

Sustainability Education in Glendale, California

Research Findings & Policy Recommendations

City of Glendale Sustainability Commission

May 2026 · Presented by the Saving the Sea Local Policy Team





Saving the Sea Organization is a national nonprofit led by college students from across the country, dedicated to evidence-based environmental policy advocacy.

Founded in 2022 as a small group of high school volunteers doing beach cleanups along the California coast, Saving the Sea has grown into a structured nonprofit with three policy branches operating at the local, state, and federal levels. Our Local Policy Team spent the past year conducting original research on sustainability education within the Glendale Unified School District, interviewing students and educators, analyzing curricula, and reviewing city programs.



Local, State & Federal

Three active policy branches



12 Original Publications

Policy research across all teams



Nationwide Team

Students from universities across the country.



THE CRITICAL GAP

High School Students Are Left Out of Sustainability Education

Glendale's sustainability programming is concentrated at the elementary level. High school students should be included in the conversation through various initiatives that ensure their involvement at the greatest capacity.

25,000+

K-12 students in GUSD

0

specifically dedicated high school sustainability electives

A Roadmap Without a Public Scorecard

Glendale adopted its Climate Action and Adaptation Plan in August 2025, a landmark commitment to carbon neutrality by 2045. It is an ambitious plan. Currently, there is no public-facing progress tracker. The community could use this progress tracker in order to follow along and understand what changes are occurring.

The Policy Window

Environmental Justice Element

Glendale's Environmental Justice Element, anticipated this season, sets goals for community engagement, environmental programming, and equity across the city's neighborhoods. Our recommendations are built to directly support each of these priorities.



WHAT WE FOUND

78%

of students say environmental education is sufficient or somewhat sufficient

55%

of students want hands-on projects instead of passive learning

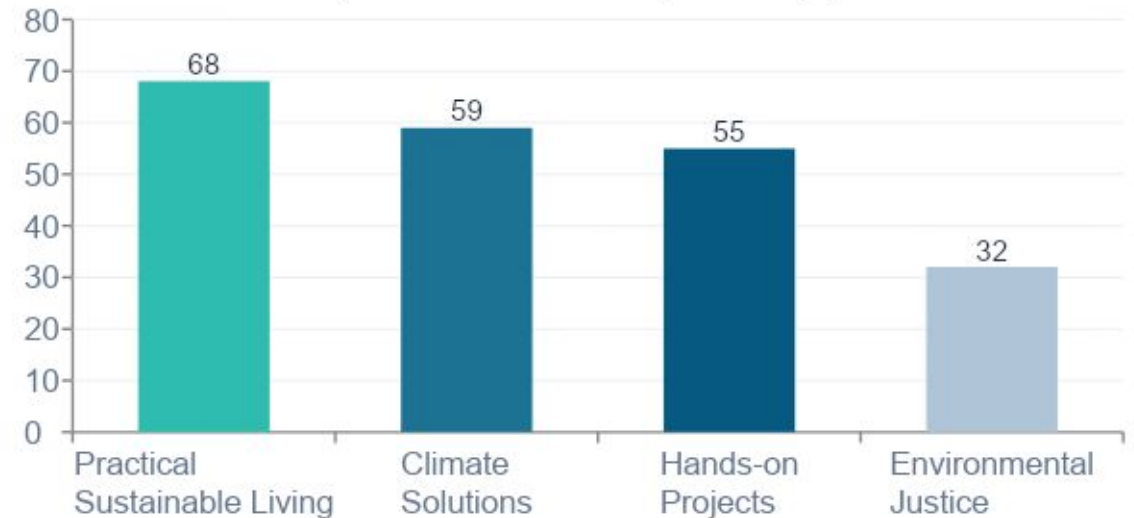
68%

want practical sustainable living emphasized more in class

The Story the Data Tells

Students are getting general awareness, but may be missing out on the applied, action-based learning they want. Teachers want to do more, but most report that they lack time and resources. And high schoolers, the age group most capable of civic action, have not been directly targeted by Glendale's sustainability programming.

Topics Students Want Emphasized (%)





Four proposals to close the gap between Glendale's climate ambitions and its students.

01



Environmental Science & Policy Course

A high school elective grounded in Glendale's local conditions, from CAAP goals to wildfire resilience.

