

DATE: June 2, 2023
TO: Kat Davis, PPS
FROM: ECONorthwest
SUBJECT: PPS Climate Crisis Response Policy Activities and Targets

Portland Public Schools (PPS) passed its Climate Crisis Response Policy (CCRP) in an effort to mobilize resources toward climate action to help mitigate the negative impacts of the human-caused climate crisis through:

1. reducing the district's greenhouse gas emissions,
2. improving the health and wellness of its schools and communities, and
3. implementing curriculum and education materials on racial equity and climate justice.

To support the implementation and evaluation of the CCRP, ECONorthwest has developed a framework that includes key indicators, evaluation activities, and short- and long-term targets. This memo describes components that can be used in prioritizing policy action, followed by descriptions of the activities and targets that form the foundation of the CCRP evaluation plan. These elements build on the key indicators described in an earlier memo and summarized in Table 1.

Prioritizing Inputs

Table 2 provides preliminary information about the subgoals that can assist with the process of prioritizing actions related to the policy, including costs, benefits, immediacy of benefits, and environmental justice considerations.

Indicators

The identified indicators align with each subgoal of the policy's three pillars. All indicators should be disaggregated to the extent possible (for example, by calculating impact on or participation by individuals across race/ethnicity, income level, and/or disability status).

Estimated cost per unit of improvement

The current cost estimates for the activity/activities surrounding each sub-goal are sometimes based on just one type of project or geography and should thus be interpreted with caution, or as a place to start. Portland-specific research, or research specific to the type of project(s) that will align with the subgoal, is needed in many cases. Further, some estimates are currently ranges while others are point estimates. Costs are currently unknown for most of Pillar 2-3; estimates for health/wellness and education activities will be developed during a subsequent phase of work.

Estimated benefits per unit of improvement

The potential estimated benefits of meeting each subgoal are framed in terms of the three high-level goals:

- Pillar 1: Marginal CO2 abatement effect
- Pillar 2: Improvement to health/wellness
- Pillar 3: Provision of effective environmental and sustainability education

For Pillar 1, the estimated benefit refers to the per-unit (marginal) volume of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduced or abated as a result of the activity/activities surrounding the sub-goal. For Pillars 2 and 3, the sub-goal’s benefit refers to progress toward the high-level goal associated with each pillar. In cases where estimated benefits are not yet available, “high/medium/low” entries provide a preliminary assessment of the magnitude of the benefit. The estimated costs and benefits together can be used to help prioritize highest value, lowest marginal-cost actions across all goals.

Immediacy of benefit

Immediacy of benefit refers to the time it takes for abatement, mitigation, or resilience efforts to take effect. For example, the elimination of fossil fuel burning infrastructure will have an immediate effect as emissions are immediately reduced upon transition, whereas the planting of additional trees will take years given that trees need to mature before they provide shade.

Ideal state

The ideal state describes a best-case scenario for each subgoal/indicator. In some cases, the ideal state is identical to the long-term target (see below).

Environmental justice considerations and other benefits

This column describes potential equity-related aspects of each subgoal/indicator as well as benefits not directly tied to each pillar’s high-level goal. Indicators for every subgoal should be disaggregated by population wherever possible to improve the district’s ability to assess equity in the CCRP evaluation (e.g., race/ethnicity, disability status, income, geography, language).

Evaluation Activities

Table 2 provides our assessment of activities needed to establish targets and track progress over time. Due to gaps in currently available data and analysis, most subgoals will require some amount of “foundational” work.

Need to estimate cost, benefit, ideal state, baseline data

These four “Y/N” columns identify actions needed for each subgoal to either estimate potential costs for actions, measure potential benefits of executing a goal, identify an ideal state for a goal, or establish and gather baseline data for indicator. The need for PPS to further estimate costs, benefits, ideal states, or baseline data for a given subgoal is driven by a broadly defined goal that has many components and ranges of actions, insufficient data or information at this time, and/or by the need for a consultant or professional service that can help provide price estimates.

Needs further definition

Some CCRP goals are broadly defined and will require more-specific language and desired outcomes for the district to meaningfully track progress. A broadly defined goal allows for more PPS activities and programs to be captured but makes target establishment and incremental progress measurement more challenging.

Type of data collection

Data collection methodology and required expertise will vary greatly between goals. Some goals will require data that is easily derived and can be performed by staff and students. Other goals may require professional services and consultants as the derived metric could require significant time commitment, specific expertise, or specific instrumentation or processes.

Frequency of collection

Each indicator will need to be tracked over time to measure progress. Given the effort to implement some goals and time it will take for progress to be seen, different frequencies of data collection for different indicators may be appropriate.

Targets

Table 4 provides preliminary data and statements to frame potential targets as PPS moves toward a higher degree of CCRP implementation.

Baseline conditions

Baseline conditions illustrate PPS's current level of emissions, programs, and activities that will serve as Year 0 for comparison heading into the future. Given the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic on PPS operations, 2019 data for GHGs is used as a baseline/proxy for 2023 data as that is the last full year of normal and full operations for PPS. For non-GHG affiliated goals, derived baseline values/conditions are more recent (2020-2023).

Short-term target (2028)

The short-term targets identify the desired outcome for each goal five years out from the beginning of PPS implementation of CCRP in 2023.

Long-term target (2040)

The long-term target of 2040 is net zero greenhouse emissions by 2040 for Pillar 1. For Pillars 2 and 3, preliminary suggested targets are set in terms of the overall objective of increased engagement, resilience, and wellness of staff and students as they "learn about and engage in climate solutions, climate resiliency, and climate justice practices."