

Cowichan Valley Schools



Climate Action Framework

April 2024



Prepared by
Cowichan Valley School District
Climate Action Advisory Committee

With thanks to
Cowichan Valley School District
Board of Education

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

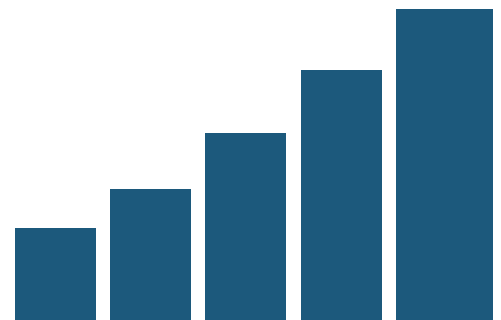
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Acknowledgement



The Board of Education for the Cowichan Valley School District's Climate Action Advisory Committee recognizes and gives thanks that we work, live, and learn on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples, specifically the lands of the Quw'utsun, Penelakut, Halalt, Lyackson, Stz'uminus, Malahat, and Ts'uubaa-asatx peoples. We dedicate our work to current and future generations of students, staff, families, and community members. We are steadfast in ensuring the committee recommends strong adaptation and mitigation measures that can have immediate and everlasting actions to counter the climate emergency.



Introduction



The Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC) is pleased to provide this Climate Action Framework to the Board of Education Cowichan Valley School District for consideration and adoption. This is the first step in the creation of a Climate Action Plan for the School District which will guide the District forward in addressing locally the increasing impacts of the climate emergency now upon us.

The Board recognizes the climate emergency unfolding in our communities, province, country, and the world. To this effect, the Board declared a Climate Emergency at the Open Board Meeting on Tuesday, February 4, 2020, stating:

"That the Board of Education of School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley) recognizes that climate change poses a grave threat to our students, the wider school community, and the general public, and as such constitutes an emergency."

On May 4, 2021 the Board subsequently passed the following motion that created the Board's Climate Action Advisory Committee:

"That the Board of Education strike a Standing Committee on Climate Change, effective October 2021, and that staff prepare a draft Purpose, Powers and Duties, Membership and Meetings for review at Board of Education Business Committee (BEBC)."

Then at the December 7, 2021 Open Board Meeting:

"That the Board of Education of School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley) approves the addition of the Climate Change Committee into Policy 8 – Board Committees as presented."

This motion implements the Board's formal recognition of the climate crisis as a complex issue affecting current and future generations globally, regionally, and locally.



Introduction (cont)



More recently, on September 5 2023, at the Open Board Meeting, the Terms of Reference for the Climate Action Advisory Committee were revised:

"That the Board of Education of School district No. 79 (Cowichan Valley) adopts the revised Policy 8 - Board Committees as amended ."

Recognizing the need to more assertively begin addressing increasing climate change impacts in the region and globally, the Board passed this motion to formalize the Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC). The motion has enabled the CAAC to develop recommendations to advise the Board on not only further mitigation measures, but also advance adaptation measures that can be taken within the scope of the Board's mandate on providing public education and childcare.

With this motion the Board has recognized that in addressing the climate crisis that more emphasis on adaptation measures must now be taken as well as continuing its mitigation strategies. Mitigation is about reducing greenhouse emissions while adaptation is about taking action to help citizens, and in the context of the school district, its students and their world of support, adjust to the current and future impacts of climate change – it is also a very powerful way to not only educate but also empower students to take meaningful action on a major crisis that will have enduring impacts on their lives.



Guiding Principles:

In the creation of not only this Framework but also the forthcoming Action Plan, the Climate Action Advisory Committee has drawn from the District's principles and values of its current Strategic Plan to develop the following guiding principles:



Student Voice

One of the main principles that the Climate Action Advisory Committee was found on was that student voice is a key contributor to this framework and subsequent action plan and our future. Students are placed at the forefront, actively involved in decision-making processes, and honoured for their perspectives. An environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute meaningfully is intentionally cultivated. The CAAC recognizes that the diverse voices of students hold the key to innovative solutions and authentic engagement. By prioritizing student voice, the CAAC fosters a culture of inclusivity and ownership, and paves the way for transformative and sustainable outcomes for current and future generations.



