

NYSP21 Leads K-12 Pilot Program Assisting to Educate South Country Central 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 initiated a pilot program that included sustainability assessments conducted at four schools across New York State in an effort to identify opportunities to improve waste management practices, water consumption behaviors, and green purchasing habits.

Challenge

NYSP21 conducted a Sustainability Assessment at Frank P Long Elementary School (Frank P Long) for the South Country Central School District (SCCSD) 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

The project identified opportunities at Frank P Long by utilizing an assessment tool developed by NYSP21, specifically for evaluating a school's sustainability practices. NYSP21 used available school data to develop a baseline and has identified opportunities for improvement.

Results

SCCSD is focused on reducing impacts associated with activities that could have a negative outcome on the environment. Reducing environmental impacts will ultimately save on budget spending and the long term effects on students, faculty, and communities. NYSP21 identified the following opportunities for improvement:

1. Purchase WaterSense labeled products to provide water efficiency without sacrificing performance.
2. Continue to 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. Use the tools provided through New York State's Executive Order 4 (EO4) "Establishing a State Green Procurement and Agency Sustainability Program". The Office of General Services (OGS) established the creation

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 SCCSD to improve impacts associated with activities that could have a negative outcome on the environment



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. Improve waste management and recycling by:
 - Providing greater access to trash and recycling bins to allow for proper separation, including standardized, color coded bins, with labels and pictures;
 - Measuring the amount of trash created versus recyclables collected to find opportunities for improvement;
 - Communicating the amount of recyclables and trash being generated so that everyone can see the progress and work together to improve;
 - Celebrating when milestones are achieved!
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 Frank P Long to continue to have a strong impact on their community, NYSP2I suggested they implement the following policies:

- Review and update SCCSD policies to include sustainability goals
- Communicate areas of opportunity to SCCSD Board, staff and the community
- Develop a SCCSD 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)

TESTIMONIAL

"The program was extremely helpful with identifying the level and type of waste generated in one of our schools. Allowing participation from different stakeholders provided greater insight toward understanding how we can curb waste, while providing a teachable moment to our staff and students of the same. The recommendations were extremely helpful, and the District moved toward implementing changes as a continuance of its environmentally conscious practices."

– Dr. Sam Gergis,
Assistant Superintendent for Finance &
Management Services;
South Country Central School District

NYSP2I PARTNERS



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