

Cherry Hill High School West

Cherry Hill, Camden County

Cherry Hill, a large suburban district outside of Camden, boasts an active community-based team, Sustainable Cherry Hill, and a newly enacted district green team. Together, a group of district stakeholders, community leaders and consultants secured grant funding to create the school district's first green strategic plan. The plan touches all school facilities, requires a contact person at each school, and measures baseline information against actual improvements to goals. The goals target education, operations, and facilities.

Cherry Hill High School West, the single school participating in the NJSSP, displayed a culture of collaboration and goal-oriented work throughout the project. The team leader started with a waste reduction campaign and leveraged access to students and peer-to-peer influence. Although results were less than desirable, the process offered valuable learning experiences. First, through sampling of waste receptacles, it was discovered that less than 10 percent of the school's waste is actually "trash." Most of the waste was compostable food waste, liquids, and recyclables. This information was presented to the district green team and a provision to explore on and off-site composting/waste digesting was included in the district's sustainability plan.

Second, the existing waste and recycling containers lack consistency in form, color, and graphics resulting in confusion among the users of the building. It was recommended to the district green team that the district adopt a standard for waste containers that remain consistent through all grade levels.

Third, the cafeteria produced the largest volume of waste, much in the form of foam lunch trays. Aramark, the food service provider, provided paper plates as an option to foam trays. However, most students opted for the foam trays as these seemed easier to use. This issue was presented to the district green team. Aramark leadership serving on the team suggested that a reusable tray with disposable liner be used at one of the district's middle schools as a pilot program.

Finally, waste reduction is not glamorous and it can be difficult to gain momentum on a project such as this, especially among the higher-grade students where activities, sports, jobs and other responsibilities greatly impact the number of involved students and the amount of time they can commit to these projects. Until sustainability projects become part of the regular school day, this will remain a challenge.

After working on improving recycling rates and seeing little improvement, the team refocused its efforts outside of the building. The team completed a wildflower meadow project and began building a trail system. The trail will serve to foster connections between students and the natural world. Through each of these projects, Cherry Hill High School West and the district are moving toward their goals and transforming their internal and external communities into groups of citizens with a higher awareness and connectivity to their surroundings.

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVE

Reduce polystyrene trays by **25%**

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

collaboration
creativity



WORDS OF WISDOM

The district administration quickly established a foundation of trust, which encouraged staff and students who are passionate about sustainability to lead the transformation of their school in a unique way that reflects the culture of their population.

Kevin Frost,
Sustainable Design
Teacher

