



Climate Jobs National Resource Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 4, 2022

Contact: Sophia Reuss, sophia.reuss@cjnrc.org, 917-545-2901

**WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCES SCHOOL BUILDING ACTION PLAN AS
UNIONS CALL FOR CARBON-FREE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS**

Labor leaders, Vice President Kamala Harris unveil national action plan to invest in carbon-free and healthy schools, including \$500 million for energy efficiency upgrades, as union-led movement for carbon-free and healthy schools surges

Yesterday, labor leaders joined Vice President Kamala Harris at Thomas Elementary School in Washington, D.C. to unveil the Biden-Harris Action Plan for Building Better School Infrastructure, a national initiative to invest federal dollars in climate upgrades for public school buildings that will slash carbon emissions, support healthier classrooms and school communities, create good union jobs, save school districts money, and advance racial equity.

The White House's announcement builds on the labor-led movement for [Carbon-Free and Healthy Schools](#), as unions in a growing number of states unite to campaign for pro-worker investments in climate-friendly schools that would help states meet climate targets and create thousands of good-paying union careers in under-resourced communities.

The White House's plan includes a \$500 million grant program for investing in energy upgrades and programs to accelerate federal investment in climate-friendly upgrades to public schools and school bus electrification.

A majority of the nation's school buildings are at least 50 years old and require major renovations to deal with issues like leaking roofs, broken air-conditioning, mold or mildew issues, and poor air quality. As a result of outdated energy infrastructure, schools emit as much carbon as 18 coal-fired power plants and use approximately \$8 billion in energy every year. Unions campaigning for carbon-free and healthy schools have highlighted how antiquated school facilities also pose serious threats to academic achievement and good public health outcomes and called for prioritized investment in under-resourced communities of color, where students are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather disasters, asthma, and other climate-related health impacts.

"Unions are uniting behind an ambitious vision for carbon-free and healthy schools. It's been 50 years since we last made major investments in our public schools. Our country's aging school

buildings run on dirty energy and are plagued with problems like lead pipes and leaky roofs that create unhealthy classroom conditions. By decarbonizing school facilities, we can support healthier schools for students and teachers and create pathways to hundreds of thousands of family-sustaining union jobs that help advance equity in under-resourced communities. The growing number of carbon-free and healthy schools campaigns are a powerful example of how labor is building support for a pro-worker transition to renewable energy that will tackle the dual crises of climate change and inequality. The Biden administration's leadership and support for this growing movement is encouraging, and we look forward to working with unions and policymakers to make carbon-free and healthy schools a reality in communities across the country," says **Mike Fishman, President and Executive Director of the Climate Jobs National Resource Center.**

Here's what labor leaders and advocates of carbon-free and healthy schools are saying:

Bridgeport, CONNECTICUT: "For far too long, many public schools in Bridgeport have been neglected due to budget constraints. As Bridgeport neighbors, union members, and public school parents, we know that our students and educators deserve better. That's why we're organizing to win carbon-free and healthy schools in our community. We know that investing in climate-friendly schools can reduce local air pollution, make our schools healthier and safer, and create pathways to lifelong union careers right here in our neighborhoods. With the Biden administration's leadership on schools and a huge amount of federal funding available for school buildings and electric school buses, this is our chance to take on the climate crisis and build state-of-the-art public schools right here in Bridgeport," says **Mustafa Salahuddin, President and Business Agent, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1336.**

ILLINOIS: "Last year, Illinois passed one of the strongest pro-worker, pro-climate energy bills in the country that committed to a carbon-free power sector by 2050. As part of the Climate & Equitable Jobs Act, our coalition of labor unions won important investments in our state's public schools, including an energy efficiency audit for every school with a focus on those in under-resourced communities of color. Investing in carbon-free and healthy schools will help us meet Illinois' climate goals, save school districts money on energy costs, create good union jobs, and help us tackle entrenched racial and economic inequality. With the Biden administration's leadership, we look forward to realizing our vision of carbon-free and healthy schools for all Illinois communities," says **Pat Devaney, Secretary Treasurer of the Illinois AFL-CIO and Principal Officer of Climate Jobs Illinois.**

