



Whether you are a parent, teacher, school staff member, student, or community volunteer, you want your school to provide a healthy, welcoming place to learn. The important effort of running greener schools needs action from everyone in the school community, and sometimes the scale of the task can make it hard to know where the start. Follow these 12 simple priority actions from the Center for Green Schools to help make your school healthy, efficient, comfortable and environmentally responsible.

### #1: Find your superstars

It takes a team to green a school, so take the first step to find out who's interested. Successful schools have given student green teams prominence and responsibility, and they've steadily become the team that everyone wants to be a part of. Look to advocates such as interested teachers, administrators, custodians, students, parents and community volunteers to be part of your green team. Talk to local organizations and professionals that have technical expertise and can help. Agree on a mission, individual roles and set realistic goals for the group. Shooting for quick and simple wins first will help motivate everyone to reach for more in the future.

#### First steps:

- Conduct interviews with at least five key stakeholders at the school or within district staff. Interviews should be used to both create a relationship with key stakeholders (school custodial staff, school administrators, district facilities department, teachers) and also to find out critical information helpful to your projects. Make a list of questions before you get started. Write up your notes afterwards, and follow up.
- Visit [www.usgbc.org/findachapter](http://www.usgbc.org/findachapter) to locate your nearest USGBC Chapter. We have chapters in every state, and most of them have Green Schools Committees that can help you find the technical resources and volunteers you might need to get started.
- Educate yourself about the effect that school-based staff and classroom teachers can have on the learning environment. The Center for Green Schools offers the [Green Classroom Professional Certificate](#) program, an online and self-paced course and exam.

#### Tips for creating a green team:

- Washington Green Schools - steps to create a green team: <http://www.greenschools.net/article.php?id=361>
- NWF Eco-Schools – Eco Action Teams: <http://www.nwf.org/Global-Warming/School-Solutions/Eco-Schools-USA/Become-an-Eco-School/Steps/Eco-Action-Team.aspx>

## #2: Ready, set – wait, which can do I put this in?

It's hard to know what to fix if you don't know where you stand. To start, if you want to kick off a recycling or composting program at your school, or increase the success of an existing program, it's helpful to know how much of each kind of waste your school produces so that you target the right items. Is the biggest culprit food waste, cardboard, plastics? Let's find out!

First steps:

- Develop a Waste Audit Plan with the green team, and consider bringing in outside expertise for support. Using the information gathered in your interviews, determine what level of audit you will be able to conduct.
- Conduct a baseline waste audit, and educate the school community by sharing your audit results.
- Create a plan for implementing and/or improving waste reduction efforts. Communicate the plan to the entire school community, even more than you think is necessary. Success will be easier if the plan becomes part of a gradual change in school culture.
- Implement the plan, and MEASURE your successes. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Your school community will be motivated by success, so they need to know if their actions are working.

Tips for improving your school's waste stream:

- EPA Teachers Guide for completing a Resource Reduction program: <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/education/teachers.htm>
- EPA Toolkit: <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/education/pdfs/toolkit/tools-a.pdf>
- EPA Planet Protector Club curriculum ideas (k-5): <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/education/kids/planetprotectors/index.htm>
- Recycle Works – Setting up a Waste Audit Program: <http://www.recycleworks.org/schools/schoolpgm.html>
- Consider joining EPA's Waste Wise program for FREE. The Waste Wise online tool helps you structure a Waste Audit and keeps all of your baseline and audit data to measure changes in recycling patterns over time. [www.epa.gov/wastewise](http://www.epa.gov/wastewise)
- Composting in Schools: <http://compost.css.cornell.edu/schools.html>
- Success Stories: <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/partnerships/wastewise/success/school.htm> and [http://www.wastediversion.org/app\\_pages/view/39](http://www.wastediversion.org/app_pages/view/39)

### #3: What's a watt?

Just as in waste reduction efforts, if you want to help your school save energy, you need to know how much energy it uses today and where the biggest energy inefficiencies are. There are a lot of reasons to find out where your starting point is—the celebration of your school's success will be so much sweeter if you can measure how far you've come. And showing measurable success is the best way to get others on board to help out.

