10 Easy Steps to Green Your Classroom – Inside and Out!

Heather Fleming – Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center

1. **Recycle**
   - Recycling program at school
   - Recycling Monitor job
   - Use recycled paper
   - Use both sides of paper
   - Scrap paper bin
2. **Compost**
   - Worm bin
   - Outdoor compost: lunch waste and landscape clippings
3. **Waste Reduction**
   - Reusable containers: water, snacks, and lunch
   - Waste-free Lunch week
   - No paper assignments
   - Ask students to email homework assignments
   - Make online worksheets rather than paper
   - http://www.worksheetless.com/
4. **Transportation**
   - Idle-free carpool lane. This includes buses.
   - Encourage carpool and public transportation
5. **Air Quality**
   - Plants in the classroom and outside (pollinator garden)
   - No odor whiteboard markers
   - Low VOC products
     - Paints and lacquers, paint strippers, cleaning supplies, pesticides, building materials and furnishings, office equipment such as copiers and printers, correction fluids and carbonless copy paper, graphics and craft materials including glues and adhesives, permanent markers, and photographic solutions.
6. **Chemicals**
   - Homemade or eco-friendly cleaning products rather than Lysol and Clorox bleach wipes
   - Low VOC products (paints, adhesives, etc)
   - Serve organic – reduce candy treats as rewards. If you do use them, make them organic.
   - Start an organic farm-to-school movement
7. **Energy Use**
   - Turn off the lights, computer, etc.: Unplug them, as many still pull electricity when off
   - Move your thermostat closer to the outside temperature.
   - Use CFL lights.
   - Assign an “energy vampire monitor” to unplug electronic devices at the end of every school day.
8. **Water Use**
   - Rainbarrel for pollinator and other gardens

- Fix leaky faucets and toilets
- Educate on water conservation in hand-washing, etc.

9. **Teach Green**
   - Incorporate environmental education into as many lessons as possible
   - Lead by example
10. **Go outside!**
   - Plant a garden, tree(s)
   - Bird feeders
   - Outdoor Classroom!
   - Free play, when time allows

Statistics, Ideas, and Resources

Recycle

- Recycle paper! And only use recycled paper in your classroom. Most newsprint is made of between 70-100% new fibers from virgin trees. Recycled paper uses 60% less energy to make than virgin paper. Each ton saves 7,000 gallons of water and 17 trees.
- If your school does not have a recycling program, start a campaign to get one going!
- Have students make signs and posters to place near garbage and recycling containers to show what materials go in which bin.
- Print on both sides of the paper whenever possible.
- Set up a scrap paper box in the classroom. If only one side of a page has been used, put it in the scrap box so the other side can be used later.

Compost

- Make a classroom worm bin http://www.cmnh.org/site/Files/AtMuseum/WORM-FamilyBin_1-6_3-2010.pdf
- If disposable cutlery and plates/cups are used for events, choose compostable options http://www.ecoproductsstore.com/
- Start a school composting program for food waste and landscape cuttings

Waste Reduction

- Use re-usable cups and plates instead of disposable cups and plates.
- Think twice before throwing something away! Ask yourself, can it be re-used or recycled?
- Don't print everything! If you don't need it, don't print it!
- Try reducing the amount of packaging you have in the first place. Buy school supplies in bulk.

Transportation

- Idle-free carpool lane program http://www.cleanaircampaign.org/Your-Schools/Learn-About-Clean-Air-Schools/Programs-Overview/No-Idling-Program

- Encourage parents to car pool or use public transportation when coming to your school!
- Help each student use a public transportation map to find a route to school from their home. Some may find that it is easier than they thought! (However, some may not find a suitable route.)
- Help parents organize carpools.
- Consider using public transportation on field trips if possible.

Indoor Air Quality

- IAQ Toolkit: http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/
    - When touring the school, committee members should take notice of any musty, stale odors; sewer gas smells; visible mold or water damage on ceilings, walls, floors, carpets; pest damage or droppings; dirty carpets; broken toilets or sinks; or chemical fumes.
    - Discuss routine maintenance practices and how staff can reduce exposure to students of cleaning supplies, pesticides, and other chemicals during regular school hours.
    - Inform teachers that they should be sure all heating vents are clear of classroom materials. Poor ventilation has been found to affect concentration.
    - Avoid having school buses idle in front of open school doors or near the building's ventilation units; bus exhaust can significantly increase the level of carbon monoxide inside the building. Maintenance staff can improve indoor air quality by shutting off the intake ventilation system and closing exterior doors during school bus arrival and departure times.
    - Limit painting, applying floor finishes, or doing other repairs or maintenance procedures that require chemical products to when students are not inside the building.
    - Replace water-damaged carpets with floor tiles. Damp carpets can become a primary source for microbial growth, often causing adverse health effects.
- Plants in the classroom
- No odor whiteboard markers
- Open the windows on nice weather days (make sure to cut off the AC/Heat)
- Homemade or eco-friendly cleaning products rather than Lysol and Clorox wipes http://eartheasy.com/live_nontoxic_solutions.htm

Chemicals in the Classroom

- Low VOC products for painting, adhesives, cleaners, etc. Make a school-wide initiative.
- Use Organic food in the classroom. Avoid serving foods that are labeled "Natural". Natural does not equal Organic and these foods may still have nasty stuff in them!
- Homemade or eco-friendly cleaning products rather than Lysol and Clorox wipes – you can find these products easily at local stores now- or make them http://eartheasy.com/live_nontoxic_solutions.htm
- Start a Farm to School movement: organic produce come straight from the garden http://www.georgiaorganics.org/farmtoschool.aspx