02



Community Field Trip Program

A grade-specific field trip sequence connecting students across age groups to sustainability sites in Glendale.

03



CAAP Progress Dashboard

A public dashboard tracking Glendale's CAAP progress that is displayed on the city website and in schools.

04



Student Advisory Council

A student voice body drawing representatives from Glendale high schools to advise the city on sustainability policy.



Environmental Science & Policy Course

The Proposal

A one-semester elective for GUSD high school students built around three interconnected areas of learning:

Local Environmental Conditions

Glendale's greenhouse gas emissions, water systems, wildfire risk, urban heat, and CAAP targets could be examples of local realities that students can see and act on.

How Environmental Policy Works

From research to legislation. Students learn how policy is made, how to read a bill, and how advocacy organizations engage the process.

Capstone: Real-World Action Project

Students identify a sustainability challenge in their own school or neighborhood and develop a concrete, presentable proposal.

Why it works

55% of GUSD students want hands-on environmental projects. Stanford research through NAAEE shows students in structured environmental education score significantly higher on critical thinking.

Why It's Feasible

- ✓ Structured as an elective: no curriculum mandate, no disruption to required courses
- ✓ Can be taught by existing Advanced Placement Environmental Science or social studies teachers
- ✓ Curriculum framework already exists through Glendale's CAAP, SDGs, and California environmental literacy standards
- ✓ Pilot at one school first, before any district-wide expansion
- ✓ Teacher input built into curriculum design from the beginning

Built Around Glendale

The course is intentionally local. Every unit connects to something students can see, visit, or act on in Glendale. The CAAP becomes required reading. The Environmental Justice Element becomes a case study. Local conditions, from wildfire smoke to water usage, become the laboratory.



Implementation Timeline

1

Spring–Summer 2026

- Commission endorses the concept and passes a letter of support to GUSD
- GUSD curriculum coordinator identified and initial meeting held
- One pilot teacher identified at each school (Hoover, Glendale, Clark, Crescenta Valley)
- Saving the Sea shares our research as a resource

2

Fall 2026

- Pilot curriculum co-developed with three teacher leads
- Course aligned with California Environmental Literacy Framework and Glendale's CAAP
- Professional development session held (one day, fundable through existing district professional development funds)
- Student interest survey conducted at all three schools

3

Spring 2027 — Pilot

- Course offered at one school to 20 to 30 students as a semester elective
- Saving the Sea analysts guest support capstone projects
- Capstone presentations held at end of semester, open to the community
- Student and teacher feedback formally collected

4

Fall 2027 — Expand

- Pilot results reviewed by GUSD and the Sustainability Commission
- Course expanded to remaining schools if pilot is successful
- Capstone projects potentially presented to the Commission as annual student input



Community Field Trip Program

A structured field trip sequence connecting Glendale students across grade levels to local sustainability sites that are available as sites of enrichment for science, social studies, and environmental classes.

Grades 6–12 · Active school program

Glendale Integrated
Waste Management

Currently operates a K–12 school outreach program offering site tours, composting bin donations, and downloadable lesson plans. Students engage directly with waste diversion systems core to the CAAP.

Extend to high school — lowest barrier ask

Grades K–12 · Active school program

LA County Arboretum
& Botanic Garden

Offers NGSS Field Study Program with educator-led tours on biodiversity and water conservation. Transportation grants are available for schools to apply for with no new city funding required. This site is already fully prepared for all grade levels.

Grants available — no new city cost

Currently K–8 · Expansion opportunity

Descanso Gardens

A botanical garden with an existing school program through the California Natural Resources Agency, currently serving K through grade 8. High school expansion is not yet offered. The city can advocate to CNRA for extending this program to secondary students.

City advocacy to expand — secondary ask



CAAP Progress Dashboard

Glendale adopted its CAAP in August 2025, committing to carbon neutrality by 2045. A reporting and monitoring plan is in development, but there is no public-facing dashboard yet. We propose one.

Proposed Starting Metrics

GHG Emissions	Water Consumption
Building Energy Use	Transportation Share
Waste Diversion Rate	

How It Works

- ✓ Built on a data visualization software, like Tableau, free data visualization platform used by government agencies including LA County
- ✓ Color-coded indicators: Green (on track), Yellow (at risk), Red (off track)
- ✓ Updated quarterly by one assigned city staff member, approximately one hour per quarter
- ✓ Annual milestone report to the Commission with adjustment recommendations

Why It Matters

The CAAP has no public progress markers yet

The plan was adopted in 2025 and a monitoring plan is in development. Our proposal aligns with what the city is already planning with a school-facing dimension added.

