stations throughout the district to incentivize employees and visitors to transition to EVs.

## **ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION**

### **Goals:**

- ICSD will promote safe routes to schools by considering the installation of safe bike sheds, improving campus bike paths and lanes and promoting cycling education at all secondary schools.
- Remove barriers to access and mobility.

## **WASTE REDUCTION**

### **Goals:**

- Reduce all outputs to landfills.
- Increase capacity and implement best practices for plastic recycling.
- Collect food scraps and participate in county composting efforts.

## ◆ HEALTHY SCHOOLS ◆

The Healthy Schools component of the CAP encompasses both outdoor and indoor environments as well as our nutrition programs at all campuses. Healthy schools positively impact students' well-being, academic performance, and overall development, and will set our district on a more sustainable path. The Healthy Schools component includes goals to expand safe routes to school, offer gardens at every school for hands-on learning, create a plan for better access to natural areas, reduce waste, buy more sustainably, conserve energy, and improve our recycling and composting efforts. Healthy schools improve the mental and physical well-being of students and staff, fosters learning, increases engagement, and promotes healthy behaviors, ultimately benefiting the Earth and students' lifelong success.

### **ROUTES TO SCHOOL**

#### **Goal:**

- Promote the use of safe and sustainable routes to school for students and staff.

### **SCHOOL GARDENS**

#### **Goal:**

- Offer the opportunity for each school to have inclusive and accessible school community gardens.

### **LAND USE**

#### **Goal:**

- Encourage and plan for access to natural areas for each school community.

### **SHARING SCHOOL RESOURCES**

#### **Goal:**

- Create a circular system for materials, furniture and supplies which have been purchased and used in schools.

### **WASTE REDUCTION**

#### **Goal:**

- Work towards composting and recycling 100% of items that are compostable and recyclable on all campuses. When possible, replace single-use items with reusable items.

### **ENERGY CONSUMPTION**

#### **Goal:**

- Improve energy conservation in all buildings.

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLNESS**

#### **Goal:**

- Focus on alleviating climate anxiety and fostering resilience by offering support and resources to help students and staff cope with climate emotions and manage extreme weather conditions.

### **FOOD AND NUTRITION SYSTEMS**

#### **Goal:**

- Promote sustainability and continue to expand healthy food options in all school cafeterias.

## ◆ EDUCATION ◆

Education for a sustainable future belongs in the curriculum across all grade levels and subject areas in the Ithaca City School District. Interdisciplinary learning experiences for students and professional development opportunities for teachers will bring a sustainability lens across the school district. When students connect with and appreciate nature from a young age and learn about creating a sustainable future, they will be more prepared to navigate the complexities and challenges ahead. Partnerships with local organizations, municipalities, and families will expand resources and educational opportunities in the classroom as well as in the field.

The goals of the Education component connect with and support the initiatives of the ICSD and the New York State Education Department. As an equity issue, teaching about the climate crisis connects with both the academic and social-emotional goals of *Learning Forward ICSD*. Embedding opportunities for leadership empowers students to be proactive with new understandings is an authentic way for them to address their eco-anxiety and deepen their learning. The New York State *Civic Seal of Readiness* recognizes the value of student civic engagement as part of their learning experience. The New York State *Portrait of A Graduate* requires instruction in climate education. Students will become more resilient by expanding their knowledge and taking informed action.

### **CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Goals:**

- Promote educational experiences for students that foster appreciation of the natural world.
- Acknowledge and support climate emotions throughout the curriculum.
- Develop student understanding of the integrated Earth Systems that incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing and how these systems are impacted by human behavior.
- Foster understanding of the climate crisis as an equity and social justice issue.
- Explore potential actions to affect systemic change for a sustainable future.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Goals:**

- Offer annual professional development opportunities on education for a sustainable future.
- Provide teachers with curriculum writing opportunities on education for a sustainable future.
- Pursue the addition of a micro-credential on education for a sustainable future to the current micro-credential strands.

## **CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY**

### **Goals:**

- Pursue collaboration with community organizations and form partnerships with local and regional organizations and municipalities to expand resources for teaching and learning about creating a sustainable future.
- Invite members of local Indigenous communities to help infuse the curriculum and learning activities with Indigenous history and wisdom.
- Create opportunities that foster student appreciation and caretaking of nature through learning experiences in the community.
- Share student learning about the climate crisis and climate action to create a sustainable future with families and the community.

## **STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN CLIMATE ACTION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **Goals:**

- Provide opportunities to develop youth leadership for an equitable and sustainable future.
- Empower youth to take informed climate action in the school district and in the broader community.
- Foster student recognition of their agency.