



Date: June 7, 2023

To: PPS Board of Education

From: Jonathan Garcia, Chief of Staff
Kat Davis, Advisor for Climate Justice

Subject: **Climate Crisis Response Policy Annual Update and Recommendations**

Introduction

The purpose of this memo is to provide an annual update on the implementation of the [Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice and Sustainable Practices Policy](#) (the Policy). This memo will review the high level approach to policy implementation, initial successes, challenges, and recommendations to move forward at the pace necessary to meet the ambitious goals in our commitment to the community.

Context

In March 2022, the Portland Public Schools Board of Education (the Board) unanimously adopted the Climate Crisis Response Policy. This policy commits PPS to immediately mobilize resources to reduce the impact on climate change. Beyond responsibility for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the policy centers frontline communities in advancing climate resilience, developing a climate justice education, and to connect students, parents, teachers, staff, and community partners as leaders in climate solutions. This policy understands climate justice as the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the vulnerable members of our community, and recognizes our responsibility to attend to our students' mental health and emotional challenges that come from anticipating and experiencing extreme climate events. With this commitment, PPS can show our students what a future of climate solutions looks like, and instill a critical hope such that our students can lead and thrive despite a changing climate.

While emissions reduction and aspects of sustainability have been in motion at PPS for decades, this policy brings together the historically individual strands of work into cohesive and ambitious goals. With this framework, the three policy Pillars of reducing environmental impacts, improving health and wellness, and providing an effective environmental and sustainability education are not separate to the District's



mission of providing a high quality education, but rather a strategy to achieve the Board goals of advancing academic milestones and student achievement, and to advance the outcomes envisioned in the Graduate Portrait.

Portland Public Schools has received national recognition for this Climate Crisis Response policy and our commitment to centering students and climate justice. This Spring, the [National School Board Association awarded PPS the Silver Level of the Magna Award](#). School districts around the country are looking to PPS for leadership. [NAAEE features PPS' policy](#) as one of only a handful of District-level climate policies in the US, and is in the process of releasing a case study about our work to help guide other school districts. In addition, the PPS Advisor for Climate Justice and the Senior Manager for Energy and Sustainability have presented at multiple conferences around the country on our approach to climate action and resilience.

The goals of this policy are unprecedented for a school district, and therefore an unprecedented level of communication, resources, and collaboration internally and with our partners will be required to fulfill our commitment to our students, parents, and PPS community. To initiate this strategic coordination, the 2022 - 2023 school year marks a foundational year, characterized by a careful and intentional approach to policy implementation that, if supported, will lead to long-term, sustained, systemic action.

Policy Goals at a Glance

Pillar 1: Reduce Environmental Impact and Costs

- Goal 1.1: PPS will design and construct new low-carbon schools and renovations that are energy-efficient, resilient, and adaptable.
- Goal 1.2: PPS will maximize reductions in Greenhouse Gas emissions from district operations, maintenance, and facilities management.
- Goal 1.3: PPS will maximize the carbon sequestration potential and other environmental benefits of green school yards and increase the ability of school grounds to adapt to climate extremes.
- Goal 1.4: PPS will minimize greenhouse gas emissions from student and staff transportation, including transitioning to electric or low-emission vehicles.
- Goal 1.5: PPS will reduce the demand for new materials and resources, and procure materials, products, and services in a manner that integrates climate considerations, fiscal responsibility, and equity priorities.

Pillar 2: Improve Health and Wellness

- Goal 2.1: PPS will address climate-based impacts on health, safety, and wellness of its students and employees.



- Goal 2.2: PPS will support frontline student communities to build resilience from climate change induced stresses and support preparation for and recovery from these events.

Pillar 3: Provide Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

- Goal 3.1: PPS will empower staff as allies for a healthy climate.
- Goal 3.2: With guidance from frontline students and communities, PPS will develop curricular learning opportunities, so PPS graduates know the causes and consequences of climate change, understand climate justice, and have opportunities to practice climate solutions.
- Goal 3.3: PPS staff will collaborate with students to create opportunities to engage youth in hands-on climate learning, preparation, and practice on a regular basis at all PPS schools.

Progress to Date

To advance the policy, an intentional and phased implementation process is imperative to coordinate the District-wide as well as department-specific goals across PPS. Some policy goals have clearly defined objectives and metrics for success, while others are more vague. This leaves opportunity for interpretation and stakeholder engagement to define progress in a way that is true to the spirit of the intent of the policy and PPS culture.

Inspired by the PPS Innovation Studio design framework for the Center for Black Student Excellence Vision Plan, the Climate Crisis Response Policy implementation plan centers equity and community-based design in developing the transformative culture shift necessary to meet the expectations of policy activities and timelines. These phases include: Clarify, Ideate, Prototype and Implement, with each phase of activities participating in an iterative development process with stakeholder engagement. Because this policy did not initiate climate action work at PPS, this foundational year prioritized understanding the history, current state, and identified barriers of policy-related activities. Activities have included: stakeholder mapping, compiling the history of climate action at PPS, beginning to understand how different communities have been engaged in climate action or harmfully impacted by climate change, and identifying the gaps in data collection and tracking. The result of this process is an overview of existing strands of work that make up the current state of policy progress as illustrated in the [Climate Crisis Response Policy 2022 - 2023 Annual Report](#) and the Policy Progress Dashboard.



