

Getting Started at Your School

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- 1. Identify Stakeholders Involved in the Process** pg 1-2
 - Parents (Both a core “Green Team” and a group of volunteers)
 - Principal
 - PTA
 - Students
 - Teachers
 - Custodial Staff
 - Yard Duty
 - Staff

- 2. Identify Local Resources / Helpful Institutions** pg 3
 - The Local Recycling Center or Waste Management Office
 - The School Board
 - The District Head of Food Services
 - The School District Elementary Schools
 - Burbank Sustainability Committee

- 3. Need To Determine** pg 3-4
 - Schedule of Implementation
 - Economic Impact
 - Environmental Impact
 - Social Impact
 - Benchmarks
 - Sustainability of Group

- 4. Schedule**
 1. Meet with core “Green Team”
 2. Meet with Principal
 3. Meet with PTA
 4. Meet with Parent Volunteers
 5. Meet with Custodians / Yard Staff / Cafeteria Staff
 6. Classroom Lessons
 7. Lunchtime Assessment
 8. Lunchtime Plan Implementation
 9. Possibly meet with District Food Services Coordinator / Nutrition Services

Getting Started at Your School

1. Stakeholders Involved in the Process

The teachers will give class time and energy to enforce lessons. The yard duty will need to be made aware of changes to process with garbage on campus and enforce them. The janitors will need to be engaged in changes in waste procedures (end of line). The principal will be key in allowing the sustainability committee to move forward. The PTA can make it an official part of the school with a line-item budget. The children will be engaged in waste-reduction efforts and education. The parents/volunteers will give time, energy, and possible funds to execute the plans and goals. It takes a village...

1a - Parental "Green Team"

Reach out to fellow parents at the school who share the same concerns and desires regarding sustainability and waste reduction. Use your school's social media site(s) or simply start up conversations. See who's interested in sustainability or can connect you to other parents who are. It is important to *get parents from all grades* - especially the younger grades - so those parents can continue the program once your kid graduates. In the initial meetings, create a vision the entire team can get behind, and from there define your goals and steps needed to accomplish them.

1b - Principal

Schedule a meeting to voice your concerns and plans with the principal. It is best to meet each problem with a solution. Let the principal know why this is important to your school's value system. Make sure they know the importance of starting this at the elementary level (so they can take the education and values with them into middle school, high school, and adulthood). The principal must be assured that you will proceed with your ideas without needing them to do much work. Also assure them that you will proceed with fact-based, scientific solutions and not politics or propaganda. It's helpful to also create a healthy environment of community elevation. Other schools are involved as well.

1c - PTA

Ask your PTA president to get on the next agenda. At that meeting, make a presentation that informs the group that you have formed a parental "Green Team" and would like for a Sustainability Committee to be an official PTA committee with a chair and a budget. The PTA will likely need to take one month to discuss and ask questions. They will vote at the following month's meeting. Use all of the information discussed with the principal in your presentation. If you already have the approval and buy-in of the principal, it is important to state that. Also ask the PTA: are there other departments that could fall under the heading of sustainability such as school garden or school beautification? Once approved, ask the PTA president what your budget is and discuss with the core green team how to best apply it to your cause.

1d - Parent Volunteers

At your PTA meeting, circulate a sign-up for any parents who are eager to join your cause. Additionally, post on your school's social media site and collect a master list of families who wish to be included in the process. Be sure to gauge their level of interest. Some parents are thrilled that conceptually the school is moving in a green direction, but don't have time or ideas to add to the groups. Other parents will offer valuable resources in terms of time, skills, or knowledge.

1e - Students

Students can be engaged in three different ways:

Getting Started at Your School

- Student Green Team / Eco Club - With the help of a teacher(s), create a student-led group that comes up with ideas and projects to help create an eco-friendly culture at school. This group may need to be split into several groups depending on age. If possible, arrange field trips to local interests that have environmental impacts. This also gets more parents involved.
- Classroom Lessons - Have a parent volunteer visit each and every classroom to talk about the principles of waste reduction, reuse, and recycling. Explain what can and can't be recycled in your community or school and create options for reduction and reuse. Check in with students each semester or trimester and continue the education. Check out www.greeneducationfoundation.org for free K-12 sustainability education resources. It's important to empower them in situations and environments that they have direct control. For example, their classroom, their campus, and their lunch. What they pack for their lunch serves as a direct engaging learning opportunity to shift behavior into a more eco-friendly choice as far as packaging is concerned. These insights can help shift practices at home to be more eco-conscious.
- School Engagement - Take advantage of opportunities to educate kids as they see you working, increasing sustainability, around the school. Assign responsibilities in the garden, lunch sort, or classroom. Empowering them and acknowledging them for their efforts is very important. Also taking photos of them in action helps reinforce the goodwill and awareness happening around campus.

1f - Teachers

The principal can facilitate communication between the sustainability committee and teachers about having a lesson in each classroom per semester (or trimester) to educate the children - and teachers - on the goals of the sustainability committee. In addition, teachers are often needed to facilitate a student-led green team or eco club. Once you meet with each class and discuss what can/can't be reused, reduced, and recycled, it is valuable to provide each classroom with signage for their refuse bins.

