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Green Schools Campaign

[Glossary](#)

Our Story

The idea for the Green Schools Campaign was developed in early 2020 by Simon Aron, Michael Zelniker, Sybil Azur, and Calum Worthy, following their successful advocacy with Climate Reality Project to commit the Los Angeles Unified School District and Los Angeles Community College District to 100% renewable energy by 2030. Then high schoolers Ava Acevedo, Natalia Armenta, Simon Aron, and Lily Morse became Climate Reality Leaders at the July 2020 virtual Global Climate Reality Leadership Corps training. After connecting during the training, they led the founding and launch of the Green Schools Campaign in August of that year. Following the launch, they got to work, developing campaign resources and guiding students across the United States to lead the change in their communities.

A month after the national launch, the Long Beach Green Schools Campaign (LB GSC) formed as the Campaign's second chapter. Spearheaded by Diana Michaelson, the student-led initiative set a precedent for high school student involvement in school district policy and environmental stewardship. After two years of dedicated LB GSC advocacy, Long Beach Unified passed a policy committing to a district-wide transition to 100% clean renewable energy by 2030. The campaign became a model for the future success to come in GSC chapters across the United States.

The Green Schools Campaign centers advocacy and grassroots organizing to spearhead initiatives to transition educational institutions to 100% renewable energy and advance community justice. Those running local campaigns will have a very similar mission.

Our People

We are all full-time high school and college students ranging from ages 14 to 19. As volunteers, we are fueled entirely by our passion for change and deep commitment to this organization and cause. Throughout our existence we have been supported by amazing **adult mentors!** While we are a youth-centered organization, intergenerational collaboration and mentorship is critical to building a movement.

What is the purpose of this book // What will you get out of it?

We hope this book can serve many purposes.

- Teach you *organizing theory*: how to mobilize individuals and bring them together for collective action.
- Through *personal stories*, you will learn from the real-life experiences of high school climate activists.
- The *leadership skill 101 sections* will isolate specific topics that are essential for activism and beyond.
- To inspire students, teachers, parents, etc. to get involved in work to fight for energy justice in their community.

Most importantly, this book is written for youth, by youth. As high and college students, we understand the struggles of organizing as young people, and will share our tips and tricks for time management, leadership, and the critical element of being heard and respected regardless of age.

Based on real life success in the Los Angeles and Long Beach school districts, this book takes you through the step-by-step process of creating and running a successful campaign, bringing youth together, and policy advocacy at school boards and other municipalities. We address how to deal with roadblocks, burnout, and climate anxiety, because running a campaign isn't easy. The climate crisis is a complex topic that requires bold, innovative minds passionate about making change. So, whether you are a high schooler looking to get more involved, a current campaign leader, or a skilled activist, everyone can take something away from this book.

We are so excited to take you on our GSC journey. Before we embark, we hope you can join our email list ([link](#)) or better yet, join our campaign ([link](#))! Also, we'd love for you to share this book to one friend or acquaintance who can join us. You can find more information about joining GSC on ([insert chapter](#)).

Now, let's get started!

Green Schools Campaign: An Introduction

The climate crisis is here.

Climate injustice threatens our homes, health, and families.
Climate injustice critically impacts millions of lives today.
Climate injustice will devastate billions of lives in future.

Unless we do something.

Young people will **not** allow this to happen.

Must we change? Yes.

Can we change? Yes.

Will we change? It's up to us.

As the climate crisis worsens, young people will be immensely impacted. But we as high schoolers have the passion, energy, and ideas to reinvent our world and play a crucial role in the fight against climate injustice. However, without a place to channel that energy, our capacity for change is lost. To our knowledge, in 2020 there were few national groups focused on organizing high schoolers and changing local energy systems.

We were frustrated that we could not find a high school community within “youth” climate justice organizations, and the few organizations aimed at engaging high school students were run by people double or triple our age. We founded the Green Schools Campaign to give students a tangible opportunity to make change in our school communities.

Why Schools? Why Students?

You often hear that ‘youth are the future’. Youth *are* critical to combating the climate crisis because we are the generation that will inherit the world. We are the future leaders, experts, and changemakers. So, if youth are the ones being impacted by the present decisions, why don't we get to voice our opinions and ideas?

In order to make this change, we need to be active, persistent, and organized. By amplifying our voices, we can improve our current political climate.

Organizing teaches skills that can't be taught in a classroom. The Green Schools Campaign is a place to practice being active community members and develop skills in public speaking, writing, effective communication, time management, planning, leadership, and organization skills. By developing these skills, students empower themselves to work more effectively, facilitate conversations with change-makers, and mobilize peers in support of resolution.

Why do we target schools?

Schools produce significant greenhouse gas emissions and spend enormous amounts on energy. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Energy, “schools annually spend \$8 billion on energy, and emit an estimated 72 million metric tons of carbon dioxide—equivalent to the output of 18 coal plants, or more than 8 million homes” (Lieberman, 2022). An analysis from Stanford University found that “educational institutions account for approximately 11 percent of energy consumption by U.S. buildings and 4 percent of the nation's carbon emissions” (Garthwaite, 2019). As major emitters, schools hold significant potential in curbing global emissions and inspiring other institutions to do the same.

Furthermore, extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change present barriers to education for many students. For example, in the fall of 2021, several extreme weather events in just one month led to closures affecting 1.1 million U.S. students (Gallagher, 2021). These

closures will only increase as climate change worsens. Continuing to pollute the atmosphere at the same rate is counterintuitive to schools' purpose of education; a wide scale energy transition is essential to ensure students are receiving the education they need.

Schools serve as vessels for student empowerment and intergenerational collaboration. We spend eight hours a day, five days a week, 180 days per year in school from ages 5 to 18, oftentimes longer. We can make our schools better by equipping can fostering lifelong learning by equipping students with knowledge, opportunities to explore our passions, critical thinking skills, and the ability to adapt to our ever-changing world. Through the Green Schools Campaign, we can transform our schools into beacons of community, hope, democracy, circular learning, and climate justice. This starts with youth leading a campaign in their school and working with their teachers, faculty, community members, and school district board members to develop and pass a resolution in favor of renewable energy. It is time for us to take back our power and define our futures in school, in our communities, and in the world.

Work Cited

- ['It Has to Be a Priority': Why Schools Can't Ignore the Climate Crisis.](#)
- [Why Schools Need to Look at Their Own Carbon Footprint](#)
- [What happens when schools go solar?](#)
- [Facing Budget Shortfalls, These Schools Are Turning to the Sun](#)

Why should school districts take action?

1. Renewable energy saves money. However, most schools lack the knowledge and funding to update their infrastructure. Luckily, there are monetary resources present for schools interested in making the transition
2. Schools can better serve marginalized groups, such as low-income and students of color, who disproportionately feel the impacts of the climate crisis.
3. Schools have a moral obligation to the climate, community and its students – students shouldn't feel like their own school is throwing their generation under the (school) bus.
4. Real world civics in action – students learn by watching change happen in their own community
5. Becoming Leaders on Climate Action – Commitments passed into policy put your district on the map for sustainability and great relationships with your students. Students have more respect for schools that actively prioritize student well-being.

Our Structure

We want to create change that is visible in our own communities and schools. Instead of national level advocacy, the Green Schools Campaign focuses on local, grassroots advocacy, allowing us to create schools that better serve us. While our changemaking is local, we act as a national network of campaigns, connected to foster collective learning, growth, and movement building.

While GSC National provides resources and support, our campaigns operate as independent decision makers because we believe each campaign team knows their school and community best. Our team is here to support as you lead. We aim to strengthen our relationships by fostering a network of young activists, local-initiative mentorship, and cross-organizational collaboration. Through this network we hope to provide:

- the resources and platform necessary to empower, train, and collaborate with other young activists to fight for an Equitable, Just, and sustainable future.
- Incubator Program: Join a Cohort of young activists in developing leadership, mentorship, and resources to pursue endeavors
- 1:1 Mentorship & Peer Support Coaching

On the local level, the Green Schools Campaign hopes to build and strengthen personalized relationships with campaign leads, their members, and ensure their voices are heard at all levels of structure while being provided with one-on-one support. This looks like:

- Developed trainings/resources and experienced members in starting a GSC campaign or other campaign organizing
- Regular weekly campaign-team-coordinator meetings (Local, Regional, and National/All Member meetings)
- One-on-one mentorship with experienced GSC Staff and Youth leaders.
- Skill-building training sessions

Campaign Organizing 101

Now that you have a general idea of what the Green Schools Campaign is and general organizing theory, we are going to dive into how to organize your very own campaign, step by step. We have broken it into five easy steps that guide you through the general timeline, with helpful insights from our very own Green School Campaign leaders.

