Sustainability Action Plan 2035



Chicago Public Schools

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Executive Summary

The Imperative for Sustainability Action in Our District

As the third largest school district in the nation, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) recognizes that sustainability—especially concerning school facility operations, resource management, and environmental health—is essential to addressing the global climate crisis. It also plays a valuable role in supporting the District's Five-Year Plan– ***Together We Rise***.

The Plan supports all three priorities—Students, Schools, and Communities—by helping to create a healthier and more sustainable district.

By implementing proactive sustainable operations strategies CPS can protect our students from the most damaging future environmental scenarios, save public funds through operational efficiency and increase the resiliency of our localities.

While providing environmental and climate education, we will create conditions for our students to solve core environmental challenges; succeed in college, career, and civic engagement; and contribute to the cultivation of just, sustainable and thriving communities.

Our Framework for Action

The plan focuses on three core Pillars. Pillars 1 and 2 are aligned to the Together We Rise strategy for 21st Century Learning Environments. Pillar 3 is aligned to the Postsecondary Success strategy.

1. Reduce our Greenhouse Gases (GHG) emissions and environmental impact.
2. Create healthy and resilient learning environments.
3. Cultivate thriving social and environmental systems and pathways to impactful careers that solve environmental challenges.



As the third largest school district in the nation, CPS recognizes that sustainability is essential to addressing the global climate crisis.



Pillar 1

REDUCE – our GHG emissions and environmental impact

Our facilities, capital operations, transportation, and nutrition services are significant sources of GHG emissions. To dramatically reduce our environmental impact, Pillar 1 focuses on transforming how we operate our physical footprint.

Pillar 2

CREATE – healthy and resilient learning environments

Our students deserve safe, comfortable, and healthy spaces to learn. Pillar 2 focuses on the direct environmental health of our buildings, how they're managed and operated to provide clean and safe learning spaces and their ability to withstand extreme weather.

Pillar 3

ADVANCE – the cultivation of thriving social and environmental systems and pathways to impactful careers that solve environmental challenges

Meeting the challenges we face requires our students to experience environmental education that supports scientific literacy, conservation mindsets, and personal and cultural relevance. It also requires a skilled workforce in areas related to resiliency and supporting the advancement of a clean built environment and an equitable economy. Pillar 3 is targeted at ensuring our students are fully equipped to be future leaders.

This Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) serves as our coordinated roadmap to reduce emissions, support environmental health, and increase environmental literacy across the District.



Introduction

Aligning with District Goals

CPS carries an important responsibility to provide safe, supportive, and sustainable physical learning environments for our communities.

For the 2026-2027 school year, our District serves an enrollment of over 300,000 students across more than 500 schools.

This Sustainability Action Plan serves as our coordinated roadmap to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, support environmental health, and strengthen the environmental resilience of our physical learning environments against a changing climate.

It also plays a valuable role in supporting the District's Five-Year Plan—**Together We Rise**.

The Sustainability Action Plan supports all three priorities of Together We Rise—Students, Schools, and Communities—by helping to create a healthier and more sustainable district, provide opportunities for postsecondary success in environmental fields, and provides learning experiences that inspire the foundation for sustainable futures to live well with each other and the rest of the natural world.

The Sustainability Action Plan supports all three priorities of Together We Rise—Students, Schools, and Communities—by helping to create a healthier and more sustainable district, provide opportunities for postsecondary success in environmental fields, and provide learning experiences that inspire the foundation for sustainable futures to live well with each other and the rest of the natural world.

The work in this Sustainability Action Plan serves as an essential collaboration across CPS stakeholders and partners toward achieving the District's vision.



Our Mission

Our mission is to provide a high-quality public education for every child, in every neighborhood, that prepares each for success in college, career, and civic life.

Supporting Our Mission

To support our students and honor our mission, the District relies on a sprawling and incredibly diverse facilities footprint. The daily operations, resource consumption, and environmental impact of a school district of this size is comparable to those of a mid-sized city.

Consequently, our approach to sustainability must be both far-reaching and deeply pragmatic, addressing the realities of the infrastructure we manage every single day.

The Complexity of Our Building Portfolio

Our environmental and sustainability goals are directly linked to the physical state of our buildings. The CPS facilities portfolio encompasses over 500 campuses spread across the city and contains nearly 800 individual buildings. In total, the District actively manages over 62 million square feet of space.

Operating a building portfolio of this size is inherently complex, but that complexity is compounded exponentially by the ages of our facilities. The average age of a CPS campus is 85+ years old, with our oldest operational campus dating back an astonishing 152 years.

Our aging infrastructure strains our operational and technical resources, raises our energy and maintenance costs, and increases the difficulty of protecting the daily health of our students and staff.

Retrofitting historic and century-old buildings with modern energy controls, on-site solar systems, or advanced indoor air quality technology presents significant engineering and architectural hurdles. Simply put, operating such a large, complicated, and antiquated building portfolio means that standard, one-size-fits-all sustainability solutions are rarely viable for our District.



Our mission is to provide a high-quality public education for every child, in every neighborhood, that prepares each for success in college, career, and civic life.

The Funding Gap and Critical Facilities Needs

The most significant barrier to rapidly transforming our District into a model of sustainability is the stark reality of our capital funding constraints. The total breakdown of our facility needs currently sits at a staggering $16.3 billion.

Historically, CPS capital budgets have been highly variable from year to year, which forces the District to rely on a strict, needs-based prioritization approach. Because capital funding is severely constrained, our planning must relentlessly focus on the most "critical needs".

We estimate that an annual funding level of at least $400 million is required strictly for

critical facility needs just to "run-in-place" and avoid further deterioration of our current assets.

Without this baseline funding, our aging infrastructure will continue to degrade, pulling resources away from proactive sustainability improvements and toward reactive, emergency repairs.

Pillars of Progress

Throughout the following pages, you will see our strategies organized by three central pillars. **Pillar 1:** Reducing our GHG emissions and environmental impact. **Pillar 2:** Creating healthy and resilient physical learning environments. **Pillar 3**: Engaging our students in meaningful instruction to foster environmental literacy while advancing them toward impactful careers in an ever changing social and industrial landscape.

While this document outlines an ambitious and necessary vision for the future of CPS, the District cannot overcome a multi-billion dollar facility need through operational efficiencies alone.

Therefore, it is critical to understand that the successful execution of the strategies, actions, and potential goals proposed within this Sustainability Action Plan are fundamentally contingent upon receiving the robust and sustained funding necessary to implement them.

Realizing our vision for a clean, efficient, and resilient school district will require dedicated investment from local, state, and federal partners to bridge our funding shortfall and ensure every student in Chicago has the opportunity to learn in a healthy, sustainable environment.



Pillar 1

Reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact.



Pillar 1
Strategy Summaries



Reporting & Transparency	1.1	By 2030, establish a GHG emissions inventory report to be updated every five years.
Increased Energy Efficiency	1.2	By 2035, implement LED lighting upgrades in 100% of District schools.
	1.3	By 2035, implement energy efficiency improvements at 50% of District schools.
	1.4	By 2035, execute building automation systems (BAS) optimization measures for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems at 50% of District schools.
Advance Renewable Energy	1.5	Inclusion of onsite solar, or other advanced energy technology, projects in all new construction projects.
	1.6	By 2035, procure 50% of electricity from renewable sources.
Electrification	1.7	By 2030, 100% of newly procured Central Office City-wide administration and Driver's Education cars to be Hybrid-Electric Vehicles (HEVs) or full Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) when funding allows.
	1.8	By 2035, transition 50% of CPS Warehouse light and medium-duty transit vans to HEV or electric vehicles (EVs).
	1.9	By 2035, develop a scalable and reliable EV charging framework that supports the District's city-wide operations adoption of zero-emission fleet vehicles.
Waste Reduction & Resource Circularity	1.10	By 2030, achieve 80% of school participation in the E-Marketplace, 100% by 2035.
	1.11	By 2030, eliminate all plastic straws and replace plastic utensil packaging with unwrapped individual utensils and bulk napkin dispensers in all school lunchrooms.
	1.12	By 2030, increase the number of schools with Share Table programs by 50%.
	1.13	By 2030, increase the number of schools with lunchroom composting programs by 50%.

