A group of children and an adult are participating in a garden planting activity. The children, wearing colorful jackets and rain boots, are holding small grass plants. An adult in a dark jacket is assisting them. In the background, there are trees, a white van with the word "everywhere" on it, and a grey SUV.

Greater Victoria School District Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2022–2027

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Introduction

The Greater Victoria School District lies within the territories of the Lekwungen peoples, known today as Esquimalt and Songhees Nations who have been here since time immemorial and their history in this area is long and rich.

The District recognizes the Lekwungen peoples as the traditional custodians of the land in which we are located. We will look for opportunities to collaborate on actions and issues of mutual interest, including actions related to climate change. The District respectfully acknowledges the First Nations' long history of land stewardship and knowledge of the land and will look for opportunities to learn from and collaborate with the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations to help us improve our District's resilience to a changing climate.



Connection to the Greater Victoria Strategic Plan

In the writing of this Climate Action Plan, we have been reminded of the importance of a collaborative community and the necessity of a focus. To ground our work we have identified five, core pillars that will carry this work. The pillars are as follows: 1) Education, Engagement and Leadership; 2) Lands and Water Stewardship; 3) Waste Reduction; 4) Energy Management; and 5) Sustainable Transportation. The work that is initiated by this plan will be limitless and will certainly overlap between pillars. All action work that occurs as part of the plan will be respectful of the three, main goal areas of the Greater Victoria School District's Strategic Plan.

Create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment that will support and improve all learners' personal and academic success.

Create a culturally responsive learning environment that will support Indigenous learners' personal and academic success.

Create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment that will support all learners' physical and mental well-being.



About the Greater Victoria School District

The Greater Victoria School District No. 61 is located in the capital city of British Columbia and covers the municipalities of Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Victoria, View Royal and a portion of Saanich and Highlands.

The Greater Victoria School District is proud to provide quality education for 20,000 students in 28 elementary schools (Kindergarten to Grade Five), 10 middle schools (grades six to eight), and seven secondary schools (grades nine to 12). More than 1,000 International Students from across the globe attend schools in our District, and each year, over 650 adult learners register in the Continuing Education Program. Our District also offers a variety of Programs of Choice, including French Immersion.

Mission

We nurture each student's learning and well-being in a safe, responsive, and inclusive learning community

Vision


Each student within our world-class learning community has the opportunity to fulfill their potential and pursue their aspirations.

Values

Engagement – Students are actively engaged in their education and connected to our learning community.
Equity – We give each student the opportunity to fulfill their potential.
Innovation/Positive Change – We are innovative. We constantly seek ways to make positive change.
Integrity – We are ethical and fair.
Openness and Transparency – We are open about the decisions we make and how we make them.
Partnerships – We create open and respectful partnerships with each member of our learning community.
Respect – We respect ourselves, others, and our environment.
Social Responsibility and Justice – It is our shared responsibility to work with and inspire students to create a better world.

Energy, Environment and Climate Change

The Greater Victoria School District has a long-standing commitment to the environment. In 2008, the Board of Education adopted Policy 4216.22 ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT, AND CLIMATE CHANGE. The Board of Education takes it as its responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to conserve energy and resources in order to reduce the District's carbon footprint. This requires an ongoing, integrated, and systematic approach to energy management, including assessing performance, setting goals, creating an action plan, and tracking and communicating results. The Greater Victoria School Districts Board of Education made its climate emergency declaration on June 24, 2019. The following Board motion carried unanimously:



“That the Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) recognize that the breakdown of the stable climate and sea level under which human life has developed constitutes an emergency, and that in declaring a climate emergency the Board:

- a) direct the Superintendent to develop a Climate Action Plan that establishes targets and strategies commensurate with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's call to limit warming to 1.5 degrees;**
- b) direct the Superintendent to report back on specific actions and resources that could be included in future correspondence to the provincial or federal government; and**
- c) demonstrate leadership by directing the Board Chair to write letters to other school boards, local MLAs, and Provincial governments encouraging them to declare climate emergencies and develop targets and strategies to combat climate change.”**

Public education is tasked with preparing children for their future, and in doing so we must consider what future awaits them. We recognize that the breakdown of the stable climate and sea level under which human life has developed constitutes an emergency, and we developed a Climate Action Plan that establishes targets and strategies in alignment with the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's call to limit warming to 1.5 degrees.

Our Pillars and Strategies

The following Greater Victoria School District Sustainability Pillars provide a foundational structure that supports sustainability initiatives focused on fostering student, educator, and staff engagement through environmental stewardship at the school and district levels. Each of the Plan's pillars outline goals, objectives, targets, and actions to focus on for the next 5 years to provide a roadmap for implementation. The Board of Education is committed to establishing and supporting a Climate Action Committee who will regularly report to the Board and community about the implementation of the Climate Action Plan.



