

# How to Pass a School District-Wide Climate Policy!

**Course goal:** Our course on [How to Pass a School District-Wide Climate Policy](#) helps [students, teachers, and staff/employees](#) to understand what it takes to pass a climate policy in their school district so that they can [have a climate policy that helps solve the biggest threat to humanity](#). **So that every school district in the US has a climate policy or at least a climate resolution!**

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## Course Plan:

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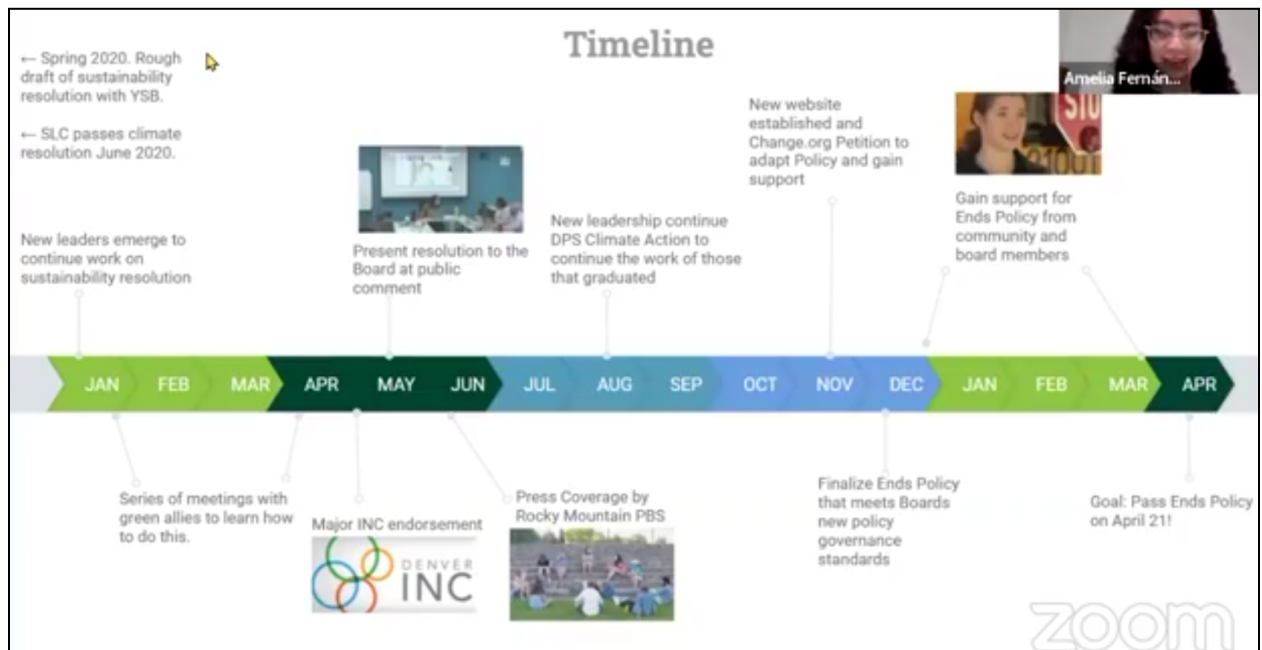
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## Unit 1 - Introduction

**Our Story.** We are Denver Public Schools (DPS) Students for Climate Action, a youth-led organization that helped to pass and implement a district-wide climate policy. This campaign will impact all [90,250+ students in DPS](#) (the largest school district in Colorado) and [14,950+ employees](#) (arguably the largest employer in Colorado) in the coming years. With the help of [Lotus Engineering](#), we will install heat pumps, solar panels, an eco-curriculum, and 100% electric buses by 2050 and change how we produce food. Our climate policy aims to reduce greenhouse emissions, promote sustainability as a core value, and address environmental injustice.

We started working together in January 2021 and had 1,450 signatures on a petition before we presented it at a School Board meeting for the first time in May 2021. From then on, we made at least one comment at every Board meeting until it passed in April 2022, over a year after we started. Check out the timeline below for more details.



**Why should you pass a policy/resolution in the first place?** [This article](#) by Amelia Fernández Rodríguez gives three good reasons:

1. Minimize the district's carbon footprint
2. Stop the effects of eco-anxiety
3. School districts save more money in the process

Passing a policy/resolution in your school district is also a great way to break the [“polite” silence](#) about the impacts of national climate inaction on students and future generations.