First steps:

- If you can, get ahold of your school's or district's energy history. Depending on your location, this work can be very simple or much more difficult than it seems. If your school or district is not yet using tracking software, consider starting with a free online energy tracking program such as Energy Star Portfolio Manager.
- Involve students in the planning process for conducting an energy audit. Conduct a baseline energy audit, and educate your community by sharing your audit results. Work with all appropriate departments and with your local utility for support in conducting an energy walkthrough or a more comprehensive audit of your school.
- Create a plan for reducing energy usage. Communicating the plan will be crucial for its success. Remember that you are working toward a shift in people's actions within the school. It will take time and constant reinforcement.
- Implement the plan, and track your success. Put the data somewhere visible in the school.

Tips for reducing energy usage:

- As part of the energy audit, conduct interviews with school custodial and energy staff to understand energy usage at your school, what energy efficiency measures are in place and where there might be opportunities for improvement.
- Energy Audit Steps: [http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/wue/energy2\\_procedures.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/wue/energy2_procedures.html)
- Alliance for Climate Education "Planning a Successful Audit": <http://www.acespace.org/actnow/toolkit/organized/project>
- Energy Star Portfolio Manager: [http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=evaluate\\_performance.bus\\_portfoliomanager](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=evaluate_performance.bus_portfoliomanager)
- Cool Schools Challenge Audit Planning Resources: <http://coolschoolchallenge.org/materialssecondary.aspx>
- Use an energy audit as a teaching opportunity in your classroom:
  - Energy Calculator: [http://www.eia.gov/kids/energy.cfm?page=about\\_energy\\_conversion\\_calculator-basics](http://www.eia.gov/kids/energy.cfm?page=about_energy_conversion_calculator-basics)
  - National Energy Education Development "Student Learning & Conserving Guide": <http://www.need.org/needpdf/Learning%20Conserving%20Student%20Guide.pdf>
  - PICO Energizing Energy Education Program (6-8 grades): <http://www.need.org/peco>
  - Energy Activities (k-5 grades): [http://www.eia.gov/kids/resources/teachers/pdfs/Activitybook\\_web.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/kids/resources/teachers/pdfs/Activitybook_web.pdf)

## #4: Go behind the scenes

Speaking of figuring out where your school stands—why not ask the real experts? When is the last time you talked to your school's custodians or school facility staff? The men and women who take care of school buildings are the best source for knowledge about how to make schools more efficient, healthier, and more environmentally responsible. They have often been trained on green cleaning methods or energy efficiency initiatives. Where can the lights be turned off more often? Why is there a strange smell in that corner room? They know their buildings inside and out, and asking them for ideas is a great way to appreciate their work and bring them onto the team.

First steps:

- Schedule a time to talk with your custodial and maintenance team, both supervisors and staff. Plan carefully ahead of time: How do you want to structure the conversation? What questions do you want to ask the team? How will you work with the team to come to a few actionable steps or suggestions for the school or district?
- Act on at least two suggestions or recommendations put forward by the team, and follow up with the group to let them know what has been done.

Tips for investigating the day-to-day operations of the school or district:

