

CASE STUDY

Wayside Schools: Making Strides in Conservation through Data Analysis and Evaluation

DISTRICT PROFILE

Location | Wayside Schools
Number of schools | 5 schools
Number of students | approximately 2,000 students

Wayside Schools is a public charter school district in Austin, Texas, a city that has demonstrated a commitment to sustainability. While Wayside doesn't promote itself as a practitioner of sustainability practices, the district has expressed an interest in adopting practices that would help them operate more efficiently.

THE PROBLEM

Founded in 1998, Wayside started out as a single school on one campus. Since then, the district has experienced significant growth, ultimately expanding to five schools across three campuses. Along with that growth came opportunities to scale the organization and its operations in ways that were cost effective and environmentally sound.

By 2016, Wayside was looking for help in identifying improvements they could make that were sustainable and would reduce costs. That year, Wayside's COO and superintendent connected with Zac Ziebarth, founder and owner of Benacras (which was acquired by GSNN in July 2021) and now a school and district coach for GSNN. With Zac's help (and continuing as a GSNN partner), Wayside began a data collection and analysis initiative that has helped them reap costs savings in three areas: energy, water, and waste.

OUR IMPACT

The first step Zac took was to help Wayside determine which metrics to measure for energy, water, and waste and then collect baseline data. Metrics are measured on a cost-per-student basis, making them meaningful and easy to understand for everyone in the school community, not just the facilities and operations team. Data is captured in an insight report that shows how Wayside is faring across all three areas.

Data is also entered into an excel dashboard that is updated every quarter with the latest data for each energy, water, and waste metric. The dashboard reveals trends in facility costs and environmental outputs, provides insights for the facilities and operations team on how their facilities performed over the last quarter and what needs to be addressed, and informs decisions around areas for improvement. With data easily at hand, Zac can work with Wayside's facilities and operations team to review quarterly data, set goals for each year, and identify strategies to reduce cost and use.



RESULTS

Working with Zac and GSNN, Wayside has used the data it has gathered to implement a variety of projects that support energy, water, and waste conservation and reduce costs. Two of these projects include a districtwide LED retrofit effort and the launch of a waste management program.

Energy

Wayside's insight report has consistently shown that energy management presents the greatest opportunity for improvement. When it came to lighting upgrades, Wayside chose LEDs, an affordable, cost-effective energy conservation option. Data from the district's insight report was used to identify which campuses would benefit the most from LED retrofits, thus presenting the most immediate opportunities to reduce costs. The project has been implemented in phases by Wayside's facilities and operations team, starting with campuses where LED retrofits would result in the greatest energy savings. GSNN supported Wayside by helping them identify contractors and assisting with project management. To date, the LED retrofits have helped Wayside achieve reduced energy costs. Over a 12-month period in 2021 – 2022, district energy costs decreased by \$5,248 compared to the previous 12 months, as noted in the district's insight report.

Waste

In 2015, the City of Austin passed a waste ordinance that requires all commercial buildings to recycle and have organic diversion practices. Wayside launched its EcoWaste program in 2016 to not only meet the city's mandate but also to reduce the district's waste footprint. Prior to program implementation, 100% of cafeteria waste was being sent to landfill. A pre-program audit conducted by the City of Austin determined that over 50% of cafeteria waste could be diverted from landfill by recycling or composting. Under the EcoWaste program, all three district school sites participate in recycling and composting initiatives. GSNN supports program implementation by providing annual training to district staff, conducting an annual audit, and submitting documentation to the City of Austin to ensure compliance with the waste ordinance. To date, Wayside has met its pre-program audit goal, diverting over 50% of its cafeteria waste from landfill.