

2021 -- H 5625

LC001382

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION – THE CLIMATE LITERACY ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Cortvriend, Carson, Ruggiero, Ajello, Kislak, Donovan,  
Kazarian, Speakman, Ranglin-Vassell, and McGaw

Date Introduced: February 19, 2021

Referred To: House Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by  
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 110

4 THE CLIMATE LITERACY ACT

5 **16-110-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as "The Climate Literacy Act".

7 **16-110-2. Legislative findings.**

8 The legislature finds and declares that:

9 (1) The evidence for human-induced climate change is overwhelming and undeniable, and  
10 the heaviest burden of climate change impacts will fall on the next generation;

11 (2) Nearly ten thousand (10,000) students graduate from Rhode Island high schools each  
12 year, armed with skills and knowledge about the climate that inform their actions, and the effects  
13 on the climate, positive or negative, of each of those ten thousand (10,000) students lasts beyond a  
14 lifetime;

15 (3) Those students need to be prepared to implement changes in professional and personal  
16 practices, to support and help develop new technology and policy, and to address the coming social  
17 and economic challenges and opportunities arising from a changing climate;

18 (4) It is thus essential that each of these graduates are climate literate and understand key  
19 environmental and sustainability principles;

1 (5) A study published in Nature demonstrated that children who take a climate education  
2 curriculum foster climate change concern among their parents;

3 (6) According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communications, over seventy-six  
4 percent (76%) of the people of Rhode Island support teaching students about the causes,  
5 consequences, and potential solutions to climate change;

6 (7) According to a recent national public radio poll, eighty-six percent (86%) of teachers  
7 in the United States feel that climate change should be taught in schools;

8 (8) A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that nearly half of  
9 American teenagers say they have learned either little or nothing about the causes or ways to reduce  
10 the effects of climate change, and that the number of teenagers who say they are being taught in  
11 school about how to mitigate climate change appears to be on the decline. Sixty-one percent (61%)  
12 say the issue of climate change is very or extremely important to them personally;

13 (9) The National Science Teaching Association, the National Association of Geoscience  
14 Teachers, and the National Association of Biology Teachers, as well as other professional education  
15 organizations, have all called for greater support for science educators in teaching climate science  
16 and climate change. In a recent paper in the proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,  
17 scientists picked climate education as one of six (6) key societal transformations needed to address  
18 the climate crisis;

19 (10) The resilient Rhody report recommends that kindergarten through twelve (K-12)  
20 education be expanded to include education on environmental literacy, including climate-related  
21 emergency preparedness, by developing resources for school use and identifying how these  
22 concepts can be incorporated into existing state standards.

23 **16-110-3. Purpose.**

24 The purpose and intent of this chapter is to ensure that all students attending public schools,  
25 or other schools managed and controlled by the state, become environmentally and climate literate  
26 by the time they graduate from twelfth grade.

27 **16-110-4. Implementation.**

28 The Rhode Island department of education shall:

29 (1) In consultation with a wide representation from the environmental and climate  
30 education community as well as practicing teachers, principals, and superintendents, develop a set  
31 of key environmental, climate, and sustainability principles and concepts to be infused into all  
32 science and civics and social studies courses throughout kindergarten through twelve (K-12), no  
33 later than August 31, 2023;

34 (2) In consultation with a wide representation from the environmental and climate

1 education community as well as practicing teachers, principals, and superintendents, identify and  
2 disseminate lessons, activities, and materials related to the environment, including potential career  
3 paths, which are based on these key environmental, climate, and sustainability principles and  
4 concepts while meeting the learning standards and grade span expectations to all Rhode Island  
5 schools no later than August 31, 2024;

6 (3) Produce and disseminate models and examples of how to incorporate climate change  
7 into math and English language arts to teachers and schools no later than August 31, 2024;

8 (4) Infuse these key environmental, climate, and sustainability principles and concepts into  
9 the learning standards in science and the kindergarten through twelve (K-12) Rhode Island grade  
10 span expectations for social studies where appropriate no later than August 31, 2025;

11 (5) Ensure that all RIDE teacher professional development in science and civics and social  
12 studies includes these key principles and concepts no later than August 31, 2026; and

13 (6) Establish a "climate smart" award program to recognize high performing schools based  
14 on the metrics of the US department of education green ribbon schools program and a "green apple"  
15 award program to recognize kindergarten through twelve (K-12) teachers who develop and  
16 implement high-quality instruction that addresses these key environmental, climate, and  
17 sustainability principles and concepts no later than August 31, 2023.

18 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO EDUCATION – THE CLIMATE LITERACY ACT

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1           This act would implement literacy of climate change for all students enrolled in public  
2 schools or other schools managed and controlled by the state in kindergarten through twelve (K-  
3 12).

4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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