Introduction

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are a major driver of climate change, which can lead to more extreme weather events, threaten food and water security, disrupt ecosystems, and increase risks to human health and safety. By reducing GHG emissions, we can help slow climate change, protect natural resources, and preserve biodiversity, ensuring a healthier environment for future generations here in Chicago.

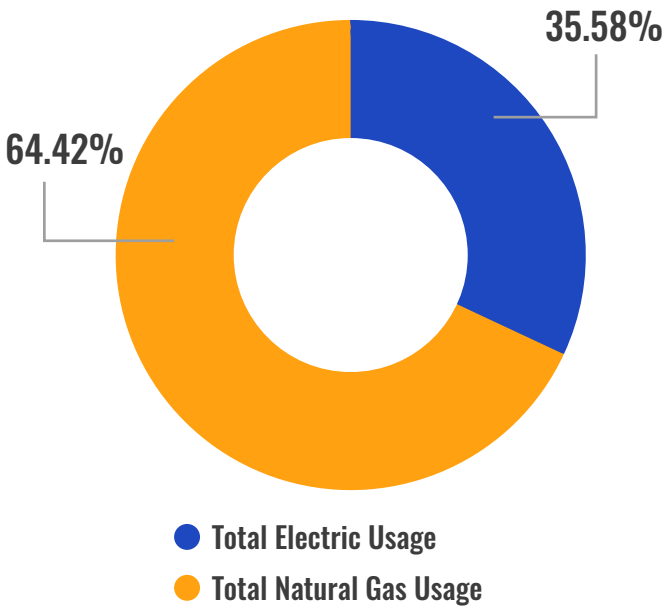
CPS is advancing a wide range of measures to drive sustainability and lower its environmental impact. These efforts span energy efficiency, renewable energy, transportation, and waste management, laying the foundation for deeper progress in each area. By taking action across these categories, CPS is positioning itself to make meaningful, long-term reductions in GHG emissions and overall resource use.

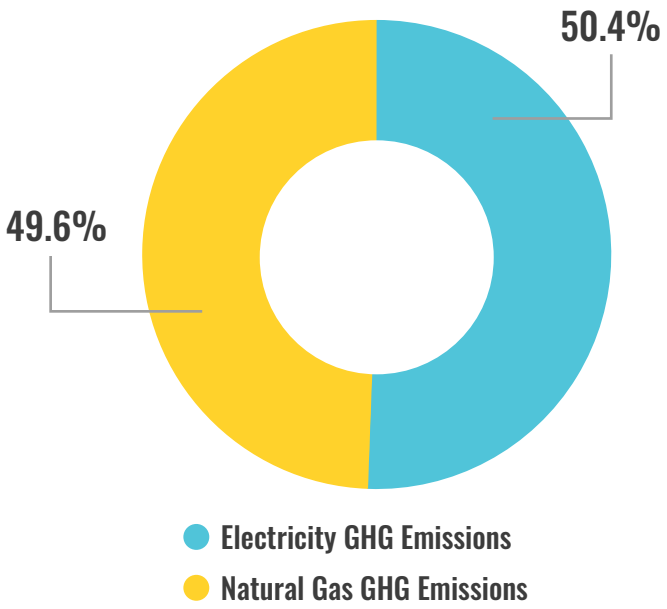


Emissions Tracking

To help anchor the District's sustainability efforts, establishing a baseline of CPS' annual GHG emissions provides a clear starting point for measuring progress and identifying opportunities for improvement. This internal CPS data will enable progress tracking and informed decision-making on decarbonization strategies.

The District's first goal of this Sustainability Action Plan is to *establish a GHG emissions inventory report by 2030 with updates every five years.*







Energy Efficiency and Building Optimization

With an average facility age of 86 years across the building portfolio, sustainable operations depend heavily on the correct sequence of operations (scheduling), mechanical modernization, and rigorous controls management. The District's facilities encompass more than a century of evolving building standards and legacy mechanical equipment, creating both operational challenges and substantial opportunities for decarbonization. By systematically upgrading legacy HVAC systems, optimizing building automation, and integrating utility commissioning programs, CPS drives measurable energy reductions while optimizing student comfort and classroom air quality.



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

CPS embeds sustainability standards into both macro-level design guidelines and individual project scopes. The District prioritizes replacing failing equipment with modern, high-efficiency mechanical systems that at a minimum meet the City of Chicago's Energy Transformation Code—one of the most aggressive municipal energy standards in the nation.



BUILDING AUTOMATION SYSTEMS (BAS)

Operating as the central intelligence network for HVAC and lighting, BAS enables proactive, automated regulation of temperature, humidity, and ventilation. Real-time visibility and centralized controls enable teams to optimize runtime schedules, identify operational anomalies early, and reduce peak demand and fossil fuel use while improving indoor air quality.



COMMISSIONING PARTNERSHIPS

Through strategic collaboration with ComEd's Retro-commissioning, Virtual Commissioning, and Monitoring-Based Commissioning frameworks, the District ensures its building portfolio sustains peak operational performance. Continuous commissioning is fundamental to persistent energy efficiency, as it systematically addresses software problems and equipment errors that naturally erode equipment efficacy. This protocol optimizes Building Automation System (BAS) functionality, safeguards long-term capital investments, and ensures that the sophisticated HVAC infrastructure consistently achieves its engineered decarbonization and energy-reduction targets.

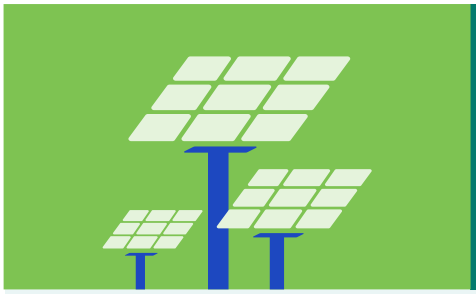
Our commitment to improving our facilities' energy efficiency will continue and include goals of *Energy Efficiency Improvements and BAS Optimization Measures at 50% of the District's schools, and LED Lighting Upgrades at 100% of campuses, by 2035 from a 2022 post-pandemic baseline.*

Renewable Energy Strategy

Fossil fuel combustion for power and heating generates roughly 51% of emissions in the Greater Chicago region.* Because CPS consumes approximately 500 million kilowatt-hours annually—and on-site solar can fulfill less than 20% of that total—the District utilizes a dual approach:

On-Site Distributed Generation: Deploy rooftop/ground-mount solar, along with electric battery storage and other decarbonization technology in capital improvement projects when feasible.

Clean Power Target: Procure at least 50% of District electricity from renewable sources by 2035.



CPS in Action

Green Schools Board Resolution Solar Pilot Projects

In June of 2025, the Chicago Board of Education passed the Healthy Green Schools, Good Jobs, Bright Futures: Protecting the Health and Economic Security of Chicago's School Communities resolution.

Through this mandate, the District is pursuing four on-site, behind-the-meter solar pilot projects. Two of the projects will be ground-mounted systems at Carver Military Academy and the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, and two will be rooftop systems installed at Hubbard High School and Pershing Elementary School.

