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Where Could Climate Learning Fit Within Albany County Services for Children and Families?

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At a glance

- **This brief identifies ten ten Albany County-run, funded, or supported settings where climate-related learning or guidance could fit**, including childcare, youth employment, parks, family services, public health, and Cooperative Extension.
  - These opportunities serve different purposes: environmental learning, household action, preparedness for heat and storms, exposure to green careers, and support for climate-related worry. They should not be treated as interchangeable programs.
- **Research is strongest on how activities should be designed**, including using local and personally relevant examples, hands-on learning, family involvement, and real projects.
  - Notably, direct evidence on delivering climate learning through county-level services is limited.
- **Options could build on programs, staff, and partners already connected** to Albany County, including summer youth employment, county parks, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Soil and Water Conservation District.

Background

Why it matters. Children and families are already encountering climate-related conditions that affect health, safety, and daily life. These trends raise questions about how children understand climate-related conditions and what they can do in response. In an international survey of 16- to 25-year-olds that included the United States, 59% said they were very or extremely worried about climate change.[1] Albany County already reaches children and families through youth employment, parks, family services, public health, Cooperative Extension, and other programs. These existing connections provide potential opportunities for climate-related learning, preparedness, or career exposure.

What the research says

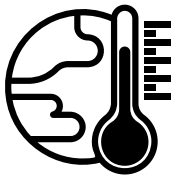
Although there is little to no research on how climate change education can be delivered through county-level services specifically, we highlight some valuable lessons learned from research in other settings, such as schools and out-of-school programs (e.g., nature centers).

Across studies [2,6]

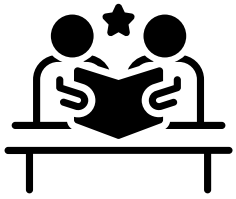
Research on environmental and climate change education emphasizes the importance of active and engaged learning activities that involve whole families and communities. While many studies demonstrate improvements in knowledge, fewer show changes in behavior, highlighting the need for efforts that increase knowledge transfer.

Effective themes and strategies

A systematic review of 49 studies[2] identified two overarching themes for strategies that contribute to effective climate change education:



Making climate change information personally relevant and meaningful



Using activities or interventions designed to engage learners

Four additional strategies identified in this review include:

- **Deliberative discussion**
- **Interactions with scientific process and scientists**
- **Addressing misconceptions**
- **Designing and implementing school or community projects**

What does the research support?



Family involvement

Research highlights the effectiveness and benefits of intergenerational learning. For example, one experimental study found that parents of middle school students who received climate lessons expressed higher levels of climate change concern than parents of students who did not receive the intervention.[3] Research also suggests that children are more likely to share what they learn from environmental education programs when they focus on local issues and involve parents.[4]



Young children

A scoping review of 8 studies[5] suggests that many climate change education programs for younger children adopt a nature-based approach, focused on learning in and about nature, but whether these approaches lead to changes in climate-related behaviors remains largely unknown.



Preparedness lessons

A methodological review of 40 disaster education programs[6] shows that teaching children about natural hazards such as storms and floods enhances their knowledge of disaster risks and protective actions. However, evidence is still lacking around whether these programs change children's behavioral outcomes in household preparedness.



Worry and action

Research on coping related to climate change suggests that opportunities for meaningful action, along with seeing how others respond, may support more constructive ways of dealing with climate-related worry.[7,8]

Options: Where Climate Learning Could Fit

Based on the research reviewed above, we present options for where climate learning could be incorporated within Albany County. The settings below are run, funded, or supported by Albany County. They differ in purpose, population, and the County's role in delivery.

The final column provides implementation examples showing that similar activities have been used elsewhere; these examples should not be read as evaluations of effectiveness.

