

Climate Crisis Response Committee

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION

JUNE X, 2025

The Climate Crisis Response Committee (CRCC) advises the Portland Public Schools Board of Education on implementation of the Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice and Sustainable Practices Policy.

Committee Members

Barbi Alexander (Chair)

Isaac Barrow

Jane Comeault

Charity Fain

Alyssa Koomas

Angela Long

Tess Nestel

Erik Opsahl

Dianne Riley

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Executive Summary

In the Fall of 2019, climate justice advocates began working with Portland Public Schools (PPS) to develop ground breaking climate change policy that will advance PPS' efforts at a pace necessary to address the climate crisis. In March of 2022, the PPS School Board (the Board) adopted the Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice and Sustainable Practices Policy (the Policy). The Policy includes a requirement for a Climate Crisis Response Committee (the Committee) of up to nine (9) persons to monitor the effectiveness of implementation, ensure transparency, and track the progress of initiatives needed to meet the policy. The Committee is required by a Committee Charter, to report to the Board at least once per year to ensure the Policy is met and comment on how effectively PPS is implementing the Policy thus far.

The Committee's previous recommendations focused on improvements in transparency, fundraising efforts for project management and implementation, and student engagement.

The Committee notes four main successes advancing the Policy this fiscal year:

- Increased **transparency** and **engagement** via launch of the Climate Policy Public Dashboard which provides a clear, accessible visual representation of progress toward the Climate Crisis Response Policy goals
- Increased **student engagement** with the roll out of the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) student-led climate projects as well as dissemination of the Climate Awareness Student Survey
- Significant **fundraising** wins totaling over \$40 million supporting additional staff capacity as well as infrastructure
- Board support for maintaining electrification standards in high school modernization plans thereby securing PPS's ability to reduce emissions and reach long term decarbonization goals

In brief, we are pleased to report PPS's strides in fulfilling the Committee's previous recommendations with numerous tangible deliverables and program implementation. In light of the increasingly restrictive budget environment, we applaud PPS and the Board in their commitment to climate goals and encourage efficiency, alignment with PPS goals, and transparency moving forward.

The Committee has three recommendations to share for the 2025-26 school year:

1. Prioritize strategies from the Policy that align with PPS goals such as: efficiency and electrification in high school modernization, student engagement (e.g. PCEF projects, Climate Awareness Student Survey takeaways), HVAC upgrades for safe/comfortable schools for learning
2. Maintain focus on transparency with students and broader community utilizing the Dashboard as a tool
3. Prevent erosion of existing climate programs due to budget cuts and explore mobilizing community volunteers for grant writing, capturing climate successes to share, resilient school yard maintenance, etc.

Commented [1]: Appendix A: Portland Public Schools ClimateCrisis Response, Climate Justice, and SustainablePractices Policy

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Introduction

In the fall of 2019, climate justice advocates began working with Portland Public Schools (PPS) to develop ground breaking climate change policy that will advance PPS' efforts at a pace necessary to address the climate crisis. In March of 2022, the PPS School Board (the Board) adopted the Climate Crisis Response, Climate Justice and Sustainable Practices Policy (the Policy). The Policy includes a requirement for a Climate Crisis Response Committee (the Committee) of up to nine persons.

The Committee's mission, outlined in its **Charter**, is to monitor effective implementation, provide transparency, and to track and report progress or challenges of the Policy and the goals within it. The Committee informs and advises the Board, but does not have decision-making authority. The PPS Superintendent has responsibility for performance of PPS Staff engaged in the implementation of the Policy that collaborates with the Committee.

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This report includes an assessment of the following tasks, which the Committee is responsible for overseeing and reporting on to ensure the Policy is met.

1. **Reports and Data.** The Committee receives regular reports and data from PPS Staff on the current status and planned implementation of the Policy goals and directives, including the impact of the policy implementation on frontline communities.
2. **Status and Implementation.** The Committee determines whether such status and implementation are consistent with the identified goals of the Policy.
3. **Findings and Recommendations.** The Committee, at a minimum, shares written findings with the Board on an annual basis, and may make recommendations to the Board as part of its work.

The Committee is required to meet quarterly at a minimum; to ensure the above tasks are met; the Committee met seven times between October 2024 and June 2025. Agenda items during these meetings included an orientation, and information or updates about policy implementation, data tracking and evaluation, student engagement, and grants and budget issues.

Committee Public Meetings 2024-25

October 24, 2024 Orientation

November 14, 2024

February 13, 2025

March 13, 2025

April 10, 2025

May 8, 2025

June 5, 2025

Assessment of Progress in 2024-25

This assessment is organized according to the Committee's three areas of responsibility under its Charter: Reports and Data, Status and Implementation, and Findings and Recommendations.

1. Reports and Data

The Committee is aware of three major projects underway that relate to reports and data: Project Management Dashboard, Evaluation Plan, and a Decarbonization Plan.

