

The Philadelphia Standard: School District of Philadelphia Adopts First-Ever Sustainability Plan

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The School District of Philadelphia is a recognized leader in successfully implementing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools model to create healthy indoor environments for its students. Now, the district is taking a big leap forward with an anticipated Spring 2016 release of its first-ever sustainability plan, GreenFutures. Inspired by the City of Philadelphia's Greenworks initiative, a city-wide sustainability plan that targeted energy, environment, equity, economy, and engagement, GreenFutures sets a new standard for sustainability and student education for the city's schools.

A Vision for the Future

The foundation for GreenFutures was informed by the work of other school districts and their efforts to develop comprehensive plans around school environmental health, sustainability management, and education for sustainability. The School District of Philadelphia was already operating a successful indoor environments program; however, district staff believed they could do more. The district did not have to look far for inspiration. The City of Philadelphia had implemented a five year sustainability plan, Greenworks, to position the city as a leader in urban sustainability. Greenworks proved to be the perfect model for GreenFutures since both the city and the district share similar characteristics, such as serving a diverse population, operating and maintaining hundreds of buildings, and managing a large staff and public client base. The timing for the plan was also ideal. With an ever tightening budget, the School District of Philadelphia saw GreenFutures as an opportunity to demonstrate fiscal responsibility by adopting practices that would ultimately save the district money over the long-term.

To kick-start planning for GreenFutures, the School District of Philadelphia assembled a diverse team of stakeholders and partners from non-profits, government agencies, higher education, and other peer school districts, among others. Five subcommittees were formed, each dedicated to developing a mission, goal, actions, targets, and metrics for each of the plan's focus areas, including 1) Education for Sustainability; 2) Consumption and Waste; 3) Energy and Efficiencies; 4) School Greenscapes; and 5) Healthy Schools. Looking beyond Greenworks, the subcommittees researched other school district and higher education sustainability plans and incorporated their findings into GreenFutures' framework. The

committees adopted the name “GreenFutures” to represent hope for a sustainable future where the students of today are the educators, innovators, environmental stewards, and global citizens of tomorrow.

Read on to learn more about GreenFutures’ five focus areas and the key programming planned for each.



Photo | Lois Brink, Big Sandbox

Education for Sustainability

Perhaps the most important of the five focus areas, Education for Sustainability (as defined by [The Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education](#)) is a “transformative learning process that equips students, teachers, and school systems with the new knowledge and ways of thinking we need to achieve for economic prosperity and responsible citizenship while restoring the health of the living systems upon which our lives depend.”^[1] GreenFutures calls for integrating Education for Sustainability, or EfS, throughout the School District of Philadelphia, from the classroom and administrative offices to family and community engagement. The goal is for 100% of schools and administrative offices to show evidence of EfS within 5 years of plan implementation.

To facilitate the behavior shift EfS requires, GreenFutures recommends the district work with partners, such as [Eco-Schools USA](#) and the [Philadelphia Zoo](#), to design and offer professional development opportunities for teachers. One such workshop was offered in December 2015 by the School District of Philadelphia and Fairmount Water Works on “Understanding the Urban Watershed Curriculum Framework Units.” Other ways in which GreenFutures intends to incorporate EfS into the district’s culture include identifying an EfS

point of contact for every school, creating and facilitating Professional Learning Communities and Green Teams, and setting standards for lessons, projects, and/or units across all grade levels and subjects.

Consumption and Waste

Consumption and Waste was identified as a focus area for GreenFutures as a result of the district's desire to reduce the amount of waste being sent to landfills. The plan calls for every school in the School District of Philadelphia to implement a recycling program, and establishes protocols for vendors to adhere to as well. This particular component is being rolled out slowly (42 schools are in the pilot group) to ensure the program is successful. By adopting a robust waste reduction plan, the School District of Philadelphia aims to increase its waste diversion rate by 10% within the next five years.

Everyone has a role to play in the district's recycling and waste reduction efforts. Training is being offered for facilities staff, students, and teachers. Schools are encouraged to participate in "Paperless Fridays," especially those that do not have recycling programs yet. Currently, the district is raising money through the Recyclebank Green Schools Program for a Recycling Road Show. The Recycling Road Show, if funded, will consist of an interactive Material Recycling Facility (MRF) display that ideally will be designed and constructed by students enrolled in the Career and Technology Education Program. The MRF will be available for schools to borrow for classroom demonstrations. Students that participate in the Recycling Road Show will gain a better understanding of the waste sorting processes that takes place in a MRF, as well as how to respond to engaging and complex environmental issues, problems, and challenges through collaboration and project-based learning.