What is a campaign? How do you start one?

Step 0: Finding Your Climate Story

Establishing your individual story is critical to starting a campaign. When starting your local Green School Campaign, the bulk of the strategy, campaign building resources, and the end goals are already established for you, making it tempting to simply find a group of people who are interested and then begin checking off the boxes: ✓ find people, ✓ create pitch, ✓ reach out to board members, etc...

We all understand that climate action is important, and we all know that switching to renewable energy is important, but why are **you** pushing for this? What will your campaign bring to **your community**? How can **you amplify** the voices and actions already being done in your community?

It is important to establish these reasons early on in order to ensure the campaign will remain motivated and responsible for progress towards a certain goal. Although the campaign might already be making lots of progress, these goals help members create a culture, environment and tone so their work serves a certain purpose despite change over time.

Step 1: Learning about the Topic: Research, Research, Research

Before starting a campaign, it is important to do some research on both the issue you are working on and the landscape where you will run your campaign. This research will give you important

context to what work has already been done on the issue and which key stakeholders you may work with.

What should you know about your community? Look into what specific climate impacts your community might be facing:

- Are you located next to a factory? A port? A frac pump?
- What effect are these things having on your community?
- Have there been natural disasters recently in your area? Are they connected to climate change?
- What is the history of activism in your areas? Are there any local climate groups that you can connect with that can share some knowledge with you?
- How can you make change?
- Who are your local politicians? Which ones are specific to where you live?
- Who are your local school district's board members?
- Who are the big stakeholders in your community?
- Are there any big companies? Any powerful activist groups?
- What committee does your city council have? Are you able to connect with any of them and learn about the environmental work that they've done?

Step 2: Building a core team

A team of your peers and mentors is the **MOST CRITICAL** group you will gather. These people will share the workload, help you build power, bring new ideas and passion, provide a community of support, and more!

Who and how to recruit?

- Contact friends, classmates, and anyone you think would be interested!
- Reach out to teachers + clubs who are interested in the climate crisis, leadership, social justice, organizing, environmentalism, etc.. Ask them if you can give a quick presentation or announcement to the class or group! This is also a good time to be on the lookout for a supportive teacher to act as a mentor for your group.
- Share on social media
- Reach out to local climate justice organizations and see if they have any youth that would want to work on this campaign with you!
- Put up fliers in your classroom or school
- Set up an interest meeting – have people come, lay out the dream, how they can get involved and make it happen!

Team members should be passionate, excited, and ready to take initiative to get involved and make change. They should be good communicators, collaborative, respectful, and ready to learn/grow. While past organizing, environmental knowledge, and/or leadership experience, is helpful, it's completely optional. We're ready to teach new leaders!

Letter to the Reader: Building a team in a virtual world

By: Ava Acevedo

Building a team during the pandemic definitely had its challenges, but by communicating with teachers and students online we were able to create a far reach! I first created relationships with my local electricity utility manager of my city by emailing him about the campaign and asking about our energy sources. Once he communicated back about steps the city utility was taking toward more renewable energy, I relayed this information to my English teacher via email. In the email, I proposed the initiative to her and asked if she'd be willing to allocate a minute or so of class time for me to present the initiative to the entire class. Also, I suggested that interested classmates could fill out a Google form with their contact information.

From there, we created a team of about 8 people, and designed a presentation to present to about 20 other classes about our initiative, each emailing our teachers (using a template email) [see appendix for more info on this] asking for class time to present. Teachers were super critical in helping us spread our message and goal! From there, we gauged more interest, allowing people to sign up as "allies" for a lower commitment and "team members" for a higher commitment.

Then over summer, we proceeded to meet over zoom, and I conducted one-on-one conversations with members to find out their strengths and interests, and we would create and delegate new tasks based on these interests. For instance, a member who loved doing graphic design suggested creating fun graphics for our campaign, while members interested in writing chose to reach out to our local city newspaper to get more wide attention, and other members who enjoyed walking volunteered to hang posters around campus and town.

Overall, our campaign was strengthened by several elements, including:

- **Online platforms** to build a team and reach a wider audience
- **Collaboration and support from stakeholders**, including the electricity utility manager and my teacher
- **Flexibility in task delegation** based on individual strengths and interests
- **Resonant presentations and following up** with interested individuals

By harnessing collaboration, adaptability, effective communication, and your available resources, you can really smooth out your road to campaign success!

Step 3: Drafting Demands and Creating your Campaign Plan

Now that you have your core team of organizers, it is important to create a **strategic plan** that makes it easy to tell your campaign story to new audiences and ground your team in a shared vision and goals of your work.

A strategic campaign plan is made up of five key elements:

1. **Goals & Demands:** What are you working towards? Why does this matter? What is the key decision that will accomplish this goal?
 - a. Green Schools Campaign's overall goal is to transition schools to 100% renewable energy by 2030. This means there are key demands that can be made of any school or school district;
 - b. Every school and school district are different, so you might have a slightly different set of demands based on your audience and decision-maker, but all

demands should come back to this larger goal of switching schools to renewable energy.

2. Targets: Who has the power to grant your campaign its demands? Who are the other key stakeholders that influence decisions around your campaign?
 - a. Based on Green Schools Campaign demands, it is often the school board who has the decision-making power to make decisions around them, however there are a number of groups like teachers, parents, and community members who might help to influence those decisions.
3. Audience: Who are you organizing? What groups might support your campaign? Who might oppose it?
4. Resources: What resources and support do you need to make this campaign happen?
5. Strategy and Tactics: What actions and steps will your campaign plan to start building support for your demands and pressuring your decision-maker? Why and how are these actions and events effective?
 - a. **Strategy** is a careful, long-term plan for achieving a goal. It defines how someone moves forward to make their vision and mission real via their **theory of change**. Strategy calls for devoting resources, energy, and attention to certain objectives over others. Win or lose, a campaign with a strong strategy builds **power for the movement**. Strategy consists of one long term goal and several short-term goals within.
 - b. **Tactics** are actions or methods used to achieve a goal. In this case, the goal is transitioning your school to renewable energy. Tactics exist to develop the strategy from idea to reality. Tactics are *informed* by and rely upon strategy to achieve their goals.
 - c. There are two general groups of tactics: collaborative tactics & confrontational tactics. **Collaborative tactics** center peaceful communication between stakeholders and organizers, such as petitions and meetings with decision makers. On the other hand, **Confrontational tactics** more aggressively escalate demands and demonstrate the power and passion behind the movement. They include strikes, marches, dine-ins, and more. Almost always, both collaborative and confrontational tactics are necessary for a successful campaign!
 - d. Together, strategy and tactics build **pressure**, build **leaders**, and build **power**, setting the tone and telling the story of our campaign!

Escalating your campaign plan

We recommended starting with collaborative tactics to make your campaign's ask via petition and give your target the opportunity to support before escalating your tactics. Collaborative tactics are often lower-risk and crucial for campaign beginnings. They help build the trust and experience among team members necessary for future, potentially riskier tactics.

If decision makers are supportive early on, that's amazing and makes for a smooth path forward! However, decision makers are likely to resist or express hesitance with your demands. This is where escalation comes in! **Escalation** harnesses consistent pressure from people, money, and media to show decision makers that change is necessary.

Escalation is like a staircase. Taking one big leap to the top isn't feasible, but gradually dialing up pressure shows commitment and a willingness to maintain pressure until demands are met.

Absorption is also an important part of an escalation arc. To prevent burnout following a big escalation/action/tactic a period of absorption following this action is critical. By stepping back to absorb the people, money, etc. you've built you can better channel it to continue climbing up the steps and eventually making the change you are asking for.

Delegating tasks

It's physically impossible to run a campaign all by alone, so it's vital a leader delegates (or distributes) the work and mental strain among several members. Though it's important to keep in mind to assess what the strengths of each group member are. You might delegate one member to keep a document with notes (notetaker position) from every meeting you host and/or attend, while another is in charge of reaching out to the press for publishing and having another handle the social media account. Don't feel pressured to handle every menial task.

