

green schoolyards

FOR HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES



Photo: Baltimore City Public Schools

CASE STUDY: Baltimore City Public Schools Green Schools Initiative

GOALS:

- > Develop environmentally literate students
- > Create healthy school environments
- > Reduce and conserve natural resources
- > Improve school green spaces
- > Engage school communities
- > Build student leadership

*Baltimore City Public Schools
Sustainability Plan 2018*

Significant attention is focused on making school grounds greener, more inviting places to play and learn. Even small outside areas can become outdoor classrooms that help students learn about the environment – and at the same time help improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay by preventing rain water from washing over paved surfaces directly into storm drains.



OVERVIEW

The Baltimore City Public School District has a robust, thoughtful, and comprehensive approach to its green schools initiative. It is intended to support the health and well-being of all students in the schools, their families, and the communities where they live, learn, work and play. There are 80,000 students in their schools, spread over about 170 buildings. The green schools initiative arose in part out of the need to renovate old schools that were unsafe, and to build new schools where possible. All new school buildings must be LEED certified at the Silver level. The school board passed a sustainability policy in 2016, and the current superintendent has championed Building a Generation: City Schools' Blueprint for Success with its pillars of Student Wholeness, Literacy, and Staff Leadership. While efforts to improve all aspects of the environmental quality of the Baltimore City Public Schools have been underway for years, much progress has been made in the past five years. The Sustainability Plan 2018 shows clear connections to the City Schools' Blueprint for Success and involves inter-departmental collaboration. All of this occurs, however, in a largely decentralized

leadership system where individual school principals with a good deal of latitude to implement aspects of both the Blueprint for Success and the Sustainability Plan 2018. The green schools initiative includes green schoolyards, energy conservation, teacher professional development, use of non-toxic cleaning materials, stormwater management, environmental education woven throughout the curricula, and more, all in an effort to provide an equitable experience to all students.

THE WORK

Highlights from the Baltimore City Public School District Sustainability Plan:

- > All schools that are built new or substantially renovated must be certified by the U.S. Green Building Council through its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver standard.
- > Students, teachers and staff are encouraged to pursue the rigorous Green Schools Certification from the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education.

- > As part of the 21st Century Schools Buildings Plan, all efforts are made to comply with the recommended goals and strategies for sustainable design, construction and operations.
- > A comprehensive maintenance plan addresses how buildings will be maintained so that they are healthy, optimal places to learn and work.
- > Students, teachers and staff are all involved in the three Rs—reduce, reuse, recycle. Many schools are actively reducing the amount of trash and increasing the amount of recycling collected.
- > There is an energy management plan in place to monitor and reduce the amount of energy used.
- > In order to ensure that the air within school buildings is of high quality, efforts are made to eliminate mold and mildew, use green cleaning products, and employ practices of integrated pest management.
- > Environmental lessons are included in science curricula in 5th, 6th, and 9th grades, developed with support from local partners.

FUNDING

Funding for Baltimore City Public Schools' green schools initiative is not embedded within the school district's budget. As a result, funds to pay for the part-time role of the Green Schools Coordinator are raised by an external source, the Baltimore Community Foundation. While it would be ideal to have the role funded from within the system, it appears not to be feasible under the present circumstances. The combination of a part-time role and external funding makes it all the more inspiring and remarkable how much is being accomplished. The Coordinator has been able to attract additional funds from a variety of sources to create opportunities for the students, staff and community members to participate effectively in achieving the goals of the project.



Photo: Baltimore City Public Schools

WHO IS SERVED

The children and youth of the Baltimore City Public Schools are the first and primary focus, however, considerable attention is paid to the teachers who serve them, in order to support them to integrate education about the environment within the curricula and to enhance their, as well as their students', own health and well-being by creating optimal, healthy, green learning environments for all.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Every school is to appoint a sustainability ambassador. Those ambassadors are asked to submit an annual School Sustainability Plan, using a template that the Green Schools Coordinator provides. The Coordinator has neither a carrot to offer nor a stick to use, and thus received 45 plans in SY16 and 33 in SY17. The completion of the School Sustainability Plan is a significant accomplishment and can serve as an inspiration and guide for other school districts. So too are related documents and toolkits that are made available internally for staff via the Baltimore City Public Schools website.



More information about Baltimore City Public Schools Green Schools Initiative is available at baltimorecityschools.org/sustainability and baltimorecityschools.org/internal_sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED

- > It is important to consciously work to create a culture in which green initiatives are normal and desired, for everyone's health and well-being.
- > A model of Green Leader Achievement Units, earned by teachers for their green efforts, is a fruitful way to incentivize teachers to participate since it is possible for them to increase their salary level as a result.
- > Relationship building and strong partnerships are key to getting results. Collaborating with multiple departments within the district and beyond is accomplished by finding ways to further the goals of everyone involved.
- > Small grant programs with awards in the \$1,000 to \$2,500 range, like the Office of Sustainability's Green Healthy Smart Challenge grant, can help enhance student leadership in greening projects. That same office that pays high school interns to work on sustainability projects. Similarly, the Baltimore Energy Challenge provides 10 to 15 \$1,000 grants each year to focus on energy awareness and conservation.
- > The program aims to build connections between the many students, who live in high-stress environments and experience considerable trauma in their lives, and nature, whether that be on school grounds or other locations.



We have huge challenges, including some schools with limited heat or air conditioning, which can make it difficult to get buy-in. Even so, we are getting a lot done. The issues are compelling. We have amazing teachers and students who have an interest and appetite for this work. We can do better, we need to do better.

—Joanna Pi-Sunyer
Green Schools Coordinator
Baltimore City Public Schools