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REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Deliberative Democracy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington State Legislature has specifically funded climate science education in K–12 schools since 2017, with the creation of a legislative proviso focused on science teacher training, which has since been named “ClimeTime.” In 2023, a legislative proviso called for a Deliberative Democratic Climate Change Education Program that could be replicated across the state. The Pacific Education Institute (PEI) was awarded the contract to develop this program through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. They worked with three pilot educators to implement and localize the program, which included a four-phase process: learning about climate change, analyzing policies, building consensus, and presenting to local decision-makers. Feedback from students and educators was positive, though some educators expressed concerns about the time required to implement the full program. Moving forward, the program requires more resources and continuous professional development support to ensure its success and expand its reach.

INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Legislature began specifically supporting climate science and climate change learning in K–12 schools in the 2017 Legislative session. With the 2022 Legislative Session, additional funding was allocated specifically for climate change integration across content areas in K–12 classrooms, including creating the Climate Science Curriculum Integration Consultant at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The 2023 legislative session added a legislative proviso (Appendix A) that called for the creation of a climate change education program based on a pilot program.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRATIC CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Program Origins

The legislative proviso called for the climate change education program to be created based on the “Washington student climate assembly pilot program.” The pilot program referenced is the [“Democracy in Action—Student Climate Assembly,”](#) which is described as a “guide and toolkit” of resources based on a student climate assembly that happened at Bellingham High School. The Puget Sound Educational Service District funded this pilot program through grant money they received from the Science Teacher Training (ClimeTime) proviso in the 2022–23 school year.

Request for Proposal Process

Due to Department of Enterprise Services (DES) requirements, this contract was required to go through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. An RFP was created with a due date of January 2, 2024.

In the RFP, OSPI required proposals to develop curricular materials and pilot the Student Climate Assembly program with at least three school districts from across Washington, collect feedback from participants to revise the program, promote the program with professional learning for educators, and publish their final, revised curriculum as an Open Educational Resource (OER) on the OER Commons website. The proviso's language also required that the program be replicable in public high schools across the state. As most courses are designed and approved at the local level, one of the few courses that carry a specific graduation requirement is High School Civics, governed by [RCW 28A.230.094](#). To fulfill the expectation of the proviso that this would be replicable, OSPI also made alignment with the Civics course a requirement in the RFP.

Two proposals were submitted to OSPI as bids for the program. A team of reviewers from OSPI evaluated the two submitted bids using the rubric provided and came to a consensus on the apparent successful bidder. The Pacific Education Institute (PEI) was the successful bidder, and after negotiation, they were awarded the contract, which was executed on February 29, 2024.

Creation of Revised Program with Pilot Schools

PEI named Lisa Eschenbach the statewide coordinator for this program. Lisa and David Ketter, the pilot program's original authors, were the main leads for this work. They recruited three educators to pilot the program at their schools.

Pilot Teachers

- Chrystie Ryba-Johnson, Heritage High School, Marysville School District.
 - Ms. Ryba-Johnson used the Student Climate Assembly in her Native Ecology classes, with a total of 50 students participating.
- Ryan Hauck, Glacier Peak High School, Snohomish School District.
 - Mr. Hauck used the Student Climate Assembly in his AP Comparative Government and Politics course, where 87 students participated.
- Eric Wickwire, Ellensburg High School, Ellensburg School District.
 - Mr. Wickwire used the Student Climate Assembly in his *College in the Classroom* course, Social Problems, a partnership course with Central Washington University. Mr. Wickwire had a total of 40 students participate in this program.

As the original materials for the pilot program did not include specific lesson plans, the three pilot teachers worked on implementing a Student Climate Assembly in their classrooms but localizing it to meet the needs of the courses they were teaching and their school community.

Final Curriculum

After receiving feedback from the three pilot teachers, PEI created their final version of the curriculum, [which is free and publicly available online](#). They subcontracted with a curriculum writer to support creating the final lesson plans and student handouts.

The final curriculum has four phases of work for students. Each phase is centered on a different component of the Student Climate Assembly.