Letter to the Reader: Campaign Management

By: Ruthie Heis

The Long Beach Green Schools Campaign started off in August of 2020 with set goals; transitioning LBUSD off of fossil fuels and onto 100% renewable energy in the electricity sector by 2035 and in all other energy sectors including HVAC and busing by 2040. We first met with Board Members of the Long Beach Unified School District who supported our campaign's ideas and overarching goals but didn't want to claim that they publicly supported our guidelines. I don't blame them, our timeline was radical and difficult to achieve without the necessary funding. The board knew that LBUSD did not have the necessary funds to make this transition happen. Especially since we first started meeting with LBUSD staff in the middle of the pandemic. We were told that our initiative's goals were not a priority until students returned to the classroom. So, in the meantime we organized the community. One thing LB GSC learned best was that community support will make or break your initiative's ability to pressure the district you are working with. When students returned in early spring of 2021, our district contacts were still slow to reply. We continued organizing the community in opposition. It worked, our voices were heard across LBUSD and across all of Long Beach. But in this new season of meeting with LBUSD Facilities and other staff, we learned another important lesson: too much opposition will cause your school district to dismiss your voices. And in over-exaggerated opposition, it was difficult for both of us to brainstorm and find solutions we could agree on. We refused to move past the idea of passing a resolution while district staff that would not hold any weight over the Board's decision making. We spent all of 2021 feeling dismissed and not valued as students. It wasn't until we decided that compromising was easier than constant fighting.

The Long Beach Green Schools Campaign ended up passing our policy a couple months after we decided to pivot our plan and take a different course of action. In fact, we ended up presenting this policy twice for approval, once getting sent back for further revision. This rejection is exactly what the LB GSC student team needed at the moment, however. After our concerns for a need for time-marked goals were dismissed on the basis of approving the board, we gave public comment before the vote on the policy. The board heard us and affirmed our

concerns, then forced their staff to revise the policy to include our suggested timeline. After months of feeling dismissed while working with district staff, this moment was immensely validating and rewarding. It also marked the beginning of a new culture for LBUSD. Before the LB GSC team forced our way into the legislative system, the district had never worked with stakeholders on such a level before. LB GSC students set a new precedent that LBUSD expanded on in the next school year where students were brought into professional settings to provide direct insight on policy. This new system worked so well, they included students in seven more coalitions.

Although the LB GSC achieved great things, mistakes had to be made for us to grow. I can share the importance of actively training members to take on higher skill responsibilities because it was difficult for LB GSC to do so. Throughout the two years of working with the district to pass our policy, we spread our team very thin. Consistently the same people were taking on the same roles, which burnt people out quickly. Therefore, only a select few remained with the majority of the workload for the entire process. This allowed only that top group to grow in skill. However, in order to incorporate other students, we would've had to hold group trainings or go out of our way to train these individuals since we worked on such a vertical structure. This was not within capacity for us. This is why it is incredibly important to have older mentors to fill the gaps student capacity leaves. Because we failed to train students not in the direct core team, the LB GSC had a hard time continuing after post the passing of policy 35101.1. The students in the direct core team had been with GSC the longest and therefore had the most skill, but this unfortunately meant that most of them graduated after the policy was passed. Since we had failed to train a younger generation, our group could not survive student turnover. This bottle-necked our size and productivity. Granted, this change came at a season of low activity for the LB GSC. I still am struggling to accept that campaigns grow and diminish as they pass through different seasons of success. One way to survive the ebbs and changes of a campaign is to provide enduring consistency. Consistency builds trust. Maintaining a schedule and a structure keeps people involved throughout time. By setting a meeting time, you are creating an expectation that you have to fulfill and maintain. You want people to expect to join you on a designated time every week so that they can pitch in. Consistency is easier to keep in the school year, when you can follow a schedule that supports your school club base to core team structure. Prepare for the summer to the best of your ability and plan for productivity to be low. Mistakes are easy to make once or twice, but overtime they become consciously allowed. Have a team keep you accountable and keep yourself accountable as well. It is just as important to care for yourself than it is to care for others. So, if need be, taking a rest from managing can be a wise decision.

Step 4: Building and Mobilizing Support

In addition to having a core team of organizers, it is important to also build a base of support and continue building up new leaders. This is important because with more leaders your campaign has more capacity to put towards building a stronger movement. There are a number of key tactics to build up community support and a base of young leaders:

One to Ones (1-1s) are a critical organizing technique to recruit, retain, and develop new members. They are a scheduled, intentional conversation you have with someone about their values, vision, life, and motivations. 1-1s serve to develop the person's relationship to organizing

and building power with us, obtain information, and uncover their self-interest (described above). You should also always come out of a one-on-one with clear next steps for each person.

This might look like asking them to head or help you on a project or event, rotating meeting facilitators, or expanding your leadership team to include more roles. Leadership is much more than a position, but sometimes giving people a role can empower them to take responsibility and step up to a role.

Remember – everyone is constantly learning, even you. Coaches and mentors should be receiving feedback from their mentees because feedback is a gift and leadership development is a circular process.

Everyone has a role to play. If they may be relatively new to activism or action toward the campaign's focus, they are still welcomed to join, develop as a leader and be a strong connection that improves the overall work of the organization.

Storytelling & Inspiring Hope: Storytelling is key in all aspects of organizing. On a fundamental level, we are all able to connect with each other through the common ground of a shared home. By sharing our own stories and uplifting the stories of others, people are able to relate and be inspired to take similar actions.

We are constantly bombarded with gloom and doom caused by the media and inaction of our political leaders. Centering of climate optimism is essential to building strong relationships and motivation for people in the community. Pushing forward hope for a better world is a vision we all strive for and connecting people on that positivity enacts action.

Social Media: Always utilizes the tools and resources you have. Social media and technology are the topping platforms in engaging youth and sharing information. This may look like creating posters, videos, or stories to reach a large audience. Social media can also be used for individual outreach whether that is reaching out to similar organizations to collaborate and share events or sharing your posts with individuals.

Letter to the Reader: Strikes and Actions (Natalia)

March 25th, 2022, A Global Day of Action to advocate for #PeopleNotProfits, honing into the destruction of the oil industry and the desperate need for a clean, equitable, and renewable energy transition. This is one of many mobilizing events I have been able to help facilitate alongside other amazing organizers.

As a highly introverted teenager, it was a struggle to ever consider myself as someone taking a leadership role in large actions. However, as I grew more comfortable and found a community within the climate movement, I found my voice in advocacy. There is nothing more powerful than using your voice to connect, storytell and mobilize people to take action. An example of this is our March 25th Climate Strike, a strike built by the power of two young activists, 40-day time limit, limited funding and adult supporters. In the beginning stages of planning strike, the foundation conversation we had to have was, What is the message? What voices do we want to uplift? Who are we calling to take action? For this particular event, we decided to focus on uplifting the voices of the youth, the generation who will be most affected by climate change,

and demanding for our San Diego community leaders to make a statement of solidarity and call to action for:

1. STOP Approving new fossil fuel permits
2. DROP all existing fossil fuel production through a just and timely transition
3. ROLL out 3200 ft Health & Safety Setbacks between neighborhoods and new and existing oil & gas wells.

After setting the logistical components of the strike, our main focus was getting people there. We built a toolkit, flyers, social media posts and sent out emails to get the data and mission on people's calendars. We strategically reached out and called high school administration, environmental clubs, local organizations, and personal connections to get the word out. This process is tremendously tedious, however, essential to building your campaign's people power and ability to communicate the message of the day of action. Following our recruitment stages, the next focus is curating demonstration materials and day-of-event schedule (Speakers, postcard writing to legislators, etc.) to maintain the viability of our efforts. We were able to prepare for this by hosting an art-build with local friends at one of our houses or park. Finally, as the day approached we continued our efforts of outreach and coordinating with confirmed invites if they had any needs.

March 24th, 2022. A day of action that I will always hold dear, after the long efforts of my fellow organizers and myself, there was no greater feeling than seeing hundreds of the students marching from their school to the strike location chanting. As people flooded in, we proceeded with scheduled activities and also were flexible based on the feeling in the moment. At the end of the day the action was successful and also a learning moment. Following the strike, I personally experienced burnout and reflected on ways that we can improve our process to make sure it goes more smoothly in a future run. It's essential to never give up hope in something you are passionate about, even when motivation can feel at its all time lows and how the love and support of fellow organizers who share your motivations and values are the backbones of any actions.