## Unit 2 - Create a Team

**Form a team.** Reach out to people, ask teachers for help, and build a team. Learn who your School Board members are, how they pass things, and what you want to achieve. Then set up meetings with interested Board members to describe your goals. You can use a google form like [this one](#) to recruit people.

**Recruit from existing clubs.** High school sustainability/climate action clubs are good places to find interested students. From there, having a consistent meeting time makes it easy for others to join.

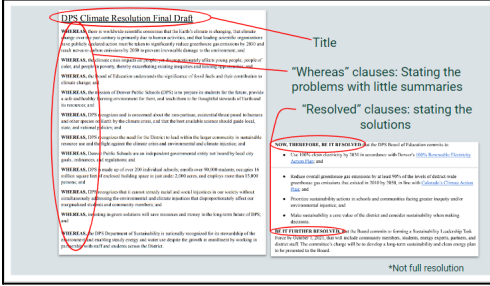
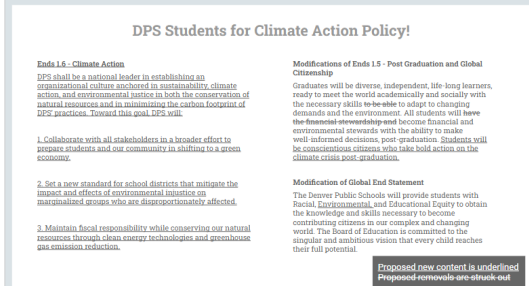
**Find an adult sponsor.** This person should consistently show up to the meetings to guide/support the team without overriding the student’s leadership. Ours was Heather Bird Jackson, a parent in Denver (but not of any of our members), who was a great supporter throughout the process.

**If you’re an adult reading this,** consider reaching out to local students about helping them organize a campaign like ours; be the glue for them.

**Work with your Sustainability Manager.** We had LeeAnn Kittle, who was new to the district and supportive of our vision. If your district has someone in a role like that, reach out to them and ask for guidance. If your district doesn't have that position, consider making one of your campaign requests that the district create that job. The energy and cost savings from someone doing that job might easily pay for that person's salary.

## Unit 3 - Create a policy/resolution

**Difference Between Policy and Resolution.** Below is a comparison between a resolution and policy that will help you decide which option you want to pursue. However, it can change with different administrations, whether private, charter, or public school, so you have to do research. You can also set up an initial meeting with your school board members or other administrators to discuss the whole process before you spend a lot of time on your initial resolution.

