

Case Study: Depaul College Prep, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Climate Action Education For All.

CLIMATE ACTION EDUCATION

Climate Action Schools is a global network that connects educators and students ages 5-18 to explore the causes and effects of climate change, develop solutions, and take action together.

Each year, DePaul Prep students will take action during this 10-month, climate education learning experience, that will include educator certifications and an online Community of Practice, cross-curricular resources, guided data collection, school-to-school international virtual exchanges, and a student-led climate project.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

DePaul College Prep in Chicago, Illinois, stands out for its innovative Sustainable Urban Food Systems program led by Melissa Flynn, a Year 2 Climate Action Schools Champion. This interdisciplinary program integrates food security, environmental stewardship, and community engagement, preparing students to address real-world sustainability challenges. The Sustainable Urban Food Systems program is designed to provide students with practical knowledge and hands-on experience in urban agriculture, sustainable culinary practices, and food justice. The program aligns with DePaul College Prep's mission to foster critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and social justice through experiential learning.

PORTRAIT OF A CHAMPION

Melissa Flynn is a dedicated educator and Year 2 Climate Action Schools Champion at DePaul College Prep in Chicago, Illinois. With a strong background in sustainable urban food systems, she serves as the Sustainable Urban Food & Culinary Arts Teacher, where she empowers students to explore the intersection of food security and sustainability. Melissa also moderates the Baking Club, Life Smarts Team, and Climbing Club, promoting teamwork, environmental awareness, and outdoor leadership. She holds a B.A. from St. Louis University and an M.A. from Loyola University of Chicago. Melissa has led students to state conferences to present their work on sustainable urban food, co-created the "Food Waste Recipes Global Cookbook," and brought students to the United Nations to engage with global sustainability leaders. As a passionate advocate for sustainability, she continues to inspire and lead her students toward becoming active, informed stewards of the environment.

AT A GLANCE

Climate Action Schools

- Goals
- Solutions
- Results
- Lessons Learned

Call To Action

- Lessons Learned
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

School Facts

- **School type:** private, college preparatory high school
- **Grade level of students:** grades 9-12
- **Students:** Around 1,347
- **Faculty members:** The student-teacher ratio is 12:1, with a teaching staff of 67
- **The school offers a diverse curriculum, including** College Prep, Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Additionally, DePaul Prep provides dual enrollment courses in partnership with DePaul University.

Mission.

Guided by our core values of Faith, Respect, Excellence, Service and Health, we educate young adults of Chicago to think independently, pursue intellectual excellence, practice compassion, and value all individuals.

Vision.

We strive to create an educated, compassionate, and just world, one student at a time.



GOALS

Through their participation in the Climate Action Schools program, students engaged in asset mapping and conducted a school-wide sustainability audit to identify the most pressing environmental challenges within their community. This process revealed that food waste was a significant issue, leading them to focus their project on solutions that could make a real impact.

As part of their initiative, they co-authored a Food Waste Recipe Cookbook, collaborating with Champions from around the world to compile innovative recipes that repurpose food scraps and reduce waste. This global collaboration not only deepened their understanding of the issue but also empowered them to take meaningful action within their own school and community.

Building on these insights, the students developed a comprehensive action plan to address food waste at multiple levels. Their project combined education, advocacy, and hands-on solutions, engaging stakeholders across the school and beyond. The following sections outline their journey—from research and data collection to implementation and impact—showcasing how student-driven climate action can create lasting change.

SOLUTIONS

Working as a unified team, student delegates were selected from Depaul College Prep School to attend a field trip as a part of a **NYC Delegation Impact Report Team Project**. The NYC Delegation Impact Report Team Project is a collaborative initiative where student delegates take on formal roles before, during, and after their travel experience. Each student contributes to a final Impact Report, which will be presented to the school community and partners.

IMPACT REPORT COMPONENTS

- Experience Overview (purpose, itinerary, goals, participants)
- Preparation (application, research, visual evidence)
- Roles & Responsibilities (Project Managers, Comms, Travel Coordinators, Social Media, Debriefers, Impact Specialists)
- Daily Activities & Reflections (partners, learnings, quotes, photos)
- Themes & Impact (personal & global takeaways, Call to Action)
- Recommendations (opportunities, highlights)
- Appreciation (recognition of contributions)



RESULTS

The impact of this project extends beyond waste reduction—it has fostered a culture of sustainability and collaboration within the school and community. One key highlight is the garden at DCP, which showcases the dedication and innovative techniques students have implemented to promote sustainable food practices. This space not only serves as a model for climate-conscious agriculture but also represents the power of student-led initiatives. Sharing its success while in NYC will emphasize the tangible outcomes of their hard work.

Additionally, the project introduced students to the concept of intercropping, where certain plants support each other's growth and survival. This understanding of symbiotic planting has reinforced the importance of biodiversity and strategic cultivation in sustainable agriculture. Perhaps one of the most exciting developments is the connection between the school cafeteria and the garden. The cafeteria has begun incorporating some of the harvested produce into school meals, demonstrating the potential for stronger collaboration between community gardens and food providers. This success story highlights the importance of communication and partnership in creating a more sustainable food system—one that minimizes waste while maximizing local resources.

As the students continue their journey, these experiences serve as a powerful reminder that small, school-based initiatives can inspire broader systemic change. Their work not only addresses food waste but also lays the groundwork for a more sustainable and interconnected future.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through the Sustainable Urban Food Systems program, DePaul College Prep has demonstrated the power of experiential learning in fostering environmental stewardship and community action. Key lessons learned include:

1. **The Power of Student Voice:** Providing platforms for students to share their ideas and solutions, such as state conferences and the United Nations, amplifies their impact and deepens their commitment to sustainability.
2. **Hands-On Learning is Transformative:** Engaging students in practical, real-world projects like the Food Waste Recipes Global Cookbook enhances their understanding of complex global issues and empowers them to take action.
3. **Collaboration Strengthens Impact:** Partnering with local and global organizations expands the reach of sustainability efforts and provides students with diverse perspectives and resources.

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking ahead, DePaul College Prep aims to:

- **Expand the Sustainable Urban Food Systems Curriculum:** Incorporate new topics such as climate-resilient agriculture and circular food economies.
- **Increase Community Outreach:** Strengthen partnerships with local food justice organizations and engage more community members in sustainability initiatives.
- **Support Student-Led Innovations:** Encourage students to develop and implement new projects addressing emerging sustainability challenges.

By building on these lessons and pursuing ambitious future goals, DePaul College Prep continues to lead by example, empowering the next generation of environmental advocates and changemakers.

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