



Youth Climate Ambassador Program

Program Report for 2020

Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative (ELSI)

San Mateo County Office of Sustainability

Citizens Environmental Council of Burlingame

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Youth Climate Ambassadors (YCA) is a knowledge to action Leadership Program that provides 9-11th grade students in San Mateo County with the opportunity to dive into social and environmental issues contributing to the global climate crisis. The program is run in partnership with Peninsula Clean Energy (PCE), San Mateo County Office of Sustainability (SMCOOS), Citizens Environmental Council of Burlingame (CEC), and the Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative at the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE).

During this year-long program, students attend monthly online workshops that cover a variety of topics to strengthen their knowledge in climate change, build individual skills, and support regional capacity among youth to lead action on climate change. The program culminates with students developing and implementing an impact project that addresses local sustainability issues throughout the year. While developing their impact project, students gain experience in a variety of skills including observations, data collection, interviews, survey design, problem-solving, and more, based on student interest and the project.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND STRUCTURE

The structure of this program follows the calendar year, with a kick off retreat early January and the graduation event in mid December. Students have a number of synchronous in-person/virtual touchpoints, a project, as well as asynchronous tasks to complete throughout the program.

Program Element	Requirement Details
Application Oct - Dec	Students apply to the program in the fall, and applications include a range of questions, including basic demographics and context, as well as the opportunity for students to share their passion, and interest in taking part in the program.
Retreats: Two full day retreats (9-3:30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Kick-Off Retreat in January where students were introduced to the topics, their fellow ambassadors, and the structure of the program.● Summer Retreat in July where students had the chance to reflect on the knowledge gained and shift into action.
Evening Workshops: 7 - 8:30pm	Throughout the program, students attend 16 workshops (1-2 per month). The first half of the year's workshops were spent building knowledge and developing students' passions and interests. Then, after the summer retreat, students moved into action with workshops focused around skill building and community impact projects.

Asynchronous Tasks	Between workshops and retreats, students complete asynchronous tasks that support knowledge building and skill development.
Community Impact Project	During the second half of the program, students work individually or in teams to complete a community impact project that brings forward a solution that mitigates climate change. The intended outcomes of the project is for students to gain experience in project development, implementation, and evaluation. A full list of the 2020 impact projects can be found here .
Coaching Sessions	During the action phase of the program, students participate in coaching calls with adult mentors who provide guidance on different phases of the project, and also provide support for students on their personal leadership plan.
Final Deliverables & Graduation	At the end of the program, students complete a written case study and oral presentation that captures their overall experience in the program, including: reflection on knowledge building, reflections on skill development, challenges and successes with their community impact project, and overall enduring understanding about what it means to be a climate ambassador.
Program Surveys	YCA staff administered 4 surveys over the course of the year . These surveys gathered metrics on how students developed knowledge and skills before, during, and after the program.

2020 PROGRAM SUMMARY

The 2020 YCA program got off to a great start, with a highly successful retreat in January, and the first few whole group and regional chapter workshops. However, the program was quickly faced with extraordinary challenges due to a convergence of crisis that began early in 2020, and continued through the end of the program (i.e. COVID-19, Climate Change, Racial Justice, Presidential Election and Media Crisis, etc.). Despite all these challenges, facilitators and students were successful in achieving program outcomes.

The most extreme shift that happened over the course of the program was the onset of a global pandemic caused by COVID-19. However, because the program was originally structured to be hybrid (a blend of virtual and online), facilitators and students were able to pivot to entirely virtual without too many hiccups through the Spring. As the program moved from knowledge to action, the COVID-19 context proved to be more challenging for students. They had to plan and implement projects in a very context that was volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), which was difficult to navigate. Still, by the end of the program students had tangible evidence of the impact they made through their community impact projects.

Fortunately, the program was already prepared to focus on personal growth and leadership. With COVID-19, this provided an important thread of social and emotional learning, throughout the spring and into the fall, which was really critical to the ability to keep students engaged and connected to the community.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT FOR 2020

A) Deliverables/Collective Impact and Final Numbers Served:

The YCA program started with 60 students, but due to a variety of reasons (moving, overwhelmed from too many activities, COVID-19 related responsibilities at home, etc.) 10 students did not complete the program. This level of attrition from a co-curricular activity is standard in high school activities during normal times; however, the rate was much higher during COVID-19. Therefore, the YCA program staff were pleased to see that 50 students remained and graduated despite all the challenges. The 50 graduates all came from San Mateo County, and represented five out of the six high school public districts (and 12 out of the 24 public high schools), and a handful of private schools. See exact statistics in the tables below and a link to [each individual's case study here](#):

Public Districts and Schools	# of Students
Sequoia Union High School District <i>(4 out of 10 High Schools)</i>	
Carlmont High School	9
Menlo-Atherton High School	3
Sequoia High School	2
Woodside High School	3
Sub Total	17
San Mateo Union High School District <i>(5 out of 8 High Schools)</i>	
Burlingame High School	2
Mills High School	4
Aragon High School	4
Hillsdale High School	3
San Mateo High School	3
Sub Total	16
Cabrillo Unified School District <i>(1 out of 2 High Schools)</i>	
Half Moon Bay High School	4
Sub Total	4
South San Francisco High School District <i>(1 out of 3 High Schools)</i>	
South San Francisco High School	2
Sub Total	2
Jefferson Union High School District <i>(1 out of 6 High Schools)</i>	

Terra Nova High School	1
Sub Total	1
Public School Total	40
Private School Name <i>(3 of 23 private high schools)</i>	# of Students
The Nueva School	6
Crystal Springs High School	2
Mercy High School	1
Saint Francis High School*	1
Private School Total	10
Grand Total	50

**Saint Francis High School is in Santa Clara County, but this student resides in San Mateo County*

These 50 students worked individually or in groups to plan and implement a number of community impact projects that varied in focus and reach. For a comprehensive overview of students' community impact projects, visit the [YCA webpage](#).

Focus Areas	# of Students	# of Projects
Water	13	5
Waste	12	7
Biodiversity	9	5
Energy	8	5
Food	4	3
Transportation	3	2
Climate Change	1	1
Total	50	28

B) Survey Data and Testimonials:

The first survey was given before the program began, to see where students were at and where growth was most needed. The second survey was given after the Kick-Off Retreat, to see knowledge and confidence gained over the course of one day. The third survey was given at the Mid-Year Summer





Retreat, as the knowledge phase was coming to a close. The final survey was at the end of the program, to collect an overview of the cohort's experiences as a whole.



Skill	Before YCA	After YCA
Knowledge on Climate Change	44% of students had some knowledgeable about climate change	97% of YCA graduates felt very knowledgeable about climate change 99% feel comfortable recognizing credible sources of news on climate change
Empowered to Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12% of students felt empowered to make a difference 29% of students expressed climate anxiety 21% of students expressed fear about climate change 10% of students felt very knowledgeable about solutionary change 	91% of YCA graduates felt empowered to take action
Environmental and Climate Leadership	4% of students discussed climate change with their friends and family often and 20% of students talked a little with their friends and families about climate change	99% of YCA graduates feel comfortable having conversations with others about climate change and 95% of YCA graduates feel comfortable designing education and awareness campaigns focused on environmental topics and issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% feel comfortable with public speaking and presenting information on climate change 97% feel comfortable with their verbal and written communication skills on climate change

Below is a sample of student testimonials about the program:

- “From YCA I’ve learned to read more into my daily actions and how they impact the planet, and also to question things such as what really happens to the garbage I throw away and where my food and water comes from.” - 2020 Ambassador
- “Being a Youth Climate Ambassador has been an incredible learning experience - I’ve been able to grow both as a climate activist and a human being because of the support I’ve received from the staff and my fellow ambassadors.” - 2020 Ambassador
- “I have definitely grown as a Youth Climate Ambassador since I started the program in January. I have learned a TON about climate change, gotten to meet and work with so many high schoolers around the Bay Area, and have been able to put together an awesome community impact project. I now feel so much more confident in my abilities to network with others, plan large-scale projects, and raise awareness about climate change.” - 2020 Ambassador
- “I have immensely grown in knowledge, purpose, and leadership skills. I feel more confident in my abilities to lead, plan, and take action. I am so grateful to this program for awakening me to this passion and helping me guide my future plans (such as college, my major, and an occupation in this field).” - 2020 Ambassador

Additional impact can be found in the video testimonials below:

