

Dreaming a Lean and Green School: A Symposium on Healthy Food, Fitness and Environments
September 9, 2008
Report Outline

“Your opportunity to dream lean and green school in Colorado... tell us what you see!”

Strategies to Develop a Lean & Green School

Categories include:

- Systems/Environmental Change
- Built Environment
- Policy and Leadership
- Programs
- Community Outreach and Engagement
- Partnerships
- Resources/Funding
- Capacity
- Education (staff, students, parents, etc)
- Cultural Competencies
- Research and Evaluation
- Other

Systems/ Environmental Change

Symposium attendees identified a vision for a lean and green school that included creating an environment that supports healthy eating and active living as the status quo; mitigates and prepares people for the impact of climate change and other problematic environmental issues (i.e. peak oil, ecosystem dehydration, etc); increases transparency to demonstrate relationships between green actions and health/academic outcomes; long term consensus and buy-in from community, including teachers, staff, parents, administrators, community members, etc.; and, and overall culture that takes small steps towards large, systemic change and encourages students to see green AND health as “cool”.

Built Environment

Participants discussed the need for several built environmental changes to achieve both a lean and a green school. Common recommendations included a school that sought maximum LEED standards; created a more interactive environment to learn from that engaged students, community and family members, including outdoor classrooms, outdoor “play spaces”, gardens, composts, greenhouses, and learning landscapes; a classroom that was conducive for physical activity and movement to be incorporated throughout the daily curriculum; and, improved walking and bicycle paths for students and parents.

Policy

Participants stressed the need for school, school district, and state level policy changes to build leaner and greener schools. Some common suggestions for policy and legislative advocacy included improving transparency and commitment from local and state leaders; an approach to re-localize food economies; mandates for green school building standards; mandates for nutrition standards for schools (such as the Institute of Medicine standards); statewide policy initiative to redirect savings from greening to the site that created the savings; encourage biking and walking to school, including supporting federal programs such as Safe Routes to School and

USDA school meals; support and hold schools accountable for wellness policy implementation; state health and wellness standards developed; legislation that supports healthy eating and active living in schools; mandates to implement physical activity into curriculum; and, consistent and bold leadership from local and state district leaders.

Programmatic

Participants discussed the need for several programmatic changes to achieve a lean and green school. Some common suggestions included outdoor education and activities including gardening, composting, creating a farmers market and green house, all of which are student managed; garden-to-table initiative; bike station/rental program managed at the school; green and sustainability curriculum; nutrition curriculum, including cooking and menu planning; nutrition education opportunities for food services employers and other school staff and parents; after-school physical education programs; and, programs to educate teachers and staff how to incorporate physical activity into the classroom and curriculum.

Community Outreach and Partnerships

Participants stressed the need to engage community members and partners. Common themes to address this included community education and roundtables about the importance and value added nutrition, physical activity/education, and green building brings to our schools and students; relay a common message to students, parents, community members, school and district staff that health and wellness is a priority for our students and overall community; community planning and goal setting for schools; develop community partnerships to help sustain programs, such as garden-to-table; collaborate with community businesses and organizations around the school to reduce resources and transportation use; encourage community members to write legislators to improve school nutrition, physical education, and buildings; engage community volunteers to help with school related activities; and, create a school environment that is a product of the communities needs and aspirations and that is welcoming to families and communities on evenings, weekends, and summers.

Resources/ Funding

A common theme in the symposium was the question of funding and resources to implement lean and green initiatives. Some of the common themes expressed by participants in regards to their vision regarding funding included obtaining adequate funding and long-term budgeting for resources; funding for retro fitting, education, programming and evaluation; identify a 3rd party advocate or community member to help seek grant opportunities; obtain media sponsorship; fundraise to obtain monies from the community and the PTA; seek federal funding, i.e. Safe Routes to School, USDA school meals reimbursements, etc; and, identify flexible funding streams.

Capacity Building

Symposium addressed the need for capacity building to ensure the success of a lean and green school. Common suggestions included reaching out to consultants who can help in the green building development process; build in positions for a school district (or one for each school) sustainability education coordinator, nutrition education coordinator, and physical education coordinator; ensure dedicated and educated food services and kitchen management staff; hire more school nurses and certified dieticians; seek out a grant writer to obtain funding for physical education and/or other positions that aren't integrated into the budget; form a health

and wellness committee that oversees the wellness policy implementation in the school; and, hire crossing guards for all schools.

Education (staff, students, parents, etc)

Participants discussed the need for several education initiatives to achieve a lean and green school. Recommendations included connecting students to environment via environmental education curriculum; holistic awareness/education; “green”, physical activity, and nutrition infused into curriculum to ensure sustainability; train students how to become stewards of the environment (i.e. energy conservation awareness, gardening to obtain food and nutrition); educate first generation from student to home; and, career education (lean and green job opportunities).

Cultural Competencies

Participants indicated that it was important to be culturally inclusive and diverse when developing a lean and green school. One size does not fit all and that the school needs to consider diversity of geography (urban vs rural), income, ethnicity and race. For example, schools can expose and students to ethnically diverse foods.

Research and Evaluation

Participants stressed the need for a strong research and evaluation component for a lean and green school. Common suggestions included to evaluate the impacts of the green building, physical and nutrition education on academics, carbon footprint, and health status; monitor overall energy and water use; obtain public and community support in evaluation process; use data collection as a method for developing and advocating for policy change in schools; and, assess best practices before, during, and after.