Energy Use

- Move your thermostat closer to the outside temperature. Do not open windows when the A/C or heat is on. Moving your thermostat just 2 degrees closer to the outside temperature will save over 500 lbs of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere in a year.
- Completely shut down computers, chargers, and printers. Un-plug them from the walls when they are not in use. Even when computers are in a shut down mode, they are on stand by and still pull electricity.
- Trade in your light bulbs. Start using CFL lights. CFL light bulbs are 70-75% more efficient than the incandescent light bulbs we currently use.
- While CFLs are wonderful for saving energy, they do contain a small amount of mercury and therefore cannot be thrown directly into the trash. Recyclable at Home Depot.
- Assign a light monitor to turn off the lights every time the class leaves.
- Have students make signs to put up by the light switches reminding them to turn the lights off.
- Experiment with the lights in your classroom on a sunny day. Try turning off one bank of lights at a time and see whether all students are still able to work.
- Make sure windows are uncovered and clean to let in as much light as possible.
- Assign a computer monitor to turn off the computers at the end of every school day.
- Set your computer to automatically enter sleep mode when it's not being used.
- Assign an "energy vampire monitor" to unplug electronic devices at the end of every school day. Use a Kilowatt meter as a class project to see how much power some of these devices use during a school year. Check your local library to check out Kilowatt meter or Home Depot/Lowes to purchase one.
- Plug devices into a power strip with an on/off switch to simplify the process. This is especially helpful for groups of devices that are used together. For example, plug the computer, monitor, and printer all into one power strip. Plug the TV and the VCR/DVD player into another power strip.

Water

- Work with the children to turn the water on and off when washing hands, instead of leaving the water to run continuously. The average faucet releases about 3 gallons of water a minute. The average person wastes about 30 gallons of water a day.
- Check your toilets daily to ensure that they are not running continuously. This is a common problem in our classrooms and toilets can run for days until maintenance can fix them. Take action yourself.
- Get those leaky faucets fixed!
- Have students make signs to put up by the sink to remind them to turn off the water.
- Use reusable water bottles kept at students' desks. Will reduce waste at the water fountain and improve health.

Teach Green

- Evaluate the curriculum. Are there additional ways to incorporate environmental sensitivity and education into the classroom?
- Use the environment as an integrating context in the classroom- use the environment as the setting for problem solving, math, and writing projects
  http://www.seer.org/
- Arabia Mountain High School – first LEED certified school in GA, also practices Environment as an Integrating Context model (EIC)
  http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/arabiamtnhs/
- The Department of Education, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the White House Council on Environmental Quality launched the concept of the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools on April 26, 2011
  - The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) recognizes public and private elementary, middle and high schools that save energy, reduce costs, protect health and exemplify environmentally sustainable learning spaces and educational programs to boost academic achievement and community engagement.
  - Resources for Green Schools (Green Ribbon Schools)
    http://www.ed.gov/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/green-ribbon-schools-program.doc
- Evaluate student activities. Are there other ways to introduce students to environmental studies or to increase environmental sensitivity?
- Have a parent meeting or training on how they, too, can be green at home!
- Become a Green & Healthy School
  http://greenandhealthy.org/
- Lead by example! Be environmentally conscious in your actions and the kids will follow suit!

Go Outside

- Plant a pollinator garden on your playground or in your flowerbeds. Yellow, blue, and purple flowers attract bees, while red and orange attract Hummingbirds. Pesticides, pollution, and habitat destruction are taking a toll on our birds and insects that pollinate about 80% of the world's food supply.
- Get your kids outdoors more often! The best way for us to protect our resources for the future is by helping children develop an appreciation for the outdoors.
- Plant a Tree! Even better, plant several trees! Trees are like natural air conditioners. They lower the temperature, filter air, remove carbon dioxide, absorb storm water and provide shade and beauty. A single tree will absorb a ton of CO2 over its lifetime.
- Help the butterflies by planting milkweed seeds in your flowerbeds. Butterflies are bio-indicators that scientists look to for signs of landscape quality and habitat loss.
- Free nature play. Time is limited during the day, but kids can get so much out of just a bit of free nature play – time to explore, journal, or just 'be' in nature.
  http://www.naturalearning.org/

http://www.childrenandnature.org/

- Outdoor Classrooms! There are many grants and such. You don't need much really – just get those kids into some fresh air.

Resources:

The Everything Green Classroom Book: From Recycling to Conservation, All You Need to Create an Eco-friendly Learning Environment [Book] by Tessa Hill in Books

Tim Grant and Gail Littlejohn (editors), Greening School Grounds: Creating Habitats for Learning, Toronto: Green Teacher, 2001, ISBN 0-86571-436-3, 136 pages, 8½ " x 11", Grades K-12

Classroom Audit
http://www.calacademy.org/teachers/resources/lessons/green-classroom-audit/

11 Ways to Green Your School: http://centerforgreenschools.org/utility-nav/blog/11-04-22/Celebrate_Earth_Day_with_11_Ways_to_Green_Your_School.aspx

http://www.centerforgreenschools.org/home.aspx

Resources for Green Schools (Green Ribbon Schools)
http://www.ed.gov/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/green-ribbon-schools-program.doc