Another foundational activity includes better defining policy goals as measurable benchmarks. PPS contracted with an external evaluator, ECONorthwest, to mobilize staff from departments across the District to identify existing data sets and determine indicators for success. The final deliverables of this work include the [PPS Climate Crisis Response Policy Activities and Targets](#) (with a supplemental [Evaluation Plan Table](#)), which detail policy indicators, ideal states, estimated costs and benefits of advancing different policy activities, targets, impact on environmental justice, and gaps in data. These activities then inform the proposed [PPS Climate Crisis Response Policy Evaluation and Implementation Plan](#) which outlines a path forward to communicate progress on policy goals with transparency, prioritize activities by impact and feasibility, and develop further evaluation tools where needed. Further developing these evaluation tools and advancing a centrally coordinated data collection effort will characterize the 2023 - 2024 policy implementation scope of work.

Notably, efforts to acquire necessary data and set PPS up for future success have simultaneously moved forward. PPS completed a [Greenhouse Gas \(GHG\) Inventory](#), which sets the baseline and evaluation guidelines for measuring GHG emissions reduction efforts to reach 2030 and 2040 GHG goals, and will complete the Green Schoolyard Inventory in summer of 2023. This Spring, waste sensors were installed across all buildings to better track waste data and effectiveness of reduction efforts. PPS also welcomed our first two electric school buses this Spring, and updated the Technical Design Standards to align PPS standards for construction and installation projects to comply with policy goals. Each of these activities establishes the conditions necessary for future success.

While these foundational activities are important, it is imperative to immediately mobilize opportunities for engagement and climate action. The Climate Crisis Response Community, the Board community oversight committee, was launched in October, 2022 and has provided meaningful input on PPS policy goals and progress. In February, PPS offered professional development for teachers on teaching with a climate justice lens, and will offer a more robust two-day climate justice professional development opportunity for teachers of any subject or grade level in June. In April, over 300 high school students and teachers participated in the PPS Spring Climate Summit where they connected with an inspirational speaker, Favianna Rodriguez, on the roots of climate change as systemic injustice, and created their own campaigns using creativity and art for climate action. Finally, PPS continued to offer the High School Climate Justice Elective, a course which was co-created by teams of social studies and science teachers as well as students in the summer of 2020. This elective has been offered 21 times across nine PPS highschoools, and over 500 students have taken the course.



These are just a few of the many opportunities to engage in climate justice at PPS, with school-site activities advancing with enthusiasm regularly.

Work Ahead

As foundational work to understand the current state continues, the next year of policy progress requires deploying central systems and structures to develop a strategic plan of priority activities alongside robust community engagement to guide external funding opportunities and internal resource alignment.

The Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) has designated funding for schools in their upcoming Climate Investment Plan (CIP), with PPS anticipated to receive nearly \$17M for advancing climate mitigation and resilience infrastructure, and \$3M for supporting student projects. This CIP will go to City Council in September, and if passed will require PPS to put forth a plan for how to spend this money over the next five years. This is not the only large amount of public funding that may become available, so PPS will develop a strategic plan that includes our internal funding priorities and how to best take advantage of supplemental funding as it becomes available. To carefully attend to each of the policy pillars will require interdepartmental and community-based design.

To ensure a comprehensive approach to the GHG emissions goal, PPS deployed a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Decarbonization Implementation Roadmap, which will provide a robust analysis of potential pathways forward to reduce emissions which balances the complex challenges that PPS faces with aging infrastructure and the need for more climate resilient equipment. This RFP contract is currently being negotiated with a goal of completing this scope of work over the next year, the findings of which will inform PPS strategic infrastructure investments to meet the 2030 and 2040 GHG goals.

To center frontline communities and climate justice, it is imperative that intentional and thoughtful stakeholder engagement elevates the voices of those most impacted by climate change in developing solutions so that we may build a new system in which all communities can thrive. Over the next year, a priority will be engaging diverse stakeholder groups to increase partnerships in defining policy progress.

Opportunities for Continuous Improvement

There are challenges to achieving PPS' climate goals, most notably mobilizing resources for large-scale infrastructure change and coordinating the necessary community engagement within the confines of a limited budget. Beyond fiscal needs,



challenges range from the minute details of implementation decisions to the big-picture complexities of a transformative culture shift. A few of the most critical challenges are:

- Consistent, transparent, and inclusive community discourse around the complex decisions and tradeoffs involved in policy implementation.
- Mobilizing and educating departments District-Wide in the complex subject of climate change, sustainability, and most importantly, climate justice.
- Balancing the urgency of the situation with the integrity of the process to address historic and current injustices through community engagement and intentionality.
- Lack of a centralized system for collecting data and communicating stories about climate action, a consequence of which is an assumption that no progress towards is being made.

