



King County Green Schools Program

Success Story

Reduce • Reuse • Recycle • Rethink

Mercer Island School District

Began participating in the Green Schools Program:
April 2010

Level One of the Green Schools Program:
Achieved in June 2011



Waste Reduction and Recycling (Level One)

- As of June 2011, all five district schools had received assistance from the Green Schools Program and had been recognized as Level One Green Schools, thanks to their improved waste reduction and recycling practices.
 - **June 2023 updates:** The district added a sixth school, Northwood Elementary School, in fall 2016. All six district schools have received Green Schools Program assistance and recognition as Level One, Level Two, Level Three, and Sustaining Green Schools.
- The district eliminated polystyrene (Styrofoam) in school cafeterias, and all trays, plates, bowls, and cups were either durable or compostable. Plastic utensils were replaced by durable or compostable utensils.
- Each school lunchroom collected food scraps and food-soiled paper to be composted at Cedar Grove Composting facility.
- By April 2010, the district's garbage disposal costs had been cut in half, thanks to waste reduction and recycling practices in all facilities.
- The district reduced paper use by distributing parent newsletters electronically.
- Each school had a Green Schools lead who advised the student Green Team.
- All school leads, family volunteers, and district staff such as the food services director and operations director, met three or four times each school year to share successes and challenges, and to plan district-wide conservation actions.
- District food services and elementary school parent leaders organized a system of providing compostable serving-ware for class parties and school events.



- **May 2019 updates:** Food service director Carol Bus reported on waste prevention practices at a district-wide Green Schools meeting.
 - A majority of serving-ware in school cafeterias was compostable.
 - The district purchased imperfect (odd shaped) produce to support food waste reduction.
 - Kitchen staff used all of each food item. For example, when they cut up broccoli, stalks were saved, shredded, and used to make coleslaw.
 - Foods that could not be used by the kitchens before expiration date were picked up weekly by the nonprofit OSL, with guidance from the Green Schools Program. OSL also picked up whole fruits and unopened packaged foods from the school meal program which elementary students placed in cafeteria food donation bins.

Other conservation practices – reported in 2011

- District-wide conservation was achieved through many behind-the-scenes efforts, including participating in City of Mercer Island energy and water audits, tracking energy use and costs in each school facility, regular preventive maintenance on heating and ventilation equipment, and installing solar panels on the high school building.
- The district started walking routes to school, provided covered bike parking and bike racks, increased the high school bus zone to encourage bus ridership, installed an electric vehicle charging station, and replaced small diesel buses (when fully depreciated) with more efficient, unleaded engine buses.
- As of June 2011, all five schools had been recognized as Level Two Green Schools for maintaining Level One practices and improving energy conservation practices. Island Park Elementary and Lakeridge Elementary also were recognized as Level Three Green Schools for sustaining Level One and Two practices while engaging in water conservation practices.



Awards

- The district was one of 42 state districts to receive a grant for building systems improvements to yield energy cost savings. The grant helped buy new lighting, replace boilers, and install central boiler controls at Mercer Island High School.
- In May 2013, the district received the Recycler of the Year Youth Education award from the Washington State Recycling Association.
- The district received a Green District Leader award from Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2013. Based on criteria set by the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School award program, the award recognized the district for achievements in Pillar 1 (reduced environmental impact and costs) and Pillar 3 (effective environmental and sustainability education).
- Carolyn Counihan and Liz Evans, parent volunteers at Lakeridge Elementary School, received a King County Earth Hero at School award in April 2013.
- Heather McLyman, teacher at Lakeridge Elementary School, received a King County Earth Hero at School award in April 2013.
- Superintendent Gary Plano received a King County Earth Hero at School award in April 2012.
- Island Park Elementary received a King County Earth Hero at School award in April 2011.
- Jamie Cooke, Mercer Island High School teacher, received a King County Earth Hero at School award in April 2011.
- Nancy Weil, family volunteer and facilitator of the district Green Team, received a King County Earth Hero at School award in April 2011.
- Islander Middle received a King County Earth Hero at School award in 2009.

Comment

“We are achieving personalized learning and student-centered education through the lens of environmental stewardship. Preserving the environment for future generations is a powerful motivation to enact change. I am very proud of our students and staff.”

- **Superintendent Gary Plano**