With these projects combined, more than 1.2 megawatts of solar generation will be installed and provide over 20% of the annual electric usage at these four schools.

In addition to the immediate impact these pilot projects will have on the District's GHG emissions, these efforts will inform a District-wide approach to building decarbonization and establish best practices within CPS standards for construction and maintenance.

more than

1.2

megawatts of solar generation will be installed and provide

20%

of the annual electric usage at four schools

*See Appendix for additional information on data and renewable energy strategy.

Fleet Electrification and Transportation

Transportation contributes roughly 29% of nationwide emissions.* CPS is working to transition to low- and zero-emission vehicles to reduce emissions and lower long-term operational and fuel costs.

District Vehicle Fleet

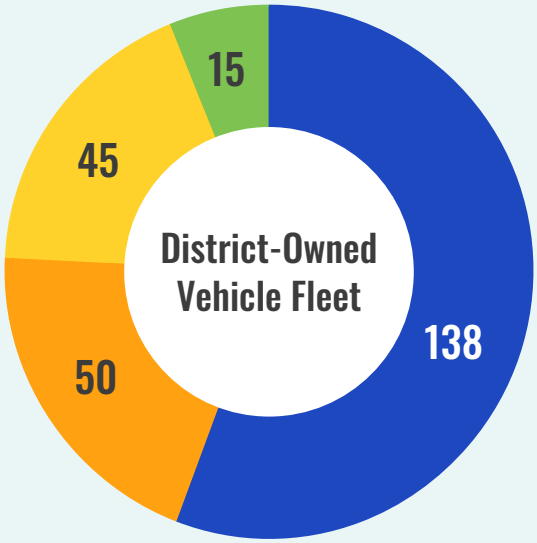
As a critical strategy of the District's Sustainability Action Plan, transitioning our mobile assets directly complements building decarbonization to drastically reduce neighborhood-level air pollution. By aligning replacement lifecycles with scalable charging infrastructure, CPS ensures long-term operational resilience, reduces lifecycle maintenance overhead, and demonstrates municipal climate leadership across every school community we serve.

The District's efforts towards this transition will include *developing a scalable and reliable EV charging framework that supports the District's city-wide operations adoption of zero-emission fleet vehicles.*

Additionally, CPS plans to *transition 50% of CPS Warehouse light and medium-duty transit vans to hybrid or electric vehicles by 2035.*

The District is dedicated to *procuring only Hybrid-Electric Vehicles (HEVs) or full Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) for Central Office City-Wide administrative and Driver's Education vehicles* when the need and funding opportunities allow replacement.

*See Appendix for additional information on data and transportation emissions.





Waste Management

CPS generates over 40,000 tons of waste annually, 35% of which is food scraps.* When sent to regional landfills currently nearing capacity, this organic waste decomposes and generates methane.

Diverting this massive organic volume presents an urgent dual opportunity to slash fugitive greenhouse gas emissions and curb escalating hauling and disposal costs.

The District's waste management initiatives prioritize two main strategies:

- **Waste Reduction:** This strategy focuses on preventing waste from occurring in the first place and drastically reducing the volume of materials sent to the landfill.
- **Resource Circularity:** This strategy is designed to keep materials and products in circulation for as long as possible by giving them a new purpose. This includes diverting food scraps to commercial composting facilities to create nutrient-rich soil amendments, utilizing lunchroom "Share Tables" to recover uneaten, edible food so it can be offered to other students, and participation in E-Marketplace for the reuse of furniture and supplies as opposed to always purchasing new.

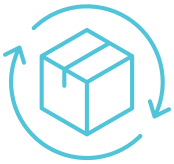
Targeted Initiatives



Waste Reduction & Sourcing
Eliminate plastic straws, shift to unwrapped individual utensils, and implement bulk napkin dispensers across school cafeterias.



Diversion & Composting
Expand Share Tables and cafeteria composting programs by 50% by 2030.



Resource Circularity
Expand school participation in CPS E-Marketplace to 80% by 2030 and 100% by 2035.

*Internal Data = 40,000 tons of waste annually and 35% of which is food scraps.



CPS in Action

CPS E-Marketplace

Launched in September 2024, this internal asset redistribution platform serves as the District's central hub for redistributing surplus office and classroom furniture, as well as essential school supplies.

By matching existing District inventory with real-time school needs and offering free delivery, the platform streamlines our operations and maximizes the lifecycle of our existing assets.

By prioritizing the reuse of quality items, we are actively helping schools reduce waste and ensuring that excellent resources stay right where they belong—supporting our classrooms and staff.

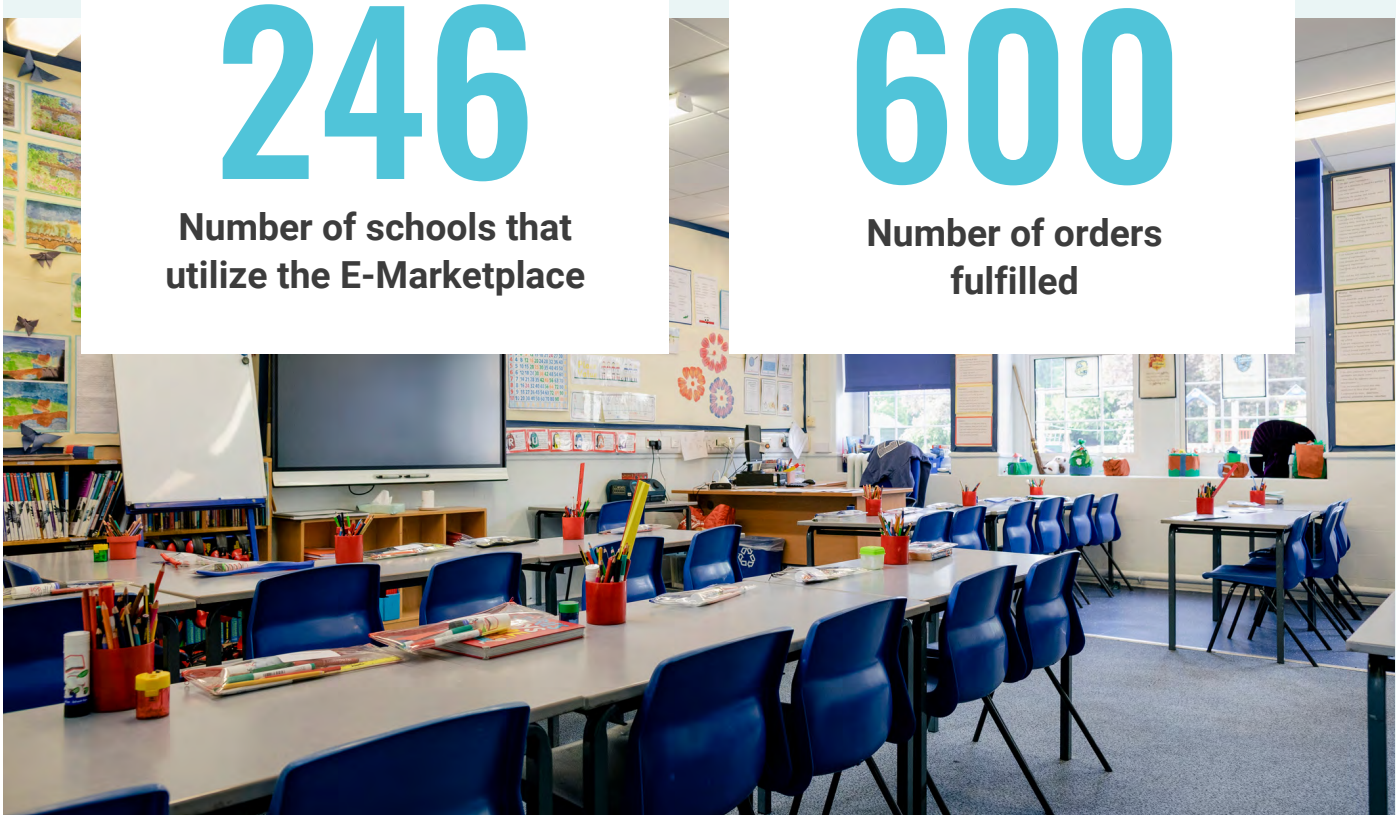
To date, the E-Marketplace is utilized consistently by 246 schools and has fulfilled over 600 orders. By redeploying over 800 pieces of furniture and supplies that would have otherwise been thrown away, the initiative has saved the District thousands of dollars in unnecessary purchasing and disposal costs.