- Questions to consider when interviewing your maintenance staff:
  - What green policies are in place and which are working?
  - What green cleaning methods are being used by staff?
  - What do staff members know about a sustainable purchasing policy?
  - What do staff members know about an integrated pest management plan?
  - Do we currently have a way to track how much (in weight or volume) the school recycles, composts vs. sends to the landfill?
  - Do you know how much the school spent on utilities (electric, gas, oil and water) last year? How can we make sure everyone in the school knows what our utility usage is?
  - Where do you see opportunities for improvement?
  - What do you think we could each be doing to reduce energy, water, and resource use at school?
  - What are some of the challenges or barriers you face in putting in place more green practices?
- USGBC Greening Existing Schools Implementation Workbook: <http://www.usgbc.org/ShowFile.aspx?DocumentID=6427>
- EPA Buildings & Grounds checklist: <http://epa.gov/iaq/schools/pdfs/kit/checklists/bldgmaintchklist.pdf>
- EPA environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP): <http://www.epa.gov/epp/>
- National Wildlife Federation – school audit: [http://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Ecoschools/Eco-SchoolsUSAEnviroReview-Auditcombined\\_2-1-10.ashx](http://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Ecoschools/Eco-SchoolsUSAEnviroReview-Auditcombined_2-1-10.ashx)

## #5: Put the kids in charge

If you are a parent or you work with kids, you know that no group is better able or more willing to speak up about why being smart about the environment is important than kids—they get it! Students across the country are starting green clubs in their schools, with the help and support of teachers and parents. These students plant gardens on school property, calculate carbon footprints, advocate for environmentally preferable purchasing, assess school energy use, enforce the school's recycling program with their peers, encourage teachers to bring sustainability curriculum into the classroom, and much more. Help start a club at your school, and let the kids run with it!

First steps:

- Educate students about the components of environmental sustainability, and create a plan with them for at least three realistic goals during the year. Educating students is important to fostering awareness and giving them the skills to speak confidently and take action. Whether it's in the classroom or after school, start with the basics and build the expertise to tackle big projects!
- With the students, implement a project that directly affects energy, water, and/or resource use at the school or that directly affects the health and wellness of school occupants. Join our [Green Apple Day of Service](#) during the last week of September to provide rallying day to connect your effort with others around the world.

Tips for getting kids involved:

- Check out these student voices from Sidwell Friends Middle School in Washington, DC:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q30Ggqtu6Q&feature=relmfu>
- Kids Gardening: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/>
- Meet the Greens carbon calculator: <http://www.meetthegreens.org/features/carbon-calculator.html>
- Classroom & home energy audit for students:  
[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/activities/3519\\_energy.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/activities/3519_energy.html)
- Sustainability Education Curriculum Clearinghouse:  
[http://www.greeneducationfoundation.org/index.php?option=com\\_sobi2&Itemid=567](http://www.greeneducationfoundation.org/index.php?option=com_sobi2&Itemid=567)

## #6: Hey, what's this thing do?

Your school might already be a green school. Heck, your school might be the greenest school in the world. But how would you know? There is a simple way to find out (and share) this information: SIGNS! For instance, simple stickers on light switches work wonders. The more you find out about your school and how it works, the more you will gain to share with all of the students, faculty and staff in the building. If you want to green your school, everyone needs to feel like they're part of the team—and people don't get behind something they don't understand.

First steps:

- Hold a competition among students to create signage about components of the school and/or to communicate environmental lessons to students, faculty and staff.
- Talk with students and staff to find out what they know and don't know about how the school runs every day. With your student group or green team, take a tour of your school to see where information from signage could make a difference. Take photos to document what is already in place, and keep track of where and how many of each signage type is in place.
- Design and print signs to post important information around the school.

Tips for communicating through signage:

- This video of Manassas Park Elementary School has some great examples of signage: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2WVqJ6Doo4>
- Talk to maintenance staff about policies for hanging signs in the school and how they can help with your project. Consider durability of signs and how they will remain in place.
- Research best practices for green printing and environmentally friendly signage. Here are five green questions to ask your printer: <http://info.greenerprinter.com/bid/54037/5-Questionsto-ask-your-Green-printer>

## #7: You are what you eat...and recycle, throw away and compost...

The attention that school lunch food has been getting lately—through programs like Alice Waters’ Edible Schoolyard and Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution—is beginning to change the way Americans look at the food we give our kids. You can get the movement started at your school in a number of ways. You can plant a school vegetable garden to help students understand where food comes from. You can work with kids to prepare fresh meals or snacks that they can enjoy on the spot. And don’t forget about the opposite end of the lunch period—what about hosting a waste-free lunch day?

First steps:

- Investigate how food is purchased and brought to your school. Learn what initiatives for healthy food in schools are already in place.
- Plant food plants or a food garden to teach students about where food comes from.
- Connect with community partners who can bring expertise and resources to help make school lunches healthier and bring fresh food to students.
- Institute a waste-free lunch day, and make it a recurring event.

Tips for improving the lunch period:

- Food is a great way to connect with a wide audience and talk about sustainability issues spanning topics such as social justice, economics, agriculture, operations, health and more. Consider hosting a taste test with samples of tap water vs. bottled water; local vegetables vs. canned veggies; organic vs. non organic, and take this opportunity to educate your taste testers.
- School gardens can be wonderful teaching tools and inspiration for students, but they must be maintained. If you’re bringing one to your school, ensure that you have spoken to your school district staff and that there is a maintenance plan in place with the necessary resources to make it sustainable in the long-term.
- School Garden resources:
  - Alice Waters’ Edible Schoolyard: <http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/about-us>
  - Teaching Garden learning tools: <http://www.takepart.com/articles/teaching-garden-learningtools/139154>
  - The Kitchen Community school gardens: <http://www.thekitchencommunity.org/>
  - School garden funding sources: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/grants-and-awards>
- Healthy Lunch resources:
  - Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution: <http://www.jamieoliver.com/foundation/jamies-foodrevolution/>
  - Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine – Healthy School Food: [http://www.healthyschoollunches.org/fivesteps/five\\_steps.cfm](http://www.healthyschoollunches.org/fivesteps/five_steps.cfm)
- Waste Free Lunch resources:
  - General resources and signage: <http://www.wastefreelunches.org/>
  - Waste free lunch audit and lesson plan: <http://www.recycleok.org/pdf/wastefree-lunchlessonplan.pdf>
  - EPA - Waste free lunch resources: <http://www.epa.gov/osw/education/lunch.htm>

## #8: Let the Sun Shine In

If you've ever had to spend a few hours in a windowless office or conference room, no one needs to tell you much about the relationship between daylight and productivity (and happiness!). But in case there is any doubt, several studies have connected the two in adults as well as children. So open the blinds and turn off the lights! Take that student artwork off the windows and hang it somewhere else. No windows or small windows in your kids' classroom? Move class outdoors every once in a while or to a room with more access to the sunshine.

First steps:

- Prepare your classroom to receive maximum daylight without the glare. To make way for more light, remove paper, display boards, or other obstructions from your classroom windows! Keep blinds open except when direct sun is causing too much glare. Test out different scenarios at various times of day with natural or indoor light to find the right balance.
- Hold your classes outside at least three times a year, and encourage others to do the same.
- Educate your colleagues on the benefits of daylight and how to maximize daylight in their classrooms.

Tips to increase access to daylight:

- Ask school administration about policies for hosting classes in other areas of the school or outside. If there is hesitation or restrictions against this, make your case and get others to speak up about the benefits of taking students outside. Set a goal for taking your class to a more daylit area or even outside during nice weather.
- National Education Association tips for taking your class outside: <http://www.nea.org/tools/take-your-class-outside.htm>
- Daylight and Productivity studies: <http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=77#occupant>



## #9: You know it's dust, but what IS it?

We don't always think about it, but dust is not just magically-appearing gray clouds. It comes from our clothes, our skin, and various other items we use during the day. It also, importantly, contains dust mites and cockroach dander (yes, it's true!) that can be very harmful to breathe, especially to kids with asthma or other respiratory problems. Nearly one in every 13 school-age kids suffer from asthma, a chronic disease which is the leading cause of absenteeism. The EPA's Tools for Schools Indoor Air Quality program gives tips for keeping a healthy classroom, and one of the simplest and most crucial steps is to clean out the clutter. Those corner piles of paper and decorations and science experiments serve as great collection areas for dust—not to mention their tendency to block daylight from windows and get in the way of air conditioning and heating vents. Clean them out, and your classroom will be automatically easier to keep clean and healthy.

First steps:

- O Interview your school's custodial and maintenance staff to understand what green cleaning and health and safety practices are in place.
- O Organize and clean classrooms, perhaps by hosting a "Classroom Green Cleaning Day."
- O In cleaning out classrooms, remove un-used papers, books and supplies. Strongly consider removing items that typically collect dust and mites, including stuffed animals, cloth pillows, and fabric. Clean all carpet thoroughly to remove all dust and dirt build-up. Ensure that the heating and cooling units, windows and vents supplying air to your classroom are free of obstructions. Ensure that animal cages and fish tanks are regularly cleaned.

Tips for improving cleanliness at school:

- The school district may want to form a specific team focused on green cleaning, due to its health and safety benefits. Key participants to consider for this team are nurses, Environmental Health & Safety staff, custodians, and community health experts. Some tips for forming a Green Cleaning Green Team: <http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/gcs/guide/s1-create-green-team.html>
- General Teacher Resource on healthy schools: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/teachers.html>
- EPA Tools for Schools Indoor Air Quality program – Classroom Checklist: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/pdfs/kit/checklists/teacherchk1st.doc>
- EPA - Asthma prevention: <http://www.epa.gov/asthma/school-based.html>
- American Lung Association's Asthma Friendly Schools Initiative: <http://www.lung.org/lung-disease/asthma/creating-asthma-friendly-environments/asthma-in-schools/asthma-friendly-schools-initiative/asthma-friendly-schools-initiative-toolkit.html>

## #10: No really, what is that smell?

We know schools can really smell—whether it's someone's day-old snack, the students' recess sweat, or the closet full of who-knows-what. The temptation is to mask all those smells with plug-in or spray air fresheners, but please don't! The problem is that those smells could also be coming from mildew under the sink, cleaners or sealants used by the custodian, mold above the ceiling tiles, or any number of other sources. If you mask the smell with something additional (like the air freshener), you're not only NOT getting rid of the problem, you're also ADDING to the asthma triggers within the classroom. Air fresheners and other commonly-used chemical agents such as bleach-based cleaners do not make air better for students and teachers; they add other smells on top of an already bad situation.

First steps:

- Use the guidance from EPA's Tools for Schools program to form an Air Team to keep track of issues within the school that may affect air quality. Many actions to fix air quality can be simple and low-cost if the problem has been caught early.
- Investigate the school's classrooms. Find out where the odors or leaks are coming from, and report what you find to the facilities maintenance team. Work with a custodian to identify and fix problems in your classroom. Remove air fresheners, clear supplies from vents, ensure fume hoods are working properly, and review the chemical inventory in science classrooms or labs for possible hazards.
- Educate yourself on green cleaning and the importance of healthy indoor air quality in schools. Healthy buildings are critical for ensuring students and teachers have the highest quality learning and working environment.

Tips for improving air quality:

- Green Seal certified green cleaning products: [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)
- Ecologo certified green cleaning products: [www.ecologo.org](http://www.ecologo.org)
- Greenguard Virtual Walkthrough of School IAQ: <http://www.greenguard.org/en/HealthierSchools.aspx>
- Take part in the Healthy Schools Campaign. Sign up for free resources, become educated, find case studies and start advocating for a healthier school.
  - Healthy Schools Campaign: <http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/gcs/>
  - Green Cleaning Award for Schools & Universities:  
<http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/gcs/award.php>
- EPA School Chemical Cleanout Campaign: [www.epa.gov/schools](http://www.epa.gov/schools)
- Tips for science classrooms: [http://www.sciencetoolbox.com/articles/article\\_07-10-04.html](http://www.sciencetoolbox.com/articles/article_07-10-04.html)

