

Holland Township School District

Holland Township, Hunterdon County

Every school has an entry point to sustainability. At Holland Township School, the catalyst was the receipt of a school garden grant which began with a teacher's interest in carrying her students' learning experiences outside. Holland Township School is located in a rural setting and had the land and teacher expertise to help establish and maintain a garden. The focus quickly moved from a butterfly garden to edibles. The Extended Summer Year students utilized compost bins to collect the garden and food scraps. Then after the first harvest luncheon the school set more challenging goals. These included reducing plastic water bottle waste and conserving water by building rain barrels with families.

Each project aligned with lesson plans and opportunities to extend learning from the classroom to the community. The green team realized how much waste they could divert and reuse by the compost pile, which drew their attention to the waste generated by users inside the building. Supported by the principal and led by a small group of teachers and students, the green team set a measurable goal of eliminating polystyrene trays by 20 percent and eliminating waste in classrooms on early dismissal days. The engagement of students in collecting and calculating real-world lunchroom waste totals was also helpful. Those figures taught graphing, percentages and decimals, which met core curriculum standards. The students were an important part of the project as they were actively involved in collecting sorting and analyzing data as well as communicating what they learned to their parents and local government.

Over 18 months Holland Township's team successfully launched 'Styrofoam-Free Fridays and hosted a Green Apple movie night with "Garbage: The Revolution Starts at Home." The sustainable goal was embedded into districtwide after-school events; Holland launched a t-shirt sustainable logo design contest as part of an awareness campaign, and having these t-shirts placed at each entrance reminds visitors that Holland is striving to be a sustainable school.

The team faced common challenges with each initiative: staff time, collaborating with outside vendors, conflicting interests as students age and inconsistent messaging across the district. Throughout the project the team met regularly and openly discussed their challenges and ways to improve the process. Due to the support of administration and a very active green team the district was able to move forward. The green team has become instrumental in ensuring that the district continue to add goals to create a more sustainable learning environment.

Holland Township hired a new superintendent in the midst of the project. By engaging district administration in green workshops, they had a shorter line to the board of education and were better able to work with the superintendent to communicate district sustainability goals. Holland Township now has a sustainable goal in the district's strategic plan so student achievement standards continue to be met as facilities are monitored, updated and embraced into the sustainable environment.

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVE

Reduce polystyrene trays in food service by **20%**

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

supportive leadership
unifier
active listener
creativity
able to work well in groups
self-reflective
persistent
evaluative
able to delegate

WORDS OF WISDOM

Have a dedicated committee with a broad range of members. Have specific measurable goals and responsibilities and ask your team, 'How can we help and support your efforts?'

Dr. Nancy Yard,
team leader