LEARNING, ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP



LANDS AND WATER STEWARDSHIP



WASTE REDUCTION



ENERGY MANAGEMENT



SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION



PILLAR 1: LEARNING, ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP

Support culturally responsive and locally relevant educational practices in the curricular areas of sustainability while incorporating and promoting holistic Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

The Learning and Engagement pillar supports the implementation of the other Climate Action goals by building awareness and education on environmental topics and everyday actions we can take to reduce our impact. Providing support for students, educators and parents who are passionate about sustainability education is a key part of the Greater Victoria School District's Climate Action Plan (CAP). We will provide extracurricular activities and leadership development opportunities to engage our schools to work together to achieve the goals outlined in the CAP. We aspire to have a learning community where sustainability is the basis for all decisions, and our school community members are engaged on climate action issues.

Thanks to the innovative and creative staff in the facilities sign shop we were able to offer elementary students the opportunity to take part in climate action in a fun, engaging and educational way. Each student was given a template in which to design their own light switcher sticker. The design was their idea of what would serve as a good reminder of when to turn off the lights. The templates were digitized and processed into each student's very own sticker. The program started in October 2022 as a small pilot project at Tillicum Elementary. It quickly grew to involve 25 of 27 elementary schools. Participation at these schools surpassed 80% and we were overwhelmed with the positive feedback. This program will return by popular demand in 2023, and we will now include middle and secondary school art and environmental classes.



LEARNING, ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP

Key Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action
Expand and support culturally responsive and locally relevant professional learning opportunities and nurture leadership around learning on the land and sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and expand communities of practice through opportunities such as local land-based community partnerships. • Develop a professional learning series for students and staff that promote an understanding of Lekwungen history, territory and contemporary matters and the important relationship to the land.
Create learning environments that recognize the unique identity, heritage, and traditional practices of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a list of recommended open-ended resources to support the BC curriculum, to integrate First Peoples Principles of Learning, authentic Indigenous resources, and diverse learning experiences including land-based education and traditional ecological knowledge with a focus on Lekwungen and Coast Salish culture from Kindergarten through Grade 12.
Identify innovative means and additional opportunities to enhance and inspire student engagement with locally relevant sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honour diverse student voices with particular attention to Indigenous Ways of Being to directly inform further action. • Engage school-based sustainability teams to lead sustainability initiatives, including climate resiliency in their school learning community. • Identify additional opportunities to inspire student engagement with sustainability learning, experiences, and practices. • Support the development of programs, including Board Authority Authorized (BAA) courses, that have a curricular focus on land-based education, traditional ecological knowledge and sustainability.
Identify and advocate for fully funded sustainable development of School District Facilities and school grounds resilient to climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send letters to the Ministry of Education and Child Care requesting funding to support additional GHG reducing projects. • Send letters to the Ministry of Education and Child Care requesting funding to purchase new high efficiency condensing boilers. • Send letters to the Ministry of Education and Child Care requesting funding to support additional window and roofing upgrades/repairs. • Send letters to the Ministry of Education and Child Care requesting funding to support additional photovoltaic generation systems. • Send letters to the Ministry of Education and Child Care requesting funding to support NetZero Ready buildings. • Continue to develop and advocate programs that create behavioural change, awareness, and accountability to promote a positive culture shift towards eco-friendly habits across the district and to help plan for a climate ready future.



PILLAR 2: LANDS AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

To approach all decisions which affect water or land, in a culturally responsible manner, with the goal of sustainability.

With less than 1% of all water on the planet considered safe to drink, water conservation is important to preserve our potable water supply. The Greater Victoria School District currently consumes over 200,000,000 litres of water per year, which is equivalent to the same amount of water as 80 Olympic- sized swimming pools. Across all district-owned facilities, each year we use over 11,000 litres of water per student on average.

As a school district, our water management priorities include ensuring that our buildings have safe and efficient water fixtures and infrastructure and developing a water conservation strategy to achieve further water reductions. Conserving water will result in cost savings for potable water, wastewater disposal costs and will reduce the energy needed to pump, treat and heat water.

SD61 will develop a Water Conservation Strategy, applying a similar approach that was adopted during the development of the Zero Waste Strategy. This will include reviewing water consumption data, conducting a water audit of target buildings, engaging stakeholders for feedback, and drafting a strategy to reduce water consumption. We will explore opportunities for water conservation more fully during years 4 and 5 of the CAP, following the strategy development process described in the Plan Implementation section.