Step 5: Meetings with School Board members + Developing Relationships

One of the most important people to connect with is a supporting **school board member**. You'll want to identify a board member who will advocate for you and your team and help ensure that your resolution gets on the docket.

Identifying School Board Members

Identifying school board supporters can be a challenge. A good place to start your search for information about members is the **school board's website**, likely in the "About" section and the board members' bios. You can also explore their **social media** activity for posts they support, create, and uplift. Look out especially for any of their language, history, and advocacy aligning with **environmental or social justice work**. It's also helpful to research **previous pieces of legislation** that the board member voted on, which can help predict how supportive they will be of your resolution.

Below is an example of a good candidate for championing your resolution, taken from the website of San Diego Unified School District. Some key indicators are underlined in green:

BIOGRAPHY

■■■■■ native San Diegan, born at University Hospital (now UCSD Hillcrest) and brought home to UCSD's Mesa Grad Student Apartments. Raised in La Jolla, California, he attended La Jolla Elementary, Muirlands, and La Jolla High, did his undergraduate degree at UC Berkeley, and came home to do his Ph.D. in Anthropology at UCSD.

■■■■■—both of whom attend Torrey Pines Elementary, where he serves on the School Site Council and Site Governance Team. He also serves on the La Jolla Town Council, as well as numerous local boards, including the [San Diego River Conservancy](#), San Diego International Sister Cities Association, and Volcan Mountain Foundation. He is a former member of the [Executive Committee of Sierra Club San Diego](#) and the [Board of the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego](#).

■■■■■ has spent the last 5 years helping to organize and moderate workshops and trainings for school board trustees, educators, and community members across the County, on issues like learning loss recovery, community schools, science-based closure and re-opening, social and emotional learning, Board-Superintendent dynamics, Special Education, and district budgeting.

■■■■■ is [Senior Advisor for Land Use, Education, and Environment](#) and manages Intergovernmental Affairs for San Diego County Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer. He's also a Lecturer in the UCSD Anthropology Department, where he's wrestled with lesson planning, remote learning, grading, and maintaining student motivation and engagement in the context of the pandemic. When he isn't working, teaching, or doing common core math with his kids, ■■■■■ is an ocean swimmer, avid hiker, and California native plant enthusiast.

The board member's participation in environmental initiatives indicates that they may be an ally. Not all board member bios are as detailed as this one, but most contain at least a few clues.

There's often a single board member (if any) leading district-wide climate legislation. If you identify several potential supporting candidates, explore their past votes to determine which member **introduces** the legislation. If there is an environmental committee, seek out which board member **leads the committee** or is actively involved. If you struggle to identify a single candidate, you can either do more research into all of the school board members or schedule introduction meetings with a few potential candidates to gauge their reaction to your resolution. Ideally, the best candidate will hold a leadership position on the board. If you have a potentially-supportive **student board member** on your school board, you can ask for their help in identifying the best potential supporters.

Reaching Out

Once you identify your school board member, the next step is to reach out and **schedule a meeting** with them. In the next session, we dive into email etiquette for reaching out to school board members. Your first meeting with the school board should be with the person likely to champion your resolution. This way, they can give you insights on **how supportive** the other school board members will be. After that, you can begin organizing meetings with the rest of the school board and following through on any action items the supporting member requests.

In 2022, the Long Beach Green Schools Campaign, passed a policy committing Long Beach Unified School District to rapidly transition off fossil fuels. However, this was only possible after 2 years of continuous work. Passing the actual policy took an extreme amount of effort, including building relationships with board members, working on our pitch, and reaching out to the press to publicize our efforts.

Intentional Collaboration

Your intentions before even beginning this endeavor are important to establish. It is crucial not to alienate the board members by putting down their current efforts or misrepresenting them. You are a team, and in order to accomplish anything you need to work

together. However, this is different from letting the pressure off them, which will be covered in a later section. You still need to be firm, but not degrading.

Language is key here. It's helpful to use your previous assessment of how supportive this board member is to decide your asks and goals of the meeting. If you are in a board meeting, calling a member directly out for things you don't agree with will always reflect back on you. It may be extremely frustrating to continue to host meetings if officials are uncooperative and slow to change, but it's important to stay polite and to keep pushing your message respectfully.

If you are facing resistance, rather than being aggressive, try holding members accountable in different ways. This can include reaching out to press to document meetings, or continuing to show up at meetings. Or, it could be less of a result of the actual board members, but simply improving your pitch, so be sure to look over all of the possible causes.

Preparing for a Meeting

Preparatory discussions and outlines are crucial to delivering your intentions in a successful meeting. This can start with a meeting beforehand with your student leaders where an agenda, a presentation, and a collective approach is built. Especially as students who might not have the most experience within political spaces, working out your ideas into a polished plan can give a team a sense of security and confidence.

In a pre-meeting, discuss the things you want to accomplish. How do you want to use this person's connections, resources, and power? How important is their support? What is the impact you want to make and what impact can they have for your initiative? Considering this, make an agenda of the topics you want to discuss. With your team, make sure to establish a professional and respectful approach. Through this discussion, you can also delegate who will handle the email relations and close communication with this official. Ideally, this person is someone who is part of the elected representative's constituency.

See resources/appendix for sample agendas.

Crafting and Delivering a Pitch

Select an elected official who is important to the progress of your initiative. This could be a district superintendent, a district board member, a city council member, or a state representative. Create a presentation on the goals of your initiative and make sure to also mention the progress you have made on the campaign already. This can prove your team's credibility and effort. Each slide can include a visual, and in-depth explanation of your ideas. For example, one slide could speak to the benefit your initiative will bring to student health, and another could explain the proven cost-effectiveness. When creating a presentation, discuss the aspects of your proposed change that are proven to be beneficial, but also leave room for the problems that arise within your plan. In addition, you should structure your presentation to foster dialogue between the members presenting material and the elected official. Through this, you can bring a close to your presentation and open up a conversation. Within this dialogue, make sure to take notes on their insights and suggestions.

Whatever the response of the official, keep pushing for their support. If they respond with resistance, utilize their points of conflict to re-adjust your message. For example, reassure them that the initiative's faults are why are you looking for more resources and support. Use their

insight to shed light on the way your timeline is consistently improving through continued research and connections with experts.

How to use your allies/experts

Creating and cultivating relationships with stakeholders is a key tactic key to achieving your campaign goals. Stakeholders in the context of climate activism include climate-focused organizations, community groups, and experts in climate science. In a school district context, employees like teachers and principals are also helpful connections because they are sometimes already connected to elected officials like board members, and can help you set up a meeting. Hence, your connections can help you create more connections.

Another way your allies can be useful to you is when facing resistance from elected officials. As students advocating for change, it is common to be discounted as too young and not knowledgeable enough. In these situations, it can be helpful to bring in an expert in the field who is qualified and can support the feasibility of your goals with facts.

Publicity

Publicity is important to elected officials, since they are accountable to the community and usually are looking to be reelected. Therefore, it must also be important to you. When used wisely, publicity is a tool that you can utilize to achieve your climate goals.

One way to hold elected officials accountable is to publish blog or social media posts when you meet with them. These posts can include a picture (taken with consent) and a brief description of what was discussed during the meeting. If the person you met with made any commitments during the meeting, make sure to include this. Publishing their commitments will make them more likely to follow through, as they do not want to go on the record falling back on their word.

Another strategy is to hold town hall meetings, rallies, marches, or other events that involve the public. Large events like these, especially when covered by the press, are a way to push urgency on elected officials and show that the general public supports your cause. The more community members that want something, the more likely elected officials are to give it their attention. Also, ensure that you invite a press point of contact to your events to raise the campaign's media attention and visibility.

A continued partnership

Consistency following meetings is just as important as in-meeting accomplishments. A continuation of this now-built relationship creates a good image for your initiative and allows for a productive collaboration of resources. Showing public support towards their campaign, regularly turning to them for involvement in different events, and maintaining a continued stream of communication sustains a mutually beneficial political alliance. When building a repertoire and working to overcome obstacles, these connections will serve as vital tools. Running a successful campaign requires a base of political support that these partnerships will build. Even after your initiative has passed, keeping good relations with officials will keep the pressure on them to follow through with what they agreed to. A habit of networking establishes your campaign within the local political field and marks a significant step towards accomplishing climate goals!

Letter to the Reader: Meeting with School Board Members

By: Alli Dangio and Keala Minna-Choe

Alli

June 15th, 2023: the day the San Diego Community College District passed the resolution that I had been campaigning then to pass for the past six months. This success would not have been possible without learning how to meet with the Associated Student Government leaders throughout the district.

