

Case Study: Pinellas Virtual School Pinellas, USA

Climate Action Education For All.

CLIMATE ACTION EDUCATION

Liz Thompkins is dedicated to breaking the isolation that many of her virtual students experience. In a world where students often lack the opportunities for in-person clubs, extracurriculars, or group activities, getting them to collaborate is a vital first step. By pushing students to not only work together within their own school but also reach out to the wider community—across the county and beyond—Liz is guiding them to realize their potential as leaders. While initially intimidating for some, this challenge of expanding their climate action efforts beyond their comfort zones is helping them grow in confidence and advocacy. They're learning to use their voices and technology to spread awareness and make a significant impact, showing that even the most introverted students can be powerful agents of change.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The Climate Action Schools Program is a paid, year-long initiative that empowers schools, districts, and networks with students ages 5-18 to collaborate locally and globally on environmental topics. Now in its third year of the program, Bullis Charter School (BCS) has grown from a single Climate Champion to a dedicated team of champions and an established Eco Club, deepening its commitment to sustainability. Throughout the project, BCS classrooms explore the causes and effects of climate change, develop innovative solutions, and take meaningful action as a unified school community.

PORTRAIT OF A CHAMPION

As the lead for Social Studies, Foreign Language, Electives, and Hospital Homebound, Liz Thompkins wears many hats—but her passion for climate action drives everything she does.

Inspired by a professional development session, Liz immediately knew she had to be part of the movement. Since then, she's led transformative experiences, including the Lego Build the Change, Global Goals Challenge, & international collaboration through the Stevens Initiative. Her students took ownership of Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, teaching grades 6-12 about its impact and leading discussions on local and global solutions. Their Climate Action Club shared their work at a county-wide leadership conference and is now working to expand a tree-planting event into a community-wide initiative. To close the year, Liz and her students will lead a school-wide beach cleanup (K-12), proving that even in a virtual setting, climate action has no limits. Through her leadership, students aren't just learning about change—they're leading it.

AT A GLANCE

Climate Action Schools

- Goals
- Solutions
- Results
- Lessons Learned

Call To Action

- Lessons Learned
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

School Facts

- **School type:** Virtual Online School
- **Grade level of students:** K-12
- **Students:** PVS serves 3,500+ students
- **Faculty members:** 35 faculty members
- **Access to online course work** 24 hours a day/7 days a week
- **For students in K-5, PVS offers free enrollment in a full-year program.**



Mission.

Pinellas Virtual School's (PVS) mission is to provide an educational choice for students in grades K through 12.

Vision.

PVS's vision is to offer flexibility, innovative curriculum, and instructional oversight.

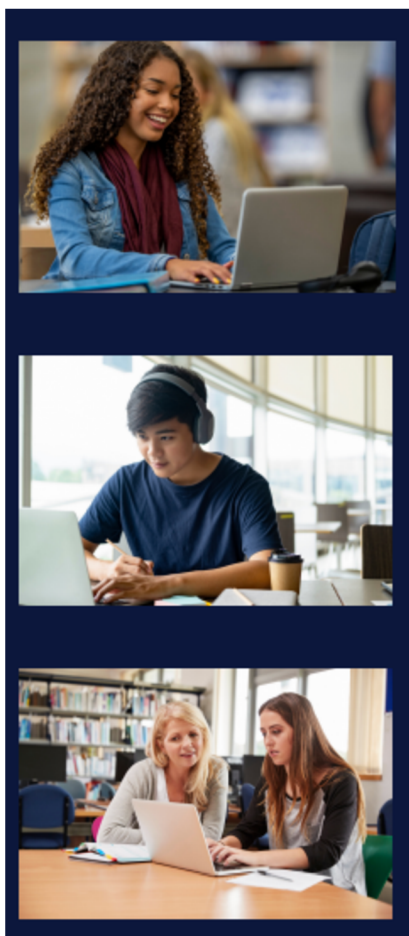


GOALS

The primary goals of the project were to foster student collaboration, promote advocacy for climate action, integrate climate education into various subjects, raise awareness about global climate issues, and encourage problem-solving and innovation. The initiative aimed to overcome the isolation often experienced by students in virtual school settings, promote active participation in environmental actions, and empower students to take leadership roles in advocating for sustainability. Additionally, the project sought to embed climate-related topics into curricula, providing students with hands-on learning opportunities to tackle real-world global issues, such as water sanitation and pollution. The ultimate objective was to help students realize their capacity for change through their involvement in climate action efforts.

SOLUTIONS

To achieve these goals, several solutions were implemented. The Stevens Initiative was a key strategy, fostering international collaboration by enabling students to work on climate-related projects with peers from schools around the world. Through this global exchange, students participated in the Global Goals Challenge, helping them connect to global climate issues. Lego Build the Change provided students with hands-on opportunities to create solutions for water pollution and marine life protection, while local actions such as tree planting and beach cleanups gave them real-world environmental experiences. Additionally, virtual homeroom lessons were integrated into the students' regular school schedules, ensuring climate education was embedded into everyday learning. Student-led presentations empowered students to advocate for climate issues within their school communities.



RESULTS

The project led to significant engagement in climate action. Students participated actively in projects such as Lego Build the Change, tree planting, and beach cleanups, fostering both awareness and action. Many students extended their learning beyond the classroom, advocating for climate awareness in their homes and local communities. The global collaboration aspect of the initiative was also a success, with students working with international peers to raise awareness and share solutions for climate challenges. The project enhanced student understanding of environmental issues, particularly water scarcity, and demonstrated the interconnectedness of global challenges. Additionally, the initiative encouraged student leadership, as students not only learned about climate issues but also took the initiative to lead environmental actions in their school and local communities. A diverse climate action club was formed, bringing together students from various backgrounds to collaborate on projects and advocate for sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several lessons emerged during the course of the project. One significant challenge was engaging high school students, as participation in climate action activities was not mandatory. This led to lower involvement from some students, highlighting the need for more strategies to ensure wider participation, especially among those who are not typically involved in extracurricular activities. Hands-on learning, such as Lego Build the Change, was identified as an effective way to increase student enthusiasm and creativity. The global nature of climate issues also helped students relate to their local context, particularly when addressing issues like water scarcity. Despite the challenges posed by the virtual learning environment, technology proved to be a valuable tool for bridging the geographical distance between students, facilitating global collaboration. Furthermore, while real-world projects like tree planting were impactful, they required careful planning and ongoing efforts to ensure their sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the experiences of the project, several recommendations can be made for future improvements. First, making participation in climate action activities mandatory or incentivized would likely increase engagement, particularly among high school students. Expanding opportunities for collaboration with other schools, both locally and internationally, would further enrich students' learning experiences and offer more diverse perspectives on climate action. It is also important to ensure that all students, including those who may not be involved in extracurricular activities, are reached with climate education messages. This could be achieved by incorporating climate education into school-wide events or using existing communication channels to raise awareness. Focusing on long-term sustainability of real-world projects, such as tree planting, is essential. Follow-up actions and continued care of these initiatives will help ensure their impact is lasting. Lastly, fostering an inclusive climate action program by leveraging diverse student voices and using technology effectively will be key to ensuring the initiative's ongoing success and engagement.