Indigenous Ways of Knowing

The CAAC recognizes that Indigenous peoples have been the careful stewards of these lands since time immemorial. Indigenous knowledge is also foundational to this framework and subsequent action plan, and the CAAC will prioritize Indigenous voices, perspectives, and knowledge throughout all stages of development and implementation. We strive to foster genuine partnerships built on trust, reciprocity, and mutual respect, recognizing the inherent value and richness of Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous peoples' long history on this land. We will uphold principles of cultural humility and co-creation, acknowledging that Indigenous communities hold profound insights and solutions rooted in their deep connections to land, culture, language, and tradition. By authentically incorporating Indigenous perspectives, we not only foster more equitable and sustainable outcomes but also uphold the principles of truth and reconciliation and respect for diverse ways of being.



Partnership and Collaboration

The CAAC will actively strive to and recommend to the Board that the Board continues to foster collaborative relationships that prioritize the voices, expertise, and needs of diverse community stakeholders. We will cultivate a culture of mutual respect, transparency, and inclusivity, recognizing that each partner brings unique perspectives and resources to the table. The CAAC will embrace shared decision-making processes that honour the collective wisdom and aspirations of the community. By nurturing authentic partnerships, the CAAC not only enhances the relevance, sustainability, and impact of this framework and subsequent action plan, but also fosters a sense of ownership, pride, and resilience within the community.

Guiding Principles:



Empowering Learners to Address the Climate Crisis

The CAAC will prioritize forthcoming recommendations that offer experiential learning and stewardship which foster a deep connection to their local environment and empower them as stewards of the land and water. Integrating climate science, ecological literacy, and Indigenous knowledge systems will provide learners with a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of environmental issues. The CAAC hopes to empower learners to identify local climate challenges through collaborative problem-solving, innovation, and community engagement. By equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and agency to take meaningful action, we not only cultivate a generation of climate leaders but also nurture resilient communities capable of adapting to a changing world.



Garnering Educational Partner Support to Ensure Success

The CAAC recognizes the importance of buy-in to its Action Plan. It will prioritize teachers, administrators, and educational stakeholders from the outset, soliciting their input and involvement in planning and implementation. We will cultivate a shared vision and goals that align with educational objectives and priorities, emphasizing the relevance and benefits of the initiative to the broader educational community. Providing support, resources, and professional development opportunities to empower educational partners in implementing and sustaining projects, we ensure that initiatives are not only feasible but also impactful, scalable, and integrated into the fabric of the educational system.



Wellness

The CAAC recognizes that the Climate Emergency can and does affect our communities' physical and mental wellness. The CAAC places the well-being of individuals at the forefront of recommendations, recognizing that thriving communities are built on a foundation of holistic health, including environmental sustainability. The CAAC recognizes the overarching effect of wellness and recommends integrating strategies that promote mental resilience, emotional intelligence, and stress management. We will prioritize recommendations that:

- increase access to resources and that support physical health, including nutritious food, safe spaces for physical activity, and healthcare services.
- cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters identity, belonging, connection and mutual support among community members and participants.

By prioritizing mental and physical wellness as drivers of our recommendations, we not only enhance individual and community resilience, but also create a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Duties and Members of the Board's Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC)



The Board's Climate Action Advisory Committee and its predecessor were formed to encourage the School District to take a big-picture policy approach, along with potential actions, to mitigate its environmental impact, prepare for and adapt to a future of increasing local climate impacts.

- The CAAC will provide guidance and input on developing a Climate Action Plan for the Cowichan Valley School District.
- Recommendations by the Climate Action Advisory Committee will be brought forward to the Board Education and Business Committee who can then make recommendations to the Board.

To ensure the CAAC adheres to its Guiding Principles, a diverse group of individuals representing various groups and partners has been invited to contribute to this framework.

- Students
- CVTF
- CVPVPA
- First Nations and Metis Nation
- BCSTA Climate Action Committee
- DPAC
- CUPE
- USW

Process

Over the course of several meetings, the Climate Action Advisory Committee researched best practices, shared ideas from other students and experts, and discussed and debated action items from climate action reports throughout British Columbia. Some of these learnings coalesced into specific action items, while others spurred discussions on themes for the report.

A facilitated goal-setting session for the Climate Action Advisory Committee was hosted on January 19 2024. During this session, both the specific action items distilled by the group, as well as the thematic work were discussed and debated to refine into four main goals that the CAAC could recommend to the Board Education and Business Committee to then help it advise on developing a Climate Action Plan for the District.



Overarching Goals of this Report



In keeping with the overarching goal of the Board's Climate Action Advisory Committee to encourage the School District to take a big-picture policy approach, the four main goals of the CAAC are:



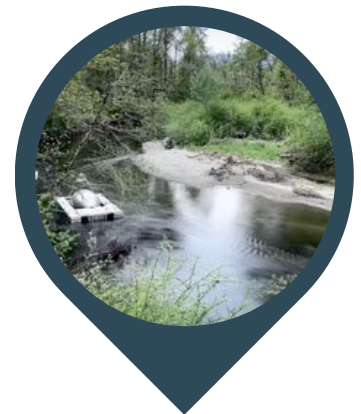
Environmental Stewardship



Education and Advocacy



Honouring Indigenous Teachings



Creating Sustainable Learning Environments

Environmental Stewardship



The Board will commit to the goal of environmental stewardship within our school district by researching and implementing sustainable practices where possible. The goal of Environmental Stewardship could see the Board actively engage students, teachers, administrators, and the broader community in initiatives to protect and preserve our local environment and remain open to adapting over time. By fostering a culture of environmental responsibility, we aim to cultivate future leaders who are informed, empowered, and committed to creating a more sustainable world for generations to come.

The CAAC is recommending some specific practices that could be implemented to achieve the goal of Environmental Stewardship.

Examples of the practices could include:

- using fewer non-recycled items
- conserving energy
- increasing our use of sustainable energy sources
- composting
- promoting green transportation options
- water catchment and water literacy (where water comes from, where it goes, the need to conserve it, and watershed awareness)
- sustainable food systems
- further embedding environmental education into our schools.



Education and Advocacy



Empower our school district and community with comprehensive environmental education and advocacy initiatives aimed at nurturing eco-conscious citizens. Together, we will inspire a generation of environmental leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and passion to drive positive change and create a more sustainable future for all.

The CAAC is recommending some specific practices that could be implemented to achieve the goal of Education and Advocacy. These specific practices include:

- implementing robust experiential and real-world learning opportunities
- community engagement opportunities to instill ecological literacy
- foster a sense of stewardship among students and staff - especially what it means to live in a watershed and which one.

The district could also actively promote environmental advocacy by organizing events, campaigns, and partnerships to address local and global environmental challenges. Additionally, the district could continue to advocate for policy changes and sustainable practices both within our region and in collaboration with wider educational networks or public bodies.



Honouring Indigenous Teachings



Embrace cultural humility and seek out and integrate Indigenous teachings into any climate action plan in culturally appropriate ways that respect Indigenous protocols, and recognize the profound wisdom and connection to the land inherent in Indigenous knowledge systems. Collaborate closely with Indigenous communities to develop culturally responsive teachings, experiential learning opportunities, and community partnerships that honour and uplift traditional ecological knowledge and practices. “Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational focussed on connectedness, reciprocal relationships and sense of place” (First Peoples’ Principles of Learning).

The CAAC has recommended some specific practices that could be implemented to achieve the goal of Honouring Indigenous Teachings. These specific practices include:

- providing professional development for educators to ensure they are equipped to respectfully incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching respective of the Climate Change Emergency.
- continue to create spaces for Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers, and community members to share their wisdom and stories with students, fostering understanding, respect, and appreciation for Indigenous ways of knowing and being.
- in the spirit of reciprocity, uplift the ways Indigenous people have historically been stewards of the land.

Through these actions, we, as a District will strive to cultivate a deep respect for the land, promote environmental stewardship rooted in Indigenous values, and contribute to reconciliation efforts by engaging Indigenous voices and perspectives in our environmental education endeavours.



Creating Sustainable Learning Environments



Transform our school districts' systems by creating a robust infrastructure for sustainable change. Collaborate with local government, businesses, and community organizations to develop partnerships that support climate action initiatives such as tree planting, waste reduction programs, and sustainable transportation options. By creating sustainable learning environments and fostering collaborative partnerships, we aim to inspire a generation of climate-conscious leaders equipped to mitigate the impacts of climate change and also adapt to the changes underway in order to prepare and build a more resilient future for all.

The CAAC is recommending some specific practices that could be implemented to achieve the goal of Creating Sustainable Learning Environments, but also in a way which helps restore the District's lands to healthier conditions, where possible. These specific practices include:

- implementing further energy-efficient infrastructure upgrades, such as solar panels and efficient lighting, to reduce carbon emissions and promote resilience to climate impacts.
- fostering green spaces and outdoor learning areas to connect students with nature and promote environmental stewardship.
- partnering on programs such as tree planting, ecosystem restoration, waste reduction programs, composting, community clean up initiatives and sustainable transportation options.



Conclusion



The Board's Climate Action Advisory Committee recommends this framework and the the above actions that could form the District's Climate Action Plan be adopted by the Board Education and Business Committee for Board consideration. While the recommendations under each goal offer specific examples that could inform the creation of the Climate Action Plan, it is our intent to provide these as an illustration of what projects came to the forefront during the conversations in the CAAC.