Type of Project:	Name of Student, grade and school	Community Impact Project (CIP) Description
<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> <i>Education Awareness</i></p>	<p>Ellen Kim 10th Grade San Mateo High School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Ellen's project and her experience with YCA here (5:57)</p>	<p>For this project, Ellen created a series of virtual educational panels for high school students. The series featured different perspectives on four climate change related topics and how it relates (and will continue to relate) to our everyday lives. The topics covered were Environmental Justice & Intersectional Environmentalism, The Future Impacts of Climate Change, Climate Activism, and Careers in Climate Change. Please visit this website for more information about the panel series and to view the recordings of past panel events.</p>
<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> <i>Transportation and Energy</i></p> 	<p>Rachel Liu 12th Grade San Mateo High School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Rachel's project and YCA experience here (5:54)</p>	<p>For this project, Rachel and her partner focused on providing youth clipper cards (a card that provides access to alternative transportation like CalTrain and SamTrans) to all youth within San Mateo County, starting with the San Mateo and Hillsdale high schools. They noticed that their schools had a lot of the information that was needed to obtain a free youth clipper card and wanted to encourage their school administration to use that information to automatically sign up students for Clipper Cards. They also created an education and awareness campaign about climate change impacts, and solutions to reduce those impacts through transportation alternatives like taking the train or bus.</p>
<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> <i>Water Conservation</i></p> 	<p>Anahita Asudani 11th grade The Nueva School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Anahita's experience in YCA and her project here (4:00)</p>	<p>For this project, Anahita created a call to action which encouraged folks to engage in trash clean up in local waterways. Through her "Backyard Trash Bash", Anahita educated others about the importance of picking up waste from our natural spaces and how our trash negatively impacts local water systems. For more information, please visit backyardtrashbash.weebly.com.</p>
<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> <i>Waste</i></p> 	<p>Maya Avida 12th Grade The Nueva School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Maya's project and her experience in YCA here</p>	<p>For this project, Maya focused on the fast fashion industry and educated her peers on how the clothes we wear contribute to climate change. She also encouraged students to buy less clothes from major retailers and instead go to second hand stores like Goodwill. Maya also created an Instagram account to spread awareness about the harms of fast fashion and encourage people to find alternatives.</p>
<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> <i>Food</i></p> 	<p>Katinka Lennemann 11th grade Carlmont High School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Katinka's project and experience here (3:39)</p>	<p>Katinka's project set out to spread awareness about local gardening and composting as well as educating younger students on sustainable food systems. Together, they built a garden at a local elementary school and hosted three separate hands-on and socially distanced workshops with students to teach them about the impacts of climate change on our food systems and gain experience working in a garden.</p>

<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> Water Conservation</p> 	<p>Connie Gong 12th Grade Carlmont High School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Connie and her project here (3:15)</p>	<p>For this project, Connie and her group planned to install rain barrels at Carlmont High School. Additionally, Connie hosted an art contest open to first through sixth graders across the county to promote education in youth about the water cycle and water conservation. Check out the website she created as part of her project here.</p>
<p><i>CIP Topic:</i> Biodiversity</p> 	<p>Rachell Le 11th grade South San Francisco High School Case Study Link</p> <p>Learn more about Rachell's project and her experience in YCA here (3:03)</p>	<p>For this project, Finley and Rachell chose to develop a proposal that would transform part of their school's lawn area into a native plant garden. The purpose of this garden is to create an outdoor seating area to support COVID-19 recovery in the form of outdoor classrooms.</p>

→ Students also provided a reflection in their individual case studies - to see a list of all the individual case studies visit: [YCA 2020 Cohort Individual Case Study Links by District](#).

BUDGET AND EXPENSES

Item	Description	PCE	SMCOOS	SMCOE	CEC
Program Administration	Logistics: marketing and outreach, registration, purchasing, etc.	-	40% FTE	10% FTE	In-Kind Volunteer
Food and Beverage	When in person we provided food and beverage	-	\$2,800 (\$700 per gathering)	-	-
YCA Program Materials	Support and branding materials	-	\$3,000	-	-
Program Planning and Facilitation	Curriculum Development, Workshops, Retreats, and Coaching	-	20% FTE	40% FTE	In-Kind Volunteer
Case Study Stipends	\$500 Each	\$25,000*	-	-	-
Mini Grants	Funds for students to implement their community impact project	-	\$15,000	-	-

*Additional funding was provided to some students as a travel stipend in the beginning of the program