

AYLEE Survey Report: The Youth Led Environmental Education Poll 2021

By The Alberta Youth Leaders for Environmental Education





Land Acknowledgment

We are grateful to be on the traditional territory of Treaty 6, 7, and 8, we acknowledge the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people living across so called Alberta. We acknowledge the Indigenous peoples from Treaty 6 territory including the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene, Nakota Sioux, and the Métis Settlements and Métis Nation of Alberta, Regions 2, 3 and 4. We would also like to take time to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples living in Treaty 7 land including the Blackfoot Confederacy together with the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, and Métis Nation Region 3. As well as the Indigenous peoples living on Treaty 8 territory who continue to make their home on this land, including the Cree, Dene, and the Métis Settlements and Métis Nation of Alberta, Regions 1, 4, 5, and 6.

Being on this land has given us so many gifts within its beauty, and we respect and are grateful for it, and we bring to light the work that continues and needs to be done in reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and the land. We acknowledge the devastation, hurt, and harm faced by Indigenous peoples living on this land - who continue to face the impacts of colonialism and white supremacy, both past and present, and we stand in support with Indigenous sovereignty and in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, who boldly and unapologetically take action to protect the place we call home, and we will strive to support their efforts and work together to protect our home.

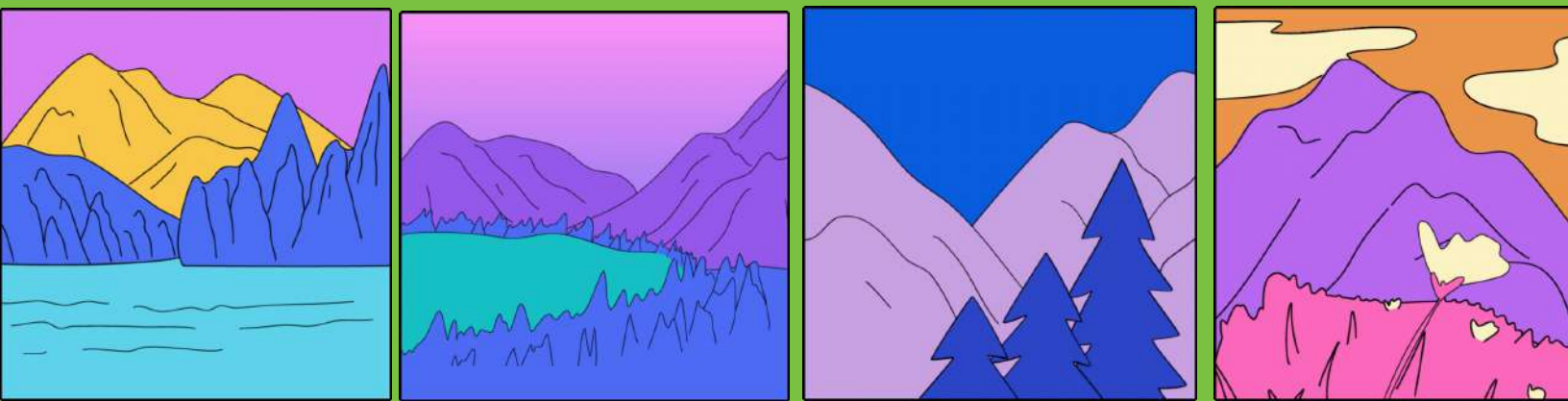




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Executive Summary



The Youth Led Environmental Education Poll 2021, conducted and created by the Alberta Youth Leaders for Environmental Education (AYLEE) - a network of youth across Alberta in grades 7-12 - aimed to bring youth voices to the forefront on their perspectives on environmental education. The survey was conducted from March 3rd until the end of April, through direct and indirect outreach methods to youth across the province in different demographics, and received a total of 318 responses.

The poll provides a recent depiction of youth perception regarding the pivotal point in time, where the need for environmental education is of severe urgency for Alberta youth to feel confident, prepared, and equipped with the knowledge to take action for our future amidst the climate crisis.

The poll expressed a widespread concern from youth living in Alberta for the impacts of anthropogenic climate change on their future without environmental education. Over **80% of youth who were polled believed that there should be more environmental education, with 49.49% stating that there should be much more.** Youth should feel able to take action, prepared for our future, and the support of a community. Evidently, **72% of youth stated that "I could be doing a lot more to reduce my impact on climate change" - yet less than half of those surveyed felt prepared to do so.** Youth need strong networks in Alberta to support their endeavours to fight for their future, and learn how to do so without feeling overwhelmed, they should feel capable of the important task at hand that is taking climate action. The youth perspective is coherent; youth need environmental education.

The Alberta Youth Leaders for Environmental Education are calling on Albertans to speak up about environmental education. Through conversations, spreading awareness about the need for it, taking climate action, and supporting youth leaders in your communities, you can help bring environmental education to Alberta youth. Alberta's students are also calling for a systemic change in bringing environmental education to schools, it must be integrated throughout the curriculum and teachers must be supported in delivering it.

For more information on AYLEE's recommendation for environmental education, here is the link to our White Paper: **["Supporting Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Climate Education in Alberta Schools: Recommendations by Students for Alberta's Educational Leadership."](#)**

Alberta youth are calling upon all Albertans to work with their communities to bring environmental education into the lives of youth.

Introduction



Alberta Youth Leaders for Environmental Education (AYLEE) are a group of youth in grades 7-12 across the province working for change. This includes biweekly meetings, action projects, workshops, learning opportunities, and various advocacy initiatives. Over the past few years AYLEE youth have written a White Paper outlining our recommendations for climate, energy and environmental education with four primary sections: furthering curriculum and student applications, ensuring opportunities for school infrastructure projects, providing teachers with necessary professional development, and promoting sustainable transportation options across rural and urban Alberta. These recommendations were shared across Alberta and with Alberta Education. Over the summer of 2020, AYLEE students also created [a video](#), bringing light our vision for the future of environmental education. All our work led us to this project, in gathering more youth perspectives in support of our past initiatives and recommendations on environmental education.

Youth across Alberta are demanding the integration of environmental literacy in schools, so we can be educated on the climate crisis and take action to protect our planet for future generations. AYLEE developed the Youth Led Environmental Education Poll 2021, to create a platform for youth to share their perspectives and understanding of environmental and climate education across Alberta. The poll was made accessible early March to grades 6-12 students and recent high school graduates across Alberta. Our primary goals were to understand youth perceptions across Alberta on climate change, environmental, and energy topics, and where further opportunities for environmental education should be made for Alberta's youth. This survey was conducted over the course of two months and shared with youth communities across Alberta through social media, reaching out to schools, and other youth involved clubs and organizations. AYLEE students hope that the following results from the Poll give Albertans a greater understanding of youth perspectives on the dire need for environmental education.

Background



The Youth Led Environmental Education Poll 2021, was a poll directed, created, and analysed by youth. Similarly, other surveys conducted by various environmental organizations have concluded the importance of environmental education. In 2020, the Alberta Council for Environmental Education (ACEE) worked with Leger to conduct the 2020 Youth Poll [1] which focused on grouping youth into the categories of alarmed, concerned-passive, and dismissal through a segmentation analysis based on their perspectives on climate change. AYLEE's polling adds to this information by focusing on schooling, including perspectives on potential actions to take to reduce emissions and advancing environmental content in curriculum. This will be of value to both education leaders and Albertans facing the climate crisis due to its recentness and its emphasis on action and next steps. In addition, ACEE's polling as well as a survey conducted by Field, E., Schwartzberg, P. & Berger, P. [2], cover primarily the age group of post-secondary youth and/or a focus on adults' knowledge and perceptions. Thus, our survey adds greater details on the perceptions of grades 6-12 youth. Lastly, this polling method differs from other environmental surveys conducted, such as the ACEE Youth Poll and the Field et al. survey, as it was conducted by youth and will be understood by youth. Overall, our polling is a recent addition to the current selections of environmental education polls and provides a crucial up-to-date understanding of youth perceptions on climate change and education in Alberta, and aids in understanding the need for environmental education in helping Alberta's youth to feel prepared, confident, and knowledgeable on our future.

