

DIRECT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



CASE STUDY

NYSP21 Leads K-12 Pilot Program Assisting to Educate Beacon City School District's Students & Teachers on Environmental Sustainability

The New York State Pollution Prevention Institute (NYSP21) at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) has a vision of fostering the transformation and development of sustainable businesses and organizations in New York State in a collaborative program committed to making the State a leader in environmental stewardship.

NYSP21 implemented a pilot program that included sustainability assessments conducted at four schools across New York State in an effort to identify opportunities for improved waste generation, water consumption, and chemical exposure through better purchasing decisions.

Challenge

NYSP21 conducted a Sustainability Assessment at Sargent Elementary School (Sargent Elementary) for the Beacon City School District (BCSD) as part of a pilot program for a new K-12 initiative focused on New York State Schools creating a safer environment for students and teachers.

Solution

Beacon City School District expressed interest in participating in the pilot program, and after a successful screening, NYSP21 selected BCSD for an assessment. Beacon City School District had already begun their sustainability journey with programs including farm-to-school, the Hudson Valley Seed gardening education program, the Common Ground Farm culinary experience, and the Green Teen Program from the Cornell Cooperative Extension. The next step for BCSD was adopting daily habits to become a more sustainable, environmentally friendly school.

The project identified opportunities at Sargent Elementary by utilizing an assessment tool developed by NYSP21, specifically for evaluating a school's sustainability practices, including waste management practices, water and chemical usage, and procurement practices. NYSP21 used available data to develop a baseline and has identified opportunities for improvement for these focus areas.

Results

NYSP21 learned from the assessment that BCSD is aware of their everyday environmental impact, but are limited to inconsistent recycling, a community garden, and Earth Day activities. The assessment NYSP21 conducted highlights the positive benefits of reducing environmental impacts which will ultimately save on budget spending and the long term effects on students, faculty, and communities. NYSP21's major suggestions were as follows:

1. NYSP21 recommended BCSD continue purchasing WaterSense labeled products to provide water efficiency without sacrificing performance.
2. NYSP21 suggested BCSD use certified green cleaning products avoiding products with fragrances or strong odors that may trigger asthma symptoms or other health issues and adopt green cleaning practices and create a district-wide policy for doing so.
3. NYSP21 recommended using the tools provided through New York State's Executive Order 4 (EO4) "Establishing a State Green Procurement and Agency

CHALLENGE

- Identify opportunities for improved waste generation, water consumption, and chemical exposure through better purchasing decisions for school districts across New York State

SOLUTION

- NYSP21 developed an assessment tool for evaluating a school's sustainability practices, including waste management practices, water and chemical usage, and procurement practices

RESULTS

- NYSP21 identified several opportunities for BCSD to improve impacts associated with activities that could have a negative outcome on the environment



Sustainability Program.” The Office of General Services (OGS) established the creation of green procurement lists and specifications of commodities, services, and technology for use and a cost calculator and approved lists of products and suppliers.

4. NYSP2I found that Sargent Elementary School’s greatest opportunity for improvement was with waste management and recycling and suggested they:
 - Provide greater access to trash and recycling bins to allow for proper separation, including standardized, color coded bins, with labels and pictures;
 - Measure the amount of trash created versus recyclables collected to find opportunities for improvement;
 - Communicate the number of recyclables and trash being generated so that everyone can see the progress and work together to improve;
 - Celebrating when milestones are achieved!

NYSP2I further suggested that BCSD create a district-wide recycling policy; starting with establishing a baseline of the amount of trash and recyclables to determine at the end of the year if the program has been a success or if there’s still room for improvement.

5. Cost saving decisions were identified in the school’s use of styrofoam trays due to the low cost of the material. NYSP2I suggested eliminating all polystyrene (styrofoam) used for food and beverage consumption and first encourages the use of reusable containers, then compostable containers, then recyclable alternatives when necessary (all of which should be made from recycled content or sustainably made).
6. NYSP2I’s cafeteria waste audit revealed that just over 45% (by weight) of the discarded waste consisted of food. NYSP2I suggested working with Waste Management to use a food waste collection bin or use the services, like Impact Earth, for example, to establish a cafeteria waste segregation system to enable a recycling and food waste collection system in cafeterias.

In order for Sargent Elementary to continue to have a strong impact on their community, NYSP2I suggested they implement the following policies:

- Review and update BCSD policies to include sustainability goals
- Communicate areas of opportunity to BCSD Board, staff and the community
- Develop a BCSD Sustainability Team (in addition to individual school teams) to continue sustainable progress and incorporate sustainability into the classroom and across the district
- Measure and monitor progress towards goals
- Communicate status against goals and how it compares to the baseline, showing successes or the need for improvement
- Encourage involvement by faculty and students to foster success
- Seek funding for additional professional development opportunities and green implementation projects (e.g., NYSAR3 Green School Grants)
- Apply for awards and recognition to build pride in accomplishments (e.g. Green Ribbon Schools)

Beacon City School District has successfully begun implementation of the recommendations provided by NYSP2I. Already, district schools are seeing the benefits of implementing the outlined improvements. Sargent Elementary, with support from the PTO, has provided recycling containers, signage and education to students and staff to improve school wide recycling. In the cafeteria, reusable forks and spoons were introduced in January of 2019. This eliminated the need for and cost of the disposable Spork kits. The District has also discussed the use of Share Tables with the State Child Nutrition and Food Nutrition Association. Sargent Elementary custodial staff are tracking waste and have seen trash loads reduce by 5-6 bags from lunch service. The decreased trash generation has sparked conversations with the District’s waste hauler to determine a reduced hauling schedule.

The benefits of initiative implementation seen at Sargent has inspired action across the District. Reusable ware will be introduced to the high school within the year. Recycling programs have also been initiated across the District. In addition, the District has formed a Sustainability Committee to establish goals and implement initiatives district wide; members include the Administration, Board of Education, teachers, and community members.

TESTIMONIAL

“The NYSP2I team conducted a thorough review of our current practices and in turn, provided us with valuable recommendations to reduce our environmental impact and to promote sustainability. As a result, we have made significant policy, purchasing and behavioral changes that have significantly reduced our environmental footprint.”

– Anthony D’Amato, Director of Facilities
Beacon City School District

NYSP2I PARTNERS

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