Energy and Efficiencies

A third focus area for the School District of Philadelphia's GreenFutures plan involves identifying ways the district can operate more efficiently, including energy and water consumption. Energy efficiency is a top priority for the district, and one of its goals is to reduce can you really buy ambien online energy consumption by 20% within the next five years. To achieve this goal, the district has hired a consulting firm, Practical Energy Solutions, to help it implement a comprehensive, student driven, energy education program. The consultants plan to visit each school in the district to educate students, teachers, and staff on how to conduct an energy audit and use energy data to understand and reduce their energy consumption. Every school will receive a "toolkit" of energy management equipment and supplies to help track and measure energy use. Students will work with school staff to conduct energy audits and collect data, which will ultimately be entered into an online dashboard for use by teachers in the classroom. Other district initiatives include using

innovative energy procurement strategies, implementing electricity demand-response and management programs during peak load events, and the design and construction of Capital improvements, such as re-lighting projects, that are more energy efficient.

School Greenscapes

The School District of Philadelphia recognizes the value of green schoolyards in complementing classroom curriculum, promoting active recreation, and enhancing the surrounding community. Under GreenFutures, the district's goal is for every school, including those in urban settings, to have some type of greenscape. To launch this ambitious initiative, the district plans to install five green schoolyards per year over a period of five years, as well as catalog all existing green schoolyards at district schools.

In addition to installing new greenscapes, the School District of Philadelphia plans to work with partners such as the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the Philadelphia Water Department, and the Trust for Public Land to develop programming and curriculum that transform green schoolyards into outdoor classrooms. To encourage schools to use the spaces as teaching tools, the district is creating an awareness campaign around green schoolyards and is developing a resource tool to help teachers apply for green schoolyard funding.

(You may learn more about these partnerships at the Green Schools Conference and Expo by attending Session 03: Place Based Education Track [STEM Among the Leaves: Green Schoolyards for Education and the Environment](#).)

Healthy Schools

The School District of Philadelphia strives to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for each of its students. The motivation behind this fifth, and final, focus area is to create a multi-faceted, holistic healthy school model that can be easily replicated across every school in the district. To do this, the district plans to develop a set of healthy school parameters that cover a range of issues including indoor environmental quality, nutrition and farm to table, physical activity, and mental health, among others. Once these parameters are set, the district plans to assess each school to obtain a baseline and identify actions the school can take to meet all healthy school parameters. Currently, the district aims to assess 25 schools per year.

Some of the programs envisioned under the Healthy Schools focus area include:

- Identify and connect common goals and initiatives for the Safe Routes to School program, Philadelphia Water's Green Streets, and the district's GreenFutures.

- Develop a plan to increase the number of students who walk or bike to school, including priorities for improving infrastructure to make active transportation more appealing, tracking the number of students walking and biking to school, and setting targets for improvement.
- Develop a plan to increase drinking water access and appeal for all students at every school, including a plan to help schools purchase and install bottle filling stations.
- Conduct proactive, comprehensive indoor environmental quality assessments at 30 schools per year.
- Develop a plan to increase breakfast participation by students.
- Develop a Healthy Schools Report Card, with metrics.
- Develop a Healthy Schools Award Program based upon the report card to incentive schools to participate.

A Bold New Venture

The Spring 2016 release of the School District of Philadelphia's GreenFutures comes at an opportune time for the district and its engagement in the green schools movement. On January 25, 2016, the Green Schools Alliance announced the creation of a district collaborative, otherwise known as the Green Schools Alliance District Collaborative, which will harness the collective power of schools to support greener, more sustainable solutions. The School District of Philadelphia is one of 21 school districts that are participating as part of the collaborative. The district, along with its peers, will work to accelerate hands-on sustainability action in local school communities and at the national level. With its work on and commitment to GreenFutures, the School District of Philadelphia will bring a wealth of knowledge and inspiration to the table, and hopefully, have an impact on the future of sustainability in schools across the country.

References

Interview with Francine Locke, Environmental Director, School District of Philadelphia

Francine Locke is the Environmental Director for the School District of Philadelphia, where she also received her own K-12 education. She is a Philadelphia resident and a graduate of Temple University where she majored in Biology and received a Master's Degree in Environmental Health. Francine has worked for the School District of Philadelphia, a large, diverse, urban public school district, since 2005. Her job is to create sustainable healthy learning and working environments through innovative program development. Several programs that Francine has designed with team members include Indoor Environmental Quality, Asbestos Management/AHERA, Lead-based Paint Management (and Lead RRP), Mold/Moisture Identification, Remediation and Prevention, Universal and Hazardous Waste Programs, Laboratory Chemical Management, and Lead Safe Drinking Water. Francine is presently managing the development of an Asthma Management Program and Sustainability Management Program for the School District of Philadelphia.

[1] <http://cloudinstitute.org/brief-history>