	Resolution	Policy (also known as an end statement)
Definition	Like a New Year's Resolution, it's a firm decision to do something, but in a formal document including "Whereas" and "Resolved" clauses.	A policy (or end statement) is a fancy way of saying "goal." It's a statement describing what is expected of the superintendent.
Examples	 <p><b>Whereas</b> in our pursuit of a sustainable future, Sonoma Academy seeks constant improvement by the sharing of knowledge, linking long-term sustainable considerations with ethical responsibility, and reestablishing the integral relationship between natural processes and human activity.</p> <p><b>Whereas</b> we have committed to school-wide sustainability practices and principles.</p> <p><b>Whereas</b> the Sonoma Academy Student Leadership Council recognizes and understands the significant negative impact that rapid and ongoing climate change has on America's schools, students, and their communities.</p> <p><b>LET IT THEREFORE BE RESOLVED THAT:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Sonoma Academy Student Leadership Council (SLC) declares climate change a generational justice and human rights issue.</li> <li>We call upon our own governance, the Sonoma Academy Board of Trustees, to adopt a similar climate resolution responding to the urgency of climate change.</li> <li>Sonoma Academy Student Leadership Council calls on Congress to swiftly end 30 years of climate neglect by enacting national policies to restore the climate for the good of young people and of future generations.</li> <li>We thank the student councils who have spoken up for climate justice by passing their own climate action resolutions. Sonoma Academy Leadership Council calls on the independent school student community to pass similar resolutions.</li> <li>We encourage the National Association of Independent Schools and California Association of Independent schools to adopt similar climate change resolutions, calling on Congress to enact climate policies to protect current and future students.</li> </ol> <p>You can view many more examples on <a href="#">Schools for Climate Action</a>.</p>	 <p><b>Ends 1.6 - Climate Action</b></p> <p>DPS shall be a national leader in establishing an organizational culture anchored in sustainability, climate action, and environmental justice in both the conservation of natural resources and in maintaining the carbon footprint of DPS practices. Toward this goal, DPS will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with all stakeholders in a broader effort to prepare students and our community in shifting to a green economy.</li> <li>Set a new standard for school districts that mitigate the impact and effects of environmental injustice on marginalized groups who are disproportionately affected.</li> <li>Maintain fiscal responsibility while conserving our natural resources through clean energy technologies and greenhouse gas emission reductions.</li> </ol> <p><b>Ends 1.5 - Post-Graduation and Global Citizenship</b></p> <p>Graduates will be diverse, independent, life-long learners, ready to meet the world academically and socially with the necessary skills to be able to adapt to changing demands and the environment. All students will have the financial stewardship and become financial and environmental stewards with the ability to make well-informed decisions, post-graduation. Students will be conscientious citizens who take bold action on the climate crisis post-graduation.</p> <p><b>Modification of Global End Statement</b></p> <p>The Denver Public Schools will provide students with Racial, Environmental, and Educational Equity to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our complex and changing world. The Board of Education is committed to the singular and ambitious vision that every child reaches their full potential.</p> <p><i>Proposed new content is underlined. Proposed removals are struck out.</i></p> <p>You can view DPS 4 CA's policy <a href="#">here</a>.</p>

**Do the Research.** With the team, you created in Unit 1, research before you start writing your policy/resolution. Research the administration's goals and core values to help you align their interests with the policy/resolution. Here is a list of websites to help you research:

1. Pass a climate board policy based on [policies already in place in your state](#)
2. [Making the Grade: How does climate education rank in your state?](#)
3. [Unleashing the creativity of teachers and students to combat climate change: An opportunity for global leadership](#)
4. [Schools for Climate Action Resolution Replication Guide](#)
5. [Pass a climate school board resolution - Steps](#)
6. [Pass a climate school board resolution - Article](#)
7. [Pass a climate school board resolution - Videos](#)

**Learn about your school board members.** Each board is different! Research each member's educational and political background and (possible) interest in sustainability. This research is meant to connect you with the board members individually, creating future sponsorships and/or endorsements of your policy.

**Learn about other climate groups who've successfully passed a policy.** Reach out to them and also look at environmental organizations that have passed policies at the local level. You can look at successfully passed resolutions [at Schools for Climate Action](#).

**What to include in a policy/resolution (sustainability criteria).** Make it easy on yourself by starting with a successful resolution or policy from another district you like. We started with a resolution and modeled it after the [resolution](#) passed by the Salt Lake City School District. We liked their resolution because it had specific targets for climate action, and we had heard from students in Salt Lake that it led to real change in their district. Consider aligning your targets with those of your city, [state](#), or some other group that can help add legitimacy to what you are asking.

We ended up with a one-sentence policy statement because that is what worked for our district. According to the rules of our district, a policy passed by the Board needs to be a statement of fundamental values rather than specific targets. These binding fundamental values are the metric by which our superintendent's progress is measured, and it is up to our superintendent to figure out the best targets that address the fundamental values of our district. This policy statement turned out to be just as binding - if not more - than the specific targets we had listed in our resolution. The advantage of writing the resolution first, however, was that it clarified for us and the school district what exactly we were looking for.

**People we worked with.** For feedback and endorsements, we reached out to like-minded peer groups, such as the Youth Sustainability Board, supportive adults, and like-minded community groups. Community groups included climate-oriented city council members, the Climate Action, Sustainability & Resiliency department in the City and County of Denver, Denver Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation, the Denver Metro Chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby, Resiliency Denver, GreenLatinos, and school principals (for endorsements).

**Find outside sponsors and professionals to back you up.** Work with the local government to understand their goals. They can help you edit and determine the logistics/financing of your policy/resolution.