MAINE: "At a time when oil, gas and electricity prices are through the roof, we should be focusing on how to transition our public schools to renewable energy – it's better for the planet, for school district budgets, and for our kids. Let's put solar on every school roof and upgrade our public schools to be climate-friendly, healthy environments for kids and educators. Building carbon-free and healthy schools will create tons of solid, family-sustaining union careers right here in Maine. We have the money to invest in carbon-free and healthy schools across Maine, let's get it done," **Matt Schlobohm, Executive Director of the Maine AFL-CIO.**

MICHIGAN: “The climate crisis is one of the biggest threats to public health, and it’s already impacting students and educators in public schools across Michigan, particularly in low-income and under-resourced communities. That’s why unions like AFT and AFT Michigan are some of the strongest advocates for a shift to sustainable energy and carbon-free schools. By investing federal infrastructure funding in climate-friendly school buildings and electric school buses, we can tackle climate change, save school districts millions of dollars in energy costs, advance racial equity, and create thousands of good union careers,” **said David Hecker, President of AFT Michigan.**

New York, NEW YORK: “New York City students deserve the best – the best education, educators, and facilities. That’s why investment in carbon-free and healthy schools is a critical component of any forward-looking infrastructure plan. Installing energy-efficient retrofits and solar power across New York City’s public school system will save tens of thousands of tons of carbon emissions annually, create thousands of good, union family-sustaining construction jobs in the process, and keep schools healthier and safer for students. We applaud the Biden administration for its leadership in advocating for carbon-free and healthy schools and call on lawmakers to help make this prospect a reality for New York City’s public schools and others across the nation,” **said Gary LaBarbera, President of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and New York State Building and Construction Trades Council, and Director of Climate Jobs NY.**

RHODE ISLAND: “Green and healthy schools are a priority for workers, students, educators, and communities across the Ocean State. The Climate Jobs RI coalition, a group of unions and climate advocates united behind a pro-worker pro-climate agenda for our state, is organizing to win a groundbreaking \$300-million school construction bond that would rebuild our state’s public schools for the future with the strongest labor and equity standards. This new initiative from the White House will be key to tackling the climate crisis and creating good union jobs in Black and Latinx communities that have been under-resourced in Rhode Island and across the country for far too long. Thanks to the federal infrastructure funding for schools and the Biden administration’s support for this important issue, we look forward to breaking ground on green and healthy schools across Rhode Island,” **said Patrick Crowley, Secretary-Treasurer of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO and Co-Chair of Climate Jobs Rhode Island.**

TEXAS: “Climate change is a real issue for public school students and communities across Texas. From school evacuations and floods during Hurricane Harvey to heat waves that make classrooms too hot to learn, our outdated school facilities aren’t ready for the climate crisis. The Texas Climate Jobs Project, a coalition of Texas unions united to advance a pro-worker and pro-climate agenda that works for all Texans, believes that every student, teacher, and community in Texas deserves a healthy, state-of-the-art public school. It’s time to invest in carbon-free and healthy schools and buses that keep our kids safe and protect our planet. With federal infrastructure funding, we can create healthier classrooms for students and educators, slash carbon emissions and local air pollution, create union jobs in our communities, and save school districts money on energy costs.” **says Rick Levy, President of the Texas AFL-CIO.**

Racine, WISCONSIN: “Wisconsin is home to thousands of aging school buildings filled with issues that could make kids and educators sick, from lead pipes to mold. There’s no excuse for unhealthy classroom conditions – we must invest in carbon-free and healthy schools that save our school districts money on energy costs and create local jobs for Wisconsinites. With this support from the Biden administration, cities like Racine can invest in the climate-friendly schools our kids and communities deserve,” says **Cory Mason, Mayor of Racine, Wisconsin.**