Beginning this campaign was something completely new for me, as I had never before done anything similar to this. The first thing I had to do was reach out to someone in a position of power, so that they could tell me if passing a resolution at the district level was even possible. As a student at San Diego Miramar College, I was able to connect with my student government president. After scheduling a time to meet with him, I had to figure out how to talk to him and how to get him to support our initiative. While not the same as talking to a politician or an elected board member, talking to a student rep was just as scary at first. I did not know what level of formality he expected, if he was going to be supportive of the resolution, or even if he was going to be able to help me out.

I realized after the meeting truly how unprepared I was. The meeting went well, mostly because of how supportive he was. He was ready to connect me with the other 3 Associated Student Government presidents at Miramar's sister colleges, and was willing to help me bring the resolution to the Miramar Student Government. During the meeting I struggled to keep the topic focused and to concisely relay the goals of the resolution and the overall timeline of the campaign. I struggle to ask him good questions because I was so nervous, I ended up having to email him later with more. I realized that for this campaign to be a success I needed to learn how to hold my ground and easily converse about the demands of the resolution. So, I sat myself down and fully prepped for my next meeting, which was going to be with all the student government presidents from the district and their advisor

Before arriving at this moment, there were many hoops and setbacks would occur. Not having done anything like this before I had to ask for a lot of help to understand how to get started: who do I reach out to to make this happen? I started by reaching out to student members of the Miramar College Associated Student Government, and was able to get a meeting where we could present the resolution to the Student Trustees of the SDCCD Board. The meeting went really well and all of the Trustees were interested in passing the resolution through their respective colleges' Associated Student Government, along with wanting to get the board to pass it. We left that meeting feeling really excited and energized, thinking we would achieve this goal in no time!

What we did not realize was that we still had a lot of emailing and networking to do to make this happen. Sending emails to our student representatives and not receiving any sort of response for months was definitely something we did not expect. This was proving to be the biggest roadblock thus far, as how do you push for the passing of a resolution if no one even seems willing to have that conversation? Finding one person who we could rely on was the turning point. As students of Miramar College we were able to connect with our ASG president, who was working with us to the resolution on the agenda of one of the ASG meetings. When that day finally came, we were so excited! We were finally going to have the opportunity to present the resolution with the hopes of it being passed, but then the nerves hit: this presentation would be in-person, and high stakes as we may not get another opportunity.

On the day of the meeting, we showed up early, hyped ourselves up, and went in hoping for the best. After the presentation, there was a period where we were being asked questions both about the resolution and the economy of climate change in general, which was something really stressful as these complicated topics are hard to explain in short, high stakes time periods.

In the end, the resolution was passed 8-1, and now San Diego Miramar College is a part of the growing number of entities that have signed on to this resolution. Our next focus is going to be the rest of the schools in SDCCD, then the board itself. The biggest goal we have is to get the resolution passed through the Student Senate for California Community Colleges, which represents all of the community colleges in California.

Keala

My first ever meeting with a school board member was not ideal. I was signed up to facilitate the meeting and had no idea what to expect. It was my freshman year of high school, and it was a few months after starting our campaign. We had done the research and were very well prepared to present our resolution. We introduced ourselves, then it came time for the board member to introduce himself. He started talking. Minutes went by. We only had a 30-minute meeting, but by the time it took him to introduce himself, we had a minute left to present. I, as a facilitator, had failed in my job to keep the meeting on track. We ended up presenting and the meeting took an hour. The school board member later voted on yes on the resolution, but I remember thinking how stressed I was in that meeting. It seemed as if he wanted to talk more about himself than our work.

Since then, I look at how much I've grown from that meeting. I meet with elected officials and their representatives frequently, and do not shy away from asking the hard questions or keeping the meeting on track. In those meetings, I have gotten a lot of practice and have learned how to navigate tough situations. I think the most important message to take away from that meeting is that elected officials are people. At their heart, they are simply people with the same wants and needs as anyone else. Sure, you may have to treat them with a higher status or be more formal, but it is critical to understand the humanity behind advocacy and how sometimes relationships can be the biggest factor in passing resolutions.

We both have learned that in meetings with school board members, it is important to be well prepared and knowledgeable about your topic. My best advice is to prepare hard questions that board members may ask and practice before presenting. Alli's best advice is to find people in positions of power that support your goal, and network with them and their connections as much as possible to ensure your success. Together, we have collectively passed resolutions at San Diego Unified School District, Sweetwater Unified School District, San Diego County Board of Education, San Diego City Council, and San Diego Miramar College. Alli is currently working on passing a resolution at the San Diego Community College District.

Overcoming Obstacles and Roadblocks

Starting a campaign is no easy task. You are going to encounter many challenges, and in this section, we are going to give you resources for how to overcome them some of the most common ones. The most important thing to remember when you are encountering challenges is to take your time. It is very easy to be overwhelmed by the fact that for climate action to be effective, it needs to happen now. This could lead you to feeling defeated if your campaign is taking more time than expected, but the reality is that passing the resolution is not the only measure of

success. What you are doing is creating a stronger climate movement and activating more youth voices. No matter how long it takes, you are still succeeding at taking action.

Building Member Engagement

Campaigns tend to start slow, especially when you are building a team from scratch. You are likely to struggle with building excitement or gathering a good number of committed individuals to join your campaign at the beginning.

However, Environmental campaigns tend to struggle with a loss of momentum after the initial push: you built the team, you assigned roles, you took action, and now you wait for a response. Passing resolutions and public policy can be a long, drawn-out process, and for students with so much else to manage, it is common to lose the motivation to keep pushing. This is entirely normal, even for campaigns run by adults. Below are some ways to keep your team motivated.

- **Group bonding:** one of the best ways to keep your team intact and active is through group bonding. Having a relationship with your fellow activists outside of the campaign setting helps create a strong sense of community, and good team chemistry is essential to running a smooth campaign. Being friends with your fellow campaign members can also make otherwise tedious situations, like board meetings or political seminars, feel more fun and exciting. Fostering this sense of community can look like going out to a restaurant together, hosting debrief meetings after important calls where you can be more informal, or coming up with fun icebreaker questions. Below are more low-cost team-building social options.
 - Team hikes
 - Team dinners
 - Picnics
 - Craft socials (crochet, painting, etc.)
 - Powerpoint presentation nights
 - Thrifting
 - Movie nights
 - Art builds/poster making ahead of events
 - You can find more examples online or through polling your team. Just remember to keep your events fun and lighthearted! These will be great ways to deal with climate and general anxiety and burnout, and ensure that your team knows that they are well supported and valued.

- **Spreading climate hope:** sharing good news about climate advocacy work being done elsewhere is another great way to keep your team motivated. If your team is feeling like their efforts are futile, sharing articles about environmental protection laws being passed or scientific breakthroughs being made can be encouragement that what you are working toward is achievable and worth the effort. It also serves to remind your team of the reason that they joined the campaign in the first place: their passion for making a difference and working towards a more just future. Taking action always feels exciting at first, but then it becomes your normal. Remembering that passion is important for a sustainable campaign.
 - The Green Schools Campaign can be a great source of climate hope. During our monthly general campaign meetings, you will hear from the other branches and

how their advocacy is going. This will give you a chance to hear about successes of other high school advocates, along with what they are struggling with.

Unresponsive and/or Unsupportive Board Members

Another issue that can stagnate your campaign's progress is board members not responding to your requests to speak with them. This can be extremely frustrating to you and your team and make you feel like your advocacy is not being heard. Some possible solutions have been collected below.

- **Be persistent:** Explore different ways of getting in touch with them. Try email, phone calls, or even snail mail. Another way to escalate this issue is to increase the number of people contacting them. This approach is likely to work only at the beginning. If continuing to contact them is still unsuccessful, use your resources. As a student, you might have a connection with someone at your school (a teacher, a counselor, another student...) who may be closer to the board member you have been trying to contact. Connecting with them and asking them to reach out may be more successful at trying to set up a meeting.
- **Give a public comment:** attending public board meetings and giving public comments discussing the importance of climate action is a very effective way of getting the board's attention. Your comment should not be a moment where you call out a specific board member for not responding to your emails, but should be a place where you can pitch your campaign and ask for support. Don't expect a response right then and there from the board, as usually meetings hear one public comment after the other without any response. You should inform the board that you are going to reach out to them with more information and that if they are interested in supporting your effort you would be happy to set up a meeting with them.