One of the most substantial of these challenges is clear and transparent communication of progress. It is important to spend the next year filling the gaps around data collection in order to best represent meaningful policy indicators and outcomes, as well as to better connect the innovation and creativity happening at the site level to the broader District-wide policy objectives. Creating a communication pathway to share solutions and resources for change among schools will foster more efficient and collaborative action and better inform how PPS can support these grassroots efforts and learn from the wisdom and leadership of our students, teachers, community partners and staff.

Strategic Direction Moving Forward

PPS has made foundational progress over the past year that, if backed with a commitment to coordination and action, will be positioned to successfully implement a sweeping, complex, and emergent policy. A significant lift will be required District-wide to give PPS the best chance of success. The following recommendations pertain to the next year of policy implementation to manifest this success:

1) Coordinated and Effective Leadership

- Initiate a Climate Crisis Staff Advisory Group to support cross-organizational policy decisions and provide a space for transparent conversations about tradeoffs.
- Establish a practice of strategic foresight and sustainable teaming structures to better coordinate and make more efficient the multiple initiatives that require a transformative shift district-wide as to how work is done.



- Communicate policy goals and activities as strategic initiatives to fulfill PPS strategic priorities (*SP Primary Themes: Embracing Change, Racial Equity and Social Justice*) and contribute to the outcomes of the Graduate Portrait.

2) *Inclusive, Collaborative, and Data-Driven Decision Making*

- Adopt a culture of data-driven decision making, enable schools and departments to contribute to a centralized policy data tracking and reporting system.
- Develop a robust, sustainable, and responsive community engagement program on the complex decisions related to policy tradeoffs.

3) *Strategic Advocacy and Allocation of Resources*

- Provide resources specifically for capital projects or strategic programs that directly fulfill policy directives such that funding is not in competition with allocations for existing essential services or for repairing infrastructure.
- Successfully fulfill the scope of work with partners to complete a decarbonization roadmap for the district to help prioritize and plan for meeting our primary 2030 and 2040 carbon reduction goals.

To advance the policy goals at a pace that matches the urgency of the climate crisis, we must develop a multi-pronged approach to procure and allocate resources. Expanded centralized support with the Climate Crisis Staff Advisory Group will ensure current or additional policy solutions are sustainable and effective. Investments in PPS staff with expertise in public funding (e.g. local, state and federal allocations and discretionary funding) as well as project management will be key to ensure capacity for strategically and successfully pursuing funding opportunities.

Conclusion

Portland Public Schools is made up of an ecosystem of passionate and dedicated students, parents, teachers, staff, community partners, board members and volunteers. The 2022 - 2023 policy scope of work has brought to light a wealth of activities that show a commitment to climate action. Despite significant work ahead, this year builds the foundation for the road ahead and celebrates tangible progress.

Since the policy passed, PPS has seen new professional development opportunities for teachers, real-world, community based climate experiences for student learning, improved systems for waste reduction, expanded school garden education, and more efficient building operations. With the resources available, the next year will



continue to build the critical foundational infrastructure for long term policy success while taking significant steps on implementing some of the most critical goals outlined in the policy. With a focus on building effective pathways for accessible community engagement and transparent communication across the District on policy progress and implementation decisions, PPS will continue to build collaborative relationships with the community, local stakeholders and partners, and local and statewide public agencies with shared goals. Moving forward, these partnerships will better elevate existing strands of work and fill the gaps for collecting data and telling the stories of the important work taking place at PPS.

While there are challenges ahead to meet the two overarching policy objectives of reducing emissions and prioritizing engagement, resilience and wellness, leadership support of a cohesive and coordinated approach to this work will ensure that PPS sets the stage for how to develop a transformative, rigorous, and joyous approach to a climate justice education as we move forward together.

CCRP Annual Progress Update Documents:

- Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice and Sustainable Practices Policy 2022-23 Annual Report (pdf)
 - The Annual Policy Progress Report which outlines the approach and philosophy driving the policy implementation progress, as well as provides a full scope of activities that have contributed to moving the Climate Crisis Response Policy forward for 2022-2023.
- Climate Crisis Response Policy Annual Update Presentation (powerpoint)
 - The Annual Policy Progress Presentation that the Advisor for Climate Justice will share to the Board of Education on June 13, 2023, which provides a high-level overview of the Annual Report.
- Policy Progress Dashboard
 - Interim dashboard for tracking progress on various strands of work related to Policy goals and objectives to better communicate to internal and external stakeholders the scope of work taking place at PPS to advance our CCRP goals. A goal of 2023-2024 Policy Work Plan Dashboard will be replaced with a more sophisticated

Additional Resources

- PPS Climate Crisis Response Policy Activities and Targets - supplemental Evaluation Plan Table



- Deliverable produced by ECONorthwest in collaboration with staff across PPS to Detail policy indicators, ideal states, estimated costs and benefits of advancing different policy activities, targets, impact on environmental justice, and gaps in data.
- PPS Climate Crisis Response Policy Evaluation and Implementation Plan
 - Framework to guide PPS direction on policy-related activities and prioritize activities by impact and feasibility, and develop further evaluation tools where needed.
 - Further developing these evaluation tools and advancing a centrally coordinated data collection effort will characterize the 2023 - 2024 policy implementation scope of work.