246

Number of schools that utilize the E-Marketplace

600

Number of orders fulfilled



CPS in Action

Zero Food Waste Schools Program

The Zero Food Waste Schools Program with Seven Generations Ahead is currently in 18 elementary, middle, and high schools.

How the Program Works

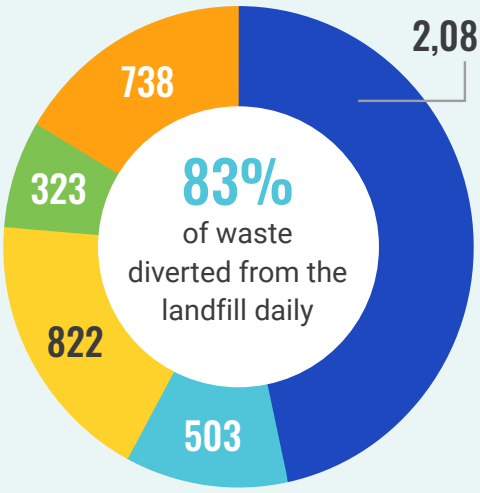
With support from Seven Generations Ahead (SGA), each school:

- Forms a Zero Food Waste Team (administration, engineer, custodian, dining manager, teachers) to plan implementation and ensure ongoing success.
- Is provided with organics/compost hauling equipment and weekly service (all CPS schools already have recycling hauling service).
- Sets up sorting stations in the lunchroom and kitchen.
- Educates all students and staff on the How & Why of the program.
- Engages student Zero Waste Ambassadors who monitor the sorting process during the lunch period.
- Conducts a waste audit to measure and celebrate their impact.

Impact of 18 Program Schools

13.3K **students composting and recycling every school day**

Zero Food Waste Program Impact - Daily Waste Profile



- lbs of lunchroom composting (47%)
- lbs of recycling (11%)
- lbs of liquid diversion (18%)
- lbs of food share (7%)
- lbs of waste going to the landfill (17%)

328 **tons of waste diverted annually**

Pillar 1 Summary

By focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, transportation, and waste management practices, we lay a stronger foundation for a more sustainable future for CPS. This starts with knowing our current impact and finding realistic and actionable ways to reduce it. This paves the way for progress and our second pillar, creating healthier and more resilient learning environments.



Pillar 2

Create healthy and resilient learning environments.



Pillar 2
Strategy Summaries



Operational Excellence for a Healthy Learning Environment	2.1	Sustain the Healthy Green Schools & Colleges Standard Gold certification.
	2.2	Maintain a minimum 85% threshold of cleaning supplies that meet environmental preferable product standards and certifications such as Green Seal, UL Ecologo and Safer Choice.
	2.3	Annual Exceedance of all federal and state water testing standards.
	2.4	By 2030, develop a structured, rotational chemical safety audit schedule prioritizing high-risk buildings and spaces such as science labs and custodial closets.
	2.5	Maintain "just-in-time" delivery model with chemical manufacturers, reducing extensive warehouse storage needs while prioritizing safer, high-quality materials.
Monitoring & Transparency	2.6	Expand framework for sharing building maintenance strategies and operational efforts directly with school-level staff, District stakeholders and the broader community.
	2.7	By 2035, install indoor air quality (IAQ) monitoring devices at 50% of District school, 100% by 2050.
	2.8	By 2035, implement public-facing displays in District schools to provide building facility information to the school community.
Resiliency Adaptation	2.9	Achieve +30 Megawatts of summer demand response event curtailment capacity by 2030.
	2.10	Annual expansion of green schoolyards and increased square footage of stormwater management and flood reduction measures.

Introduction and Core Mandate

Pillar 2 focuses directly on the physical and environmental health of CPS' 522 campuses and 62 million square feet of facilities.

Guided by the foundational mandate of keeping schools "Warm, Safe, Dry, and Cool," the District establishes safe baseline building conditions before scaling advanced environmental health and resiliency programs across three areas: operations and maintenance, environmental health and safety, and climate resiliency.



Operations, Maintenance, and Green Standards

Facility operations directly influence indoor air quality and resource efficiency.

CPS manages these operations in accordance with the Healthy Green Schools & Colleges (HGSC) Standards—the first national standards for sustainable school operations.

The HGSC standards plays a critical role in reducing the environmental footprint of large educational institutions by mandating sustainable purchasing practices, ensuring schools buy environmentally preferable consumable goods and durable, energy-efficient equipment.

It also promotes decarbonization and energy efficiency through rigorous HVAC system maintenance, optimized building-system operations, and waste-reduction strategies such as recycling and composting. Enforcing a shift away from toxic cleaning chemicals and higher-risk pesticides prevents harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from entering the atmosphere and protects local water systems from toxic runoff.

CPS achieved Gold Certification under the HGSC Standard, earning 90 out of 100 possible points and making it the first school district in the nation to achieve this certification.

Efforts to achieve Gold Certification included developing and training staff on over 200 new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) aligned with HGSC guidelines.

CPS achieved Gold Certification under the Healthy Green Schools & Colleges (HGSC) Standard, earning 90 out of 100 possible points and making it the first school district in the nation to achieve certification.



The adoption of a Green Cleaning Policy in 2024 focused on exclusively purchasing and using environmentally-sensitive cleaning supplies in accordance with the State of Illinois guidelines and Specifications for the Green Cleaning Schools Act.

Also, utilization of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which is an environmentally friendly, common-sense approach to controlling pests by focusing on pest prevention and the use of pesticides only as needed by developing a variety of pest management techniques that focus on pest prevention, pest reduction, and the elimination of conditions that lead to pest infestations.

To build upon this achievement, the District is committed to *sustaining the 90+ point gold standard by prioritizing operational excellence and continuous improvement, undergoing regular third-party audits, and securing annual recertification through the Healthy Green Schools organization.*

CPS is also striving to *maintain a minimum 85% threshold of cleaning supplies that meet environmentally preferable product standards and certifications such as Green Seal.*

And finally, the District is taking efforts to *expand the framework for sharing building maintenance strategies and operational efforts directly with school-level staff, District stakeholders and the broader community to help foster greater inclusion and transparency.*

The District is committed to sustaining the 90+ point gold standard by prioritizing operational excellence and continuous improvement, undergoing regular third-party audits, and securing annual recertification through the Healthy Green Schools organization.



Environmental Health and Safety

The District's Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) program establishes rigorous, proactive safeguards that directly protect the well-being of over 300,000 students and staff across every Chicago community.

By pairing strict compliance protocols with continuous monitoring—from leading drinking water testing thresholds to advanced indoor air filtration and hazardous material abatement—CPS systematically mitigates foundational environmental risks before they can affect the classroom.