Another common roadblock, though it often occurs much later into your campaign, is board members seemingly refusing to pass your policy or resolution unless there are *significant* changes in its content. Sometimes this can be due to the board seeing the goals set out in your resolution as not feasible. It is likely that their reason for being unsupportive has more to do with not Though this can sometimes be due to goals in the policy that the board views as unmeetable in the time frame you set out, you should get a second opinion about your policy to see if this is the case, in this case, we are assuming it is due to the board members being unwilling to make strides to your goal.

If this happens, it's important to keep restarting your pitch. Convince the board that your policy is essential to the well-being of the population the board is meant to be serving. If they are still resistant, build pressure. Send out press about your current efforts and come to each board meeting stronger and with more support. The board cares heavily about its stakeholders, so if they are willing to show their support for your policy, theoretically, it should help convince the board as well. Another important step to take is simply compromising. If it's clear the board is not going to budge, adjust the clauses that are making them reject your policy. Remember, do *not* completely back down from your goal, simply be willing to change it a little.

Letter to the Reader: Addressing Political Pushback with the Leander Green Schools Campaign

By: Angeline Aloysius

“Let me just remind you, you’re not in California anymore. This is Texas.” This was an exact quote I heard from a potential group of allies when I first explained the motivation behind Leander Green Schools Campaign, a GSC initiative I had started in my school district, Leander ISD. My family had just moved from Southern California to Central Texas. Upon transferring into a Texas public school, I decided to start a GSC initiative at this new school district. I was now in, Partially motivated with the knowledge that in the time I had worked with the international Green Schools Campaign, we had not had any schools from Texas sign up to start a GSC initiative.

I knew starting a GSC initiative at a Texas school district would not be similar to the GSC initiatives I had worked with thus far in California. The quote above only served as a reminder. But I felt that if we were to have at least one successful initiative in a Texas district, it could serve as a catalyst for more districts across the Lone Star state to pursue similar renewable energy initiatives.

Within the first few weeks of our campaign, we were able to build up a coalition of students, teachers, local climate leaders and non-profits, energy companies, and even a member of the State Board of Education. It was mind-blowing, really, when we first saw the extent to which we had been able to grow support for an environmental initiative at LISD. But the real challenges started when it finally came time to bring the specific goals of the campaign to the public and address potential implementation strategies.

“Transition LISD to 100% clean renewable electricity by 2030 and all other energy needs by 2040”. This was the one-liner mission of our campaign. Not only did we want to achieve the goals set in this mission, but also we wanted to do so through a primarily youth-led movement. Leander GSC served to be a youth-led initiative that would help achieve the goals of the campaign. These two aspects, the actual renewable goals of the campaign, and the emphasis on being “youth-led”, were the stems of most of the criticism and pushback we received.

On April 7th, 2023, students of the Leander GSC attended our first school board meeting on behalf of the campaign. Six students from three schools in LISD were given the opportunity to speak during the “Citizens Comments” section of the board meeting, with each of us being given three minutes to speak. From where we were sitting towards the back of the conference center, I noticed a parent sitting near us with poster papers and large black markers on their laps. When the board meeting facilitator announced our group and what we were there to speak about for the evening, the parent began writing: “DO NOT BRAINWASH OUR CHILDREN.” She took another sheet of paper: “SCHOOL IS NO PLACE FOR ACTIVISM.” I watched her as she went through six or seven poster sheets, writing messages along the same line, and then distributing them to the parents sitting in the group around her. When these signs were held up, they could clearly be seen and read by the board members seated at the long table at the front of the room. It took us by some surprise when we read some of those signs. We’d often heard about parents with strong opinions trying to assert their control in school board level decision-making. But actually, seeing them in-person, and having those strong opinions now be pointed at something we were very directly involved in, was a different experience.

I think this is when I first realized that despite the coalition of support we had, there were a lot of important people that would ultimately play a role in the success of this initiative who were currently not in support. I was aware that parents had a direct influence on how school

board members decided to vote on different propositions that were on board meeting agendas. So more of our efforts would have to be focused, in particular, towards these parents who did not support our mission.

Addressing concerns regarding the goals of the campaign's mission required an approach that involved addressing certain hard held political opinions. Some of these parents didn't believe in the climate crisis, so they didn't want their kids to be educated on it. This was one of the first times since the start of my climate advocacy journey where I had to explain in-depth the reality and truth of the climate crisis. Having been trained as a climate leader with the Climate Reality Project really helped me with addressing this aspect of political pushback. We invited parents to come to the presentations we gave in classrooms of teachers who generously offered their class time to us. Our presentations became tailored to include hard evidence of the climate crisis, highlighting the drastic impacts that could be seen here in the state of Texas. We also emphasized the positive effects of youth activism, such as the lessons in leadership it would help instill in students, and clarified how engaging in youth activism while in school would not actually take away from the education a student would continue to receive from their school. Changes in mindset weren't immediate. After all, we were trying to change these parents' opinions on a matter that news outlets, research articles, and other sources had not been able to change. However, every new parent that we saw join our coalition provided the motivation to keep going.

Some of these challenges that we addressed as part of Leander GSC were actually opposite of a common trend I'd seen in other GSC initiatives I had assisted with in the past: we initially saw more support from a few of the school board members than we did from some parents. However, through paying attention to exact points of opposition, we were able to stay prepared with pitches tailored to our intended audience, helping address some concerns that opposition had.

Letter to the Reader: Pivoting with the Long Beach Green Schools Campaign **By: Lily Palmer**

The Long Beach GSC's original goal was to pass a resolution committing our school district to 100% clean energy by 2040. This was our basic mission statement that I recited so many times, I didn't even have to think about it. I would rattle it off to anyone who asked. However, while our core goals remained the same, what we accomplished in the end was quite different.

After over a year of trying to pass a resolution, we were making very little progress. Our school district had a tradition of never passing resolutions that came from outside organizations, and they did not want to break this tradition. At one meeting with our district's facilities director, he suggested we look into a recently adopted board policy that committed the district to going green but named no specific goals. The next week, we had completely pivoted, and our main goal was to update this board policy so that it included a commitment to clean energy by 2040.

When this change first occurred, I was left reeling. Despite having been one of the first people in our campaign to hear about this possibility, I was initially dismissive of it, simply because it was different from what I was used to. Passing a resolution felt so vital and central to our vision that I could not conceive of abandoning that. It took some time for me to recognize that the resolution was simply a vessel for an actual climate solution, and that changing the vessel would not change the environmental impact. Once I came to terms with this, I embraced the policy update wholeheartedly. In the end, this was the best decision we could have made,

because we ended up passing the board policy, committing our district to a transition to clean energy.

When to Pivot

If your campaign efforts are stagnating or if you are facing setbacks, it may be time to pivot. This should not necessarily be your first approach, however. It is important to remember that political change takes time, and patience and persistence are vital to achieving it. A pivot should come after you have exhausted one method and it has proved ineffective. At this point, it is likely that trying a different method will be a better use of your resources.

For example, if your campaign's main strategy is primarily focused on protesting, but you have been making no progress, you might consider taking a more diplomatic approach by meeting with your district officials and discussing possibilities more privately. The opposite can also be true: if diplomatic approaches have consistently failed, gathering large crowds and protesting can be effective in showing that you have community support.

Climate Anxiety and the Importance of Radical Optimism

Climate change, coupled with other very apparent issues today, is getting worse and worse. We are burning more fossil fuels every day, and any amount of current action we are taking may feel insignificant. The statistics always seem overwhelming. There is frustration over dates and goals. How are we supposed to be net zero by 2050 if it is likely that we will feel the full effects of climate change by 2030? Why can we only settle on legislation that commits to 30% renewable energy and not 100%?

The news only makes this feeling of intermittent dread worse. It now feels like every day we are witnessing a new climate disaster in some part of the globe, viewing posts and reading articles about people who have lost everything, and wondering if we are next. We have calls to action from activists throughout the globe, and yet it feels like no one is listening. Storms keep increasing, droughts lengthening.

It is very easy to feel hopeless, especially if you are a young person. To realize that the dystopian books one reads may come to fruition, that the future that we currently are preparing for could not exist by the time we are old enough to live it is a terrifying thought. Youth have the most at stake in terms of the climate crisis, which is why we must raise our voices. It is important to note that the feeling of climate anxiety is something that many experience, and you are not alone. By recognizing our emotions as a collective, we can join and turn that fear into action.