Comparable cities show stronger engagement

LA County and San Jose use public sustainability dashboards and document stronger community engagement with environmental programs.

Students become accountability partners

When students can track Glendale's progress in real time, they connect classroom learning to civic ownership of the city's commitments.

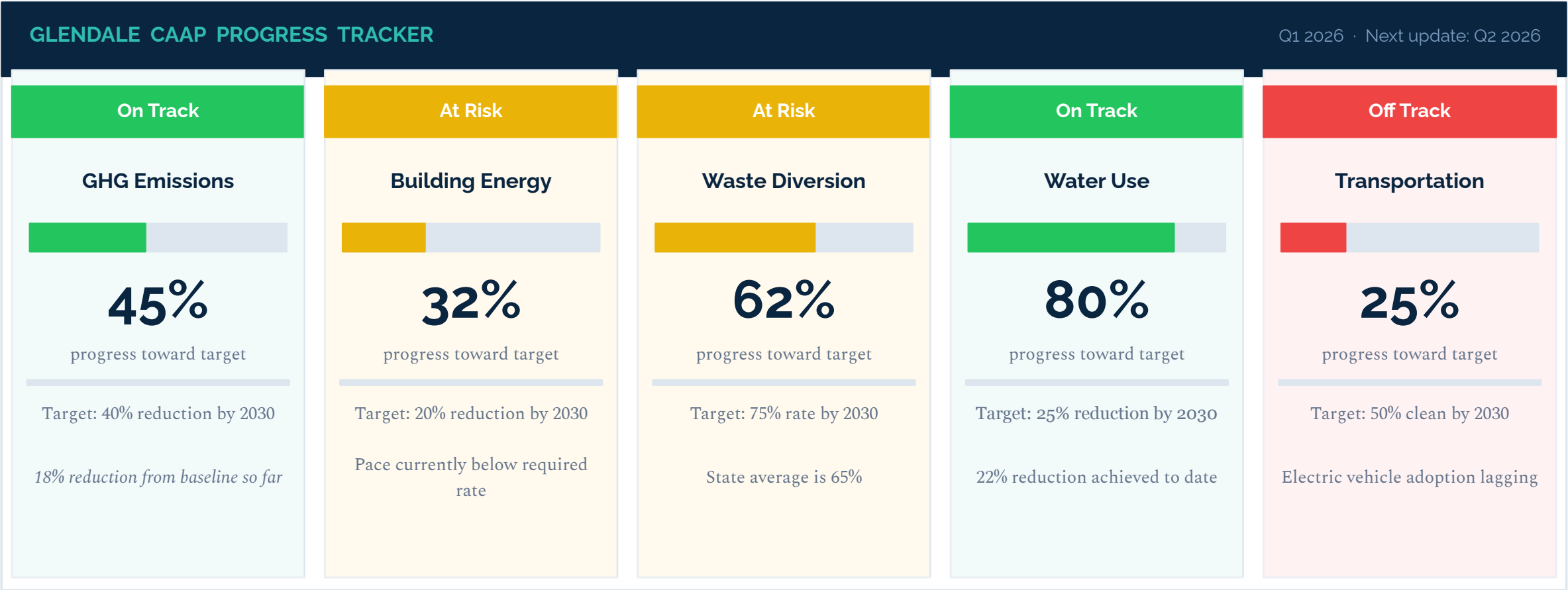
Where It Lives

City of Glendale website (public) · Each public high school as a classroom display · Integrated into the Environmental Science course as a live data resource



What the Dashboard Could Look Like

Illustrative example modeled on LA County's public sustainability dashboard. Actual values come from Glendale's GHG inventory and CAAP monitoring reports.



Note: Values above are illustrative examples only.



Student Advisory Council

The Proposal

A formal student advisory body drawing representatives from Glendale's public high schools to provide direct input to the Sustainability Commission on environmental policy, which can close the loop between the classroom and city hall.

