

# The world is their oyster: students at the New York Harbor School reconnect the city to its water.

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In honor of World Water Day, Murray Fisher, Founder of the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School and President of the New York Harbor Foundation, shares how their CGI Commitment to Action will restore one billion oysters to the New York Harbor.

Every day millions of New Yorkers navigate the maze of Manhattan to get to school, arrive at work, or run errands, with little thought to the water—much less the under-water inhabitants—surrounding them. Just below the ferries that transport New Yorkers across the Hudson and East Rivers is an entire ecosystem of sea life, including oysters, which contribute to the environment we take advantage of every day.

Oysters are ecosystem engineers, meaning they have a disproportionately positive impact on the biological community surrounding them. In the temperate waters around New York City, oysters existed for thousands of years, covering more than 200,000 acres of the Hudson-Raritan Estuary in pre-colonial times. Just like coral reefs in the Caribbean, oyster reefs ringed the archipelago that is New York City, providing calmer and clearer water, and more habitat for dozens of species of fish. All that is gone now, replaced by dredged channels and a one-dimensional bottom of flat muck.

At the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, the New York Harbor is our playground, and has become our laboratory for teaching and learning science, technology, and engineering. So we asked: Wouldn't it be

a better place for teaching and learning if the harbor were calmer, cleaner, and clearer? And what role could students play in making it that way? This month, we recommitted to the school's mission of preparing students for college and careers through the restoration of their local marine environment at a 10th Anniversary event, featuring a keynote speech from President Bill Clinton.

By participating in the Clinton Global Initiative, the Harbor School has had the opportunity to work with the best possible partners and make our ambitious and long-term goals a reality. President Clinton praised the Harbor School model, saying that "Every coastal city in the world should have a school just like this, doing a project just like this," and people from around the world would come running to the Harbor School if the students' work could be illuminated.

Harbor School became a member of the Clinton Global Initiative over two years ago, with an unusual Commitment to Action for a public high school: to restore one billion live oysters to New York Harbor by the year 2030. The most radical yet important part of the commitment is that students at the Harbor School would do virtually all of the work as part of the institution's Career and Technical Education programs.

Through the Billion Oyster Project, Harbor School students grow oysters in Aquaculture, monitor oyster reef biology in Marine Biology,

maintain vessels for visiting the Harbor in Marine System Technology, monitor the deeper part of the Harbor with Remote Operated Vehicles (ROVs) in Ocean Engineering, plant oysters and monitor reefs in Scientific Diving, and navigate and drive boats throughout the Harbor in Vessel Operations. Each student must choose one of these CTE programs, and each program ends in an industry-approved technical credential in that field. Through this curriculum, every student plays a role in the restoration of 1 billion live oysters to the harbor, thereby improving the ecosystem for 8 million people and reconnecting all New Yorkers to the water.

**Murray Fisher is the founder of the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School and president of the New York Harbor Foundation.**

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