

## Rock Creek Elementary School

**School district:** Tahoma

**School location:** Maple Valley

**Began participating in the Green Schools Program:** September 2007

**Level One of the Green Schools Program:**  
Achieved in December 2009

**Level Two of the Green Schools Program:**  
Achieved in April 2012

**Level Three of the Green Schools Program:**  
Achieved in May 2014

**Sustaining Green School:**

Achieved in

- 2014-15
- 2015-16
- 2016-17
- 2017-18
- 2018-19
- 2021-22
- 2022-23



A Green Team student displays paper conservation stickers on paper towel dispensers

### Waste Reduction and Recycling (Level One)

- Rock Creek Elementary maintained a recycling rate of 61%.
- In spring 2011, students and staff began to collect compostable materials in the cafeteria. Compostable materials were sent to a regional composting facility.
- Recycling bins were placed in the cafeteria for empty milk cartons, juice boxes, plastic bottles, and aluminum cans.
- On all recycling bins, students placed recycling stickers from the Green Schools Program to show what materials can be recycled, and compost stickers from the program were placed on all classroom compost collection bins.



- The school's garbage volume decreased by 54 cubic yards per month after classroom recycling was expanded and cafeteria collection of recyclable and compostable materials was started.
- The school hosted the King County assembly and follow-up workshops about reducing waste and recycling.
- In 2014-15, the school switched from disposable to durable and reusable utensils in the lunchroom.
- The school collected Capri Sun pouches and Lunchables separately in the lunchroom to send to TerraCycle, a company that used those materials to make new products.
- "Kid Cops" were appointed in classrooms to survey garbage, recycling, and compostable materials bins, and then help educate students about correct sorting.
- Green Team students created and shared PowerPoint presentations and signs to remind students and staff about the four R's – Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. To educate the school about composting, they performed the Compost Rap written by student Stacie Loftus.
- School administrators provided regular reminders to employees and students about reducing waste and recycling. Custodians Dave Oertel and Jim Saftich supported efforts to increase composting and recycling and helped monitor waste sorting.
- To reduce paper waste, the school sent parent newsletters electronically, and forms and district fliers were posted online.
- Announcements about conservation practices were made through the Rock Creek Network News. Teachers received announcements focused on reducing waste and recycling to share with their classes. Reminders about correct sorting were shared during lunchtime.

## **Energy Conservation (Level Two)**

- Green Team students created an energy pledge, made morning announcements with energy goals for the week, and visited classrooms to educate students about how to save energy.
- The school community was regularly reminded about energy conservation through classroom video announcements, signs, and PowerPoint presentations.
- "Turn Off Lights" and "Turn Off Equipment" signs and stickers from the Green Schools Program were displayed near light switches and projectors to remind students and staff to turn them off when not in use.



- The Green Team delivered energy conservation checklists to each classroom so that teacher helpers could promote energy conservation practices.
- Most classrooms assigned teacher helpers to remind the teacher to turn off the projector, lights, and computers at the end of each day.
- To further reduce energy use, employees removed all personal appliances, including coffee pots and microwaves, in offices and classrooms.
- Custodians Oertel and Saftich helped Rock Creek to save energy by maintaining vents, following shut down procedures before vacations, and regularly maintaining the building's heating and cooling systems. Hot water and circulation pumps were turned off during extended school breaks.

## **Water Conservation (Level Three)**

- Green Team members created signs that were posted around the school to educate students and staff on the importance of water conservation.
- “Turn off the Faucet” stickers were placed in portables, classrooms, and bathrooms to remind students and staff to conserve water.
- Kid Cops expanded their role to include monitoring water conservation efforts.
- Water conservation facts were shared through classroom video announcements.
- Green Team members created a trivia game and video announcements to educate the school about water conservation best practices.
- In 2011-12, the school installed a rain barrel with the assistance of the Friends of the Cedar River Watershed and Tahoma School District.
- Third-grade curriculum focused on protecting streams and salmon in Puget Sound.
- Fifth-grade students maintained the school's rain garden as part of the conservation curriculum.
- Staff reduced water use by running full loads in dishwashers and washing machines.
- Head custodian Dave Oertel installed aerators and motion sensors on all faucets.
- Students were encouraged to conserve water at home and received a charm for their conservation efforts.

## **Sustaining Green School recognition**

Rock Creek Elementary has been recognized as a Sustaining Green School for sustaining and building on its Level One waste reduction and recycling practices, Level Two energy conservation practices, and Level Three water conservation strategies. How the school did this each year is described below.



## **Sustaining Green School 2014-15**

- To conserve energy, the school participated in the People, Power, Planet Program provided by McKinstry, the district's resource conservation management company.
- Students made sure classroom lights and electronic equipment were turned off at the end of each day and that blinds were closed. An energy conservation checklist was displayed in each classroom.
- The school made announcements reminding staff and students to turn off lights when not in use. Signs were posted reminding staff to turn off electronic equipment when not in use.
- Once each month, teachers received a video and accompanying lesson focused on energy conservation, waste reduction, or recycling to share in their classrooms.