These ongoing operational investments ensure that educational facilities serve as safe, resilient, and healthy environments that support learning, reduce chronic absenteeism, and exceed municipal and national safety benchmarks.



WATER QUALITY

Exceeding state (5 ppb) and federal (15 ppb) standards, CPS tests 25% of all schools annually for lead, prioritizing pre-K facilities. Out of 137,618 samples collected through August 2026, 93% met the 5 ppb standard, 74% were below detection limits, and only 6.5% exceeded 5 ppb.

The District employs a broad range of tactics to ensure that drinking water in our schools is below the State regulatory limit for lead. CPS is dedicated to continuing to exceed all federal and state water testing requirements on an annual basis.



INDOOR AIR QUALITY (IAQ)

To mitigate particulate matter (PM2.5, PM10, CO2, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), CPS conducts minimum quarterly IAQ assessments, utilizes the appropriate MERV rated filtration for the existing HVAC system, and performs pre- and post-occupancy fresh-air flushes.

To further improve building health and transparency, the District will pursue implementing public-facing displays in District schools to provide building facility and air quality information to the school community, while also striving to install indoor air monitoring at 50% of District schools by 2035 and 100% by 2050.



CHEMICAL SAFETY

CPS protects over 300,000 students and staff by reducing hazardous inventories, mandating Green Chemistry in the curriculum, and creating school-level Chemical Hygiene Leads. Since 2023, CPS has safely removed 150+ lbs of mercury, 120 gallons of methanol, and 1,000+ expired chemicals.*

To ensure systemic improvement and long-term chemical safety success, the District will strive to maintain a "just-in-time" delivery model with chemical manufacturers, reducing extensive warehouse storage needs while prioritizing safer, high-quality materials.

CPS will also focus on developing and implementing a structured, rotational audit schedule prioritizing high-risk spaces, like science labs and custodial closets, by 2030 to ensure all schools are systematically reviewed and improved over time.

*Internal District data

150 lbs

amount of mercury safely removed

120 gal

amount of methanol safely removed

+1k

number of expired chemicals safely removed



Resiliency and Green Infrastructure

CPS proactively addresses compounding climate risks by fortifying its old and diverse building portfolio with targeted green infrastructure and dynamic building controls. Transforming impermeable lots into living, flood-mitigating spaces and curtailing electrical demand during regional heatwaves safeguard critical capital investments, strengthen grid reliability, and build lasting environmental resilience in Chicago's most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure: By utilizing permeable pavement, bioswales, and rain gardens to capture on-site stormwater, CPS protects historic assets from flooding while easing pressure on municipal sewer systems.

As such, the District is committed to annual expansion of green schoolyards and increased square footage of stormwater management and flood reduction measures.

Demand Response: Utilizing centralized Building Automation Systems and Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs), CPS temporarily sheds non-essential electrical load (via slight fan speed reductions and zone setbacks) during regional peak demand events, helping avoid reliance on high-emission "peaker plants".

Our vision moving forward is focused on expanding our Demand Response capabilities and *achieving +30 megawatts of summer demand response event curtailment capacity by 2030.*



CPS proactively addresses compounding climate risks by fortifying its old and diverse building portfolio with targeted green infrastructure and dynamic building controls.



CPS in Action

Space to Grow Program

As a core component of **Pillar 2: Create – healthy and resilient learning environments**, the Space to Grow program represents a cornerstone of our District's climate resiliency efforts.

This pioneering initiative transforms traditional, outdated schoolyards into dynamic, green community hubs that support sustainable water management while providing safe, engaging outdoor spaces for our students and neighborhoods.

Launched in 2013, Space to Grow is an award-winning, multi-agency partnership between CPS, the Chicago Department of Water Management, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, the Healthy Schools Campaign, and Openlands. The program strategically selects schools based on high flood risk (including FEMA high-risk areas), historic disinvestment, and the spatial capacity to support stormwater collection systems.

Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, each schoolyard is custom-designed through hands-on community planning meetings. These green schoolyards are completely re-engineered from the ground down.

At the surface level, they feature permeable play surfaces, track and field areas with permeable turf, outdoor classrooms, vegetable gardens, and deep-rooted native rain gardens. Beneath the surface, engineered layers of gravel and subterranean chamber systems act as giant sponges to capture initial rainfall and slowly release it, drastically reducing the pressure on city sewers.

To date, the program has successfully transformed 41 schoolyards across the District. These spaces not only retain millions of gallons of stormwater but also serve as vital community assets, providing students with daily access to nature, physical activity, and participatory learning environments.



Pillar 2 Summary

By looking inward at the direct impact of the environmental health of our buildings and learning environments on our community, we can improve not only the places we work and learn, but the futures of all members of our CPS community. Healthier buildings mean healthier students and set the cornerstone for our final pillar, creating pathways to impactful environment-focused careers.



Pillar 3

Cultivate:

1. Thriving social and environmental systems.
2. Pathways to impactful careers that solve pressing environmental challenges.



Pillar 3
Strategy Summaries



Curriculum, Instruction & Advanced Courses	**3.1**	By 2035, implement virtual & augmented reality technology solutions in introductory Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses like Welding and other skilled trades to reduce raw material use and waste.
	3.2	By 2035, adoption of EV technology, solar panel installation and sustainable agriculture techniques in skilled trades, culinary and agriculture programs.
	3.3	Expand CPS student participation in certification programs related to green or sustainable jobs.
	3.4	Expand the number of high schools offering advanced environmental studies coursework eligible for college credit.
	3.5	Through partnership with local City Colleges, expand student enrollment by 10% in Urban Agriculture and Urban Science course offering by 2030.
	3.6	By 2030, provide environmentally-based instructional resources and frameworks that complement high quality core STEM and Humanities curricula.
	3.7	By 2030, increase access to and participation in environmental science coursework for CPS priority populations, including Black students, multilingual/English learners, and students with disabilities.
Strengthen Partnerships	**3.8**	By 2030, increase awareness, partnership, and intentional decision-making about environmental partnership opportunities for student learning experiences by curating a resource for high quality community-to-classroom partnership opportunities.
	3.9	By 2030, form a Green Jobs subcommittee for the shared Workforce Development Council.
	3.10	Increased partnership with labor unions and industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on sustainable skilled trades and other industries.

Pillar 3
Strategy Summaries (cont.)



	3.11	Increased partnership with City Agencies and industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on green manufacturing and other industries.
	3.12	Increased partnership with culinary industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on plant-based cooking, zero-waste, and composting in kitchens.
Expand Student Experiential Learning Opportunities	3.13	By 2030, offer at least four aligned team-based challenges per year that incorporate sustainability within Culinary Arts, Agriculture, or Skilled Trades.
	3.14	By 2030, design and implement an annual multi-disciplinary team-based challenge that any student may participate in.
	3.15	Elevate youth participatory science as a vehicle for student voice and classroom to community connections.
	3.16	By 2030, create environmentally-based instructional resources and frameworks that complement and support the CPS service learning requirement.
Expand Teacher Opportunities	3.17	By 2030, increase awareness, partnership, and access to environmental teacher professional development by curating, communicating about, designing and/or implementing 2 professional learning opportunities annually.
	3.18	By 2030, design and implement at least one adult site visit annually that aligns to sustainable careers and industries.

Introduction

Cultivating conditions that support thriving social and environmental systems and create pathways to impactful careers focused on solving environmental challenges is key to the future success of CPS' Sustainability Action Plan.

By advancing key strategies in academic instruction, student experiential learning, and adult learning, the District will advance the following equity-driven goals to support:

1. Our students' success in civic engagement, postsecondary success, and career development; and
2. Environmental literacy; discovery and ethics; and the cultivation of just, sustainable, and thriving communities.



