

# Pennsylvania doesn't teach about climate change

The Bethlehem Gadfly Climate Action Plan, Environment, Environmental Advisory Council September 20, 2020

🌿 *Latest in a series on Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan* 🌿

Bethlehem is developing a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to address climate change by identifying policies and programs that will mitigate our contribution to climate change and help the city adapt to the effects of a changing climate, including extreme heat and flooding. The second public planning meeting for the CAP will be held virtually on Wednesday, October 7th. Mark your calendars. Gadfly will be posting details shortly.

Tip o' the hat to the Touchstone Theatre's "Speak out!" sustainability forum last night (part of **Festival UnBound**). Gadfly hopes to post here some of the student presentations from the forum in the near future.



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*selections from Paul Muschick, "As wildfires rage, Pennsylvania and 3 other states don't teach about climate change." Morning Call, September 17, 2020.*

(The headline for this article in the print edition Sept. 20 is "Pa. schools still don't teach about climate change.")

Pennsylvania is getting hotter and wetter. But in Pennsylvania schools, there's no requirement that students learn that their actions are contributing to it by changing the climate.

The state is one of only four without science education standards to teach that people cause global warming, a problem that's difficult to ignore as California wildfires burn out of control.

The goal is to implement the standards in the 2024-25 school year, to give schools time to develop curriculum.

The proposal still has to go through a public comment period, then needs approval from the Independent Regulatory Review Commission, a five-member board appointed by the Legislature and governor.

There's plenty of evidence [climate change is] real, and that something must be done.

A national climate assessment researched and written by 13 federal agencies in 2018 concluded: "Earth's climate is now changing faster than at any point in the history of modern civilization, primarily as a result of human activities."

Doing something to solve the problem starts with teaching people the facts. That's why it's important for climate change, and its causes, to be discussed in our schools.

The proposal advanced last week was drafted over the past year. Input was gathered from teachers, students, college professors, business and community leaders and others at 14 stakeholder meetings, including one in the Lehigh Valley that was held virtually in March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The update is broad and covers many topics. Lessons about how people impact the environment was one of the top suggestions from those who offered input. Proposed standards include:

**Kindergarten:** Communicate solutions that will reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, air and/or other living things in the local environment.

**Grades 3 to 5:** Describe human-caused changes that affect the immediate environment as well as other places, other people and future times.

Grades 6 to 8: Ask questions to clarify evidence of the factors that have caused the rise in global temperatures over the past century. Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing human impact on the environment. Construct an argument supported by evidence for how increases in human population and per capita consumption of natural resources impact Earth's systems.

Grades 9 to 12: Evaluate or refine a technological solution that reduces impacts of human activities on natural systems. Use a computational representation to illustrate the relationships among Earth systems and how those relationships are being modified due to human activity.

Climate change is a sticky subject under the Capitol dome in Harrisburg, where deniers have been invited to testify at legislative hearings. So I wouldn't be surprised if some lawmakers tried to squash the plan.

Some Republican lawmakers say the program would cost the economy hundreds of millions of dollars, with some of the costs being passed on to consumers, and plants and related businesses eventually closing, resulting in job losses.

There surely would be costs. But there's also great cost to doing nothing.

Requiring students to be taught about global warming and climate change would be another big step. Maybe some bright young minds will come up with other ways to tackle the problem that older generations have ignored for too long.

*It's Sunday, September 20, do you know where your Climate Action Plan is? Yep!*