It's important that we can inspire more climate optimism, being present in our communities now and creating localized actions. Eco-anxiety is rooted in global scale doom. As an individual, we have limited capacity for what we can give and do based on our circumstances, although local grassroots organizing is the key by coming together as a community and combating this crisis.

What is Climate Anxiety?

Based on research done by [Harvard University](#), Climate Anxiety is defined as, "Climate anxiety, or eco-anxiety, is distress related to worries about the effects of climate change. It is not a mental illness. Rather, it is anxiety rooted in uncertainty about the future and alerting us to the dangers of a changing climate. Climate change is [a real threat](#), and therefore it's normal to experience

worry and fear about the consequences. Anxiety about the climate is often accompanied by feelings of grief, anger, guilt, and shame, which in turn can affect mood, behavior, and thinking.”

This is an important conversation as climate anxiety can be a common feeling among activists and youth. Many people express their feelings and concerns and are able to come together as a community to initiate change. Others, it's important to validate the shared feelings as it impacts our mental and physical health alongside our relationships with people.

Addressing Climate Anxiety

As uncertainty and a loss of control characterized climate anxiety, the best treatment we can provide is action.

- Validate their concerns & support.
- Climate anxiety is shown and expressed through different shapes and forms. It's important to validate whatever someone is feeling, be a person to listen to their concerns and show support in how they want to go along with processing it.
- Facilitate efforts towards advocacy – the anger, grief, and fear we feel can be a motivation to join a local campaign or organization and direct yourself to take community-based actions.
- Take time to educate yourself on solutions and how we can work towards them, along with building eco-friendly habits in your daily lifestyle. The normalization of showing care for our planet through our lifestyle choices is transformative in creating positive impact.
- Spend time in nature or comforting environments.
- It's essential to be in the moment and the action we are taking is to address what is in front of us. Take the needed time and space for yourself in reflecting, journaling, and expressing emotion in the natural beauty of our shared home.

Climate optimism means having hope for fixing the climate crisis. It is easy to say one as hope, but in practice it may be difficult. However, when you look deeper, hope shines in all parts of the planet. It is present in the organizations, leaders, and activists fighting to make the world a better place. It is present in all the steps we are taking, although they may seem small, that will result in large effects. A way to feel hopeful if you are feeling down is to look at all the positive news in the world, because for every bad occurrence there are just as many good changes.

Why is climate optimism so important? The answer lies in your position as a campaign organizer. To have optimism means that your efforts matter. It means that you believe that the work you are doing will make a difference. Instilling hope and optimism into your work is vital to the campaign's function. Hope spreads quickly and the spark that you ignite can spread to others, changing their perspectives on the climate crisis.

Arguably the most important takeaway to resolve climate anxiety is simple: action cures fear. You may notice that the most powerful climate advocates are those who do not focus on doom but spend their energy on creating power and spreading this power to others. So, in doing climate work, you are actively combating climate anxiety and choosing optimism. You are denying the notion that climate change is unfixable and there is nothing that can be done and instead actually

doing something. By acting, you are creating the light that is necessary to fix the climate crisis instead of sitting in the darkness.

It is not easy to always be optimistic. But it is important to keep your head high and continue walking. Encourage those around you, spread the good in the world, and recognize that it is ok to have fears, but we cannot let it embody us. Together, through action and optimism, stopping climate change is possible.

Letter to the Reader: Rebounding from Burnout

By: Lily Morse

After a year and a half of pushing myself to work on environmental activism for 20+ hours every week, while balancing a rigorous high school schedule, moving across the country during COVID to a place where I knew no one, and never taking a weekend or break, I was exceptionally burnt out. I also was depressed, anxious, and desperately without hope. I wanted to give up.

From my first climate justice strike at age 13 until now, at 17, I've given my all, through the wins, losses, tears (both happy and sad), frustration, hope, passion, excitement, hopelessness, and love that makes up youth organizing. I've learned a lot, had the privilege to work alongside inspiring young activists, and connected with amazing friends and mentors. I've loved it, but one can only give so much, until one has nothing left to sustain oneself, let alone give to the movement.

I got into climate justice work because I was terrified for my community, our world, and our future; yet despite thousands of hours of work in climate justice efforts and tangible success, I still felt immense despair and a debilitating burden. Despair was stealing my time, energy, and ability to take action.

It was only through pausing my work, focusing on my mental health, and shifting my perspective by reading ("All We Can Save" was a big influence - would highly recommend it!), mentorship, community discussion, and reflection, that I was able to repel despair. I've started to see being a young person today as a gift; we have an incredible opportunity to reconstruct this broken world. It's our power and privilege, not a burden. When we can see a future for ourselves, we can get to work building it.

Burnout forced me to see a new perspective — recognizing that sometimes the best thing a leader can do is intentionally step back, relinquish my somewhat dictatorial control (oops..), and allow others to step up. When I started delegating responsibilities and power, not just small tasks, the team became dramatically more engaged, empowered, and hopeful. I tried to limit lectures, and instead facilitated conversations. By loosening my hold on the process, space opened for new ideas, perspectives, and passion. The team was the most engaged, energized, empowered, and hopeful than I had ever seen. Also, watching your friends and teammates rise as leaders is one of the most fulfilling feelings.

I had been so distracted by "doing" all the work, because of my intense fear of failure, that I wasn't "leading". Even though my team had always been capable, my old leadership style didn't

allow them to come forward and shine. We've gone on to do a lot that we're very proud of, but I think the most significant impact on me was less about what we did, and more about what we learned. If we are trying to bring a sustainable world, we need to be able to sustain ourselves first. I learned from experience that I can only give so much, until I have nothing left to sustain myself, let alone give to the movement.

Sadly, my experience is not unique; I have watched countless peers and fellow activists fall into this same trap—overworking, being consumed by despair, and eventually burning out. This is why I believe that despair is the biggest challenge we face today. Despair, apathy, and guilt are what fossil fuel companies, and other oppressors, want us to feel, because when we're weighed down by fear, we give up, rather than demanding change. If we can shift our mindset to one of hope, community, and vision we can take action and build our future.

While burnout is debilitating and painful, it taught me something that no amount of reading or lectures could have. Through this deeply personal experience, I've chosen to embrace hope instead of despair. Because I've worked through immense challenges before, I'm prepared to support others through these challenges as well as be able to support myself.

Winning

Personal Story: Long Beach Green Schools Campaign Passes their Resolution By: Rohan Reddy

After two years and six days of patience, hard work, and getting called “the kiddos,” we had finally done it. The room was flooded with green (biodegradable!) balloons and a sea of green shirts cheered, victorious at last. The Board of Education had just passed the first student-led policy in the history of the Long Beach Unified School District.

Board Policy 3510.1, Green Schools Operations — Energy and Sustainability Policy, was passed on August 17, 2022. Being there that day and seeing those grinning faces, hearing those cheers, and feeling the floor beneath me shake as we all jumped up from our seats and hugged each other, all of it contributed to the best feeling I've ever experienced.

The most amazing thing to me that day was the fact that what began as a group of four students at Polytechnic High School grew into a district-wide movement with hundreds of students that succeeded in passing an influential board policy. We attended endless zoom meetings, toiled over emails, collected thousands of petition signatures, spoke at board meetings over 70 times, and all that work culminated in a major change in our city.

The School Board meeting began with an opportunity for public comment. We had done this numerous times before, but this time was different. For the first time, we were given the yellow papers that meant our topic was “on the agenda” of the school board meeting! The student speakers reflected on the two-year journey to the point we had arrived at and celebrated all the progress that we had made. We thanked the School Board and Facilities Team for working with us so closely and urged them to vote yes and finalize our win. Then came the time for the Board Members to vote. First we heard four “Ayes,” then no “Nays,” and finally a crowd of students shouting with joy.

As the core group of students filed into the front of the room to take a picture with the School Board members who unanimously approved our policy, I felt a strong sense of unity. For once, rather than seeing political obstacles or opposing views clash, I saw everyone working

together against the climate crisis. Political differences and minor disagreements were all put aside and finally we could all celebrate together. All of us: the students, School Board, and Facilities Team, were happy to see one step made towards worldwide change.

Prepping for the Win- Spreading the word

YAY YOU DID IT!! This is an amazing accomplishment and it's now time to celebrate the win. As you are preparing for the big day, it's important to think about how you want to mobilize people, educate about the event, share gratitude to supporters, and next steps for the campaign.

