

## 'Whatever it takes': students at 50 US high schools launch climate initiative

### Level 2: Intermediate / Upper-Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss with a partner or in small groups. Explain your answers.

Is climate change an important topic:

- in your school/university/workplace
- with your family
- with your friends?

#### 2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. Then, use the words to complete the example sentences.

advocacy	aggravate	escalation	fossil fuels	justice	misconstrue
propose	rage	resilient	severe	suppress	wage

- To \_\_\_\_\_ means to suggest or offer for consideration.  
I think they are going to \_\_\_\_\_ a new agreement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ refers to how the law is administered.  
Many people think that some of the laws in the \_\_\_\_\_ system are outdated and should be changed.
- To \_\_\_\_\_ means to keep from being known or published.  
The cosmetics company tried to \_\_\_\_\_ the results of the study.
- To \_\_\_\_\_ means to fight a war or organise activities to get something done.  
Some people who work in the oil and gas sector feel that the environmental campaigns are \_\_\_\_\_ war on their way of life.
- To \_\_\_\_\_ means to happen in a strong, extreme, or violent way.  
A hailstorm is \_\_\_\_\_ outside.
- \_\_\_\_\_ means able to survive in good condition despite problems or challenges.  
These buildings are very \_\_\_\_\_ and are still standing after several earthquakes.

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7. To \_\_\_\_\_ means *to worsen a bad situation*.  
*I am worried that the smoke will \_\_\_\_\_ her lung condition.*
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a fuel like coal, oil, or natural gas.  
*There are several green energy alternatives to \_\_\_\_\_, like solar or wind power.*
9. To \_\_\_\_\_ means *to form a false understanding*.  
*He completely \_\_\_\_\_ what I said! I meant the opposite.*
10. \_\_\_\_\_ means *serious or extreme*.  
*The government is trying hard to come up with a solution for the \_\_\_\_\_ water shortages.*
11. \_\_\_\_\_ means *public support of a plan or idea*.  
*She will always be remembered for her \_\_\_\_\_ of early childhood education.*
12. \_\_\_\_\_ means *the process of becoming more significant*.  
*We would all like to come to an agreement and prevent further conflict \_\_\_\_\_.*

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**Maanvi Singh**

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- 1 Students at more than 50 high schools in the US are proposing a Green New Deal for Schools. They demand that their districts teach climate justice, create pathways to green jobs after graduation and plan for climate disasters, among other policies.
- 2 The campaign, coordinated by the Sunrise Movement, a youth-led climate justice group, is a reaction to right-wing efforts to ban or suppress climate education and activism at schools.
- 3 "We are prepared to do whatever it takes," said Adah Crandall, 17, an organiser for the Sunrise Movement based in Portland, Oregon.
- 4 "The far right has waged this battle against school boards and against public education, and they put a lot of time and money into trying to do things like ban books and prevent us from learning the truth about the climate crisis," said Crandall. "And all of these things are happening while the climate crisis is raging outside our windows."
- 5 The Green New Deal for Schools includes demands to update school buildings, buses and other infrastructure to make them more climate resilient. They are also asking that administrators develop climate disaster plans to keep students safe during extreme weather.
- 6 After living through the hottest summer on record, students returned to campuses this year as heatwaves overtook the central US, with a wildfire in Maui, a tropical storm on the west coast and another in southern Texas.
- 7 Students in the US are painfully aware that many of these weather extremes have been aggravated by the burning of fossil fuels, even as conservative politicians and educators refuse to engage with the topic, said Summer Mathis, a 16-year-old student at North Cobb High School in Kennesaw, Georgia.
- 8 But at school, most teachers have avoided or discouraged the discussion of any topics that could be considered political, including climate justice, said Mathis. "We don't learn about climate change at all," she said.
- 9 Under Georgia's vaguely worded "divisive concepts" law, aimed at suppressing education about race and racial inequities, teachers are unable to talk about climate justice and the unequal impact of global heating.
- 10 Earlier this year, the Texas State Board of Education encouraged schools to emphasise the "positive" aspects of fossil fuels in science textbooks. Florida's education board approved animated videos that compare climate activists to Nazis and misconstrue human-caused global heating as part of natural long-term cycles. In Idaho, students and educators are fighting a long battle over climate crisis education in Idaho's schools, after conservative lawmakers removed mentions of it from the state's science guidelines.
- 11 "It's really scary knowing that I'm underage and can't vote to elect the people making these big decisions about our futures," said Aster Chau, a 15-year-old student at Philadelphia's Academy at Palumbo.
- 12 Chau, too, returned to class this year amid a late-summer heatwave – to a campus which lacked air-conditioning. Some schools were dismissed early, and sports practices and games were cancelled. "It's terrifying to be faced with this," they said, knowing that cycles of extreme weather are predicted to become even more severe by the time they graduate.
- 13 To prepare for the fight ahead, about 150 high schoolers from across the US met in Illinois to attend a summer camp where they worked on their activism, advocacy, and escalation tactics.
- 14 Later this week, hundreds of students will go to Washington DC as the lawmakers reintroduce their Green New Deal for Public Schools Act. The legislation would provide funding to help schools expand and develop learning materials, hire staff, and modify campuses.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the following questions.

1. What is the Sunrise Movement?
2. Which three recent climate disasters are mentioned in the text?
3. What is the divisive concepts law?
4. What did the Texan Board of Education tell schools to focus on?
5. What is shocking about the video that was approved in Florida?
6. What are educators and students doing in Idaho?
7. What is scary, according to Aster Chau?
8. What would the legislation of the Green New Deal for Public Schools Act provide funding for?

#### 4 Key language

a. Read the words in each line. Find the word in each line that does *not* collocate with the word in *italics*.

1. *climate* academic / crisis / disaster / education
2. challenging / green / scorched / skilled *jobs*
3. extreme / severe / threatened / tropical *weather*
4. *conservative* educators / politicians / states / wildfires
5. aimed / complex / divisive / general *concepts*
6. factual / gender / income / racial / social *inequities*
7. *global* graduation / heating / politics / warming
8. clear / detailed / financial / unsure *guidelines*
9. aggressive / escalation / political / unequal *tactics*

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b. Now, complete the questions with a word from the previous activity. Then, ask and answer the questions.

1. How can we improve climate \_\_\_\_\_?
2. How should we plan for \_\_\_\_\_ weather?
3. How can we address \_\_\_\_\_ inequities?
4. What do you think about global \_\_\_\_\_?
5. Who should provide \_\_\_\_\_ guidelines for schools?

### 5 Discussion

a. Read the students' comments. What is your response to each of them? Discuss your ideas.

- "We are prepared to do whatever it takes."
- "We don't learn about climate change at all."
- "It's really scary knowing that I'm underage and can't vote to elect the people making these big decisions about our futures."

### 6 In your own words

a. Research climate education in your state/country and make notes. What should be changed?

b. Write a petition addressed to the local board of education. Focus on one fundamental change you would like in schools. Follow the steps below.

1. Identify your primary demand based on your research. Predict possible arguments against your idea.
2. Write a summary of your cause. This should include a small section on the problem and background information on the issue. Say why it matters.
3. The following section should include a solution to the problem.
4. End with the action / goal statement. This is the demand you are making.
5. Optional: include information about what else people can do to support your cause.