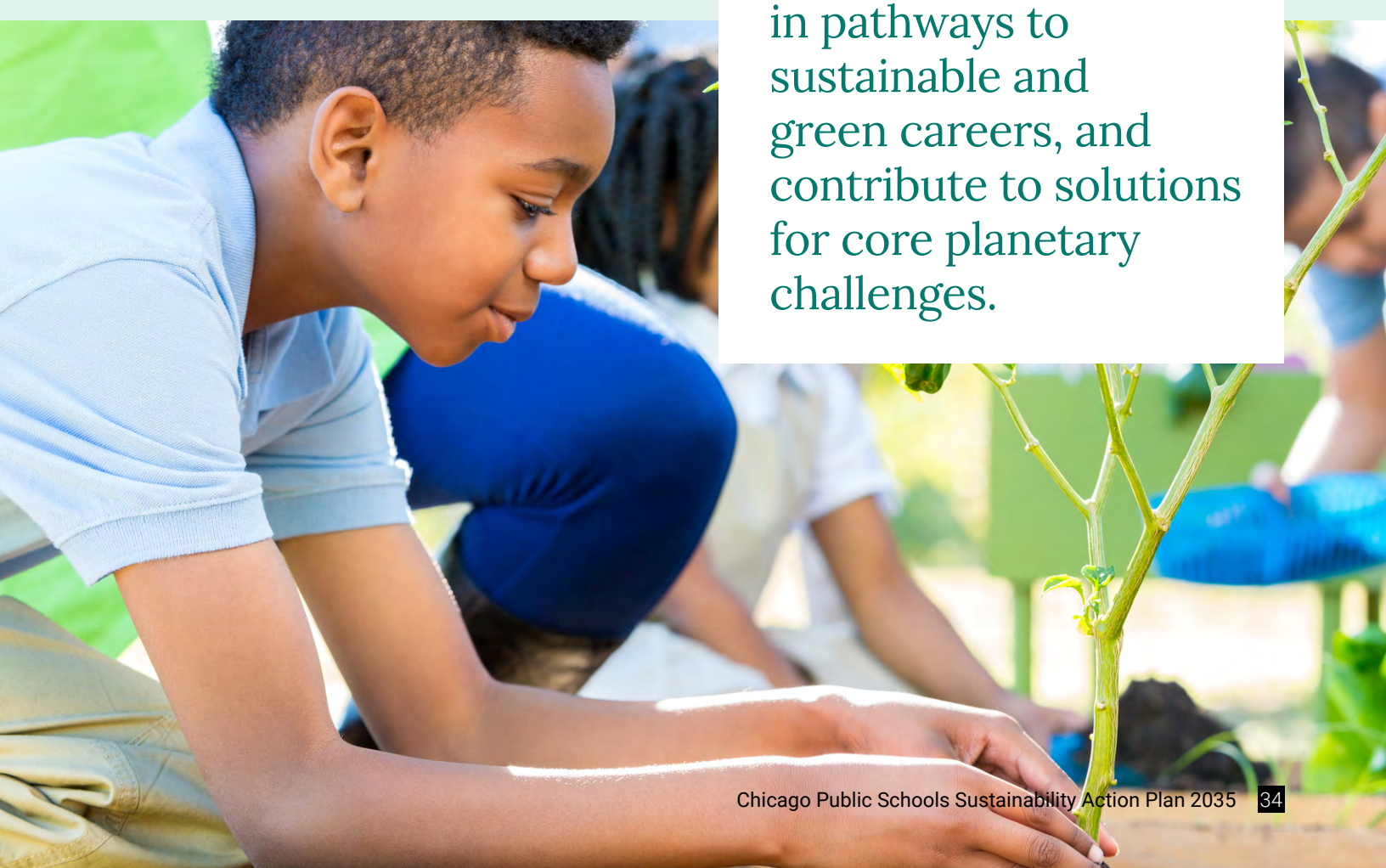
This approach aligns the work of the Offices of Teaching and Learning and College and Career Success, intending to promote more opportunities for students to deepen their environmental literacy, participate in pathways to sustainable and green careers, and contribute to solutions for core planetary challenges.

This work includes resources to support teacher practices and student experiences. In addition, these efforts will work to expose students to green careers and concepts in sustainability with the goal of increasing awareness around sustainable practices at the District and school levels to ensure that aligned programming reduces environmental impacts where feasible.

The impacts of the work below are built around increasing awareness and integration of sustainability and stewardship as it relates to core and advanced coursework and connections between community and classroom.



Our approach intends to promote more opportunities for students to deepen their environmental literacy, participate in pathways to sustainable and green careers, and contribute to solutions for core planetary challenges.



Academic Instruction

The integration of environmentally-focused content, instruction, and experiences is the key lever to meet the goals outlined in Pillar 3. Shifting instruction ensures that concepts like climate education and environmental justice are being taught in every school. By embedding these themes into Advanced Coursework and Core Subjects, we ensure that students from every zip code in Chicago are prepared to care for our communities, make informed and ethical decisions, and confront the realities of a rapidly shifting world and labor market.

Core Academic Content and Instruction: STEM and Humanities

Alignment of climate and environmental topics to core instructional materials: The free, high-quality instructional materials in Skyline include resources and connections to climate, the environment, and environmental justice across disciplines and ISBE-aligned standards, including in Skyline Science Units, Skyline Social Science Units, and Skyline Artes de Lenguaje Español (ALE). Our hope is that *by 2030, we can provide additional environmental education instructional resources and frameworks that complement high-quality core STEM and humanities curricula.*

Increase participation in environmental course offerings: Environmental topics are not only embedded into existing mandated coursework but are also offered as electives, including environmental science-related courses that count for STEM and humanities credits. *By 2030, our goal is to increase access to and participation in environmental science coursework for CPS priority populations, including Black students, multilingual students/ English learners, and students with disabilities.*

Through enhancing community-to-classroom connections, *by 2030, our goal is to increase awareness, partnership, and intentional decision-making about environmental partnership opportunities for student learning experiences by curating a resource for high-quality community-to-classroom partnership opportunities.*



By 2030, we can provide environmental education instructional resources and frameworks that complement high-quality core STEM and humanities curricula.



Advanced Coursework

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs provide students with rigorous, college-level learning opportunities to explore the scientific, social, political, and ethical dimensions of environmental challenges. Through inquiry-based learning, research, and interdisciplinary analysis, students develop the knowledge and skills needed to understand and address complex issues related to climate change, sustainability, conservation, resource management, and environmental justice.

In AP Environmental Science, students investigate ecosystems, biodiversity, pollution, energy systems, and human impacts on the natural world. AP Human Geography examines patterns of land use, urbanization, population growth, and resource distribution, while AP Biology, Chemistry, and Physics provide foundational scientific understanding of ecological systems, energy transfer, and environmental processes. Students in AP Seminar and AP Research can also investigate local and global environmental issues.

The IB's Environmental Systems and Societies course serves as an interdisciplinary learning opportunity that integrates environmental science with social systems, emphasizing sustainability, environmental decision-making, and human-environment interactions. Additional opportunities exist within IB Biology, Geography, Global Politics, and Theory of Knowledge, where students examine climate change, sustainable development, environmental policy, global inequities, and the ethical responsibilities of environmental stewardship. The IB Extended Essay also allows students to pursue independent research on environmental and sustainability-focused topics.

Through inquiry-based learning, research, and interdisciplinary analysis, students develop the knowledge and skills needed to understand and address complex issues related to climate change, sustainability, conservation, resource management, and environmental justice.