[1] Leger Marketing Alberta, Inc. (2020). *2020 Youth Polling - Environment, Energy, & Climate Literacy*. Retrieved from: (<https://www.abcee.org/youth-reports-initiatives>)

[2] Field, E., Schwartzberg, P. & Berger, P. (2019). *Canada, Climate Change and Education: Opportunities for Public and Formal Education* (Formal Report for Learning for a Sustainable Future). Retrieved from: (<http://www.LSF-LST.ca/cc-survey>)



An AYLEE Perspective



We have lived generations in a world dominated by money, and in the wake of reckless greed, many seemingly inherent values, such as environmental stewardship, have been lost. Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have worked alongside the land, trading their labor in return for produce and giving back nutrients and attention to the land. They continue to learn from their ancestors what it takes to be one with the earth and reap the benefits of a mutualistic relationship. In recent years, those teachings have been ignored and erased by settler societies in the tide of industrialization, colonization, and commercial agriculture and with that knowledge lost, we have ceased to care for the land.

A new chapter in human history is beginning as we begin to witness the foreshocks of the global environmental disaster that awaits in our future due to human action. While we begin to witness destruction and death at the hands of forest fires, tropical storms, droughts, floods, and heat waves, the health of our planet has once again caught our attention.

Youth are calling for global change to repair our relationship with the earth and prevent further disaster, but they are dramatically undereducated on the topics of environment, climate change, and stewardship. So are parents, teachers, social media influencers, and many media outlets. There is a distinct lack of easily accessible, scientifically sound knowledge on these topics, and although individuals, especially youth, are seeking ways to act, they do not know what to do. We at AYLEE believe that increasing the quantity and quality of environmental education should be an utmost priority, because it is nearly impossible to act with no knowledge on the subject you wish to act on.

Environmental education is a pathway to a multitude of positive impacts, the most prominent being the ability to act on matters of concern. Through hands-on learning about climate change, greenhouse gases, plastics pollution, renewable energy, intersectionality, and many other topics, youth begin to build their repertoire of tools and knowledge from a young age. Importantly, this develops essential problem solving skills, which can catalyze student involvement in environmental issues as well as other social issues which reach beyond the school or even community, such as equality, prejudice, and corruption. Overall, this lends them the power and confidence to initiate real change in their schools and communities, both at present, and throughout their future.



Building environmental knowledge also reveals new pathways in academics, leadership, and careers for students. With environmental issues being both immediate and global, students begin to feel increasingly involved in the world around them as they learn about these topics in the classroom and the great outdoors. Through this higher engagement, many students will actually become more passionate and motivated when it comes to school and achieve better grades because of their own internal motivations to solve real world problems, rather than reacting to external motivation from parents and educators. This emphasis on a growth mindset allows students to prioritize and develop leadership skills, personal values, and scientific reasoning, which give students the foundation to tackle the multi-faceted problems of today's changing world. As a result, careers that allow youth to have a positive impact on the world around them will begin to appeal to an increasing number of students, and more youth will pursue further education to become involved in fields that are contributing to a more sustainable future.

In addition, learning about the world around us creates a feeling of belonging and responsibility. These feelings, especially in young generations, can bring people together to collaborate in new ways. Volunteering events, town halls, brainstorming meetings, and conferences all bring people together under one purpose. Within this new emphasis on collaboration, more projects can be proposed and completed, and the community will benefit through new sustainable infrastructure and systems brought about by young minds who have used the environmental literacy gained in their schools.

Lastly, in addition to the many positive benefits environmental education has on schools and communities, it is also beneficial to student wellness. A key component of environmental education, we think, is outdoor learning. It has been shown that increasing the time youth spend in nature, and especially around trees, reduces stress, tension, anger, symptoms of ADHD, and grounds them on an individual level. For us, this means that we feel greater connection to the world around us, and we feel ready for anything that comes our way. Spending time outdoors also correlates with increased physical activity which improves cardiovascular health and overall wellness.

We desperately need more environmental education that is scientifically sound and engaging for these young minds. We have incredible benefits to reap by committing to properly educating new generations on the importance of planetary health, and we also face dire consequences if we do not ensure proper education. We will run out of time to combat environmental disasters and climate change if we do not bring on board young minds now. We risk a generation of individuals just as undereducated on climate change and the environment as the previous, and we cannot afford another generation of lost knowledge.



Methodology

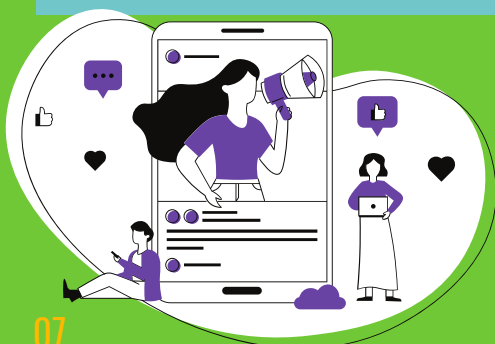


The survey was first planned during the AYLEE planning day summit on February the sixth, where the objective, audience, and other basic information was established. Following this, twenty-three questions were established that were partly inspired from similar surveys like Leger's poll of Albertan youth in 2020 as well as the 2016 AYLEE group.

It was then distributed through a URL online using survey monkey, and was open from March 3 until the end of April. In total, it received 318 responses. Those surveyed were mostly Albertan youth under 18 attending grades 6-12 who were reached through the following:

- AYLEE's social media (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)
- AYLEE members' personal school and community connections and social media
- ACEE's April newsletter, webinars, and social media
- College of School Superintendents (CASS)
- Alberta School Council Association (ASCA)
- Fridays for Future Calgary
- EcoVision
- Shep Project Green
- Green Scene - Fort McMurray Public School District

Questions asked established demographics, knowledge and perspectives on climate and environmental topics, students' conversations about energy, environment, and the economy, perspectives on environmental education, and preferred actions regarding the climate and the environment.

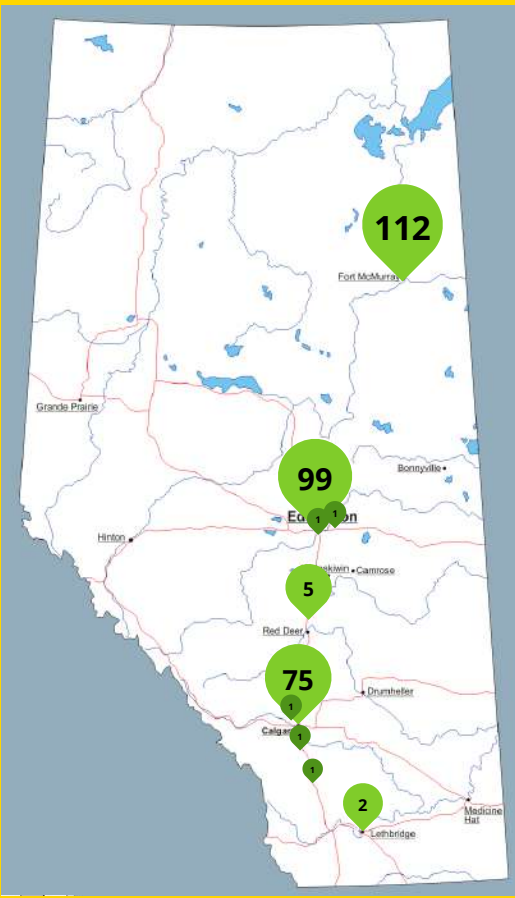
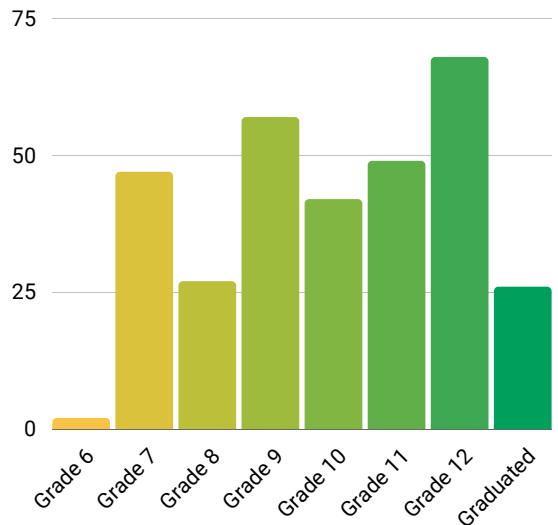


Demographics



The poll conducted by AYLEE was heavily focused on gathering data from the youth and students of the province. The vast majority of participants were in grades 7-12 while few were in grade 6 or within seven years of graduating high school. Specifically, grades 7, 9, 10, and 11 all had participant numbers between 45 and 60, while we received the lowest number of responses from grade 6 students (2 participants) and graduated students (26 participants), and the highest number of response came from grade 12 students who submitted a total of 68 responses and made up 21% of the total youth polled.