Before any water conservation initiatives can be implemented, the District should first address the issue of lead contamination in potable water that exists in many of our schools and buildings. In accordance with Island health (IH) regulations, weekly flushing of potable water systems is required to limit lead levels in our drinking water supply. Weekly system flushing requires a significant amount of water and represents a significant opportunity for water conservation for the District.



In June 2022, we put to a predictive equation for water consumption to work to help identify potential locations where undetected leaks might exist. We then used a real-time water monitoring system to check buildings of high potential.

We were able to identify and confirm the repair of leaks at 4 sites and conserve this precious resource while strengthening the resiliency of our community to withstand drought.



PILLAR 2: LANDS AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

Key Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action
Develop a Water Conservation Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving towards real-time monitoring of water usage. • Identify water conservation opportunities and actions via consultation with key stakeholders and advisory committees. • Consider alternative water supply option such as rainwater capture and greywater use.
Ensure that schools have safe and efficient water fixtures and infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace end-of-life plumbing and water fixtures with low flow versions in all buildings and schools.
Reduce our impact on the land and implement restorative efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update land use guidelines that honours Indigenous knowledge, prioritizes the use of native plants, and promotes the inclusion of trees on school grounds to increase our urban forest. Trees will reduce our carbon footprint by sequestering carbon, filter air and water, protect our watersheds, create shade, provide habitat, and slow wind and stormwater. • Schools will work with a District arborist, in alignment with municipal partners, to introduce drought resistant plants. • Support school based initiatives that implement culturally responsive, restorative efforts. • Engage in a consultation process with students, facilities staff, and educators to co-develop a Grounds Greening Plan. • Identify opportunities to green grounds at both schools and other district facilities. • Investigate larger pilot projects that support behavior change in our communities. • Explore a district- wide inquiry project that explores what it means to give back to the land. • Support learning opportunities that educate about and strengthen food security.



PILLAR 3: WASTE REDUCTION

Reduce our overall waste and increase waste diverted from the landfill.

Reducing the overall waste that enters and exits our schools and buildings is the responsibility of all members of our school district. The achievement of this goal begins with a shift in human behavior. This shift begins with the products we purchase and the packaging that enters our schools. As part of our Zero Waste strategy, all students, staff and parents will be asked to pack in and pack out.

A Zero Waste strategy is one that requires education, leadership and collaboration. Schools require necessary recycling infrastructure for the waste that does still enter a school and an understanding of how best to recycle.

Collaboration will be important with both the existing waste hauler to align operations and improve consistency of messaging on what types of waste are accepted in each waste stream. Waste audits will help identify metrics to assess current waste rates and opportunities for improvement. The audits will also be used to track progress and compare contamination and diversion rates from before and after school-based campaigns.



PILLAR 3: WASTE REDUCTION

Key Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action
Implement sustainable purchasing practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the importance of sustainable purchasing practice in Regulation 3323. • Encourage all schools and departments to purchase from sustainable companies.
Implement a Zero Waste Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an implementation plan and report on progress annually. • Highlight a district-wide focus on litter less lunches K-12. • Celebrate initiatives that are focused on a Zero Waste goal. • Ensure each school has adequate, consistent, and effective waste infrastructure. • Improve waste signage and communications to educate users on what types of waste go in each waste stream to reduce contamination. • Work with the existing waste hauler and key stakeholders to identify and implement options to increase waste diversion and reduce contamination. • Apply for applicable grants to support initiatives and advocate with the provincial government for sustainable funding.



PILLAR 4: ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Increase energy efficiency and conservation through projects and engagement.

The Greater Victoria School District is focused on achieving an overall reduction in energy use through energy efficiency projects, technology and equipment upgrades, and behaviour change campaigns. Our energy conservation strategies and priorities are outlined in SD61's **Strategic Energy Management Plan (SEMP)**, which is reviewed and updated annually as part of our energy incentive funding provided by utilities.

The District currently uses natural gas for 64% of our energy needs, primarily for heating buildings. However, natural gas use accounts for 85% of our GHG emissions. To reduce our emissions and achieve our GHG reduction targets, we must reduce our natural gas as well as factor in the additional cost of electricity as we transition. We are committed to moving toward full electrification. The SEMP must include a triple bottom line approach and business case development to achieve low-carbon electrification in both an environmentally and fiscally responsible manner.

We will identify further opportunities for natural gas and electricity reduction by conducting feasibility studies and establishing a roster of projects that will be implemented over the next five years. Our key strategies include continuous optimization of buildings to achieve energy savings, reduce emissions, and save costs. As we transition building energy systems from natural gas to electricity, implementing renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, will help offset additional electricity use and energy costs.