## #11: Lights out!

Did you know that lighting typically uses over 25% of the energy used in a school? A school-wide lighting retrofit is an easy way to save on electricity bills—the payback time from the decrease in energy costs is typically less than two years. But if a retrofit isn't in the cards for your school, a good old-fashioned "Turn Out the Lights" campaign can go a long way. Your student green team and your excellent signage will forge the way, and a chat with your custodian will ensure you're hitting all of the bases. If you're looking for more ways to save energy at school, you can find great tips from Alliance to Save Energy, SchoolDude, and EPA's EnergyStar program.

### First Steps:

- Find out how much you spend on electricity in your school, and communicate this information to students, faculty and staff. Put up signage that recognizes when the school has successfully lowered energy usage.
- Conduct a "Lights Out" campaign. Establish a leadership team, and set clear goals for the campaign. How much energy do you want to save? How long will the campaign run for? Is it just in the school or does it translate to student households?
- Keep school occupants informed about the effect of the Lights Out Campaign. Knowing the concrete effect of their collective actions will motivate your colleagues and students.
- Contact your utility to see if there are lighting efficiency rebates available. Present a lighting retrofit proposal and energy/cost savings proposal to school or district administration.

### Tips for conducting a 'lights out' campaign:

- Overview of a school's energy use from the EPA:  
[http://www.energystar.gov/ia/business/challenge/learn\\_more/Schools.pdf](http://www.energystar.gov/ia/business/challenge/learn_more/Schools.pdf)
- Consider aligning the campaign with Earth Hour or a district-wide energy reduction competition to bring more attention to the matter. Earth Hour's Lights Out Campaign: <http://www.earthhour.org/Homepage.aspx>
- Implement lesson plans on lighting and energy usage in the classroom as well as in students' own homes. Ask students to talk to their families about the importance of turning off lights.
- Energy saving tips from the Alliance to Save Energy: <http://ase.org/resources/energy-savingtips-schools>
- School Dude Energy Management Resources: <http://www.schooldude.com/resources/energy/>
- Maintaining good IAQ While Saving Energy:  
<http://marketing.schooldude.com/marketing/LandingPageDocs/PM/Checklists/IAQandEnergyConservationFactSheet.pdf>

## #12: Carpooling – jump in, the water’s fine!

You can start small, but a school carpooling program can have a big effect. The more kids or teachers in a car on the way to school, the less fossil fuel used per person and the less pollution emitted per person. Start in one or two classes to see if parents seem interested in reducing the number of times they need to drive back and forth from school. There are several ways to scale it up from there—from a simple bulletin board by the office to a paid service for online carpool coordination. You could also start a campaign to get kids and families walking or biking to school (as a group), and encourage the group to stick with it for the year.

First steps:

- Survey your students to find out how they typically get to and from school. Identify leaders and alternative transportation advocates in the school or community to act as role models and to get the message out. Do some of your teachers ride their bikes to work regularly?
- Host a walk/ride to school day, sometimes called a “Walk and Roll” Day, to encourage alternative transport or carpooling to school.
- Set up a system to coordinate carpooling with families and staff.

Tips for encouraging alternative transportation options:

- Walking and biking to school/work is a great form of exercise. Does your school have goals for physical activity or obesity prevention? A walk/ride campaign may be something that city or school district health and wellness staff would love to support.
- Get local law enforcement involved in a walk/ride day or long-term campaign to ensure that everyone gets to school safely. Consider aligning with National Walk to School Day, Safe Routes to Schools, or another national campaign.
- Carpool to School: <https://www.carpooltoschool.com/>
- Green Streets Initiative – Start a walk ride day in your school: <http://www.gogreenstreets.org/start-walkride-days-in-yo.html>
- Safe Routes to Schools: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools>
- National Walk to School Day: <http://www.walktoschool.org/>