1g - Custodial Staff

The custodians will be the last line of defense in reducing and recycling. They are the end of the systematic line before refuse pick-up. In most schools, the principal will be the one having direct contact with the staff. S/he will need to convey to them the importance of what the school is trying to accomplish and how / best practices. More often than not, the custodial and yard duty staff have been at the school for quite some time, and may be resistant to change or outside input. *It is imperative that you hear their ideas and concerns and work together to find solutions to any problems that may occur.*

1h - Yard Duty

Every school has a group of staff that watches the children during lunch and recess. For simplicity, we will call them "Yard Duty." This group of individuals are key in helping the children stick to the rules during lunch, where the vast majority of waste at the school is made. The principal or sustainability group will need to make sure they are informed of new practices and why it is important to the school. *Keep in mind their feedback and needs* when proceeding with new procedures.

1i - Staff

There are additional workers at school that do not fit into any of the above categories, such as office staff, counselors, nurses, etc. Make a one-sheet for them, that either the sustainability group or the principal can provide, that explains what your group is doing and how it may affect their job practices.

Getting Started at Your School

2. Helpful Institutions

2a. Local Recycle Center

If your city has its own recycle center, it is beneficial to create a working relationship with them. Find out what practices the school can engage in to be the most sustainable for your community and see if there is a partnership or outreach that can be negotiated. Select one member of the core green team to head this outreach with the center.

2b. The School Board

Many sustainable initiatives may be unachievable without school board approval. Select one member of your core green team to be the outreach to the school board. Get to know the members and attend the meetings. When the time comes to ask for what you need, you will already be familiar with their workings and they will be familiar with you.

2c. Food Services

When it comes to making changes to what - or how - food is served in the cafeteria, most if not all decisions come from the head of food services. Select one member of the core green team to do outreach with this person. See how you can work together to find more sustainable options. Most food services are under very specific and demanding state laws and budgets.

2d. The School District

Start connecting with other Elementary Schools in your district. Create a once-a-month "Eco-Council" meeting to share ideas and practices. We use our local recycle center meeting room to gather and exchange ideas. Lately it has been via Zoom.

2e. Burbank Sustainability Committee

Get to know the sustainability committees and other action groups in the city. They may have resources and funds to help the schools with their initiatives. It's also good to keep up with where the city is going as far as development and policy, and be aligned with initiatives to build greater community. Always good to be tied into the greater progress of the city and state.

3. Economic, Environmental, and Social Impacts

In order to measure any impacts, you must assess measurables. Weigh daily lunch waste and classroom waste. Document current costs for purchasing and garbage hauling.

3a. Economic Impacts

→ Outputs - Every school will have a vastly different amount of available money. For the majority of public schools, your group will have little to none. Familiarize yourself with the fundraising rules of the school. Can you fundraise specifically for sustainability or must it be through the PTA? Can you accept in-kind donations? Is there anyone in your group that is familiar with grant-writing? Many grants are available to schools if a member is able and willing to do the research and the work. Once you know the rules, you can move forward on funding your goals. A good deal of the goals will just require volunteer hours. Below are lists of free and costly goals.

Getting Started at Your School

Free / Volunteer Hours

- Classroom lessons
- Lunch waste-reduction assessment and policing
- Gardening
- Eco Club
- Clean-up

Cost

- New or additional waste and recycling bins
- Garden supplies / plants
- Compost bins
- Signage
- Eco-friendly work, school, or lunch supplies
- Dishwasher
- Solar Panels
- Water Bottle Filling Station
- Rain Barrels
- Apparel

→ Inputs - If a stated goal is to reduce paper waste, you could see reduction in purchasing costs by implementing an online system, an “Oldest and Only” flyer policy, and by encouraging the office and every class to have scrap paper bins. By implementing a zero waste lunch model you could see a reduction in garbage, which could result in fewer rubbish pick-ups per week. For high-price items like solar panels and dishwashers, these often require a large initial output of money but have long term cost-saving benefits. If you can get a portion or all of these items donated, the cost-savings will be immediate. For the latter, getting school district buy-in is a must.

3b. Environmental Impacts

Most sustainability goals will involve reducing waste and recycling. Does the reduced waste mean less emissions from fewer garbage pick-ups? Can you divert all your organic waste to keep methane out of landfill? Can you get solar panels to get your school off the grid? In summer months, can you quantify the amount of energy contributing to the local grid? Most importantly, will the children gain a desire to care for and protect the earth, build new sustainable habits, and share inspiration with communities for the rest of their lives?

3c. Social Impacts

The teachings of sustainability have a wonderful by-product: they show us how the world and all its inhabitants are interconnected. By teaching children how to care for the earth, they learn how to care for each other, the school, and their community. By connecting with other elementary schools, students see how their choices make a difference in their city / town. The student eco-groups empower children to change what seems too big to change. By working together they can build friendships and enable mentoring opportunities. Parent volunteers may become more closely knit with teachers and students at the school. All of this creates a greater sense of community and gives hope for the future - something individuals should want for themselves and the greater world around them. When we work towards a big picture, our differences are put aside to unite us in a goal we can all take any amount of action towards.