

2013 Environmental Literacy Summit Break-out session: *Coordinating state, national “green” school programs to make a collective impact*

Goal: Explore how coordination among Green School programs across the region can advance the common agenda of these programs

Guiding Questions for this Session:

- What are the existing programs currently support the development and maintenance of green schools?
- What opportunities has the Green Ribbon School program created in your state?
- What are the specific criteria an ideal Green School would have?
- What are management practices that Green School rating/cert programs should be adhering to?
- How have other environmental fields created certification programs?
- How are different Green School programs coordinating to improve impact and efficiency?
- What are advantages to coordination between green school programs?
- What are the specific opportunities and challenges to partnering and coordinating?

FACILITATORS

Karen Kelly Mullin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Kim Martinez, National Wildlife Federation

Kevin Schabow, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office

Welcome and Overview

Kevin Schabow (NOAA) provided a context for the session by briefly highlighting some of the many programs that work in the region to certify, recognize, or coordinate school sustainability in the region. He discussed the common agenda among many in the “green school” field and opportunities presented for sustainable schools by both the Mid Atlantic Environmental Literacy Strategy and the draft outcomes of the new Chesapeake Bay Agreement. The draft outcome in particular presents an opportunity to develop common metrics related to green schools. He concluded with an overview of the Collective Impact model and the conditions needed for the large-scale change sought by individual green school programs

Green Ribbon School Jurisdictional update

Representatives from Maryland, Virginia, and Washington D.C. provided brief updates about the status of Green Ribbon in their state (the West Virginia update was provided in the following session). The following individuals provided updates for their state:

- Washington, D. C.: Sam Ullery, Office of the State Superintendent of Schools
- Virginia: Suzie Gilley, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Maryland: Laura Collard, Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education

State were asked to provide brief verbal updates about the following information

- How many schools apply, nominated and ultimately awarded?

- How does your state select applicants to nominate?
- Is there a program or state staff to assist schools in applying or becoming Green Ribbon?
- What are the highlights that you'd like to?

Sustainable Schools in West Virginia-Challenges and Opportunities

Vicki Fenwick-Judy (Canaan Valley Institute) discussed the creation and status West Virginia Sustainable Schools program. Central to her talk was how the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon School program raised awareness of green schools in West Virginia and created a space for school sustainability where there previously was none.

The Ideal Green School-what does it look like?

Kim Martinez (National Wildlife Federation) facilitated a discussion about common elements of sustainability that participants felt were necessary for holistic school sustainability. She noted that having a collective impact on school sustainability will require common metrics across programs, and a common definition of school sustainability. Many programs recognize school sustainability, many other strive to improve some level of school sustainability. This session broadly explored the topic of what true school sustainability means. There was agreement that sustainability should be broadly defined and encompass many topics. Participants identified a range of characteristics a green school should have including:

- Focus on energy and water conservation
- Student driven sustainability initiatives and implementation
- Outdoor student learning and schoolyard habitats
- Communication and interaction with the surrounding community
- Environment used as an integrating context for learning across multiple subject areas, including STEM
- Transportation initiatives such as no school bus idling and walk-to-school programs.
- Green purchasing for energy and cleaning projects
- Health focus; both individual student (nutrition, exercise) and environmental health (indoor air quality, drinking water, etc.)
- Teacher professional development about environmental education, sustainability, and curricular ties to environmental topics
- Continuous improvement in sustainability and collection of environmental data (waste reduced, energy saved, trees planted, etc.)
- Emphasis on recycling, and waste (food, paper, etc.) reduction
- Student exposure to and training in green careers

Management Practices for Green School Rating Programs

Karen Kelly Mullin (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) gave a presentation that examined examples from the sustainable forestry and seafood industries which illustrate how those sectors have approached coordination across multiple certification programs. She also highlighted "School Sustainability Rating Systems: Strengths, Limitations, and Future Prospects", a body of work conducted by Julian Dautremont-

Smith. Julian previously presented this work at an August 2012 “Best Practices in Environmental Education” workshop sponsored by the Chesapeake Science and Technical Advisory Committee. From this work, Karen highlighted the best management practices for green school rating programs that are recommended in the broader sustainability rating systems literature that seem most relevant to schools. Those practices include:

- Accountability mechanisms
- Comprehensive scope
- Multiple levels of achievement
- Open governance process
- Performance-focused criteria
- Public reporting
- Transparent Criteria

Opportunities for collaboration between Green School programs, examples from New Jersey and Maryland

Donna Drewes from the Sustainability Institute and the College of New Jersey discussed Sustainable New Jersey’s emerging sustainable school program through Sustainable New Jersey. She focused on how the program was developed and understanding the motivations for why school participate in the certification program. She also highlighted partnerships with other green school rating programs (Eco-Schools) and best practices included in the program

Laura Collard of the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education, and Kim Martinez, National Wildlife Federation, discuss their partnership between Eco Schools and Maryland Green Schools. Maryland Schools are encouraged to apply for a joint certification in both programs: performing environmental audits; ‘greening’ school buildings and grounds; conserving natural resources; and integrating environmental education into curricula. Kim and Laura discussed how this partnership formed and how it has been received by participating schools.

What are opportunities for coordination?

Attendees were asked to address the following questions:

- What are the benefits and potential challenges to a coordinated approach?
- What are steps can the Chesapeake Bay Program take to facilitate coordination and support green schools and green school rating programs?

Attendees agreed that coordinating across programs has more benefits than challenges. Among the identified pluses of coordination include

- Sharing of resources, including staff time and expertise, and school contacts
- Increased program credibility and visibility
- Greater meaning to a certification or recognition when multiple organizations are involved
- Additional grant funding opportunities where partnership are encouraged
- Building the capacity of individual programs
- Greater geographic reach

It was noted that building relations required for a meaningful relationship can be very time consuming. In cases where programs are administered primarily by one person, taking time to build partnerships may not be feasible. There can also be initial resistance to partnering because some may worry about losing the branding of their individual program. This was only a minor concern however.

Next Steps

There are several steps in the near term that the Chesapeake Bay Program could undertake to assist partnership development, program coordination, and school sustainability more generally. For partnerships and coordination, the Bay Program should provide a platform for information sharing.

To do this, a smaller working group focused solely on green schools should form and meet regularly (bi-monthly) to initially identify partnership opportunities and strategies to encourage coordination. Specific tasks this group could do include arranging meetings between programs, conduct informational webinars, and work with various green school programs to standardize application criteria.

It was suggested that teachers and schools need more resources for how to become sustainable, and Bay Backpack could provide a venue for this. This is another topic that the green schools working group should spearhead.

Another need identified by the group was a guiding document of best practices for green schools. Given potential outcomes for sustainable schools in a new Bay Program Agreement, a detailed definition and formal descriptive document of what a green/sustainable entails is necessary.