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## **Back to School: Climate Justice is a Matter of Public Health**

**New York, NY** – On the first day of school in New York City, Faiza Azam, Climate Works for All spokesperson and ALIGN Climate & Labor Organizer, released the following statement:

“As NYC students, teachers, and workers go back to school today, we are reminded that climate justice in our schools is a matter of public health. Without proper ventilation and updated HVAC systems, overcrowded, stuffy classrooms are vulnerable to the continuing COVID surge, [toxic indoor chemicals](#), and the polluting fossil fuels that keep most public schools running. NYC schools should keep us safe, not expose us to sickness and health conditions. Without climate investments, public schools will continue to put students and workers at risk, especially in the Black and Brown frontline communities already experiencing the worst effects of our climate crisis. It’s time for the City to fund school infrastructure improvements, ensure NYC prioritizes Green, Healthy Schools, and chart a path toward a healthy and sustainable New York for all.”

### **Background:**

Buildings in NYC contribute to nearly two-thirds of citywide Greenhouse Gas emissions. The single most effective way to significantly reduce these emissions is to decarbonize and retrofit our building stock; i.e. implement Local Law 97 of 2019. As we enter the first compliance period of LL97 this year, there is a clear need for additional technical support, and more importantly, additional funding streams to ensure that building owners are able to undertake retrofits. But private buildings are not the only ones that have a responsibility to reduce emissions, the City also needs to ensure that public buildings comply with LL97 mandates.

NYC public schools’ aging infrastructure runs on fossil fuels and contributes to poor air quality, which not only impacts student and staff health but can also undermine learning by negatively affecting student attendance, comfort, and performance. Additionally, schools are vulnerable to ever-worsening climate disasters, felt first and worst by Black and brown students in Environmental Justice communities. While

the City has [already identified](#) school buildings as a great place to start to meet NYC's climate goals, Mayor Adams' Leading the Charge initiative has to date only allocated funding to electrify 33 schools out of a promised 100 schools by 2030. But with 1300 school buildings in NYC, we need to work faster. ALIGN and our Climate Works for All coalition are advocating for green energy upgrades in 500 schools by 2030 and to make NYC's school district zero-emissions by 2040. Investing in [Green, Healthy Schools](#) will save the city millions on utilities; create green, union jobs and improve working conditions for school workers; and help meet the mandates of Local Law 97, where the City should lead the way.

### **About Climate Works for All**

[Climate Works for All](#) is a coalition of labor, community, faith, environmental justice, and climate organizations that have come together to fight climate change and inequality in NYC by demanding a Just Transition for workers and Environmental Justice communities. Co-coordinated by ALIGN and NYC-EJA, our campaigns move us toward an equitable economy, a resilient, livable and healthy climate, and must prioritize justice for low-income Black and Brown communities across New York City.

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