How It Works

School Representatives

Each Glendale public high school selects 1 to 2 student representatives through a school-based application or vote process.

Annual Input Session

The Council presents once per year to the Commission: sharing capstone project findings, dashboard observations, and student-identified environmental priorities.

Advise, Don't Govern

Students present perspectives and proposals; the Commission retains all decision-making authority. This is structured to be low-cost and low-burden for the city.

Why It Matters

High school students are the generation that will live with the consequences of decisions being made in this room. Creating a formal channel for their voices can serve students while contributing to policy. Communities with youth advisory mechanisms consistently report stronger civic engagement and higher quality public feedback.

Glendale High Schools

Hoover High School	Glendale High School
Clark Magnet High School	Crescenta Valley High School

Cost to implement: minimal. One Commission liaison, one annual session. Saving the Sea can help facilitate the first cycle.

HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER



01

The Course

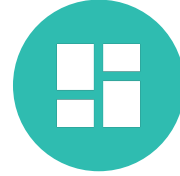
Gives students the language, framework, and Glendale-specific context to engage meaningfully with every other piece of this system.



02

Field Trips

Turns classroom knowledge into direct community experience, in turn showing students sustainability challenges and solutions already present in their city.



03

The Dashboard

Gives students live data to analyze, track, and advocate around, consequently emphasizing Glendale's climate commitments.



04

Advisory Council

Gives students a formal seat at the table, therefore translating their learning into direct policy input to the Commission.

Together, these four recommendations give Glendale's high school students something they have not had before: the knowledge to understand the city's environmental commitments, the experience to connect with them in person, the data to follow them in real time, and the voice to help shape what comes next.

How Saving the Sea Can Help



Saving the Sea is committed to being an active partner in implementing each of these recommendations alongside the city.



Share Our Research

Our full research is available to city staff and GUSD administrators at no cost. We are more than happy to provide further research as needed.



Support Curriculum Design

Our policy analysts can support capstone project development and connect students with working policy professionals.



Help Build the Dashboard

We can work with the Office of Sustainability to identify relevant CAAP metrics and connect the city to comparable examples from LA County.



Facilitate the First Advisory Council Cycle

We can help design the student application process, coordinate with school administrators, and help the program get off the ground.



Ongoing Policy Partnership

As our Local Policy Team continues its work, we can provide annual research updates on sustainability education in Glendale while tracking progress and surfacing new findings for the Commission.



Questions?



Q: How would this elective be funded, and what would it cost the city?

The elective does not require new city funding. It requires GUSD to offer an additional elective within an existing department, taught by an existing teacher. Professional development costs are modest and can be covered through existing district funds.

Q: What is Tableau, and how much would it cost the city?

Tableau is a widely used data visualization platform. Tableau Public is available free of charge for government agencies, and LA County already uses it for its own sustainability dashboards. The city would incur no software cost. The primary resource required is one staff member spending approximately one hour per quarter to update the data.

Q: How is Saving the Sea different from other organizations that have presented to this Commission?

We are a student-led nonprofit that conducted this research independently and specifically on Glendale. We interviewed 30+ students and educators within GUSD. We are crafting and presenting original research.



Q: Isn't a student advisory council just symbolic? What real impact would it have?

Advisory councils are not symbolic when structured with a clear mandate and a defined channel to decision-makers. We propose an annual presentation slot at this Commission, meaning student input becomes part of the formal public record and is directly visible to the people who make policy decisions. The Commission retains full authority, but students have a documented voice.

Q: How do we know students would participate, or that there is enough interest?

Our research found that 55% of GUSD students want hands-on environmental projects, and 68% expressed interest in practical sustainable living content. The elective and advisory council create a clear, structured pathway for interested students.

Q: Why are field trips not already connected to the CAAP or to existing sustainability programs?

Glendale's existing programs were designed before the CAAP existed and are aimed primarily at elementary students. We are proposing that the city extend what already works to an age group that has not been paid much attention.



Thank You

Saving the Sea Organization

Research Team

Nadelina Agopoglu · Local Policy Director

Carly Peters · Local Policy Analyst

Izhaar Shah · Local Policy Analyst

Lilliana Agazaryan · Local Policy Analyst

Lucy Getacho · Local Policy Analyst

Lance Mahome · Local Policy Analyst

Priyam Pandey · Local Policy Analyst