

BOARD OF EDUCATION
CLARKE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
ATHENS, GEORGIA

In the Matter of Support for the Development
of the Athens-Clarke County Clean and Renewable Energy Plan

WHEREAS, climate change is becoming an increasing threat to human existence both globally and locally, and as a community we must take immediate action to find a way to protect the health of our students and employees and our quality of life now and in the future; and

WHEREAS, the use of fossil fuels to power buildings and transportation not only increase greenhouse gas emissions, but also contribute to indoor and outdoor air pollution, such that reductions in direct emissions from energy sources that cause climate change and contribute to cardiovascular, respiratory, neurological, and other illnesses and health impacts result in tangible improvements in student health and performance, particularly among our youngest children; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), energy-related expenses are only second to personnel as the largest expenditure in school district budgets, and savings from conservation efforts can be redirected into classrooms and student learning; and

WHEREAS, Georgia Power estimates electricity rates will rise by 11.5 percent over the next three years; and the fuel surcharge is anticipated to increase as much as 17% starting in June.

WHEREAS, Athens has maintained a high poverty rate over the years, and black and brown communities and other economically disadvantaged people will experience the economic, environmental, health, and social harms of climate change disproportionately, and spend more of their income on energy than median households in our community; and

WHEREAS, on May 21st, 2019, the Athens Clarke-County Mayor and Commissioners unanimously voted to adopt 100% CLEAN AND RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOLUTION to commit ACC's energy to come from clean and renewable sources by 2035; and

WHEREAS, the Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Office aims to achieve strategic innovation toward community wide 100% clean and renewable goal through the collection and analysis of information, piloting of new practices, and development of long-term collaborative efforts so that the community as a whole can benefit from increased health and resiliency ; and

WHEREAS, the mission of the Clarke County School District is to develop lifelong learners and globally-minded citizens in our complex and changing world; and

WHEREAS, the mission of the Clarke County School District Office of Safety and Energy is to promote energy conservation while providing effective ways to reduce energy consumption and associated costs across the district; and

WHEREAS, energy improvements can make schools and communities more resilient in the face of climate and natural disasters by serving as emergency hubs that ensure community members have access to heat, light, and clean air when grid power fails or outdoor air quality is unsafe; and

WHEREAS, the evidence on tailpipe emissions is clear: electric school buses have zero tailpipe emissions, so students and drivers are protected from the dangerous air pollutants produced by propane and diesel fuels. These air pollutants can contribute to respiratory disease, heart disease, cancer and other mental and physical health problems. This is especially important for kids from low-income communities and communities of color: 60% of low-income students take the bus to school compared to 45% of higher-income students, and students from black and brown households are more likely than their peers to ride the bus and

WHEREAS, the District is committed to equity, and transitioning to clean, renewable energy can help advance that goal by helping to address climate and air pollution, which disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color, and by creating STEM and vocational learning opportunities geared toward training and preparing students, especially in underserved, frontline communities, for the impending green jobs economy; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the Clarke County School District supports the development of the Athens-Clarke County Clean and Renewable Energy Plan to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2035; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the Clarke County School District hereby commits to transitioning the District off of fossil fuels for all of its operations by 2035; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board directs the Superintendent to oversee and assemble a task force no later than August 31, 2023 to develop an implementation plan and accountability process to meet the goals of this resolution which shall be presented to the Board no later than August 31, 2025. In August 2024 or earlier, the task force shall present to the Board and the public a preliminary scope of implementation for feedback and refinement and provide subsequent quarterly updates to the Board until the final implementation plan is presented for approval. The task force shall be in place until the resolution is fully implemented; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the task force shall include District budget, facilities, transportation, custodial, and equity professionals; student, teacher, and parent representatives; community stakeholders, clean energy experts, and others deemed helpful in realizing the long-term goals of the resolution. The task force shall meet at least six times per year and

present updates to the Board in public meetings at least two times per academic year, over the life of the resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the implementation plan shall consider finance options, including third-party finance, aimed at minimizing costs and maximizing long-term benefits to the District; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the implementation plan shall also include measures that advance racial, environmental, and economic justice by prioritizing infrastructure investments in the highest-needs students and schools, and by supporting strong labor and community workforce agreements that create employment opportunities in frontline and underserved communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the implementation plan shall explore ways to make neighborhoods and communities more resilient by considering solar-plus battery storage options, which can keep schools running during power outages, and turning schools into community hubs, especially in areas that don't already have emergency shelters; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Clarke County School District will establish, build on and expand projects with other community organizations and institutions including the University of Georgia, Athens Technical College and the Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Office.