

Building Your Dream Team

Greening a district requires an integrated effort that is engaging, planned out, and based on common sense. To make your values intersect, you will need to meet in the middle

We all know the phrase “the bottom line.” But have you heard of the Triple Bottom Line? It’s a common framework, used by some businesses and the green building movement, that measures an organization’s success through three filters: people, planet, and prosperity.

To be truly successful, according to this framework, an organization—say, a school district—must be ecologically sound, operate cost-effectively, and serve the people it was meant to serve.

At its very core, the sustainability movement is about intersections—a meeting in the middle of best practices, commonsense decisions, and community and global priorities. “True green” is where social, environmental, and economic values intersect.

Undertaking a successful green school initiative requires people to meet in the middle, too. To green a district requires an integrated team that engages participants and identifies champions across departments and throughout the community.

Though many green school district efforts have grown out of facilities departments, other initiatives have roots in curriculum, finance, or food services. In other cases, school board members, principals, teachers, parents, or students have initiated the conversation.

No matter where you begin, bringing

a green school district effort to scale will require the collaboration of experts with diverse responsibilities and perspectives. Establishing a “green team” will accelerate your district’s ability to make improvements to design, construction, operations, and educational instruction.

Round up the troops

So, where will you find the experts to make up this green team? Limited resources or hiring freezes may leave you feeling paralyzed, unsure of how you can accomplish even the simplest of green goals. Uncertain economic times shouldn’t put your vision of a green school on hold, however.

In fact, now is the time to act, as green schools can save \$100,000 a year on direct operating costs and have a measurable impact on the health and performance of students, teachers, and staff, according to the 2006 publication, *Greening America’s Schools: Costs and Benefits*.

Third-party green building or sustainability consulting services can be extremely valuable to launch new programs or initiatives and provide training and educational opportunities that will enhance your staff’s skill set. However, districts should not rely too heavily on outside consulting services for individual building projects.

If you do, you may incur significant

expenses that increase a project’s “green premium” (additional costs for going green) and miss the opportunity to build the necessary capacity and institutional memory for implementing comprehensive, districtwide sustainability initiatives.

By building green expertise in-house and tapping into expertise from your community’s volunteer base, you can save on new hires, consulting fees, and other initial expenses that might otherwise deter you from making incremental improvements towards greener schools. Establishing a green team is important in actualizing your districtwide commitment to sustainability. Through training and professional development opportunities, existing staff can become green school experts and enable the district to ramp up efforts quickly and with minimal strain on operating budgets.

Identify one person to spearhead the process of assembling a green team. Ideally, this will not be an additional set of responsibilities tacked onto an existing job description, but something that will prompt a change in position title and give this green leader the authority to seek commitments across departments and convene the green schools conversation.

The secret to success for Philadelphia’s public schools, for example, has been building a strong internal team of green champions who remain in constant communication. “You need somebody to break down the goals into bite-sized pieces, so people don’t get frustrated,” says Michael Pavelsky of the Sheward Partnership, which has provided consulting on the district’s facilities master plan. “They don’t just have to be from the facilities or capital

side—it can be a dedicated teacher or administrator, too.”

In creating a green team, it is important that all members have distinct and clearly defined roles. As ideas are proposed and accepted by the team and vetted by administrators, deliverables and deadlines should be established to make team members accountable for implementation. Creating working groups within the team may allow complex or long-term projects to be completed more efficiently. Working groups may need to engage other district staff when new knowledge and expertise are required.

From the inside out

Arizona’s Sedona–Oak Creek Joint Unified School District grew its green initiatives from the inside out. When it was time to replace a rapidly deteriorating school facility, the district opened its doors and included community members in the decision-making process. “Starting at the staff level,” school board President Bobbie Surber says, “you have to ask for participation in creating the vision.”

This strategy, along with community partnerships throughout Sedona, is furnishing the district with a new school and a performing arts center that are both pursuing the LEED “Gold” green building certification, as well as with a new district office that will operate “off the grid,” or without requiring power from traditional public utility providers. LEED is a third-party certification program for the design, construction, and operation of green buildings.

Issue a call to action within your community to garner support for green schools efforts. Philadelphia wanted to make sustainability a priority in the district’s facilities, but was overwhelmed with how to start. According to Pavelsky, building partnerships with outside agencies across the city was a huge help.

Community organizations, local businesses, and parents can provide indus-

try expertise, volunteer consultancy services, and offer ongoing support in putting green policies and practices in place.

In assembling your team around your district’s green goals, don’t forget those who know your buildings best: site maintenance staff. They know the facilities inside and out and can provide you with an insider’s look at how the existing infrastructure and maintenance practices can be improved. Asking for input and participation creates the buy-in that is critical for successful implementation of new practices.

Beyond the usual suspects

Teachers are also critical to the green dialogue. Arkansas’ Bryant School District was led down the path to green by Debbie Bruick, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, who understood the impact that healthy, high-performance school facilities can have on student and teacher performance.

With the backing of a supportive superintendent, Bruick has implemented sustainability across the district’s curriculum, keeping student learning as the No. 1 priority. Using the district’s curriculum goals to steer building design, rather than the other way around, Bruick has changed the way administrators and the community think about how facilities are designed, built, and operated.

The district’s commitment to green buildings as a means of promoting student health and achievement led Bryant to build the state’s first two LEED-certified schools—both earning “Silver” certification under LEED for new construction. A third project is currently pursuing LEED for schools certification.

Partnerships with local colleges and universities can shed new light on your projects, and will introduce you to a host of enthusiastic volunteers looking for hands-on project experience. Students planning to enter the design and construction industries are looking

for experiences that will set their resume apart and qualify them for a LEED professional credential.

From program development to LEED project documentation, local architecture, design, and engineering students are eager to build the skills they will need to enter the green economy.

Practice what you teach

Keep your green team motivated and informed with opportunities for continuing education and training. The U.S. Green Building Council offers hundreds of opportunities for sustainability and green building education.

Webinars and webcasts offer learning opportunities on subjects like energy efficiency strategies for schools, and LEED for schools and LEED for existing buildings certifications.

The goal of your green team will be the ongoing advancement of sustainable initiatives. Depending on the your district’s size, organizational structure, level of administrative and community support, budget considerations, and myriad other factors, advancing new green programs and policies may require a significant investment of time and effort.

A green district is not a final destination; it is a commitment to continuous improvement whereby the district takes incremental and measurable steps to become *greener*.

More than bringing healthy, money-saving, sustainable facilities to your students and staff, green schools will connect your community to the national green schools movement, where hundreds of volunteers, schools, and districts are committed to bring a green school to every child in America. To access green school resources and green building educational opportunities visit www.GreenSchoolBuildings.org/ASBJ. ■

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