**Alpen Institute Press Release:**

**K12 Climate Action Highlights Ways the Education System Can Adapt to the Impacts of Climate Change**

*School Leaders and Educators from Across the U.S. Identify Needs and Opportunities for Schools*

**Washington, DC –** Today, [K12 Climate Action](http://www.k12climateaction.org), an initiative of the Aspen Institute, convened educators from Florida, California, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to identify needs and opportunities to support schools across the country in adapting to the impacts of climate change and building their resilience. The panelists include:

* **Michealrose Ravalier,** a certified Science Educator teaching at the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School on St. Thomas, Virgin Islands;
* **Alberto M. Carvalho,** Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the fourth largest school system in the United States;
* **Dr. Victor Carrion**, the John A. Turner, M.D. Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine and Vice-Chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences; and
* **Laura Capps**, Santa Barbara School Board Member.

By sharing the work they have achieved in their communities, the speakers offered tactics that can be considered across the United States to better help schools prepare for the reality of climate change and the impact it will have on students, teachers and communities.

“As a country, we are facing many significant crises and the only way to move forward is to acknowledge the realities of the problems and move towards solutions.” said former Secretary of Education John B. King. “Today, we have heard more about the realities of how the climate crisis is impacting schools and how our school leaders and educators are addressing them. We need policies to help support our schools in this work and build resilience in the face of climate change.”

“The pandemic has forced school districts across the globe to transform teaching and learning,” said **Carvalho**. “Our schools have innovated and adapted, swiftly responding to the virus and the needs of our students and families. However, there is still much work to be done to minimize the impact that climate change and food insecurity continue to have on our community.”

The impacts of climate change manifest differently by region, but, as events become more destructive, they will leave an indelible mark on the people impacted most.

“In the last year, we have seen our children weather a global pandemic and endure unprecedented wildfires, floods, and storms; such events will surely have a lasting impact on our children and we must ensure youth feel emotionally supported during these traumatic and difficult life experiences, including the impacts of climate change,” said **Carrion**.

The U.S. Virgin Islands, along with many other coastal communities, know all too well the impacts of hurricanes and storm surges.

“Teaching in the U.S. Virgin Islands, I see firsthand the impacts of climate change on children, schools and communities,” said **Ravalier**. “It is essential that we create learning opportunities for youth to help us develop solutions for schools and communities and create spaces for our students to feel safe and protected.”

Schools can also help build community resilience. In Santa Barbara, the school board has identified school buildings as important community gathering places in the event of wildfires, and are working to ensure that the facilities can maintain power and other essential services if they are needed to house community members.

“Building resilient schools is key to growing strong communities,” said **Capps**. “As we work to help communities meet the impacts of climate change we must look to our schools -- the cornerstones of our democracy and the central hubs of our neighborhoods -  as essential in this monumental challenge.”

Co-chaired by John B. King Jr., president and CEO of The Education Trust and 10th U.S. Secretary of Education under President Barack Obama, and Christine Todd Whitman, president of the Whitman Strategy Group and former Governor of New Jersey and Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under President George W. Bush, K12 Climate Action consists of 23 commissioners and over 35 coalition partners. It will release an action plan in 2021 that will harness schools’ unique position to educate and prepare a new generation of students to advance a more sustainable world.

K12 Climate Action has four key areas of focus:

* Mitigate: transitioning to more sustainable operations including energy, transportation, and food use;
* Adapt: building resilience in preparation for disruptions and negative impacts related to climate change;
* Educate: supporting teaching and learning to equip children and youth with the knowledge and skills to build a more sustainable world; and
* Advance Equity: centering the voices and needs of Black, Latinx, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Indigenous and other communities of color as well as low-income students and families.

In the United States, 50 million children and young people attend public schools. With 98,000 schools, 480,000 diesel school buses, and 7 billion meals served annually, the education sector has a considerable environmental impact and offers one of the greatest opportunities to build long-lasting change to advance sustainability.

For more information, visit [k12climateaction.org](http://www.k12climateaction.org) and join the conversation by following K12 Climate Action on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/K12ClimateAction), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/K12ClimateAct) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/k12climateaction/).

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The **Aspen Institute** is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world. Headquartered in Washington, DC, the Institute has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, and an international network of partners. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://link.mediaoutreach.meltwater.com/ls/click?upn=sL74g-2BPEyW0xchjgFDU4d7mItjVt581mxhTBooBUX6EvRDGuA7FETaGmKLpSjAArZqZg_RG-2F6VddlgAIPcgQ-2FwqyJsn7uuLrufX3lPBYDDgadgXjq-2FLkv1aQ-2F5AwYpXTLxMeea-2BOV00NUm6WMzOuhsOz62iTbn-2BdaJ0zS1CdEfRH3zDptWvz8AysqwZms3k9sNAjZiW-2Fm6xD34gtBzzQnt-2FPAQSykjXV9h-2BXtAH0ZcfvmyBKxdiGLX-2FdU-2ByM-2BgPygAZPz5gbKnBJpJQKA4gU3z2tZmsVFzKKfLqiQvl6-2FSeOets0ZKQNTyNgJFZr0UxxKc1KLBZCuu8vCmuRyj0igCQkwUuWk2zp2DfrXRgPmfWXfeFoD-2FSEuIlY5PqV79vxfrLf64tsQribGNpyh0bx-2FCtdJVlk760jY70lj6fIJzpyfQj56FPOO1CjAIRbVWmSG1JRwHuAVmgwiQC7WwbfleLQtBwI3CsyaeeEBw8X3f1DMdXM-3D).

The **Eco-Schools program** is an international award which recognizes schools that commit to continuously improve their environmental practice. It actively engages K-12 students in finding and implementing solutions for local environmental challenges in their schools and surrounding communities, with focus on core themes (i.e. energy, waste, water…). The program was developed in 1994 by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in response to United Nations (UN) Agenda 21.

How does the program work?

It involves the whole school – students, teachers, parents, staff, and administrators together with members of the local community. Schools conduct a campus environmental review to select one or more themes and follow a simple, seven-step change process. Once a school has successfully implemented the seven steps, it may receive a bronze, silver or the top level Green Flag award. Green Flag schools are designated as Eco-Schools, joining an international network of Eco-Schools in over 68 countries.