

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

Level 3: Advanced

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. Find words in the text to complete the gaps. The paragraph numbers have been provided to help you. Then, use the words to complete the example sentences.

1. A _____ is an organisation that is owned and run by the people who work in it. (paragraph 2)

The farmers in the area have formed an agricultural _____ to compete with multinational corporations.

2. A _____ is a document that many people sign demanding an action from the government or other authority. (paragraph 2)

Did you sign the _____ to get more funding for our cause?

3. To _____ means to fight a war or organise activities to get something done. (paragraph 4)

Things are tense on campus. Students are demanding change and are _____ war on tradition.

4. To _____ means to happen in a strong, extreme, or violent way. (paragraph 4)

We made dinner and tried to ignore the storms that were _____ outside.

5. _____ means able to survive in good condition despite problems or challenges. (paragraph 5)

Bamboo is used as a construction material and is valued for being strong, flexible, and _____.

6. _____ means extremely hot. (paragraph 6)

More trees can help to reduce _____ summer temperatures in cities.

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7. To _____ means to hit repeatedly. (paragraph 6)
An innocent football fan is recovering in hospital after being _____ by the opposing team's fans at the stadium.
8. To _____ means to worsen a bad situation. (paragraph 7)
Many experts are concerned that the flood will further _____ the national food crisis.
9. _____ means damage or suffering. (paragraph 9)
Climate change does not only have environmental consequences; it is also taking a _____ on mental health.
10. _____ means spreading new ideas to many people. (paragraph 10)
Several NGOs supported the production and _____ of the award-winning documentary.
11. To _____ means to form a false understanding. (paragraph 10)
These social media posts completely _____ the musician's message.
12. To _____ means to remove or take out. (paragraph 10)
She was _____ of her decision-making powers when George was elected leader of the council.
13. To _____ means to improve an ability. (paragraph 13)
His many years as a salesperson helped him to _____ his public-speaking skills.
14. _____ means public support of a plan or idea. (paragraph 13)
The actress has always followed a plant-based diet and has a track record of animal welfare _____.

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Green New Deal for Schools demands districts teach climate justice, update buildings and plan for extreme weather

Maanvi Singh

25 September, 2023

- 1 Students at more than 50 high schools across the US are proposing a Green New Deal for Schools, demanding 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 collective, is a reaction to right-wing efforts to ban or suppress climate education and activism at schools. The national effort could include teach-ins and walkouts, as well as targeted petitions to school boards and districts in the coming weeks, organisers with Sunrise told the *Guardian*.
- 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, and free and ideally locally sourced lunches.
- 6 After living through the hottest summer on record, students returned to campuses this year as searing heatwaves overtook the central US, a deadly wildfire scorched Maui, a rare tropical storm threatened the west coast and another pummelled southern Texas.
- 7 Students across 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 toll of global heating. In other Republican-led states, factual climate education is being targeted directly.
- 10 Earlier this year, the Texas state board of education altered its guidance to schools to encourage emphasising the "positive" aspects of fossil fuels in science textbooks. Florida's education board approved the dissemination of animated videos, developed by the conservative group PragerU, 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 still fighting a years-long battle over the inclusion of the climate crisis in Idaho's academic standards, after conservative lawmakers stripped mentions of it from the state's science guidelines.
- 11 "Being a youth right now is really scary," said Aster Chau, a 15-year-old student at Philadelphia's Academy at Palumbo. "It's really scary knowing that I'm underage and can't vote to elect the people making these big decisions about our futures."
- 12 Chau, too, returned to class this year amid a late-summer heatwave – to a campus which, like many schools in Philadelphia, lacked air-conditioning throughout the building. Some of the district's 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.

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- 13 To prepare for the fight ahead, about 150 high schoolers from across the US gathered in Illinois to attend a summer camp where they honed their activism, learning advocacy and escalation tactics.
- 14 Later this week, hundreds of students will join Jamaal Bowman, a New York representative, and Ed Markey, the Massachusetts senator, in 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 curricula, hire staff and retrofit campuses.
- 15 "We are definitely feeling the weight of the climate crisis," Chau said. "I have had times when I was just overwhelmed with climate anxiety. But I guess being with one another is really helpful, knowing that I'm not the only one who is feeling this pressure but also extreme passion in fighting it."

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First published in *The Guardian*, 25/09/2023

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3 Comprehension check

a. Skim the text quickly and choose the main idea of the text.

- i. A youth-led climate justice group is demanding that schools teach climate justice, develop climate disaster plans, and make campuses greener, among other demands.
- ii. A Green New Deal for Public Schools Act is a government initiative proposing to transform the school curriculum to include more content about climate justice and to increase the budget to create green jobs.

b. Now scan the text to find and underline the information below. Try to do this as quickly as possible.

1. Youth-led climate justice group coordinating the campaign: _____
2. Location of organiser Adah Crandall: _____
3. Recent climate disasters: _____
4. 16-year-old student from Georgia interviewed: _____
5. Georgia's law that suppresses education on climate justice and race: _____
6. Where the board of education told schools to focus on "positive" aspects of fossil fuels:

7. Where a video that compares climate activists to Nazis was approved:

8. Where educators and students are fighting to reintroduce climate education:

9. The person who said, "It's really scary knowing ... I can't vote to elect the people making these big decisions about our futures": _____
10. Number of high-schoolers at an activism summer camp in Illinois: _____
11. The Massachusetts senator supporting Green New Deal: _____
12. What the legislation of Green New Deal for Public Schools Act would provide funding for:

c. Read the article for a third time. Underline any other essential information. Then, use the underlined words and phrases to summarise the article in your own words.

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4 Key language

a. Match the verbs and nouns to form collocations from the text.

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. launch | a battle |
| 2. create | books |
| 3. wage | campuses |
| 4. ban | a climate disaster plan / curricula |
| 5. develop | a discussion |
| 6. engage with | funding |
| 7. avoid/discourage | an initiative |
| 8. emphasise | pathways |
| 9. provide | positive aspects |
| 10. retrofit | a topic |

b. Now, choose five collocations to use in questions about climate change. Take turns to ask and answer your questions.

5 Discussion

a. How would you respond to these students? Discuss your reactions.

- "We are prepared to do whatever it takes."
- "Being a youth right now is really scary."
- "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..."
- "We are definitely feeling the weight of the climate crisis. I have had times when I was just overwhelmed with climate anxiety."

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6 In your own words

a. **Research the following in your state/country and make notes on the things you consider are missing or misguided:**

- Laws for climate education
- Funding for schools to spend on climate justice
- Climate change education / content in schools
- Climate crisis planning for schools
- Retrofitting campuses

b. **Write a petition addressed to the local board of education. Focus on one or two fundamental changes you would like to see in schools regarding climate change. Follow the steps below.**

1. Identify your main demands based on your research. Predict possible counterarguments.
2. Write a summary of your cause. This should include a small section on the problem and background information on the issue and why it matters. Include references where possible.
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. Include information about what else people can do to support the cause.