

U.S. Department of Education Sustainability Plan

2022



December 2022

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1. Department of Education (ED) Sustainability Plan Summary

The U.S. Department of Education (Department or ED) is committed to meeting or exceeding the standards outlined in the Executive Order 14057. As part of that commitment, ED prepared an action plan to build a long-term strategy for reducing its environmental impacts by:

- Improving facility designs that incorporate more natural light, are more space efficient, and increase collaborative spaces
- Ensuring all projects follow Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and Energy Star appliance practices
- Ensuring furniture, fixtures, and equipment procurement and installation meet LEED requirements outlined in OEQ 4.5 Low Emitting Furniture or ANSI/BFIMA X7.1-2007 indoor air quality
- Ensuring disposal and decommissioning of space is done through proper channels and re-using excess furniture to the maximum extent possible
- Advancing sustainable procurement
- Personnel training
- Upgrading agency vehicle fleets to Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEVs)

2. Priority Actions Towards Goals

A. 100 Percent Carbon Pollution-Free Electricity

All property ED occupies is leased by the General Services Administration (GSA). There are currently no leases in place that provide 100 percent Carbon Pollution-Free Electricity environment. However, all new projects are LEED Gold or higher.

B. 100 Percent Zero-Emission Vehicle Fleet

The Department fully complies with the current Executive Orders and GSA mandates on transitioning to a zero-emission fleet. During fiscal year (FY) 22, eligible replacements were updated to either Zero Emission vehicles (PHEV/ZEV) or hybrids, with more replacements taking place in FY 23. Forward-looking strategies include:

- Adherence to the FY 22 Zero-Emission Vehicle Planning Requirements
- Eliminating underutilized vehicles
- Increasing the acquisition of ZEVs
- During FY 22, ED installed electric vehicle charging stations and has plans for more in FY 23

C. Net-Zero Emissions Buildings, Campuses, and Installations

As noted above, ED resides in all leased buildings through the GSA. However, to work toward reducing emissions, ED is reducing its real estate footprint through implementation of new workspace standards, supporting initiatives for remote work, and relocating from commercial leases to Federal buildings. All ED construction renovation projects associated with these efforts are LEED Gold or higher.

ED established a Blanket Purchase Agreement for Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment in which only environmentally responsible products are purchased and installed. The vendor conserves materials and natural resources, uses clean technologies in manufacturing, and has achieved certifications from third party organizations such as GREENGUARD and Smart Certification. This program represents between \$3 million and \$5 million commitment annually towards sustainable acquisitions.

i. Design and Construction for Net-Zero Emissions

ED, in partnership with the GSA, uses the LEED rating system as a framework for healthy, highly efficient, and cost-saving green buildings. Architects, engineers, and construction contractors must submit plans and product data as official Environmental Product Declarations (EPD) and Health Product Declarations (HPD) before products are purchased and installed.

ii. Increasing Energy Efficiency

As part of LEED design standards, all fixtures installed are high efficiency, LED lighting, Energy Star appliances and office equipment. ED is also investigating the installation of a photovoltaic cell project on the roof of its headquarters in Washington, DC.

iii. Increasing Water Efficiency

As part of LEED design standards on all ED renovations, all fixtures installed are high efficiency, low flow, and low flush devices in all restrooms and pantries.

D. Reducing Waste and Pollution

In compliance with LEED waste design guidelines, a construction waste management plan is submitted for all projects which identifies the sources of waste, the chain of custody flow of materials, and waste diversion goals. The percentages of debris diverted from landfills or incineration through extraction, harvesting, and recovery are calculated as the “capture rate” in the waste report at the conclusion of the project.

Through GSA leases, Building Management Operations and Maintenance has exceeded the minimum goal of 50% Waste Diversion (WD) as mandated by EO 14057. FY 21-FY 22 WD increased from 66% to 85%.

E. Sustainable Procurement

ED's established policy is to ensure that, wherever applicable, sustainability clause language is used to satisfy policy and guidance.

- ED encourages acquisition professionals to take sustainability training offered annually
- ED requests annual sustainability briefings from contract awardees to ensure best practices at the vendor level

F. Climate- and Sustainability-Focused Federal Workforce

The Department's approach to sustainability addresses the climate crisis through support and engagement from its most valuable resource, the ED workforce. The Department will provide new employees joining the agency with climate education information for awareness and its focus on combatting the climate crisis using internal controls. The training will provide an overview of key areas concerning sustainability, recommended strategies, and sustainability efforts to include techniques to educate ED's workforce about the challenges to the planet. ED plans to:

- Implement climate education information (CEI) agency-wide to raise awareness among employees about the climate crisis.
- Create and present briefing materials and content to familiarize new employees on sustainability and climate adaptation priorities as part of the standard new employee onboarding curriculum. (Launched September 2022)
- Deliver CEI in on-demand webinars to educate how to combat the climate crisis through adaptation and resilience strategies.

G. Incorporating Environmental Justice

The Department has taken significant steps to address environmental justice, and new programs have been implemented related to sustainable schools at agencies across the Federal government. ED has:

- Clarified guidance about Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act funds to indicate the many ways they can be used to support outdoor, environmental, and sustainability education;
- Designated a Special Advisor for Infrastructure and Sustainability to help drive public engagement, programs, and guidance with consideration to these matters; and
- Held public listening sessions related to sustainability and infrastructure.