**Edit!** EDIT the final product and get a lot of people to revise and give feedback on it to get the best wording and to make sure the resolution or policy really expresses the values and goals of your group. We met weekly and used that time to edit. **Remember:** Don't spend too much time editing because anything you write will probably get changed during the board process anyway!

## Unit 4 - Stay Organized

**Organization is crucial to passing a policy; without it, you will fail.**

**Set a consistent, regular meeting time.** We chose Wednesdays at 7 pm on Zoom. Word of mouth let people know they could show up, which led to attendance from:

- Students at different schools (including elementary kids)
- Parents at different schools
- School Board members (following persistent emails)
- Other organizations (Green Latinos, Colorado People's Alliance, UC Sustainability Board, and Denver Inc — a neighborhood council).

**Show up & get things done!** That's our motto. We passed our policy by attending meetings weekly and talking at School Board meetings month after month.

**Take meeting time to send emails.** Even if it's just 3 minutes, it's worth taking time during the regular meeting to repeatedly and consistently send emails to

- School Board members
- Legislators
- Others in the community
- [Email Template](#)

**It takes time and effort to organize.** But the amount of time required can be flexible depending on your level of involvement. Some people attend the weekly meeting, while others run the group. Delegate roles (social media, communications, president, vice-president, notetaker, etc.) and try to [document](#) all your meetings. We created a Google Drive folder with all our meeting notes, resources, and presentations. You can use google drive, coda.io, notion, or any other website that will help organize your team's documents.

During meetings, it's important that everyone shares their voice and opinion, not just one person talking the whole time. Although someone has to lead the meeting, be sure that everyone has a chance to speak and listen since this is a collaborative and strategic effort in which you need everyone's perspective.

## Unit 5 - Make it easy for Supporters

**Step 1: Create a website.** We made ours using Squarespace, which is free, but you can also use other free platforms such as Wix, GoDaddy, Google Sites, Jimbo, and Weebly. However, you may have to pay to get your own domain. We used grant money to pay for our domain. Our website: <https://www.dpsclimateaction.org/>.

Here are things to include for your website:

- Home Page with information about your policy
- "Endorse Our Climate Policy" webform
- Press Page
- Blog Page
- Proposed Policy
- Supporters
- Student Videos/Public Comments
- Place to accept art from kids

**Step 2: Start a petition.** We started a petition for people to show their support for our policy and as a way to convince the school board to adopt it. This is something prideful and impactful to say in board/public comment meetings, especially if you have many signatures.

We used [change.org](https://www.change.org/) to create our petition. Create a google doc [like this](#) so that your whole team can collaborate on the description of your petition. Our [petition description](#) told our story, stated our goals, and included links to other ways to get involved, including:

- [Mailing list signup](#) - Make an email newsletter to keep supporters informed and involved in your group's efforts.

To do that, make a google form [like this one](#) so that people can sign up for your monthly newsletter. We used MailChimp because it enables you to make aesthetically pleasing emails. You should have at least one person in your group in charge of writing these newsletters every month. We had Mariah Rosensweig, who crafted and sent out our newsletters. You can view our newsletters [here](#). (Resolution newsletter can be found [here](#), created by Felicia Winfrey)

Make your emails/newsletters short and sweet. You want them to absorb the information, not to be overloaded when people are reading them.

Here are tips/things to include for your newsletters:

- General updates:
  - Exciting announcements (i.e., press release, new endorsers), goals or progress that has been made
- Engagement opportunities:
  - Public comment, contacting legislators, connecting with local schools, trying to get more students involved
- Connect to other groups:
  - Announcements or similar tasks we are working on
- Calendar of upcoming events/meetings

- Link to your website, petition, and social media accounts
  - ["Endorse Our Climate Policy" web form](#) - We had a web form on our website so that community members and school principals could “endorse” our policy to show support. We put these prominent community members on our website with their photos at the bottom of our [People page](#). This is a fantastic way to convince your school board members to pass your policy/resolution because when they see others care, they care.
  - [Letter of support template](#) - We made this letter of support so that our team and supporters could share it with their community, parent newsletters, or school announcements so that more people could sign our petition and learn about our policy.
  - [Instagram and Twitter](#) - We encourage you to create social media and DOCUMENT YOUR JOURNEY THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS! A specific person in your group should be in charge of posting on social media.
- Here are tips/things to include for your posts and stories:
- Make them short and sweet
  - Make them exciting!
  - Link the petition
  - Use canva to make cool posts