Grades of the youth who took the survey

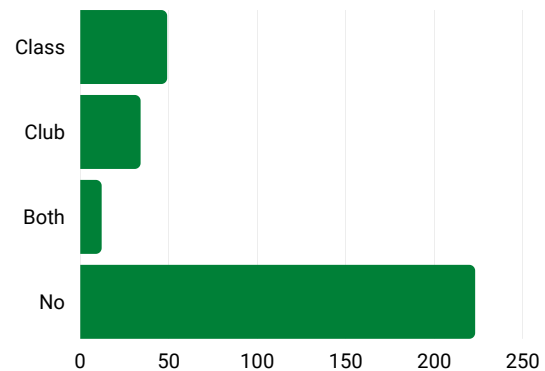


The participants of the survey came from all around the province, with many responses being submitted by students in Fort McMurray, Edmonton, and Calgary. We did, however, also receive completed surveys from Lacombe, Lethbridge, Leduc, Nanton, Okotoks, Sherwood Park, and Cochrane (20 responses were unclear or preferred not to answer).

Environmental clubs or eco-clubs, and environmentally based courses offered or required in school is one way that educational institutes can help to educate and engage youth on the topics of the environment and climate change. The vast majority (over 70%) of students polled in the 2021

AYLEE survey had not participated in either an eco-club or an environmentally-focused class. 15% of students attended a class, while 11% participated in a club, with 4% of students polled both attending a class and participating in an Eco-club.

Are you part of an environmentally-focused class or club in school?





Knowledge and Perspectives

One of the central objectives of the AYLEE poll was to assess students' general knowledge of climate change and environmental impacts. This objective also included questions seeking student opinions on the impact of climate change on the economy and life in general, and the role of governments, businesses, individuals, and themselves in combating climate change. Most survey participants completed this section of the survey while 38 participants skipped it.

It is clear through the survey results that there is widespread concern for the impact of anthropogenic climate change in the youth of Alberta.

The majority of those polled strongly agree that human activity is causing climate change (58%), while another 26% agree to a lesser extent.

73% are at least somewhat worried about the impact of climate change, while a combined 11% are to some extent not worried about climate change.

The majority of survey participants are also concerned about their future in relation to the economy and the environment. 69% are concerned to at least some extent and those not concerned make up only 10% of total responses. However, 78% of those polled believe that Alberta's economy can excel while protecting the environment.

Out of survey participants only 47% believe that business and governments are responsible for combating climate change, while 72% stated that "I could be doing a lot more to reduce my impact on climate change," though less than half of those surveyed felt prepared to do so.

In each category of knowledge-base polling, more than 30% of participants stated that they had some knowledge but not enough.

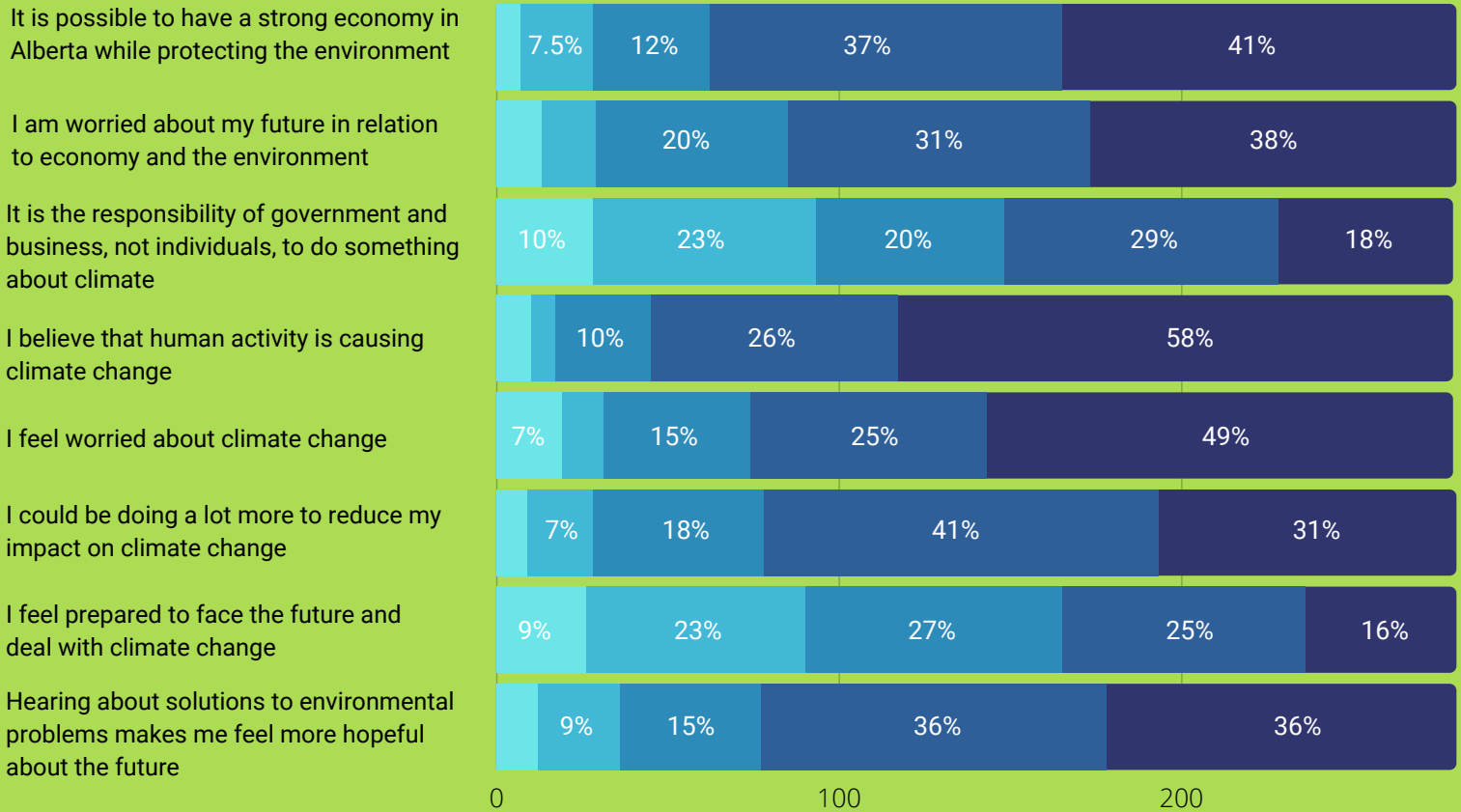
In each of the categories of Albertan impacts, Canadian impacts, and solutions to climate change, more than 15% stated that they knew very little.

Only the categories of global climate change and the impact of climate change on natural disasters elicited a response of 20% or more participants stating that they knew a great deal, with the remaining three categories at or below 15%.

Knowledge and Perspectives on Climate and Environmental Topics

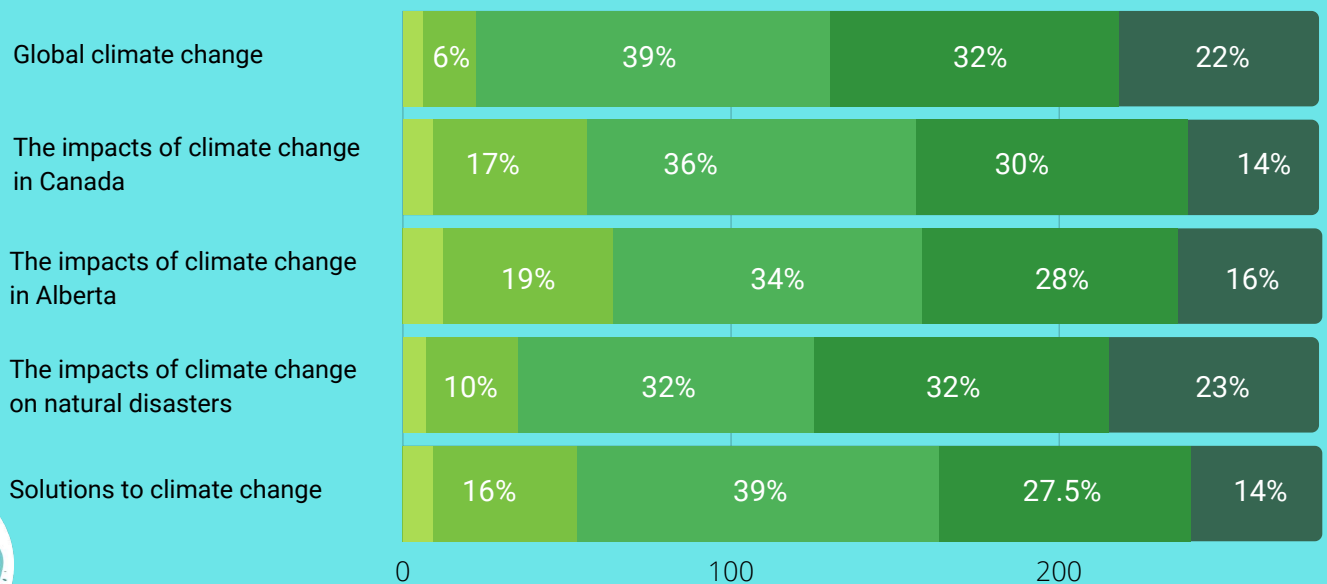
For you personally, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements about the environment:

Strongly Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Somewhat Agree Strongly Agree



How much do you think you know about the following?

Nothing At All Very Little Some But Not Enough Enough A Great Deal





Conversations

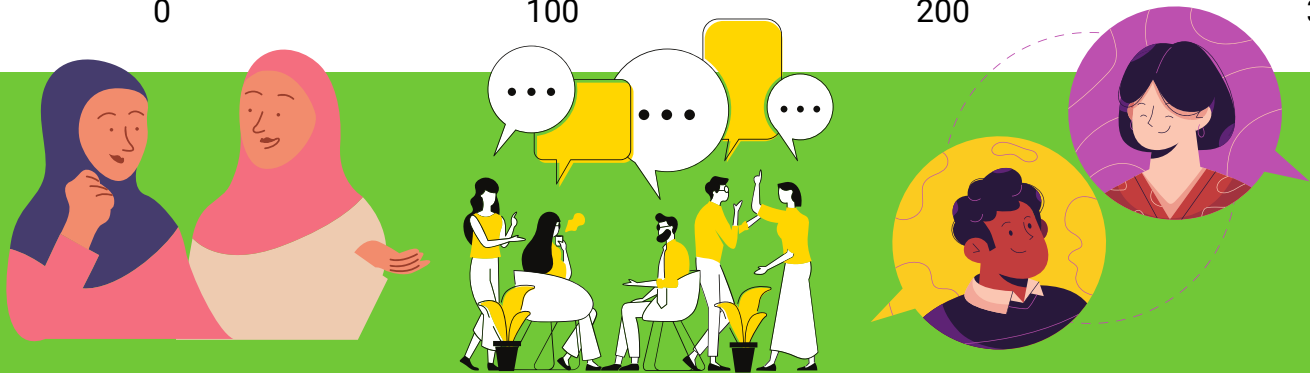
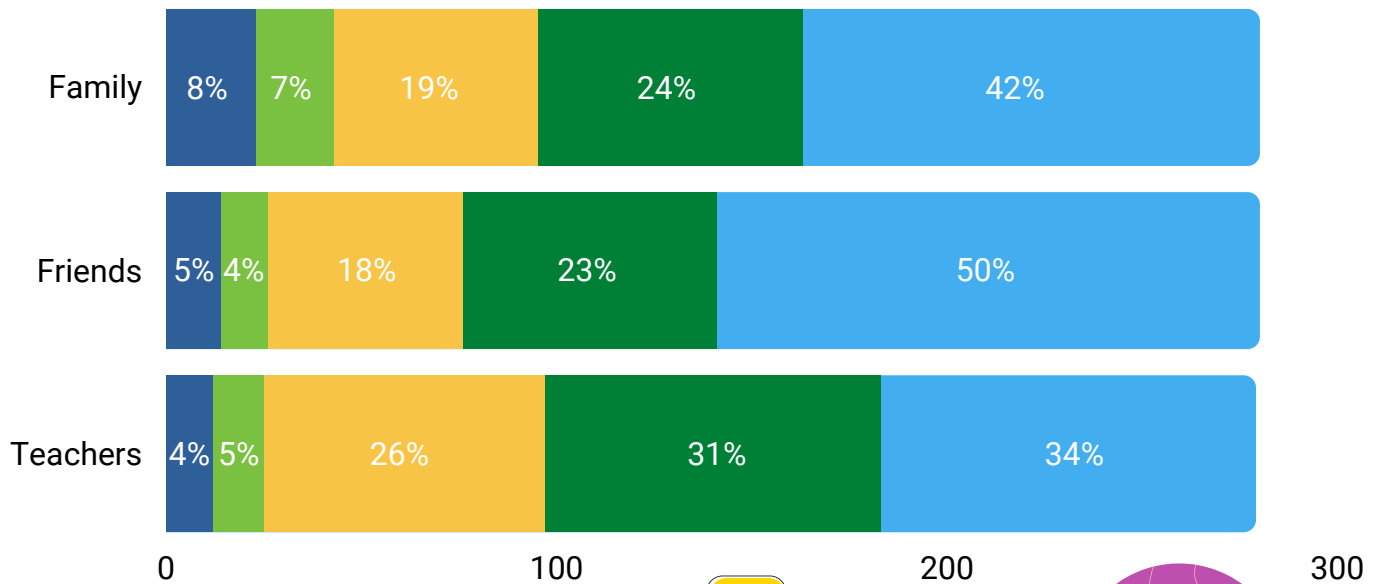
Talking about climate change and environmental issues is essential in learning and acting on such challenges.

The majority of youth survey participants feel at least somewhat comfortable discussing environmental topics, with friends being the most promising and family being the least with over 8% of participants being very uncomfortable discussing such topics with family.

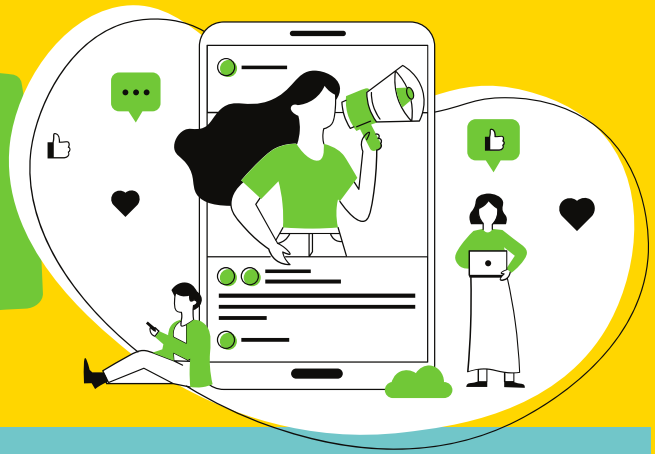
Teachers had the lowest percentage of very comfortable answers, but the highest of both somewhat comfortable and neutral answers, giving teachers the lowest combined percentage of uncomfortable answers.