A. Project Management Dashboard

One of the earliest priorities identified by the Committee in 2022 was the need for a framework that may be used to evaluate progress toward the goals and directives outlined in the policy, including specific attention to the impact of the policy implementation on frontline communities. It could also serve as a mechanism to inform the community about progress on the Policy.

A draft dashboard was developed in 2022-23, and one of the Committee's main recommendations last year was to continue using and developing the dashboard and provide more information in specific areas. The Committee reviewed the latest version of the Dashboard at our May 9, 2024 meeting and were impressed by its development. There remains a need for a way to ensure that the impact of policy implementation on frontline communities is at the forefront of consideration and there may be an opportunity to embed that in the Dashboard.

We believe the Dashboard will be a critical tool in PPS' management of Policy implementation and will also significantly enhance transparency. The Committee looks forward to its launch in Fall of 2024.

B. Evaluation Plan

PPS hired ECONorthwest in February 2023 to develop an evaluation plan for the Policy. ECONorthwest attended the May 9, 2024 Committee meeting to share progress on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Targets that it helped PPS staff to develop. The KPIs and Targets are a main component of the Dashboard and were presented together with the tool. The KPIs and Targets were mostly complete and mostly met the Committee's expectations. We look forward to the KPIs and Targets being made public, as integrated within the Project Management Dashboard, this fall.

C. Decarbonization Plan

PPS hired a team of consultants led by PAE to develop a Decarbonization Plan for the District. The Decarbonization Plan will provide a roadmap to the Policy's greenhouse

gas reduction goals: PPS will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030, using the 2018-19 school year baseline, and reach net zero by 2040. The consulting team attended the September 21, 2023 Committee meeting and provided an overview of their community engagement plan to which we provided input. The Committee fully supports the development of a Decarbonization Plan and looks forward to an update on it in Fall of 2024.

2. Status and Implementation

The Committee believes that progress towards achieving the Policy's goals is being made. The exact status of Policy implementation will remain unclear until a new greenhouse gas inventory is completed and the Dashboard is fully populated with data. Our sense is that some momentum has been built since the first year of the Policy adoption, but the pace is still inadequate to successfully achieve the goals of the Policy. Highlights of implementation efforts that we are aware of are outlined below.

A. Staffing

The Climate Justice team expanded adding two Americorps hires (three in total) compared to one in the 2022-23 school year. The goals of the Policy will be met with support from the entire organization, and we reiterate our call to PPS leadership to continue to explicitly support the work of the Policy by continuing to reinforce its importance and allocating the necessary resources. We wrote and testified to the Board about this need during the recent budget process. Increasing staff capacity is critical to the success of this policy. Specifically, **PPS needs more staff capacity to secure grants or other external funding mechanisms for implementing the Policy and to manage the numerous projects necessary to meet its goals and targets.** Both crucial roles for the policy to become reality.

B. Student Engagement

The Committee is aware of three major avenues for student engagement on climate action:

i. Youth Climate Summit

The PPS Youth Climate Summit was held on May 22, 2024. Committee members volunteered at last year's Summit and based on that experience, fully support it as an annual event.

ii. Student Climate Action Design Team

Students were part of a design team in collaboration with PPS staff, community members and educators to create a plan that outlines pathways and supports for students to take action on climate justice in PPS. This is a relatively small opportunity for student engagement now that will hopefully result in a great deal of student engagement in the future.

iii. Climate Crisis Response Committee

As dictated by the Committee Charter, two of the nine Committee members must be students. The 2023-24 student representatives were active contributors and the Committee added a standing agenda item to better facilitate input from student representatives. Specific recommendations from PPS students collected

by the student representatives is included in the Committee Oversight section below.

C. Funding Mechanisms

The Committee acknowledges the exceptionally restrictive budget environment of the upcoming fiscal year. Public schools across Oregon, including PPS, are dramatically underfunded. At the same time we strongly believe in the critical need for full and timely implementation of the Policy, and therefore the need to maintain staff and other resources necessary to be successful. In addition to regular sources of funding for public schools, PPS must become better adept in seizing grant opportunities from other levels of government and any other avenues for which it qualifies.

The Committee recognizes progress in this area and is aware of a couple of wins in 2023-24:

PPS began operating its first two all-electric school buses in 2023 thanks to partial funding support from Pacific Power and Portland General Electric PPS was awarded more than \$16 million for physical improvements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve climate resiliency in buildings, transportation and schoolyards and \$3 million for student-led initiatives over the next five years by the Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF). These funds became critical to successfully negotiating an agreement with the Portland Association of Teachers, for whom classroom safety and comfort was a key bargaining issue (heating and cooling).