Early College

Currently, three high schools offer dual credit Environmental Studies through the City Colleges of Chicago. Environmental Studies 101 is a course that is in the Illinois Articulation Initiative, which means it is highly transferable to colleges and universities across Illinois. Expanding this opportunity would allow students to have greater access to foundational knowledge of environmental impacts for society and can apply to a wide variety of career pathways that benefit a sustainability action plan.

Currently, two high schools offer coursework in horticulture. As Olive Harvey College expands its urban agriculture program, CPS will look to expand both the number of schools participating in this coursework and the number of courses offered to allow students to pursue greater knowledge of the content and skills necessary to impact urban agriculture in the future. *Through partnership with City Colleges of Chicago, our goal is to expand student enrollment by 10% in Urban Agriculture and Urban Science course offerings by 2030, while also expanding the number of high schools offering advanced environmental studies coursework eligible for college credit.*

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs serve both the environment and students when integrated with sustainability practices. By adopting eco-friendly operations, CTE programs may directly lower their carbon footprint and conserve resources. Beyond tangible environmental impacts, the transition to more sustainable practices equips students with a competitive edge in the modern workforce, which must confront the impacts of climate change. Students exposed to these sustainable environments will not only graduate with traditional technical skills but also possess the critical knowledge of resource management and eco-conscious problem-solving, making them highly desirable members in the future workforce.

This can look like:

- Partnerships with oil/grease recycling, composting, and sustainable procurement organizations to reduce waste within culinary arts and agriculture programs.
- Encouraging the disuse of single-use plastics and non-compostable packaging where possible.
- Adoption of certain technologies to reduce raw material usage and waste generated from classroom activities.
- Increasing the use of e-cycling for CTE equipment that aligns with the District's metrics, goals, etc.

By 2035, CPS wants to implement virtual and augmented reality technology solutions in introductory CTE courses like welding and other skilled trades to reduce raw material use and waste.



CTE Course Adjustments

Adjusting curricula to focus on the green economy doesn't mean sunsetting existing programs; rather, it's about infusing them with new and emerging sustainable trends within industries and exposing students to aligned career pathways. This can be achieved by integrating sustainability lessons, units, and modules into existing pathways. By embedding these technical skills into the coursework, programs not only demystify emerging careers but also provide students with hands-on experience using the sustainable technologies they will encounter in the field.

This can include EV technology, solar panel installation, and sustainable agriculture and vertical farming techniques in skilled trades, culinary, and agriculture programs. ***By 2035, we hope to have EV technology, solar panel installation, and sustainable agriculture techniques in skilled trades, culinary, and agriculture programs at CPS schools.***

The District is also striving to investigate certification opportunities related to green or sustainable jobs, such as ASE xEV certifications in automotive technology programs, and expand CPS student participation in certification programs related to green or sustainable jobs.

Sustainability programs not only demystify emerging careers but also provide students with hands-on experience using the sustainable technologies they will encounter in the field.



Student Experiential Learning

Communities are rich environments, full of knowledge, history, and environmental contexts. For students to fully grasp the content of academic instruction, they must meaningfully engage with community contexts and become empowered changemakers. Experiential learning transforms theory into practice, positioning students as doers and moving from learning about issues to designing solutions. In this process, students develop critical essential skills like communication, adaptability, community engagement, and teamwork. These skills and approaches cannot be taught inside a classroom alone, and experiential learning builds the self-efficacy required to thrive in college, career, and civic engagement.

As it relates to the core components of pillar three, the following workstreams seek to accomplish this:

Project- and Problem-based Learning

Project-based Learning is based on experiential opportunities in and out of classrooms for students to engage with varied communities, individuals, and groups. Project-based Learning is a powerful tool to disrupt inequitable patterns in who has access to a meaningful and fulfilling environmental and climate education and has the capacity to create learning environments that are rich in (inter)disciplinary learning, authentic to students and their communities, collaborative, and iterative. In CPS, students are required to participate in service learning and inquiry-to-action projects, which include projects focused on environmental justice. *By 2030, we hope to create environmental education instructional resources and frameworks that complement and support the CPS service-learning requirement.*



Project-based Learning is a powerful tool to disrupt inequitable patterns in who has access to a meaningful and fulfilling environmental and climate education.

In this work, we will also elevate youth participatory science as a vehicle for student voice and classroom-to-community connections.

CPS is also looking to develop, in collaboration with industry partners, challenges that focus on topics around sustainability in key programs of study. Team-based challenges are group problem-based learning projects relating to a student's career area of interest that involve a problem relating to employers within that area, including mentoring from adults with expertise in that area, and require students to present the outcomes of the project. Team-based challenges align with the Illinois Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework and count towards students earning the College and Career Pathway Endorsement.

This can look like:

- Central Office challenges that have sustainability metrics, such as the inclusion of plant-based recipes, sustainable procurement, addressing environmental impacts, or green technology. *By 2030, our goal is to offer at least four aligned team-based challenges per year that incorporate sustainability within culinary arts, agriculture, or skilled trades.*
- Multi-disciplinary entrepreneurship challenges focus on solving pressing environmental problems within particular industries. *By 2030, our aim is to design and implement an annual multi-disciplinary team-based challenge that any student may participate in.*

Green/Sustainable Career-connected Learning

By more closely collaborating with key industry partners to increase the number of student engagements with employers that incorporate or focus on green or sustainable pathways, we can build richer and more impactful learning experiences.

This includes guest speakers, site visits, career/trades fairs, and activities that align with existing PaCE Work-based Learning and College and Career Pathway Endorsement structures to recognize student achievements that enhance their post-secondary preparedness through participation in these experiences.

This can look like:

- Leveraging key union training centers or employers for targeted site visits for CTE skilled trades pathways that focus on sustainability in the industry, emerging technology, and new green careers. Our goal is to *increase partnerships with labor unions and industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on sustainable skilled trades and other industries.*
- Deepening collaboration with city agencies to shift existing opportunities like Manufacturing Month to focus more on green careers and companies that incorporate sustainability into the manufacturing process. We hope to increase *partnerships with city agencies and industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on green manufacturing and other industries.*
- Partnering with culinary industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on plant-based cooking, zero-waste, and composting in kitchens. In the future, we aim to *build partnerships with culinary industry associations to create aligned work-based learning opportunities that focus on plant-based cooking, zero-waste, and composting in kitchens.*



Workplace Experience

Workplace Experience courses are a component of work-based learning that allows students to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom and lab space in a real work environment. These courses exist as both a capstone to a sequence of career-focused programming and as a standalone course to be implemented at the school level. These courses are designed to assist students in the development of effective skills and attitudes through practical, advanced instruction in school and on the job through workplace experience. In most cases, workplace experiences look like an internship or a youth apprenticeship. By deepening and increasing partnerships with industry partners that focus on sustainability, limiting environmental impact, and/or green jobs, students will gain access to not only career elective credit but possible income to support their families and exposure to new and emerging careers.

Our goal is to *form a Green Jobs subcommittee for the shared Workforce Development Council by 2030.*

By deepening and increasing partnerships with industry partners that focus on sustainability, limiting environmental impact, and/or green jobs, students will gain access to not only career elective credit but possible income to support their families and exposure to new and emerging careers.



Adult Learning

Students can only navigate rich learning or paths to careers when trusted adults in their schools feel comfortable and confident supporting them. For a shift toward climate education opportunities for students, teachers, school leaders, and counselors must also be active navigators of environmental education opportunities and of the sustainable economy. To ensure that students can engage in the academic and experiential activities, the District will increase adult stakeholders' fluency in climate education and the rapidly evolving labor market. The following workstreams seek to accomplish this:

To ensure that students can engage in the academic and experiential activities, the District will increase adult stakeholders' fluency in climate education and the rapidly evolving labor market.