How comfortable are you talking about environmental topics such as climate change with the following:

■ Very Uncomfortable ■ Somewhat Uncomfortable ■ Neutral ■ Somewhat Comfortable ■ Very Comfortable



Perspectives



Assessing the state of environmental education as well as youth opinions on the future of environmental education is integral in determining what must be changed, so we asked the youth.

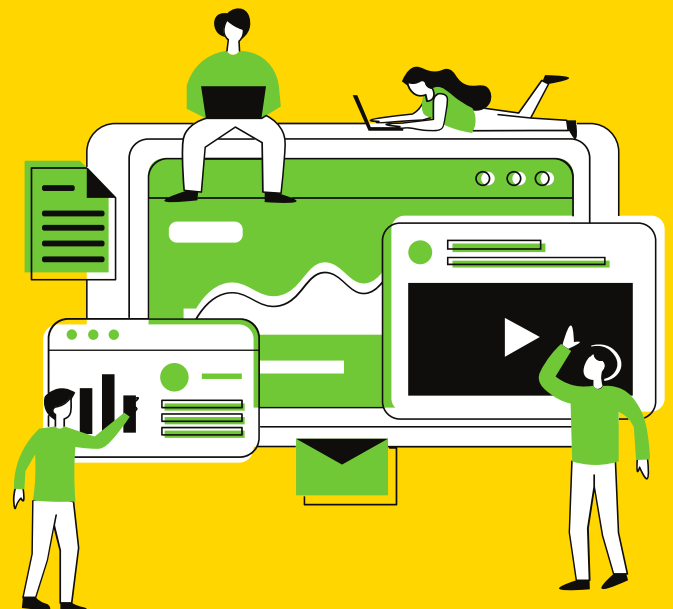
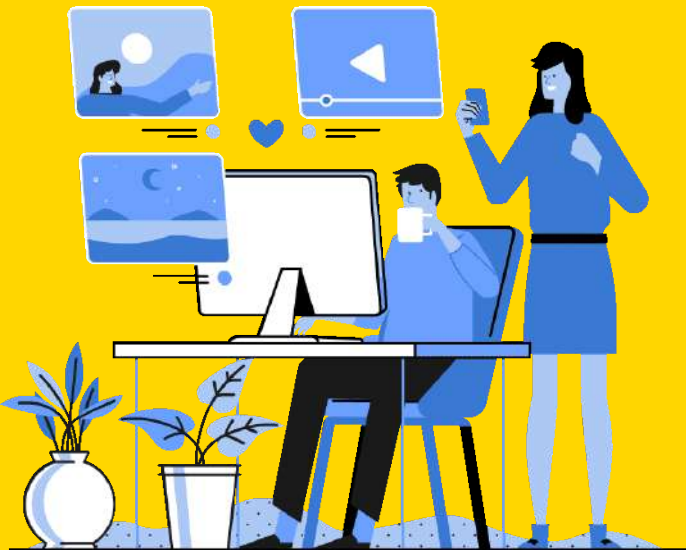
More than 50% of those polled had learned something pertaining to the environment, energy, or climate change through social media, Youtube, the news, and classes in school, social media garnering the highest percentage.

The highest percentage of survey takers (25%) stated that they learned about climate change in class 2-5 times per year while almost 10% selected once every few years and over 4% said never.

Over 80% of youth polled believe that there should be more environmental education, with 49.49% stating that there should be much more.

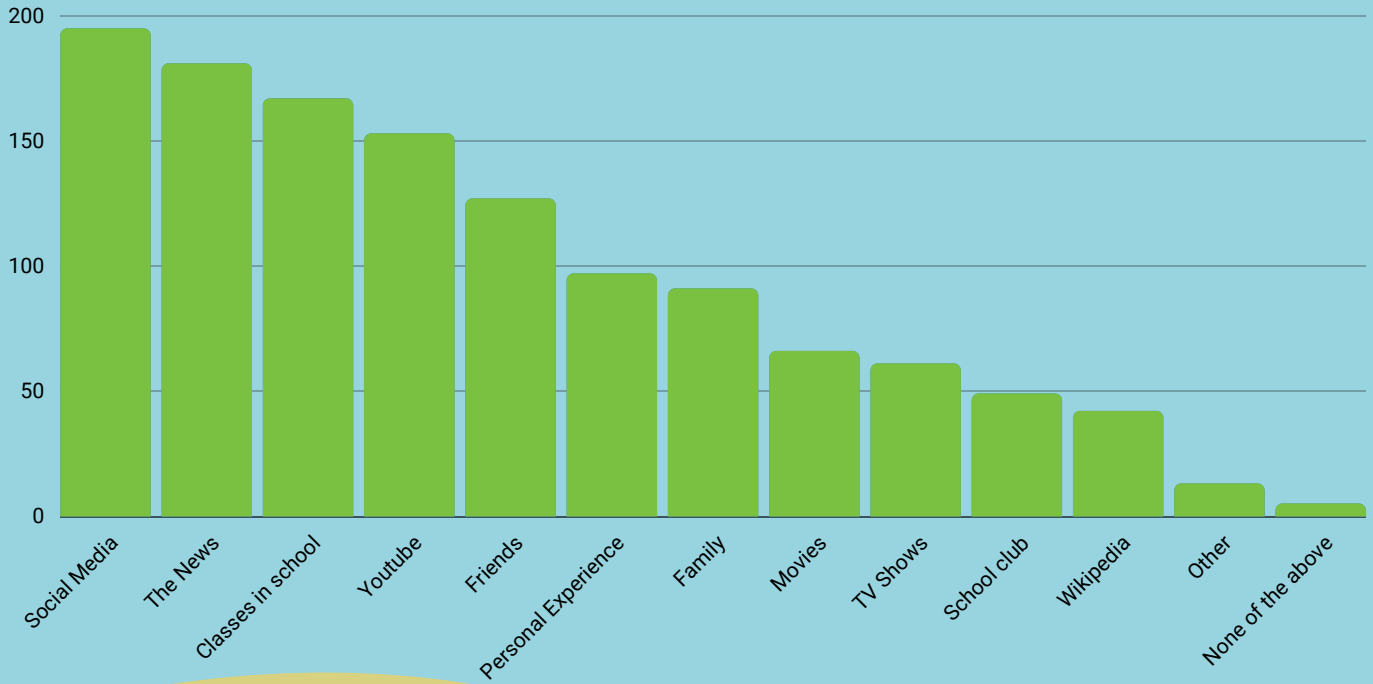
80% or more survey takers agreed on the topics of prioritizing environmental education, ensuring maximum teacher knowledge of climate change, and increasing in school education on climate solutions. No category scored below 59% agreement rate.

The only category which gained a disagreement percentage higher than 7% was implementing environmental education in classes other than science.