Still, more grant opportunities are available and should be pursued. Admittedly grant applications take time and effort; the Committee has knowledge and experience in this area and is willing and able to support these efforts. **We recommend pursuing grants and other external funding mechanisms more aggressively.** We have mentioned adding project management staff above in section 2A of this report because we see a direct correlation between increased staff capacity and the ability to secure grant dollars that become missed opportunities without capacity to complete the required applications.

D. Committee Oversight Efforts

In addition to attending and contributing to regular Committee meetings, a few special projects were undertaken, or need to be improved, in the areas of student leadership, advocacy and recruitment.

i. Student Leadership

The 2023-24 student representatives, Tess Nestel and Diego Romero, have been exceptionally valuable members of the Committee. One initiative they undertook was a survey compiling student input about PPS climate action. Their results are summarized below.

Summary of the CCRC Student Reports for the CCRC Annual Report

As student representatives, we surveyed 30 high school students at a District leadership conference including representatives from all high schools in the district, and compiled some general student attitudes towards climate action from our experiences among our peers. We hope that the concerns and experiences of students remain a central focus in the implementation of PPS climate policy. From the survey, students reported that climate change is a very pressing issue in their lives. In particular, they reported on how climate change affects their daily life at school, citing examples ranging from dealing with uncomfortable classroom temperatures to missing school entirely due to snow days. With the ever increasing impact of climate change on student's lives and the influx of unsettling information about climate change, these issues can seem daunting to students. In addition to this, for the students who are looking to get involved, students can oftentimes struggle with where to start and where to find climate related opportunities. To help address these issues, we see it as essential to **find more ways to reach students about climate related opportunities and what PPS is doing to address climate change, while expanding the pre-existing pathways for students to get involved.** Not only are students ready to engage with climate advocacy, they are also bringing their own ideas as well. In the survey, students offered ideas ranging from creating more school gardens to remodeling buildings and implementing more effective and energy efficient AC systems.

ii. Advocacy

The Committee advocated for advancement of the Policy in several ways through the year:

- Met with School Board members in support of the Decarbonization Roadmap contract in August 2023.
- Testified at a Portland City Council meeting on September 20, 2023 in support of the Portland Clean Energy Fund Climate Investment Plan's proposed allocation of funding for climate based improvements to Portland schools.
- Signed on to a MESD Letter of Intent in May 2024 advocating for Portland-area schools to receive additional PCEF funding.
- Wrote a letter and provided testimony to the Board in March-April 2024 to advocate during the 2024-25 budget process for funding additional project management and grant writing staff to help implement the Policy.

iii. Recruitment

A systematic process to recruit new Committee members must be put in place. Last year student members had a late start due to recruitment issues and did not join until November 2023. This is the first year that new community members will be recruited to the Committee and as of May 2024 the Committee is not aware of

a process underway for either students or other community members. The lack of a systematic process makes it difficult for existing Committee members to assist with recruitment of new members.

3. Findings & Recommendations

The Committee made three recommendations in last year's annual report. They are listed below with our observations of progress achieved in 2024-25:

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- Make Dashboard publicly available on the PPS website by Fall 2024 to enhance transparency and community engagement.
 - Dashboard launched on the PPS website in late Fall 2024 (<https://performance.envisio.com/dashboard/PPSCCRP>)
- Add fundraising and project management staff to increase capacity for Policy implementation.
 - Climate Justice Student Projects Coordinator hired in Spring 2025 funded by PCEF grants
- Pursue additional funding sources more aggressively to enable more rapid implementation of the Policy.
 - \$25.8M - PCEF Collaborating for Climate Action grant for infrastructure (\$40M from PCEF for infrastructure total)
 - \$99,075.48 - Oregon Dept of Land Conservation and Development, Community Green Infrastructure grant for Green Schoolyards
 - \$100,000 - Oregon Dept of Ed, Farm to Child Nutrition Program
 - Continued advocacy for funding at the legislative level
- More effectively reach students about climate related opportunities and evidence of PPS efforts to address climate change, while expanding the pre-existing pathways for students to get involved.
 - Published the Community-Centered Climate Action design team recommendations
 - Expanded support for the Climate Justice Youth Advisory
 - Over 700 students engaged in the PCEF Student-led Climate Projects, participation at 34 of the 36 eligible schools
 - Dissemination of the Climate Awareness Student Survey in May 2025 to all PPS high school students, created by Committee Student Representatives, to uncover opportunities to better reach students for climate related engagement

2024-25 Recommendations

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The Committee has three recommendations to share for the 2025-26 school year:

4. Prioritize strategies from the Policy that align with PPS goals such as: efficiency and electrification in high school modernization, student engagement (e.g. PCEF projects, Climate Awareness Student Survey takeaways), HVAC upgrades for safe/comfortable schools for learning
5. Maintain focus on transparency with students and broader community utilizing the Dashboard as a tool
6. Prevent erosion of existing climate programs due to budget cuts and explore mobilizing community volunteers for grant writing, capturing climate successes to share, resilient school yard maintenance, etc.