Stakeholder Engagements with Aligned Labor Markets

Counselors and other school-based staff often support students in learning about various career pathways. If these adults are unfamiliar with how traditional learning opportunities and careers are evolving, students miss out on critical career opportunities. The District will continue to expand relationships with partners in aligned industries. Building off the success of union training center visits with counselors, the District aims to better reach adults within CPS, exposing them to emerging careers that incorporate sustainability.



From workshops and partnerships to participation in participatory science and research experiences for teachers, educators will have a variety of ways to learn about and deepen engagement with climate and environmental materials, content, contexts, and stakeholders to inform their work with students.

Teacher Professional Learning

To integrate green concepts seamlessly, CTE teachers require technical, industry-aligned professional development. Rather than framing sustainability as an ethical add-on, professional development will focus on modern industry compliance and competitiveness, demonstrating how eco-conscious resource management directly mirrors modern workforce demands.

This can look like:

- Partnerships with SMEs in related industries to offer CTE teachers workshops on plant-based cooking, sustainable farming and animal processing, and locally sourced materials. *By 2030, CPS will aim to offer at least two sustainability-aligned professional development opportunities annually.*
- Leveraging industry partners to create aligned adult site visits to sustainable workplaces and industries to learn about emerging practices. *By 2030, we will strive to design and implement at least one adult site visit annually that aligns to sustainable careers and industries.*

Curriculum and Instruction

STEM and humanities professional learning opportunities will align with climate and environmental topics, environments, and opportunities. From workshops and partnerships to participation in participatory science and research experiences for teachers, educators will have a variety of ways to learn about and deepen engagement with climate and environmental materials, content, contexts, and stakeholders to inform their work with students.

- **Examples:** Partner professional learning with environmental and community organizations, universities, and cultural institutions.
- *By 2030, increase awareness, partnership, and intentional decision-making about environmental teacher learning opportunities by curating and communicating resources related to environmental educator learning.*

Pillar 3 Summary

This final pillar looks to the future by giving students and teachers opportunities to experience learning grounded in environmental and climate education. By setting our students up for success through instruction and experiential learning, we are setting the District up for success with our climate goals. This final pillar not only addresses climate change but equips our students with expertise that will serve them and the planet in their future careers.



Conclusion

CPS' Sustainability Action Plan charts an ambitious but logical and possible path forward.

By modernizing our facilities, rethinking our resource management, and aligning our curriculum with the future of the workforce, we can support the District's Five-Year Strategic Plan, while also reducing our climate impact and supporting our communities.

Through coordinated action, we will create a cleaner, healthier, and more prosperous future for every student in Chicago.



Acknowledgements

The development of the CPS Sustainability Action Plan was made possible through the dedicated leadership, technical expertise, and collaborative spirit of more than 30 individuals representing eight key District departments, alongside our valued external partners. This plan reflects a unified commitment to creating healthy, resilient, and sustainable learning environments for every student across Chicago.

Gratitude is owed to the leadership and staff across the following CPS departments for their strategic vision, cross-functional contributions, and support in advancing sustainability across the District:

- **Board of Education:** For their strategic leadership, advocacy, and support in advancing district-wide sustainability through the Healthy Green Schools, Good Jobs, Bright Futures resolution.
- **Department of Capital Planning:** For providing foundational facility data, long-term capital improvement frameworks, and strategic guidance on building infrastructure.
- **Department of Facilities Operations:** For guiding daily operational standards, energy efficiency initiatives, building automation system (BAS) optimization, and environmental health and safety protocols.
- **Department of Transportation:** For leading the District's fleet electrification roadmap and zero-emission vehicle transition strategies.
- **Department of Nutrition Support Services:** For establishing sustainable foodware standards, Share Table initiatives, and cafeteria waste-diversion programs across school lunchrooms.
- **Office of College & Career Success:** For aligning sustainability goals with career-connected learning, CTE pathways, and green-economy workforce opportunities.
- **Office of Teaching & Learning:** For integrating environmental literacy, climate science, and interdisciplinary instruction into the core K-12 curriculum.
- **Departments of Marketing & Communications:** For the extraordinary effort of refining the plan's content into a cohesive final document while designing the visual elements and layout to help clearly communicate our sustainability mission to the broader community.



Special appreciation is expressed to **Seven Generations Ahead (SGA)** for their invaluable technical expertise, research, and partnership in developing the waste reduction and composting sections of this plan. Their guidance and ongoing support toward food waste reduction, waste audits, and cafeteria composting drives meaningful advancement.

Along with acknowledgement to the **Chicago Teachers Union** for their steadfast advocacy in prioritizing environmental sustainability, ongoing engagement through the Green Schools Committee, and continued partnership as the District faces the challenges ahead.

Finally, we recognize the **school administrators, teachers, engineers, custodians, and dining managers** whose daily work puts sustainability into practice across our campuses. Without their ongoing commitment, none of this work would be possible.

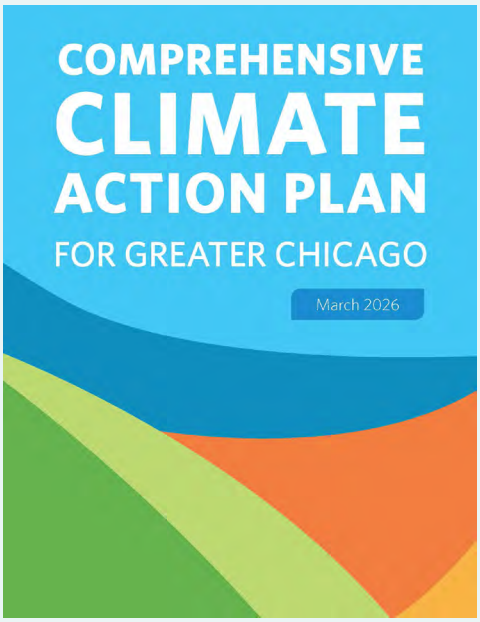


Appendix

Renewable Energy Strategy

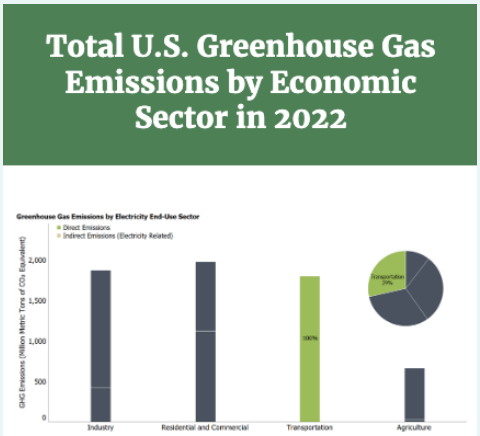
CMAP Comprehensive Climate Action Plan for Greater Chicago

"The inventory reflects end-use emissions from fuel consumption in homes, vehicles, and industry as well as emissions from electricity generation serving the region.17 Emissions from electricity and on-site natural gas use are allocated to their respective end-use sectors. Electricity usage accounts for 22 percent of total emissions, while on-site natural gas use in buildings and industry contributes 29 percent. Transportation emissions are primarily from gasoline and diesel."



Transportation Emissions

U.S. EPA Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Transportation Sector Emissions



Greenhouse gas emissions by economic sector in 2022. Transportation accounted for 29% of emissions.

Total Emissions in 2022 = 6,343 Million Metric Tons of CO_2 equivalent. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to independent rounding. Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry in the United States is a net sink and offsets 12% of these greenhouse gas emissions. This net sink is not shown in the above diagram. All emission estimates are sourced from the *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990–2022*.



Chicago Public Schools