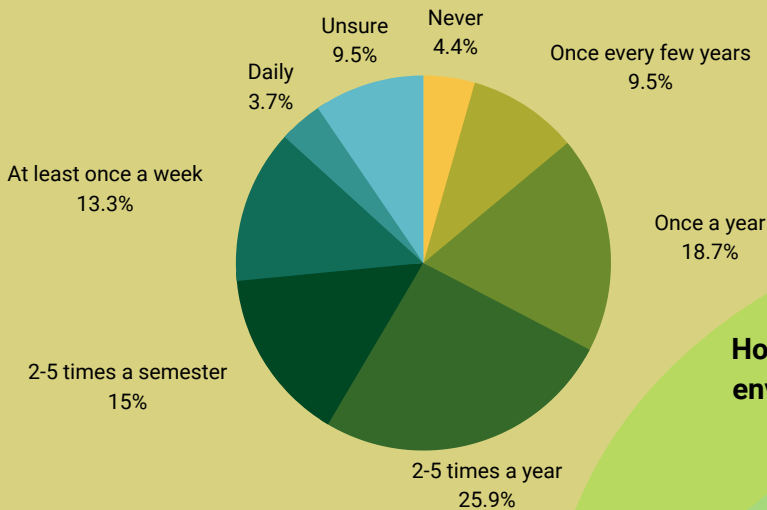


Perspectives on Environmental Education

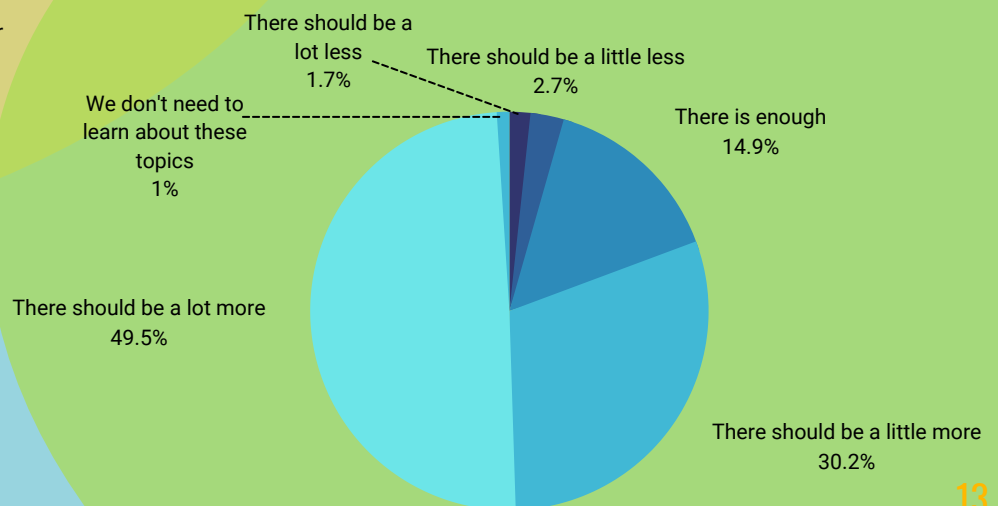
Where do you learn about the environment, energy, and climate change?



How often would you say you learn about environmental topics such as climate change in class at school?

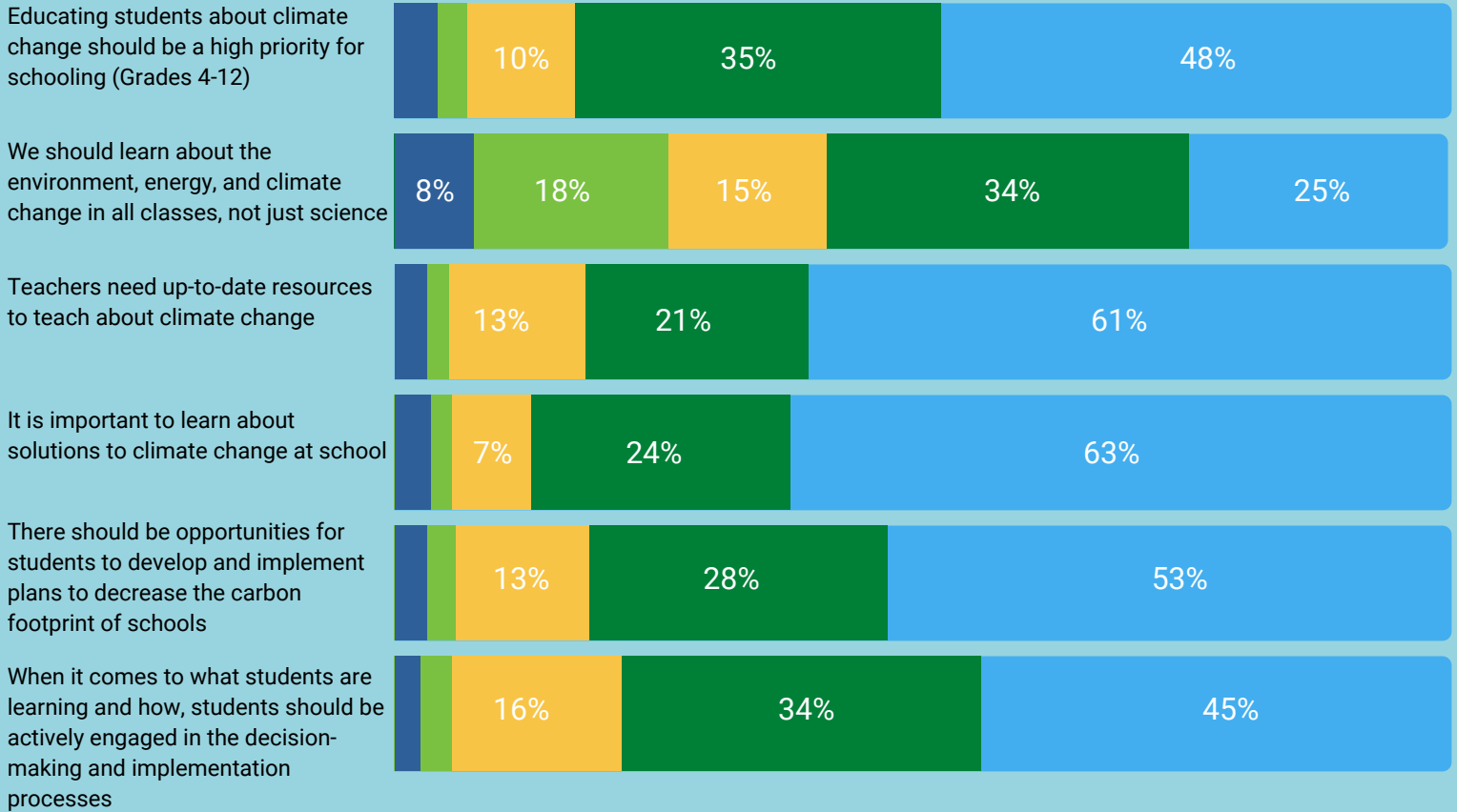


How do you feel about education on the topics of the environment, energy, and climate change in Alberta?



For you personally, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following:

■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Somewhat Disagree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Somewhat Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree



Actions



Situations do occur where schools or communities may be participating in climate action, but may not be properly educating students of that action. It is important for youth to have the knowledge of projects which both succeed and fail in order for them to learn and persevere.

32% of those polled were unsure about their school's participation in environmental efforts, which we must focus on decreasing while we further environmental education for students.

Notably, almost half of those polled stated that their school was implementing school gardens, while alternatives to single vehicle transportation, recycling and composting systems, and student environmental advisory councils were all selected by greater than 25% of those polled. Student advisory committees being the most pleasantly surprising figure for the inclusion of students in environmental strategies in the school setting.