## **Sustaining Green School 2015-16**

- The school continued to participate in a People, Power, Planet Program to encourage energy conservation at the school. As part of that program, Rock Creek achieved four power points for classroom pledges to conserve energy. Pledges collected from 145 students and staff members were displayed in school hallways.
- Green Team students created a presentation on what can be recycled and composted, and then conducted a presentation for each classroom in the school.

## **Sustaining Green School 2016-17**

- The school continued to participate in People, Power, Planet Program (PPP) and took part in activities to reduce energy use at school. Students were sent home with waste reduction, recycling, and energy and water conservation facts and pledges. Along with their families, Rock Creek students committed to three conservation actions at home to reduce waste, conserve energy, and conserve water.
- The Green Team participated in the district's first student Sustainability Summit in March 2017. Students learned how to sort items into recycling, composting, and garbage bins. Students brainstormed new ways to help the school reduce waste, and each school team presented its ideas for sustainability practices.
- During Earth Week, the school held a waste competition to see which pod could produce the least amount of garbage. Green Team students measured the volume of garbage produced by each pod and then presented ideas about how they can properly recycle and reduce garbage.



## Sustaining Green School 2017-18

- The school began holding weekly waste-free Wednesdays where students were encouraged to limit disposable packaging and bring reusable food containers, utensils, and water bottles. To promote this program, Green Team members created and displayed signage around the school, made announcements, and created a waste-free Wednesday video.
- Each classroom elected a new sustainability representative to join the student council. Each representative formed subcommittees to work on different conservation projects throughout the school year.

## Sustaining Green School 2018-19

- Student Green Team members made posters that were displayed in classroom pods to promote waste reduction and recycling.
- Staff collected toner and printer cartridges for recycling.
- Green Team students participated in a Green School training, where they learned how to encourage the school community to reduce waste, recycle right, and conserve energy, and water.
- Students planned an Earth Day event and continued to encourage students and staff to take the People. Power. Planet pledge to protect the earth.
- Staff received energy conservation reminders before school breaks.
- Staff members monitored waste stations at Kindergarten lunches to help students sort recyclable and compostable materials correctly.
- To reduce food waste, the lunchroom maintained a food share table for students to leave or take unopened packaged items from the school lunch program.
- Green Team students conducted Energy Zappers patrols to encourage energy conservation in classrooms. They made and displayed posters to share energy conservation facts and reminders.
- School staff participated in a Building Operator tour conducted by McKinstry to learn about the school's energy and water conservation processes and systems.
- To reduce stormwater pollution, the school maintained two rain gardens and multiple bioswales on the school campus.



## Sustaining Green School 2021-22

- Students learned about different recycling programs, ways to reduce carbon footprint, water conservation, energy conservation in the Future Ready Skills class.
- To conserve energy, students used natural lighting instead of turning on lights when it is bright enough.
- Students encouraged teachers to turn off their projectors when it is not in use.
- Students checked paper towels dispensers to make sure the “Shake hands off, only take one” sticker is visible to reduce paper use.
- Staff members collected plastic water bottles in a separate container to recycle.
- To reduce water use, the school installed automatic shut-off sinks for students and teachers.
- On Earth Week, students watched videos about the misconceptions of Earth Day and brainstormed ways to be sustainable and improve the health of the environment.
- All classes at Rock Creek participated in Babybel recycling through TerraCycle.
  - All students watched videos about why Babybel materials do not belong in the blue recycling bins and learned about ways to upcycle Babybel materials.
  - K-2<sup>nd</sup>-grade students made informational cards about Babybel recycling to share with their families.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> grade students created posters and labeled a separate bin to collect only Babybel packaging to ensure they would not be mixed with other recyclable materials.

## Sustaining Green School 2022-23

- A guest speaker from Recology, the school’s hauler, presented about recycling and composting.
- Twenty fifth-grade students participated in the Rock Creek Green Team. The teacher sent home permission slips in October to obtain parent/guardian permission to join the team.
- The student Green Team:
  - Observed lights being left on in unoccupied rooms, and placed stickers from the Green Schools Program on all light switches to encourage turning off lights when leaving the room. The team also created a video explaining the importance of conserving electricity.



- Created and hung posters throughout the school showing materials that should be placed in garbage and recycling bins.
- Picked up trash around the school each week.
- Continued the Babybel recycling project through TerraCycle.
- Wrote articles for the school newsletter about Green Team projects and conservation tips.
- Created a slideshow for Kindergarten-2nd grade classrooms to encourage conservation practices.
- Shared conservation practices by making regular PA announcements and appearing on the school's news talk show.
- Watched a video about the harmful effects plastic bottles have in oceans and rivers, and created a video about how to conserve water when washing hands and brushing teeth.