



Environmental Education in Glendale, California

LOCAL POLICY TEAM RESEARCH PUBLICATION

This research publication examines the effectiveness of environmental education within the Glendale Unified School District in California. Drawing on interviews with students and teachers, it finds that while most students receive a sufficient understanding of environmental concepts, there is a gap in engagement, resources, and opportunities for action, highlighting the need for more applied learning, expanded curricula for older students, and stronger support for educators.

Prepared by: Lilliana Agazaryan, Carly Peters, Izhaar Shah, and Shant Ispendjian

Date: April 14, 2026

Published by the Saving the Sea Organization

Environmental Education in Glendale, California

I. Abstract

It is said that the youth are to inherit the climate crisis: that with rapidly warming temperatures and frequent and extreme weather events, the planet's fate as we know it rests in the hands of young activists. Of course, to achieve such a goal, millions of young people must be knowledgeable of the implications of climate processes and industrial activity, as well as mitigation strategies.

In Los Angeles County, the City of Glendale Unified School District is implementing measures to do just this. With over 25,000 K-12 students, the science curriculum strives to empower young people to draw conclusions about climate and become stewards of change ("Welcome to..."). These programs are relatively new, however, and it is unknown how the students will respond in the future. A lack of extensive scholarship on this matter results in uncertainty about how educators should proceed (e.g., what topics to cover in class, time frames across grade levels, etc.). Additionally, new breakthroughs in climate science occur

frequently, creating discrepancies between curricula and the latest scholarship.

This research publication analyzes the Glendale Unified School District (GUSD)'s efforts to implement informative and inspirational environmental education. Through interviews with current GUSD students, we posit that while GUSD excels at informing students about basic environmental processes, it fails to inspire climate-conscious attitudes in the majority of students. Additionally, while most teachers feel the curriculum is sufficient, most also expressed a desire for additional resources to support science instruction.

II. Introduction

Methods

Using a sample of 22 students and ten teachers from GUSD, we examine perceptions of environmental curricula to gauge their effectiveness. We conducted short interviews with each study participant, focused on sufficient classroom materials (teachers), relevant curricula (students), and student

initiatives towards climate action after class.

Context

As of 2023, the Glendale Unified School District implemented measures to educate schoolchildren about the importance of recycling (“School Programs”). Several programs, aimed at elementary schoolers, were funded by the city to increase engagement with environmental issues. Such programs include Mr. Eco, an educational virtual experience featuring a character that teaches students the importance of managing waste; Discovery Cube, a virtual eco-challenge for fifth and sixth graders; and the LA County Environmental Defenders Program, a brief virtual program that focuses on the four R’s (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rethink) (“Youth Education; “Free Discovery…”).

These programs are offered online and for free, for ease of access and flexibility in classroom spaces. Additionally, their virtual nature encourages students to learn about environmental action from home, outside of school. The city further created lesson plans and games, which are downloadable and easy to implement into curricula. These lessons are dynamic and engaging, including “matching games” to familiarize students with recycling concepts and word searches to increase comfort level

with eco-vocabulary. A critique of these measures, of course, lies in their appeal to older students, such as those in high school or even middle school. With such a targeted campaign for elementary schoolers, older students may be overlooked or fail to fully benefit from eco-educational initiatives. Thus, a logical approach to considering Glendale's environmental education would be to invest in upper-level curricula or gauge interest among older students regarding ecological concerns.

III. Results

These questions examined perceptions of sustainability and environmental education among high school students and teachers through a survey. Sent out to local high school students and teachers in Los Angeles County.

Interview Questions

Students (22 participants):

1. Do you feel that your classes in school have taught you enough about sustainability and environmental issues?
2. Do you think your school does a good job at encouraging students to take action in helping curb environmental issues (recycling programs, environmental clubs, etc.)
3. Can you give an example of something you learned in school that better helps you understand

3. (cont'd) how to live a more sustainable and conscious lifestyle?
4. In your opinion, what topics related to sustainability and the environment should be emphasized more in your classes and curriculum?

Educators (ten participants):

1. Do you believe the current education curriculum provides sufficient coverage of sustainability and environmental education for your students?
2. What resources or training would make it easier for you to integrate more sustainability into your curriculum and teaching?
3. In your experience, how interested and engaged are students when learning about sustainability issues?

Notable Results

1. Perception of Sustainability Education Coverage

	Coverage is sufficient	Coverage is somewhat sufficient	Coverage is insufficient
Students	23 percent	50 percent	27 percent
Teachers	20 percent	50 percent	30 percent

Most students (78 percent) reported that sustainability education is either completely or somewhat sufficient. Teachers are less sure, with only 70

percent acknowledging sufficient or somewhat sufficient coverage.

2. School Encouragement of Environmental Action

When prompted, "GUSD encourages student environmental action", students:

Strongly agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed
18 percent	38 percent	23 percent	23 percent

Just over half of students (54 percent) acknowledge some effort by schools, though opportunities and strong encouragement are limited.

3. Topics Students Report Learning

- Recycling /waste reduction: 64 percent (14 students)
- Climate change basics: 59 percent (13 students)
- Energy conservation: 41 percent (nine students)
- Sustainable lifestyle habits: 36 percent (eight students)

Student learning is primarily focused on general awareness rather than applied or action-based knowledge.

4. Topics Students Want Emphasized

- Practical sustainable living: 68 percent (15 students)
- Climate solutions (renewables, policy): 59 percent (13 students)

- Hands-on projects: 55 percent (12 students)
- Environmental justice: 32 percent (seven students)

Teachers asked about science and history. Particularly covered AP Environmental Science teachers.

5. Resources Needed to Improve Sustainability Education

- Ready-to-use lesson plans: 70 percent (seven teachers)
- Professional development/training: 60 percent (six teachers)
- More curriculum time: 60 percent (six teachers)
- Funding/resources: 50 percent (five teachers)

IV. Conclusion

Based on samples of 22 students and ten teachers within the Glendale Unified School District, we concluded that administrator initiatives to implement informative and inspirational environmental education have been partially successful. Programs highlighted in the earlier section, featuring example lesson plans and interactive classroom activities for K-12 students, resulted in general satisfaction with the breadth of climate curriculum, meaning that most students gained a sufficient understanding of climate and sustainability by the end. Notably, 78 percent of students reported that

environmental education efforts were somewhat or completely sufficient.

However, the data demonstrates students' and staff's laments about insufficient resources and the district's failure to encourage student action. Staff expressed a desire for improved ready-to-use lesson plans, which the district has been implementing since 2023. Additionally, students wished for a curriculum on social issues and scientific processes, so that they may be empowered changemakers in the climate space.

References

"Free Discovery Cube Programs Sponsored by Los Angeles City Sanitation." Discovery Cube Los Angeles, www.discoverycube.org/los-angeles/lasan/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2026.

"School Programs." City of Glendale, CA, www.glendaleca.gov/government/departments/public-works/integrated-waste-management/school-programs. Accessed 14 Apr. 2026.

"Welcome to the Glendale Unified School District!" Glendale Unified School District Overview, www.gusd.net/30766_2. Accessed 14 Apr. 2026.

"Youth Education." CleanLA, Los Angeles County Public Works Environmental Programs Division, cleanla.lacounty.gov/youth-education/. Accessed 14 Apr. 2026.

Publication Team



Lilliana Agazaryan

AUTHOR

Local Team Policy Analyst



Carly Peters

AUTHOR

Local Team Policy Analyst



Izhaar Shah

AUTHOR

Local Team Policy Analyst



Shant Ispendjian

SENIOR EDITOR

President