Setting, Albany County lead, and purpose	What it could look like	Implementation example elsewhere
Child care Lead: Department of Social Services through child care assistance, together with the regional agency that trains providers. The County does not operate child care centers. Purpose: Environmental learning	Outdoor nature play; picture books about weather, plants, and energy; optional staff training through existing State-sponsored environmental education workshops, including materials such as Growing Up WILD.[9]	**Washington County, IA:** county naturalist and Extension staff trained child care providers in *Growing Up WILD* in 2025.[10]
Family counseling and coaching Lead: Department for Children, Youth and Families, including Healthy Families home visiting;[11] Cornell Cooperative Extension parenting programs.[12] Purpose: Household action; environmental learning	Optional resources for parents on talking with children about weather and climate; simple energy-saving activities families can try together; referrals to the Capital Region Clean Energy Hub for more individualized energy advice.	**Durham County, NC:** county library offered a parent session on talking with children about climate change, with take-home books.[13]
Parks and Recreation Lead: Department of Parks and Recreation (106 programs, about 7,000 participants in 2025).[11] Purpose: Environmental learning	Nature and climate activities within summer programs and field days; family programs at county parks; youth participation in stewardship activities already planned by the department.	**Westchester County, NY:** county nature centers offer summer nature camps from pre-K through grade 9.[14]

Setting, Albany County lead, and purpose	What it could look like	Implementation example elsewhere
Youth Bureau Lead: Department for Children, Youth and Families,[11] which funds programs for youth under 21. Purpose: Environmental learning (service projects)	Environmental or climate-related service projects as eligible activities within youth-program funding.	**Hennepin County, MN:** county environmental education grants supported community organizations, including youth programs; the 27 projects funded in 2026 are expected to engage more than 3,000 youth.[15]
Cornell Cooperative Extension Lead: Albany County-funded Extension office, including 4-H, gardening, climate, and energy programs.[12] Purpose: Environmental learning	4-H clubs or summer sessions on weather, energy, gardening, and climate using existing Cornell materials.[16]	**Chautauqua County, NY:** Extension's 4-H Conservation Field Days reached 473 fifth graders in 2025, including sessions on the water cycle and green power.[17]
Soil and Water Conservation District Lead: the District, which already supports tree programs, conservation grants, and a high school environmental competition.[11] Purpose: Environmental learning (stewardship)	Tree planting, conservation activities, or outdoor learning stations linked to existing summer youth programs. Envirothon, an outdoor, hands-on environmental competition for high school students.	**Jackson County, OH:** Soil and Water Conservation District and Extension jointly offered a one-day 4-H conservation camp for children finishing grades 3-5.[18]
Public health and emergency preparedness Lead: Department of Health with county emergency management. Purpose: Preparedness	Family-friendly information on heat, air quality, and storms; heat-safety training for child care providers; preparedness activities within summer programs.	**Los Angeles County, CA:** the public health department developed extreme-heat safety training for early care and education providers.[19]
Children's mental health Lead: Department for Children, Youth and Families, Children's Mental Health Clinic.[11] Purpose: Support for climate-related worry	Guidance for clinicians and parents when children raise climate-related worry; referral to appropriate community or youth activities when useful.	**Washington County, OR:** public health provides online information on climate anxiety, including warning signs, crisis resources, and guidance for parents.[20]

Other possibilities

- Youth diversion programs, such as the 2024 pre-diversion pilot run by the Department for Children, Youth and Families and Probation, could include environmental service projects. Youth could also join older adults in the nature program the County plans at Lawson Lake County Park for residents of Shaker Place, the County's nursing home.[11]

- Youth employment such as the County Legislature summer jobs program or state-funded summer employment for income-eligible youth could facilitate green-career exposure. For example, Ulster County, NY, offers paid Climate Corps internships in county departments, and Boulder County, CO, runs Youth Corps crews that work on county projects.[21,22]

Important considerations

Whichever settings are chosen, a few practical points apply:

- **Staff readiness.** In early childhood settings, staff confidence shapes whether nature activities are carried out well,[23] so most options should involve some staff training. Locally, the State's Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar offers free public programs and teacher workshops; guided lessons for groups are available for a fee.[9]

- **Climate Smart Communities.** Albany County earned bronze certification in this State program in 2021, and certification must be renewed every five years. Climate education is one of the program's certification actions, so documented children's programs may count toward the County's recertification.[24]

- **Measuring results.** Because most evaluations in this field only assessed knowledge,[2,6] tracking one real-world result, such as an energy step taken at home or a completed job placement, would show whether a program does more than inform.

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Methods

Findings presented in this brief come from a literature review of academic peer-reviewed studies, as well as reports from non-partisan think tanks, foundations, and county and state program websites. Given the rapid nature of this search, other relevant studies may exist. In addition, please note that we did not use formal statistical methods for summarizing results and exploring reasons for differences in findings across studies.

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