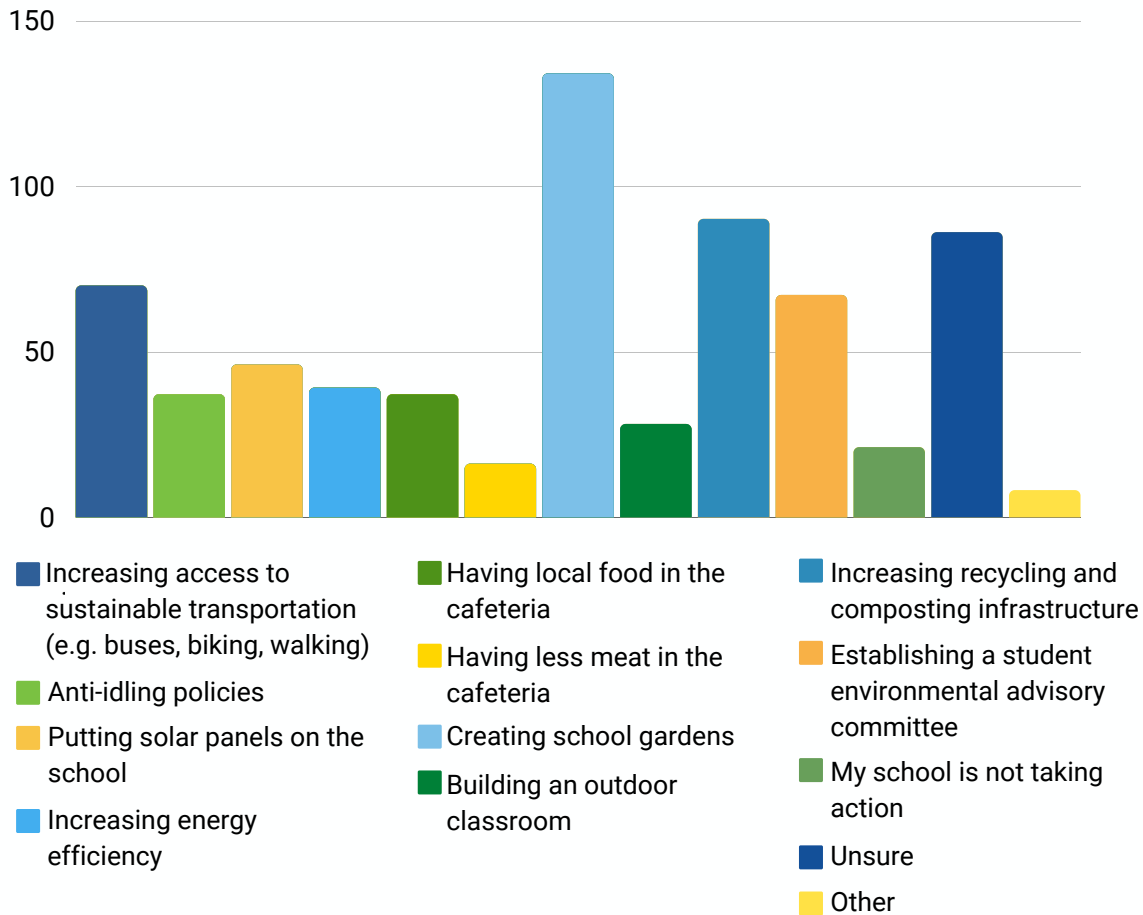
More than 30% of youth surveyed skipped the question regarding environmental clubs. From those able to answer, it seems most environmental clubs focus on a variety of topics; recycling, composting, gardening, and spreading climate awareness are involved in more than 30% of clubs, reducing energy consumption is included in 26% and only wildlife conservation and sustainable transportation fell below 20% inclusion rate in school environmental clubs.

In terms of supporting climate action in school, only 4% disagreed with all supplied options, while serving less meat in cafeterias was supported by 34% of students and every other category received the majority of student support (Sustainable transportation, anti-idle policies, implementing solar panels, reducing energy consumption, serving more local food products, implementing school gardens, building outdoor classrooms, increasing use of recycling and composting services, and establishing student environmental advisory committees).



Actions regarding the climate and the environment

Is your school currently taking action to be more environmentally friendly and/or address climate change? If yes, which of the following climate solutions is your school taking?

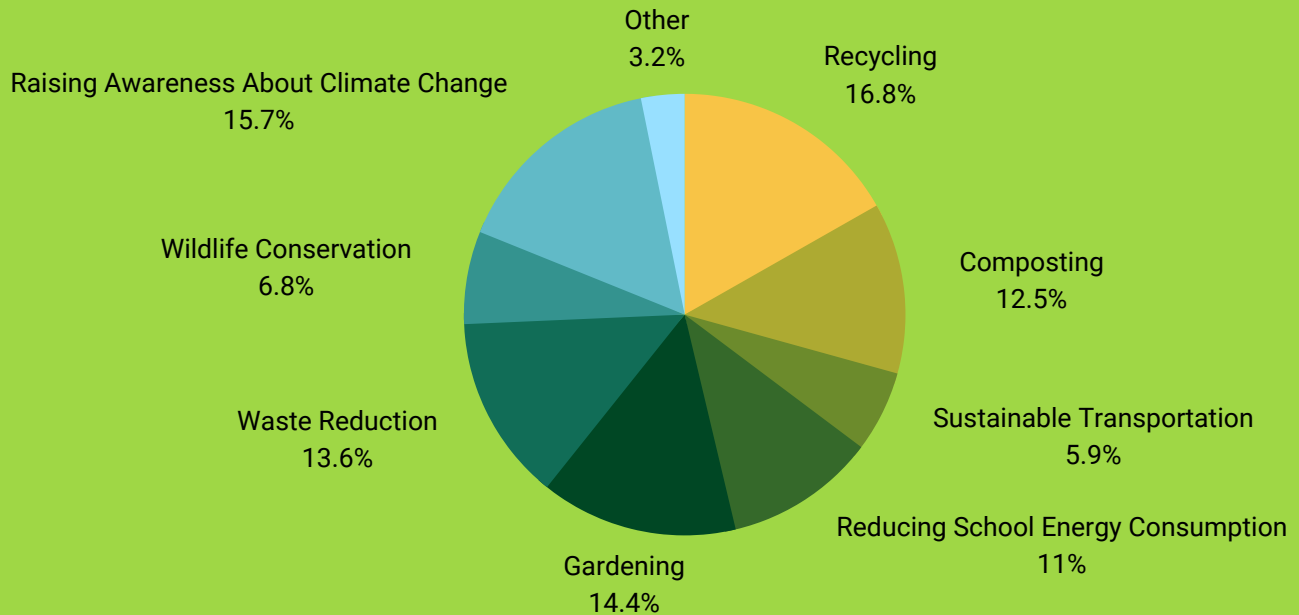


Other responses:

- Finding ways to reuse and reduce E.x. reusing the energy from the growth light
- We are doing Energy Audit, we are planning to build a greenhouse and the district will install solar panels in our school soon
- Trying to create more environmental awareness
- My school put in an AquaPonics program so we can grow our own food with cool looking fish!
- We have goats!!! (and a greenhouse!)
- Future plans for renovation
- trying to reduce printer waste
- Putting regulations on public printers in order to reduce wasted paper



If you are in an environmental club, what are the priorities of your club?