H. Accelerating Progress through Partnerships

The Department achieves its mission through its workforce's core capabilities and competencies. To support ED's learning culture, it provides leadership opportunities through external resources and partnerships to generate innovative ideas, enhance leadership capabilities, and provide training and development prospects for ED employees to support strategies to achieve business objectives. The Department identifies specific ED-wide and global competitive leadership training options to continue building a cadre of leaders, closing competency gaps, and supporting employees' professional development.

- The Department’s partnerships with top-tier external development programs afford the ED workforce to carry their business acumen to further heights of productivity and effectiveness when working on government-wide initiatives through a cohort framework.
- Sustainability efforts to reap new gains from policies and practices were installed ED-wide and led by an educated, climate-focused workforce.
- The Department worked to improve its Federal collaboration around sustainable schools, infrastructure, and environmental learning with Federal partners, including EPA, DOE, NOAA, DOI, and others.

3. Progress Examples

100% Zero-Emission Vehicle Fleet

ED is taking priority actions to adhere to the President’s goal of electrifying the fleet. To date, it has installed two dual port charging stations and is working toward replacing 11 of the eligible fleet vehicles with ZEVs and Hybrids. Continued priority actions through FY 23 include additional Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment infrastructure installations and further vehicle replacements.

Climate and Sustainability-Focused Federal Workforce

ED developed a CEI platform that will deliver on-demand webinars to educate how to combat the climate crisis through adaptation and resilience strategies. The Department successfully launched its CEI training program as part of the new employee on-boarding curriculum.

Sustainable Procurement

ED made sustainable procurement a priority when developing contracts and project plans during FY 22 and continued this commitment into FY 23. Wherever applicable, sustainability clause language is used to satisfy policy and guidance.

Section 4. Agency Action on E.O. 14057 Requirements

A. Climate- and Sustainability-Focused Federal Workforce. (E.O. Sec. 401, M-22-06 Sec. IV.B.2)

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B. Incorporating Environmental Justice (E.O. Sec. 402)

The Department has taken significant steps to address environmental justice, and new programs have been implemented related to sustainable schools at agencies including DOE and EPA. ED, however, does not have environmental education or school infrastructure role efforts to ensure equitable access to healthy, safe environments. This limits what it can do to ensure equitable access to healthy school environments. Nevertheless, equity is central to the ED mission, with most grant programs targeted toward underserved communities.

C. Accelerating Progress through Partnerships (E.O. Sec. 403)

ED participates in multiple interagency efforts related to sustainability and climate that, while closely linked to natural resource agencies' missions, are somewhat more of a subject matter and programmatic reach for education. These include but are not limited to:

- The National Climate Task Force
- Partners on Reducing Lead Levels in Drinking Water in Schools/Child Care Facilities
- President's Task Force on Children's Environmental Health
- Interagency Work Group on Environmental Justice
- DOE's Efficient, Healthy Schools Campaign
- Collaborative efforts with EPA programs and offices

D. Performance Management Systems (E.O. Section 502)

The Department has designated a Special Advisor for Infrastructure and Sustainability to help drive public engagement, programs, and guidance with consideration to these matters. Current metrics are given to ED through the GSA.

E. Agency-wide Strategic Processes (E.O. Sec. 507, M-22-06 Sec. I.D.3.and IV. B.1)

The Department has developed and published an ED-wide climate adaptation plan (September 2021) which includes consideration of each of its principal offices, as appropriate, and incorporates this policy statement. The plan identifies how climate change is impacting the Department’s ability to achieve its mission, effectively operate its programs, promulgate effective policies, and manage its operations. The plan further identifies priority adaptation actions and establishes mechanisms to evaluate progress toward continually improving the Department’s capacity to effectively adapt to current and future changes in the climate. ED produces progress reports on the status of implementation efforts, makes those reports public, and posts them on the Department’s website, to the extent consistent with applicable law.

ED proposed in the President’s FY 23 Budget a new Office of Infrastructure and Sustainability to support schools in creating healthy, safe, sustainable, 21st-century learning environments. This office would oversee a proposed National Clearinghouse on School Infrastructure and Sustainability and administer the ongoing U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools recognition award.

The proposed clearinghouse would provide technical assistance and training to state and local education agencies on issues related to educational facility planning, design, financing, construction, improvement, operation, and maintenance, including green building design and operation practices consistent with the Administration’s commitment to address the causes and consequences of climate change that have been shown to disproportionately affect underserved communities. The clearinghouse would also develop resources and assemble best practices on issues related to ensuring equitable access to healthy, educationally adequate, and environmentally and fiscally sustainable public-school facilities and grounds. The new office would provide additional capacity to engage with multi-agency efforts, education stakeholders, states, and districts.

The Department has created a core internal working group on matters related to school sustainability and infrastructure that meets biweekly and a cross-ED sustainability and infrastructure coordinating group, involving all principal offices, that meets monthly to consider how existing programs might support school sustainability and infrastructure.



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