- Phase 1 involves students learning about the structure of the Student Climate Assembly, climate change, and civics.
- Phase 2 has students use the STEEP framework to analyze climate actions, focusing on evaluating policies and government actions.
- Phase 3 involves students using a deliberative democratic process to build consensus on climate actions.
- Phase 4 has students create a presentation and share it with local decision-makers.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Students

Overall, students participating with the three original pilot teachers had positive experiences with this program and reported thinking about climate change more after participating. Students also reported knowing more about potential solutions to climate change and believed they could contribute significantly to solving the problem.

"Before this unit, I used to think [climate change] would be hard to fix. Now I think that the situation is less 'doomed' if we talk about it."

–Student Participant

Educators

The three pilot educators who worked with the original materials and helped create the final curriculum materials agreed that the project fit the needs of their classrooms. However, they all were concerned about the amount of time the full program takes to implement and the structure of the support materials and lessons. Two of the three were confident they would implement the program again in the next school year, but one was hesitant to commit due to the time constraints of the semester-based Civics course.

Community Members

Two of the pilot educators brought in community members during this project. In Marysville, a conservation scientist from the Tulalip Tribe viewed the students' projects and talked to the students about their work at the beginning of the program. In Ellensburg, the city's sustainability manager viewed their presentations and said their review of the city's sustainability plan was "insightful."

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Climate Change Programs in Schools

Every student in Washington has the right to learn about the impacts of climate change and the effective adaptation and mitigation strategies necessary to address these challenges. Educators across Washington are working to figure out the best way to incorporate these ideas, specifically issues important to their local communities, into their classroom instruction in all subject areas. In considering opportunities to improve, expand, and extend this specific program, it's helpful to consider the structure and reach of the program in its current form.

We've learned that implementing the student climate assembly program is very labor-intensive for educators. They must read through and adapt the curriculum and resources provided to meet their

students' specific needs and course structure. They also need to work to find their local community's policies and community and/or government workers who would participate in the program. Without extensive professional learning to support this, it could overwhelm educators, who are already short on planning time.

Determining the impact of this specific program is also a challenge. We are unable to collect data on the number of educators who download or use the program. As the unit was published on the OER Commons website and published with a Creative Commons license, anyone can go to the program and download it, and then share it through other means.

There was also limited interest in professional learning on the program in the summer of 2024. The online workshop that PEI held to share the program and discuss the full curriculum that would be available was only attended by two interested educators. Both PEI and OSPI shared information about this workshop across multiple forms of communication. While this could be because it was during the summer, it could also show a lack of interest in this program by educators.

Considerations for Future Program Improvement

The full curriculum for this project, which is available as an Open Educational Resource (OER) online for educators to use, has not been field-tested with educators or students. The three pilot teachers in the spring of 2024 used the toolkit to create lessons in their classrooms, and the feedback from these teachers was used to make the full curriculum. Due to the timing of the contract, there was no time for the final materials to be tested in classrooms after its completion.

Feedback from educators indicated a need for materials that are easy to read and implement. Since the curriculum has not yet had an opportunity to be field-tested, having more feedback from piloting the materials in a course could yield valuable feedback for revising and expanding the current materials.

Considerations for Future Expansion of the Program

Due to the program's complexity and the time commitment required to teach it in the classroom, significant, continuous professional learning would need to be provided for educators who want to use the materials in their classrooms. Expanding the program could also include considerations of local context and the ability to have more flexibility in determining how to integrate the curriculum into their course. Educators who participate in professional learning could become pilot schools, and educators could form a cohort to support one another in the implementation of the program.

Considerations for Future Extension of the Program

Continually providing free professional learning to educators on incorporating climate change in their classrooms is needed to ensure all students have access to this important information. Continued professional learning on this program and other ways they can incorporate climate change into their courses are needed across all K–12 subject areas.

If this program is supported for an extended period of time, it would need to be realigned to the Washington State Learning Standards as they go through the [review and revision process](#).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Deliberative Democratic Climate Change Education Program that was developed has demonstrated the potential to engage students meaningfully in climate action and civic engagement. The positive feedback from students and educators, as well as the involvement of community members, underscores the program's value in fostering awareness and empowering youth to address climate challenges. However, the complexity and time-intensive nature of the program, coupled with the need for continuous professional learning, highlight significant challenges to widespread implementation. Additional resources and structured support for educators would be required to implement this program statewide.

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