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Reading time: 3 mins

Nonprofits Bringing Climate Change Into Classrooms



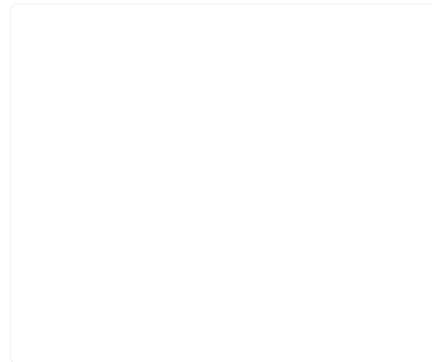
By [Gemma Alexander](#)

© MAY 17, 2022 [climate literacy](#), [climate-science](#),

[education](#), [nonprofits](#)



People can't take action against climate change if they don't understand what it is, why it matters, or what they can do about it. Considering what's at stake, the failure to integrate climate education into science curricula across the country begins to seem like criminal negligence at best. Even where academic science standards call for **climate literacy**, classroom teachers rarely have the resources they need to teach it properly. Fortunately, nonprofits are stepping up to help teachers bring the science behind climate change into the classroom.

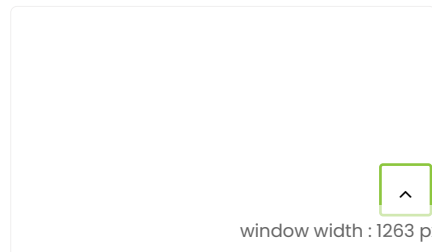
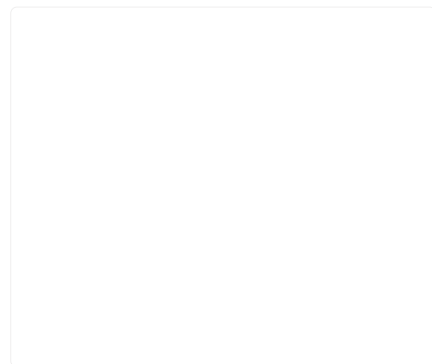


What Do You Think?

Are you considering moving because of climate change?

- I'm researching my options to decide
- Yes
- No

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Climate Education in America

In the United States, each state determines its own **educational standards**. When it comes to climate literacy, those standards aren't very high. Barely more than half (29 states and Washington, D.C.) have science standards that include human-caused climate change. Fifteen states require climate change but don't specify its cause. Five states only require climate change instruction in high school electives. Standards in Pennsylvania do not address climate change at all. Even in states that have adopted Next Generation Science Standards (the most common set of standards that requires climate science) **test scores indicate** fewer than a third of students actually meet the learning standard.

Few teachers learned climate science when they were in school, which leaves them at a disadvantage when trying to locate and evaluate materials for their students. That's where nonprofits come in.

EarthGen

Operating in Washington state, where climate education is mandated, **EarthGen** is a nonprofit that aims to teach kids about the environment and equip them to take action to protect it. Originally a certification program for student Green Teams to earn recognition for sustainability improvements on campus, they expanded to offer customizable K-12 science programs. These programs always include an action component that enables young people to have an impact in their own communities. Students have built rain gardens, created no-idling policies for school pickup, and demanded district-wide composting programs. In keeping with the programs' focus on equity, all EarthGen services and materials are offered free of charge. EarthGen also offers free teacher training illustrating climate change through locally relevant impacts. The training format models effective teaching strategies teachers can use in their own classrooms.

Planet Protector Academy

The **Planet Protector Academy** is a unique digital-led classroom-based program in which kids become "apprentice" Planet Protectors. They assign students "superhero missions" to challenge their families to adopt more sustainable behaviors at home. Each hour-long module addresses one aspect of climate action – such as home energy use or waste reduction – accompanied by a mission to make changes at home. Although the organization is based in Canada, they also

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support U.S. schools with materials that meet Next Generation Science Standards.



Beetles

A program of the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California, Berkeley, [BEETLES](#) (which stands for Better Environmental Education, Teaching, Learning & Expertise Sharing) provides professional learning resources for outdoor instruction. They design materials primarily for residential outdoor science schools. But the materials have been successfully adapted to a wide variety of education settings including schoolyards and school gardens.

National Geographic

Among its myriad other media and educational programs, National Geographic offers [The Geo-Inquiry Process](#). It provides an online training program and educator resources tailored to different ages. The resources help teachers use case studies to illustrate the ways human and natural systems interact, and how to use that understanding to make smarter choices.

The National Environmental Education Foundation

The [National Environmental Education Foundation](#) (NEEF) has a stated mission to cultivate an environmentally conscious and responsible public. Among their many programs are three that specifically focus on K-12 education. Greening STEM provides free materials and educator toolkits, National Environmental Education Week celebrates environmental education, and Climate Superstars is an online environmental challenge for middle school students to learn how they can



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take an active role in caring for the environment.

What Parents Can Do

Parents can start by looking up their state's science and social studies [standards](#). If climate change isn't a required component of the curriculum, write to your [representatives](#) in support of better standards. Don't ignore your local school board elections. States set the standards, but the selection of the specific curricula used takes place at the local level. Contact your child's teacher to find out what they are teaching. If they need support to help teach climate change, then share these nonprofit resources with them. Offer your child [books about the environment](#) to read outside of school, too.

Even the best schools can't make time spent in nature a part of your child's lifestyle. Providing exposure to the complex beauty of the natural world may be the most important thing you can do to inspire your child to care about and take action for the environment.

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Reading time: 3 mins

[We Earthlings: Do This Before Recycling Your Hardback Books](#)



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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