[Our petition](#) has been signed by over 4,000 people! We set an ambitious goal of 10,000 signatures, and although we only reached 4,085, it was enough to pass our policy and have it implemented within DPS! We got people to sign it by:

- Asking them directly with clipboards by waiting outside after school and at extracurricular events like sports, debate tournaments, or club fairs.
- Posting signs around the school with a QR code linked to the petition. [Here](#) and [here](#) are what our posters looked like. [Here](#) and [here](#) is what our QR code looked like.
- Making a slideshow with the QR code to present during morning meetings/advisory at school.
- Share your policy on social media and make posts and stories. This should be someone’s dedicated role to handle everything related to social media.
- Asking and emailing random people to sign our petition

**Step 3: Sign up and apply for grants to gain more support for your policy!** We got a [grant](#) from Denver Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation. We used the money for our website/domain, petition, Zoom account, promotional materials, and [planting trees in our community](#) through a program called [Tree-Plenish](#).

## Unit 6 - Confront the School Board!

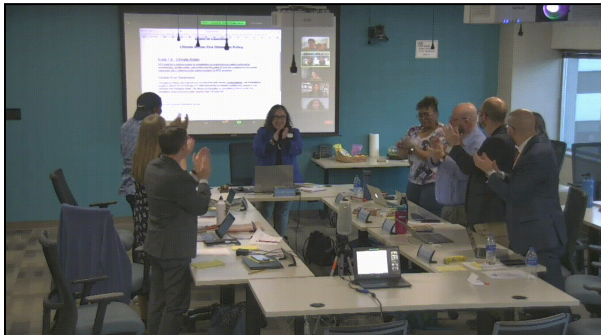
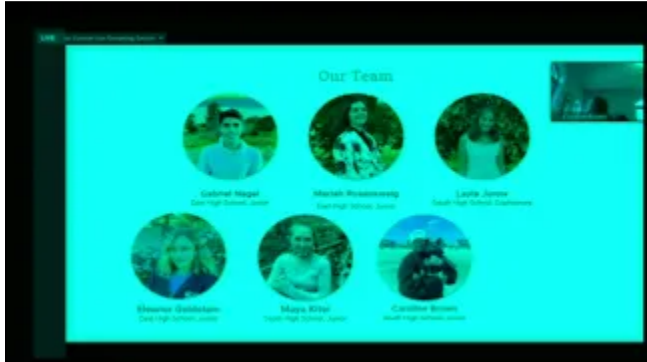
**Go to meetings.** We met with each of our board members to gain their support and have them endorse our policy by emailing them using this template: [email template requesting meeting](#) We also consistently went to Public Comment (documented below on our YouTube channel) for our cause until the school board eventually (after one year of trying to get their attention) took notice and prioritized us. They invited us to read our current policy in January 2022 and to a work session on April 7th until they voted to enact our policy on April 21, 2022.

**Attend Public Comment.** Public comment is an opportunity for students and community members to address their concerns or appreciation to the school board. If your district has public comment meetings, you and your team should attend to advertise your campaign, build momentum, and pressure the board to consider your resolution/policy. Someone should be in charge of signing your group up for public comment. Prepare what everybody is going to say beforehand so that everyone is ready! (In the YouTube video descriptions, we provide our Google doc plan for our group).

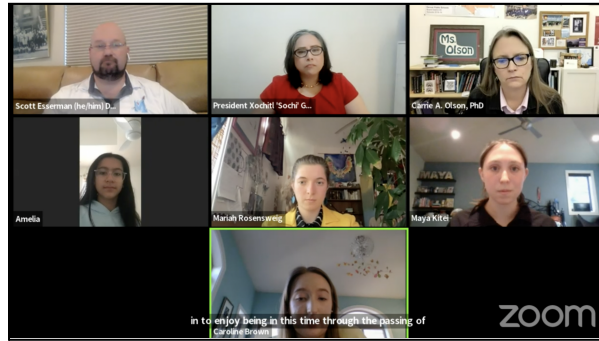
Tips for speaking at Public Comment:

- Be authentic. Use your real voice, but be powerful.
- They want to hear your story, so tell why this matters to you
  - You want a clean and livable future
  - You had an experience that opened your eyes to climate change
- Read over each other’s paragraph
- Run through the whole presentation to practice

[School Board Meetings \(unlisted\), YouTube playlist](#)

<b>Public Comment linked to YouTube video</b>
<p><a href="#">April 21, 2022 — PASSES!</a> (35 min) Skip to <a href="#">the standing ovation.</a></p> 
<p><a href="#">April 7, 2022 — Work session</a> (48 min)</p> 
<p><a href="#">March 24, 2022 — Public comment</a> (11 min)</p>





[February 24, 2022 — Public comment](#) (2 min)



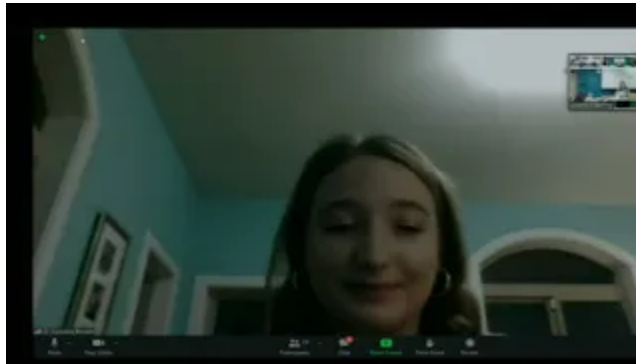
[January 20, 2022 — Policy reading](#) (10 min)



[December 16, 2021 — Public comment](#) (7 min)



[November 18, 2021 — Public Comment](#) (4 min)



[June 10, 2021 — Public Comment](#) (19 min)



[May 20, 2021 — Public Comment](#) (7 min)



## Unit 7 - Be Prepared for Setbacks

**Setbacks will arrive.** We started drafting a resolution and then learned that the School Board had switched to “policy” governance, which meant they weren’t passing resolutions anymore. This was initially disappointing, but our original resolution probably wasn’t as strong as the policy we eventually passed!

**Don’t lose hope!** After we learned that the Board wasn’t passing resolutions anymore (in May), there were several months (until after the Board elections in November) that we had a hard time getting any response from the Board. Our senior leaders had graduated, and those of us who

remained were trying to figure out what to do. We started to wonder if anything was going to happen.

A few members of the Board had expressed interest in May, but they continued to be distracted by other things (Covid, hiring a new Superintendent, a controversy about a Board member, elections, etc.). We kept meeting, going to public comment, and sending emails, but some of us were considering whether our time was better spent on other things.

Finally, after the elections, two Board members, Carrie Olson and Scott Baldermann put us at the top of their to-do list and started attending our weekly meetings. They made sure we were placed on the official agenda of the Board (not just the public comment) and helped us secure private meetings with each of the Board members beforehand to gain their support. After our first meeting with those two Board members, our energy picked up. One of our leaders, Gabriel Nagel, created a website in just a few days, and we could see the path forward to the finish line.

**Stick with it!** Even if people leave, the rest of the team should keep going. When people graduate/leave, recruit more people! Some of our founding seniors graduated in June 2021, and an adult mentor who was our main contact at the district didn't come back after that summer. Both setbacks were tough, but we persevered!

## Unit 8 - Get Press Attention

**Write press releases and contact local news outlets.** [Heather wrote a press release](#) right before the policy passed, and we got some press from it. Reach out to local press if they haven't already because they are hungry for new stories. Getting press attention can be challenging, so don't worry if that news outlet doesn't show interest. For example, our group met with the Colorado Sun, a local news organization, but they never replied to our follow-up emails, so they never wrote about our group. Your success alone will attract many local outlets to want to interview your group.

