

November 18, 2020

President-Elect Joseph Biden
Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris
c/o Biden-Harris Transition Team
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris,

We, the undersigned, write as policymakers, educators, education leaders, environmental leaders, youth leaders, civil rights leaders, researchers, parents, and more. We are encouraged that the Biden-Harris Administration has established climate change as a top priority for the agenda. We are also encouraged by the discussion of a cross-agency approach to addressing climate change. As the transition team further develops plans to govern over the coming years, we urge you to include the Department of Education in any cross-agency climate agenda and Department of Education representation on a prospective White House Climate Cabinet.

The U.S. kindergarten through 12th grade public school ecosystem is a large public sector with a considerable environmental impact. With over 98,000 schools across the country, schools are among the largest energy consumers for public sector buildings, and energy costs for schools have been estimated at \$8 billion annually, the second highest cost for schools behind only salaries. Schools operate the largest mass transit fleet in the country with 480,000 primarily diesel school buses and drive an estimated 3.45 billion miles annually. Schools also serve over 7 billion meals each year, and decisions on food sourcing, options, and waste contribute to greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change has already impacted schools across the country. After Hurricanes Maria and Irma in Puerto Rico, students missed an average of 78 days of school. In California in the 2018-2019 school year, over 1 million students were impacted by school closures during wildfire season. Over 6,000 schools across the country are located in a flood zone. As we have seen exacerbated by COVID, these learning disruptions and the disparities in access to technology and internet, in particular for students of color, rural students, and low-income students, harm student learning and access to critical services. Additionally, according to [recent research](#), increased heat exposure negatively impacts student learning, and in particular, Black students, Latino students, and low-income students perform worse academically when exposed to more hot days.

In addition to the considerable need to address climate change in America's public schools, education also provides a critical opportunity to work toward climate solutions. Our education sector can work to mitigate its environmental impact and work to build resilience in preparation for climate change. With over 50 million children enrolled in public schools, education can help prepare children and youth to advance a more sustainable world. Whether future engineers, solar installers, business leaders, farmers, or policymakers, the next generation will face the impacts of

climate change. Supporting students today in learning about climate change and providing the opportunity to explore and consider climate solutions will increase the resilience of our society as well as our competitiveness in a green economy.

By including representation of education in a cross-agency plan, the Biden-Harris Administration can help to acknowledge the critical role education can play in climate solutions and help our country build long-lasting change to advance a more sustainable society.

Again, we are grateful for your efforts to raise the priority of climate change across the Administration and would be happy to assist in considering opportunities to include education in this work. If you have any questions, please contact Laura Schifter (K12ClimateAction@aspeninstitute.org).

Sincerely,



John B. King, Jr.

President and CEO, The Education Trust
U.S. Secretary of Education
(Obama Administration)



Governor Christine Todd Whitman

President, The Whitman Strategy Group
EPA Administrator (Bush Administration)
50th Governor of New Jersey

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education (Obama Administration)

Sally Jewell, U.S. Secretary of the Interior (Obama Administration)

Gina McCarthy, EPA Administrator (Obama Administration)

Naina Agrawal-Hardin, High School Senior, Climate Activist

Megan Bang, Professor of the Learning Sciences and Psychology, Northwestern University

Vic Barrett, Democracy Organizer, Alliance for Climate Education

Representative Carlos Curbelo, Principal, Vocero LLC

Greg Gershuny, Executive Director, Energy and Environment Program, Aspen Institute

Lisa Hoyos, Co-founder Climate Parents, Director of Climate Strategy, LCV

Richard Knoepfel, Educator, Advanced Technologies Academy

Dan Lashof, Environmental Expert

Pedro Martinez, Superintendent, San Antonio ISD

Marc Morial, President and CEO, National Urban League

Janet Murguía, President and CEO, UnidosUS

Nikki Pitre, Executive Director, Center for Native American Youth

Becky Pringle, President, The National Education Association

Valerie Rockefeller, Board Chair, Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Laura Schifter, Senior Fellow, Energy and Environment Program, Aspen Institute

Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers