

First nationwide survey of climate change education

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A composite image of the Western hemisphere of the Earth. Credit: NASA

How is climate change being taught in American schools? Is it being taught at all? And how are teachers addressing climate change denial in their classrooms, schools, and school districts?

Until today's release of NCSE's comprehensive nationwide [survey](#), no one knew. The survey, conducted in concert with the respected nonpartisan Penn State University Survey Research Center, grilled over 1500 middle and high school science [teachers](#). The results may floor you.

"At least one in three teachers bring [climate change](#) denial into the classroom, claiming that many scientists believe climate change is not caused by humans" says NCSE programs and policy director Josh Rosenau. "Worse, half of the surveyed teachers have allowed students to discuss the supposed 'controversy' over climate change without guiding students to the scientifically supported conclusion." Scarier still: three out of five teachers were unaware of, or actively misinformed about, the near total [scientific consensus](#) on climate change.

Teachers who want to teach climate change accurately and honestly don't have an easy time of it. "There are some great climate education resources out there" says NCSE's climate maven Dr. Minda Berbeco. "But many teachers don't have time to find and evaluate these materials".

How much climate change education are kids ultimately getting? "Not as much as we had hoped, and not enough to provide students a solid grounding in the science. Often, it's only one or two hours in the entire year!" says Dr. Eric Plutzer, professor of political science at Penn State, who designed and implemented the survey. "The good news? Few teachers were pressured to avoid teaching about global warming and its causes."

Still more cause for hope: "It's clear that the vast majority of surveyed

teachers are hungry for additional professional development" says Berbeco. "Even half the teachers who deny the scientific consensus on climate change say they would take this training."

"Teachers didn't create the polarized culture war around climate change" says Rosenau, "But they're the key to ending this battle."

NCSE's paper on the survey, "Climate Change Education in U.S. Middle and High Schools," appears in the February 12th issue of *Science*.

More information: "Climate confusion among U.S. teachers," by E. Pultzer et al. *Science*, [science.sciencemag.org/cgi/doi ... 1126/science.aab3907](https://science.sciencemag.org/cgi/doi/10.1126/science.aab3907)

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