**Here is a list of publications about our group:**

- [PBS article about group's work](#)
  - [YouTube video link](#)
- [9news East High School Tree-Plenish video \(Ellie mentions our group\)](#)
  - [YouTube video link](#)
- [Denver students push district to combat climate change - Chalkbeat Colorado](#)
  - [Denver Public Schools website](#)
  - [Denver Schools of Science and Technology \(DSST\) blog](#)
  - [The Longmont Leader website](#)
  - [NewsBreak website](#)
  - [New York Blogs & Entertainment](#)
  - [Denverdailypost.com](#)



- [Flipboard.com](#)
- [Parkbench.com](#)
- [Press release](#)
  - [Denver Public Schools website](#)
  - [DPS Sustainability website](#)
- Dr. Marrero mentions our policy at the White House!
  - [Intro](#) (minute 35:35 - 39:45)
  - [Dr. Marrero Speaks about DPS](#) (minute 39:46 - 43:44)
  - [Dr. Marrero talks about our policy!](#) (minute 1:06:04 - 1:07:04)
- [DPS and Students Fight Climate Change](#)
- [PRESS PAGE](#)



## Unit 9 - Pass the Climate Policy/Resolution in your School District

Our strength was that we just continued to show up. Even when we didn't know if we would be successful, we kept our weekly meetings going, we kept emailing Board members, we kept showing up at public comment, and we kept talking to interested community members.

**Eventually, the Board paid attention.**

From November to April, we were just going through the procedural steps that were required to get a policy to pass, but we were optimistic that the policy would pass. We weren't 100% positive, though, because we had learned that the Board was easily distracted by other pressing concerns. We continued to meet with individual Board members, met with the Board at their official meeting in January for the policy reading (a procedural requirement before a policy can be considered), and met at their work session in April to discuss and modify the text of the policy. Finally, on April 21, 2022, we met with them to see the [policy passed unanimously](#). That was a glorious day.

## Unit 10 - Passage is only the First Step

**After you pass your policy/resolution, the first thing you should do is...CELEBRATE!** 🎉  
 You have done something significant. Speaking up on climate action in an official policy/resolution is a huge accomplishment. We celebrated with a [pizza party](#) and a hike!

**The passage is only the first step.** Here are The Steps to Action we used to set our goal:

1. Pass End Statement + Modifications
2. Climate Action Plan
3. Implementation & Action Phase

Read more details here: <https://www.dpsclimateaction.org/policy>

**Action Plan.** Talk about different sustainability criteria and how to decide which is best for different school districts (much of this will be decided by the sustainability staff).

**It's inspiring to work together!** We liked working with students from other schools, earning the support of School Board members, and learning to work together toward a big goal! After you get the policy passed, it is extremely important to continue your campaign and have strong communication with one another and your community.

## FAQs

[FAQ Video!](#)

If you have any additional questions not specified in the video, don't hesitate to email us at [dpsclimateaction@gmail.com](mailto:dpsclimateaction@gmail.com)!


## Gratitude Wall and Sources

We are thankful to the various contributors, advisors, and supporters who collaborated with this DPS Climate Action Guide during the development of this guide and the first and future versions:

- Amelia Fernández Rodríguez
- Heather Bird Jackson
- LeeAnn Kittle
- Thomas Riggle
- Caroline Brown
- Mariah Rosensweig
- Gabe Nagel
- Maya Kitei
- Piper Moss
- Molly Malek
- Joel Rosenberg
- Petey Shirayeva (FAQ video)

During the making of this Guide we listened, read and watched different materials where to grab inspiration from. Some of our inspirations and additional sources include:

- [FXB Climate Action Symposium Slides](#)
- [DPS Students for Climate Action - FXB Presentation 4/12/22](#) ([Recording 59:26](#))
- [More presentations with FXB](#)
- [FXB Case Study on our Group](#)
- [Center for Green Schools](#) Talk, May 2022, 16:07
  - Question 1: Recruiting and building momentum? 2:58
  - Question 2: Student time commitment? 1:34
  - Question 3: DPS Sustainability manager LeeAnn Kittle on support, 2:51
- Full Version: <https://www.usgbc.org/education/sessions/students-act-climate-12850783>

- [▶ HVCHS Youth Environmental Society Climate Action Proposal](#)
- [Schools for Climate Action Resolution Replication Guide](#)
- [Draft Video #ElectrifyEverything in Your School by Joel](#) (Take 2)
- [Making the Grade: How does climate education rank in your state?](#)
- [Unleashing the creativity of teachers and students to combat climate change: An opportunity for global leadership](#)
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- Newsletter Sign-Up [Google Form](#)
- New Member [Google Form](#)
- [Policy Governance](#)
- [Three As - PIO](#)