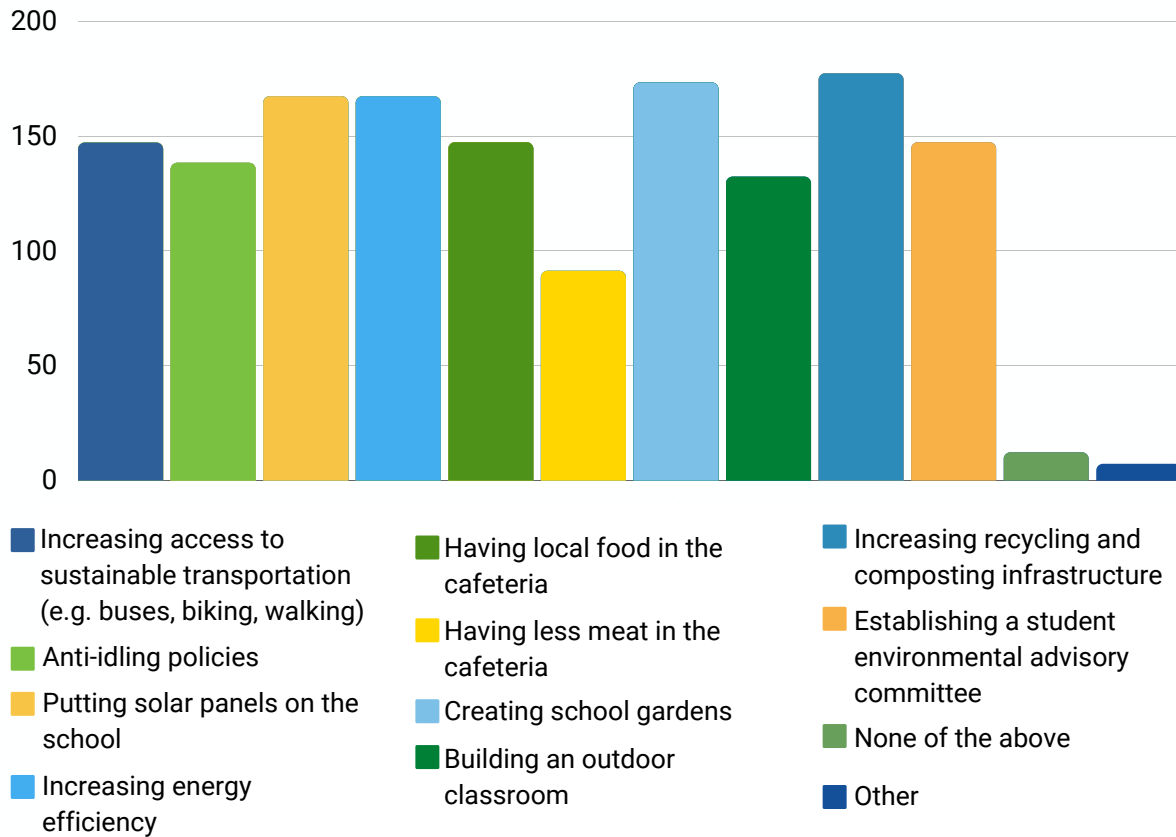


Other responses:

- I am not a part of a school group, but two separate climate organizations – one Calgary-based and one Canada-wide (x3)
- I am not in a club BUT if I were in one, I'd do all of the above (x3)
- I am not in a club, but that is what I would do (x3)
- Land use/reclamation (x3)
- Sustainability (x3)



Of the following climate solutions, which would you support your school taking?

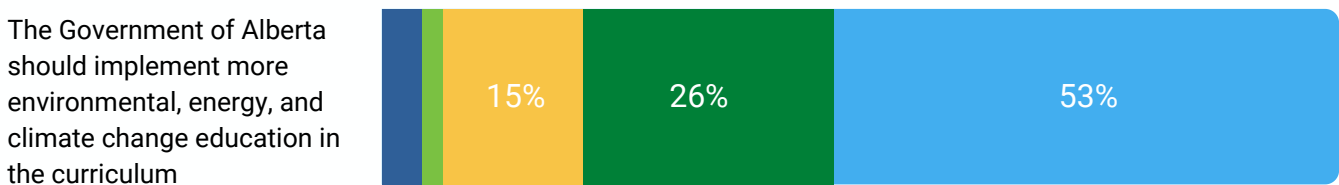
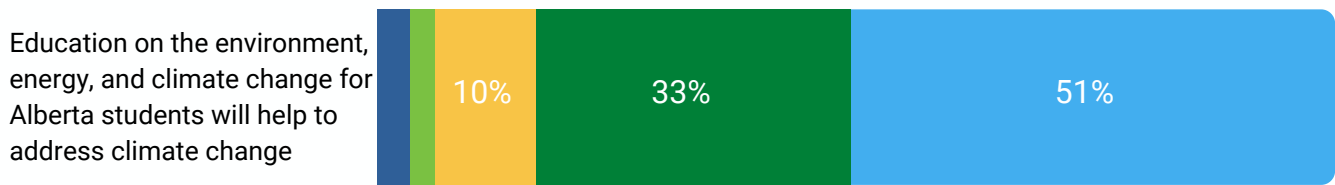


Other responses:

- All of the above
- All of them and more!
- Anything my school does to help the environment ill support 100%
- Better waste management policies
- climate change education
- Hydro/aquaponics
- We don't have a cafeteria! but if we did i would support it

For you personally, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following:

■ Strongly Disagree
 ■ Somewhat Disagree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Somewhat Agree
 ■ Strongly Agree





Analysis and Discussion

Youth in Alberta need environmental education; the issue is now more pressing than ever to educate future generations on how to combat the climate crisis. Increasingly intense and frequent feelings of helplessness, worry, and anxiety arise from the climate crisis; as made evident by the 74% of youth polled agreeing that they are worried about their future due to climate change. This is a direct result of a lack of environmental education, with, on average, 52% of youth feeling that they don't know enough about climate change, its impacts, or solutions.

Albertan youth believe that those feelings can be reduced through increased opportunities for students to learn, take action, and be heard. 72% of youth agree that hearing about solutions to environmental problems makes them feel more hopeful about the future and as such, an even greater 87% of youth believe that it is important to learn about solutions in school. Furthermore, 83% of youth agree that educating students about climate change should be a high priority for schooling; 81% believe there should be opportunities for students to develop and implement plans to decrease the carbon footprint of schools; and 79% agree that when it comes to what students are learning and how, students should be actively engaged in the decision-making and implementation processes.

In addition, 78% of youth believe that it is possible to have a strong economy in Alberta while protecting the environment. We believe it can be done, and we are willing to be a part of that transition. Specifically, putting solar panels on schools, increasing the energy efficiency of school buildings, creating school gardens, and increasing recycling and composting infrastructure in schools are the top four climate solutions youth want to see implemented in schools.

Overall, The Youth Led Environmental Education Poll supports the overall youth perspective that climate change continues to be a barrier to our future. Youth need environmental education; it is vital for youth to be educated, knowledgeable, and prepared for the climate crisis we are living in. The next generation is aware that the world they are entering is far from safe, possibly even more aware than parents and teachers, but we are brave. We have not lost hope and we will not lose hope. We are not fearless, we are more scared than any child should be but we are willing to do what it takes to make our planet and our lives whole again, we just need the education and the support to make that happen.

Call to Action



Youth need the support of those we look upon offering their intergenerational partnerships; without it, it is difficult to bring system level education changes for youth. Alberta youth call on all Albertans to work with their communities to bring environmental education into our lives. Without knowledge and resources, youth are powerless, so we are asking to please make absolutely sure that no student leaves the classroom not knowing what climate change is and what they can do about it. Let no student who wishes to act wander the halls searching for someone to show them where to begin. We have to engage our youth now. We need them and the planet needs them.

In 2020, AYLEE students outlined our recommendations for advancing environmental education in our White Paper [“Supporting Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Climate Education in Alberta Schools: Recommendations by Students for Alberta’s Educational Leadership.”](#) The paper includes recommendations on curriculum and student applications, school infrastructure, teacher professional development, and transportation.

Through the climate crisis, one of the most important ways to combat climate change is talking about climate change, with your friends, family, and school communities; including decision makers who can bring climate policy and education further. Making conversations and connections through positive discussion can help bring people together to take action. We ask that you take this next step in spreading awareness by sharing this report and our White Paper, and by taking action to support youth leaders as well as those most disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis. For those with the privilege to vote, do so by taking time to educate yourself on a leader that will best suit the needs of our community to combat the climate crisis that continues to be a matter of urgency. Alberta youth need environmental education and the Youth Led Environmental Education Poll of 2021 adds to the direness of our situation. Youth need the skills, support, and knowledge to use our voices, continue stepping up for climate action, and fuel our passion for saving our planet. We need climate education to become stronger, bolder, unapologetic, climate leaders of today. Alberta youth are demanding environmental education, to further our ability to stand up, speak up, and act on climate change. And, we need you to join us, whether it’s bringing up environmental education in a school council meeting, talking to your school trustee, meeting with an Indigenous Elder, or sending a letter to the Minister of Education; it can all make a difference, and it can provide youth with a future we will continue to fight for.