SD61 is also an active participant of the BC Hydro Energy Wise Network Program, an energy conservation program funded by BC Hydro and FortisBC that supports BC organizations in leading student and staff engagement campaigns. Given the level of alignment between the goals of the Energy Wise Network and the Eco-Wise Program, both initiatives are run in tandem.

Plans were put in place in 2022 to enter into the BC Hydro Continuous Optimization program. 2023 will see the completion of our first 3 buildings under this program, with plans to continue and hopefully pick up the pace. This program should become a foundation for energy management moving forward.



PILLAR 4: ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Key Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action
Reduce overall energy consumption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Strategic Energy Management Plan (SEMP). • Continue the optimization and recommissioning of HVAC systems. • Replace end of life heating plants and mechanical equipment with high efficiency options. • Change all lighting systems to LED lighting. • Explore options for recovery of heat energy. • Improve measurement and verification of energy use and savings projects.
Reduce GHG emissions in our buildings by 50% before 2030.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate low carbon electrification during heating plant replacement when feasible. • Ensure optimization and recommissioning, specifically targeting natural gas consumption. • Add heat recovery ventilation in natural gas heated buildings. • Complete building envelope upgrades including replacement of older, inefficient windows and doors. • Employ renewable energy solutions. • Ensure prioritization of projects that reduce emissions.
Improve communications and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and launch engagement and behaviour change programs in connection with school based environmental teams. • Create an interactive environment that reports key performance indicators to staff and students through dashboards and monthly reports.



PILLAR 5: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

Promote low-carbon transportation options for district operations and commuting to and from school and work.

Our goal is to encourage energy efficient and low-carbon ways of getting around for our district fleet and for staff, students, and educators commuting to our schools. At a district level, our aim is to use vehicles wisely to reduce our carbon emissions and impact on the environment.

Low-cost behaviour change opportunities will be pursued first, such as promoting fuel efficient driving and route planning practices for the District fleet, while funding opportunities for fleet upgrades are identified and secured. Engaging key stakeholder groups, such as the Grounds Crew, will be an important part of the strategy to identify opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of moving goods and people around the district.

SD61 aims to optimize the district fleet by replacing vehicles with more fuel-efficient and electric vehicle (EV) models, focusing first on light passenger vehicles and as vehicles are retired and replaced. For larger fleet vehicles where electric alternatives do not yet exist, additional research will be needed to identify fuel efficient and alternative fuel options. It will also be necessary to invest in EV charging infrastructure and research into suitable locations to support the transition to electric vehicles.

We also aim to promote educational and engagement programs to encourage sustainable modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, carpooling, or taking transit to school and work. The District will review opportunities to participate in programs such as Bike to Work/School Week and sustainable commuting to school programs as well as improving data on current commuting methods, barriers, and opportunities to choose sustainable modes of transport.

PILLAR 5: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

Key Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action
Operate an efficient and low carbon district fleet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to add charging stations for all fleet vehicles/buses. Replacement of internal combustion engine (ICE) with zero-emmission vehicles (ZEV). • Optimize trip routes to maximize fuel economy (e.g. for school buses and district fleet). • Engage key stakeholder groups, such as the Grounds Crew and Learning Services, to identify opportunities to improve fleet and travel efficiencies. • Identify opportunities to improve data collection for the district fleet. • Identify funding opportunities for fleet and infrastructure, e.g. via Clean BC program, Carbon Neutral Capital Fund, and other funding sources.
Promote active and low-carbon Commuting options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote carpooling to reduce vehicle trips and district incentives for purchasing bus passes. • Ensure that all sustainable transportation signage is visible and up to date at all schools. • Celebrate programs to encourage active transportation to schools, e.g. ‘Bike to Work Week’ and ‘Walk and Roll to School’ campaigns. • Providing safe and convenient bicycle and walking infrastructure, along with end-of-trip facilities, at schools and district offices ensures a secure and practical means of transportation for students and staff, promoting physical activity and reducing traffic congestion. • Investigate location options to install Level-2 EV charging stations at school sites, collaborating with the various municipalities/ City, when appropriate.



Quadra Elementary school bike shelter.

Electric Buses and Charging Infrastructure

As of March 2023, the districts electric buses had already driven over 25,000 km. Avoiding an estimated 25 tCO₂e of emissions



In the summer of 2022, we were able to take advantage of one of Clean BC's most generous EV incentives to date. This rebate provided 75% of all costs, including infrastructure. Three charging stations along with electrical infrastructure were put in place at fleet parking.

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