One strategy to uplift the accomplishment is organizing a media storm. This is setting a date, time, and content to be sent out on media platforms. This can consist of social media posts, tweets, blog posts or published op-eds.

Share Gratitude to Allies:

- This is a people power movement, without the people there is no movement. This is a time to check-in, update and share thanks for all the supporters and allies along the way that have helped push forward the campaigns. Especially elected officials and people in power to show you appreciate their support and hope to maintain a long-term relationship to continue to be allies in each other's mission.
- Send out gratitude notes
- Create a video of progress/thank you
- Check-in individual and establish long-term connections and support
- Share intended next steps for the campaign

Team debriefing:

Before and after the win, set up a time for the team to debrief and reflect on the campaign. Here are some things to consider in structuring this conversation and next steps:

Defining Next steps:

- Your team has accomplished their goal and are ready to celebrate a win. This win can also just be benign to facilitating similar processes in other local communities or applying team efforts to another project you feel passionate about.
- Take Time to reflect on the win and the campaign process as a whole.
- Make sure to consider team capacity, leadership team changes, and group interest.

Personal Story: The Long Beach Green Schools Campaign

By: Emma Huynh

The nature of the Green Schools Campaign forces youth to put themselves in positions where we challenge authority. For the Long Beach campaign, I experienced struggles spanning from maintaining communication with the district leaders to feeling patronized by the way they underestimated us at times.

In terms of the Long Beach campaign, we faced quite a few setbacks. From the beginning of the campaign in 2020, our goal was to pass a resolution document that would affect change by 2030. Over the course of 2 years, this original goal was adapted to make it more feasible for LBUSD to accomplish.

I started to work with the campaign in the summer of 2021, the beginning of my junior year. I dove head-first into working with them, volunteering for small responsibilities so that I could learn as I worked. That year, I had made the decision to stop playing soccer for my school, and to focus on my studies and other passions. On a personal level this was a very difficult decision for me, especially when it came to the choice where I stopped playing soccer altogether all together around March. This choice, however, allowed me to dedicate more time to the Green Schools Campaign.

Starting in September 2021, I sat in meetings with the “core team” as they spoke to various district leaders, observing the sequence of events, their conversations, and the outcomes of the meeting. We hosted debrief meetings that followed the more important calls to discuss how we felt about what was discussed and air out what we felt should happen next. One of the most frustrating elements of these meetings was the perception that the student leaders of the campaign weren’t credible. In observance of the tone which the district members spoke to us, I can say with confidence that a majority of the time their words were laced with skepticism and condescension. Despite our frustration, we needed their help to be successful in our goal, so to overcome this aspect we decided to bring in people whose presence would validate our argument. Adult leaders from the Sierra Club, the Sunrise Movement, and some sustainable energy companies began sitting through our meetings, chiming in when needed. Parents of the Green Schools team began to help us bring our points across, and a few times we invited an environmental lawyer to help us reason with the district members.

Next Steps

After celebrating a victory, or deciding to change focus, your main initial goal should be to **keep your power**. You successfully built power, and you want to keep using it to make change. There are many ways to do this and many different campaigns that your group can support.

Identifying the need to pivot / Deciding to shift focus

You’ve reached out to your district’s board, and they shot you down. You held school rallies, made your voices heard, and tried again, only to get the same result. It can be extremely discouraging when this happens, but don’t fret! This may mean that for your specific district it will take more pressure over time to do something. So how can you create that pressure? Through shifting your focus to another campaign/need in your community related to climate justice. The next section will focus on how to work together to identify what exactly this is.

Identifying the new campaign goal

To keep your power you need to focus it: people get distracted and move on if they are not kept engaged. To identify the new focus it is important to keep a few things in mind:

- **Include as many people as possible in the brainstorming process.** This may mean that you have multiple sessions over a week or so, but ensuring that everyone feels they had a say in the new focus is crucial to maintaining the most amount of people through the

shift. Besides from your team members, be sure to reach out to mentors and people who may want to get involved in the next chapter of your campaign.

- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** Do your research on current campaigns local to you. If any align with the goals outlined during your brainstorming session, reach out and connect with them!
- Use connections you already have to find a new focus
- **Don't forget about GSC.** Whether you were successful in the passing of a board resolution to transition your school or not, there is more you can do.
- If you were successful, you will need to make sure that the board actually follows through. For example, LBGSC is one of the most recent successful campaigns, but they have been waiting for 6 months for their board to actually set up a task force to actually begin the transition process. It is important that even if your campaign decides to shift their main focus, you do not forget to continue to keep your school board accountable
- You have gained extremely valuable knowledge through passing this resolution through your board. Another in-between activity that would allow you and your team to increase your impact is to **collect your stories.** Gather your team and ask them to reflect on and write down things that they wished they had known before beginning the campaign, things that went good and things that could've gone better and what advice you would give to a campaign that is just beginning.
- If you were unsuccessful, you can use any new or different campaigns to gain more power, visibility, and credibility in order to return to the original goal one day. Coming back with more student power and experience may result in a different, more positive outcome.
- **Focus on team bonding through the shift.** When campaigns go through a re-vamp, there may be a bit of a lull in activities causing people to begin to trickle off. To avoid this, having hybrid brainstorming sessions is important, but so are 'socials', or times specifically to form team connections. Going on team hikes, having movie nights, or doing any type social activity will be important to give the new start extra power.

Conclusion

Yay you read our book! Now we need to write something inspirational to put here....

Green Schools Campaign – Testimonials from our mentors

*As a trained Climate Reality Leader and mother of two, I was looking for a way to make a big impact on the climate crisis in my own community. After being introduced to the 100% Committed campaign, I knew exactly where to start. Both of my kids are students in the Los Angeles Unified School District, which is LA's **largest energy consumer** and the **second largest school district in the country**. I thought, what if we could get them to commit to transitioning to 100% clean, renewable energy? Even though I knew it was an impossible ask, I joined forces with members of Climate Reality Los Angeles, and after nearly a year of planning, outreach, advocacy, negotiation, and building political will, we finally succeeded. On December 3, 2019, our team was able to get our resolution passed! The district agreed to transition 1,100 school sites and 1,303 school buses off of fossil fuels, decrease waste and offer opportunities for climate education, and form a task force to hold them accountable. My best advice for anyone wanting to create a similar campaign is to build a strong team,*

do your research, be prepared to pivot when you hit a roadblock, build coalitions, rest when you're tired, and keep showing up. Our kids deserve a livable planet!

- Sybil Azur (LAUSD parent, writer, community organizer)

During my tenure as co-chair of the Los Angeles chapter of the Climate Reality Project, I had the good fortune to work on the campaign to persuade the Los Angeles Unified School District to pass a resolution to commit to transition to 100% clean renewable energy. Joining other climate leaders of the Los Angeles chapter, we spearheaded a rigorous, determined campaign that included meeting with LAUSD board members, elected city officials, renewable energy experts, the local utility and students and teachers from across the district. As with any large bureaucracy, we were met with a lot of resistance. Rallying together, building a strong coalition of allies, we worked in solidarity and eventually prevailed. My only advice: Never give up! Our children, the generations yet to come and the rest of creation that we share planet earth with are depending on our tireless resolve.

-Michael Zelniker (filmmaker, climate leader)

As a mother, I was deeply worried about the future habitability of the world for future generations. At the 2018 Climate Reality Training, I did not acquire the answers as I had hoped, and instead gained something more valuable-- an inspiration to fight for change within the sphere of my own influence. When we first envisioned all of LAUSD schools and facilities transitioning to 100% renewable, everyone said it was not possible. Change starts with an impossible dream, but with enough minds, hearts, and hands on the prize, the impossible will become possible.

-Mabel Wong, (LAUSD teacher and parent)

Joining GSC National

We want your input! Running a Green Schools Campaign instills rich experience and knowledge upon those who run it. We would be thrilled to have you on our national team working to directly develop and support our campaigns, create new resources, manage our coalition, and so much more. If you're interested in getting involved with Green Schools Campaign at a national level please email info@greenschoolsnow.org .

Connect with Us

Instagram: [@greenschoolscampaign](https://www.instagram.com/greenschoolscampaign)

Website: [greenschoolsnow.org](https://www.greenschoolsnow.org)

Email: info@greenschoolsnow.org

Resources We Use and Love & Glossary

Appendix Draft