



King County Green Schools Program

# Success Story

Reduce • Reuse • Recycle • Rethink



In 2022-23, Green Team students organized a campus clean-up event (above left), and a tree planting event (above right).

## Tahoma High School

**School district:** Tahoma

**School location:** Maple Valley

**Began participating in the Green Schools Program:** November 2008

**Level One of the Green Schools Program:**  
Achieved in April 2010

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

**Level Three of the Green Schools Program:**  
Achieved in May 2016

**Sustaining Green School:** Achieved in

- 2017-18
- 2018-19
- 2021-22
- 2022-23



## Waste Reduction and Recycling (Level One)

- Tahoma High increased its recycling rate from 17% in 2008 to 53% in 2018 by expanding and improving waste reduction and recycling practices.
- Starting in fall 2011, students and staff began collecting food scraps and food-soiled paper to be sent to a regional composting facility.
- The school decreased its garbage dumpster size and switched to on-call garbage collection service, saving an average of \$700 per month, and diverting 91 cubic yards of recyclable materials and 29 cubic yards of compostable materials from the landfill each month.
- In the summer of 2009, students, staff, and the district Superintendent participated in the Sustainability for Education conference in New York.
- In 2009-10, the school started paper recycling in classrooms and office spaces. Recycling bins from the Green Schools Program were placed in the lunchroom for milk cartons, juice boxes, plastic bottles, and aluminum cans.
- To reduce paper use, the principal's welcome back message to staff was sent by e-mail. The message included sustainability goals and actions.
- Education included waste reduction and recycling presentations at staff meetings and all-school assemblies.
- Students started a plastic bottle cap recycling program through Aveda (a company that used the caps to make products) and began collecting plastic bags to bring to grocery stores for recycling.
- Students in the Global Academy program took field trips to Cedar Grove Composting and King County's Cedar Hills Regional Landfill to learn about waste and sustainable actions they can take.
- In 2015-16, the school maintained a vegetable garden. Lettuce from the garden was used in special education classes and sold to the school community in the spring. All funds raised were used to buy materials to maintain the garden.
- Green Team students created and hung posters in the lunchroom to help remind students and staff about what can and can't be recycled and composted.



**Earth Hero at School Award**  
Cort Hammond, student,  
receives King County award in  
April 2011.



- In 2015-16, Green Team students trained special education students to serve as lunchroom monitors.
- Regular school announcements were made to remind students and staff how to sort their waste. The Green Team created a video about their school's conservation practices and teachers regularly reminded students to place recyclable items in classroom recycling bins.
- In fall 2016, the school conducted a 12 Days of Sustainability Program to promote waste reduction, recycling, and other conservation practices.
- Since moving to a new facility in 2017-18, the Green Team set up additional bins to collect recyclable materials, compostable materials, and garbage.

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

- Tahoma High reduced its energy use by 32% between 2008 and 2015, and developed an energy conservation communication plan consisting of print and electronic media for students, staff, and parents.
- The student Green Team encouraged students to dress appropriately for the weather rather than adjust the school's thermostat settings.
- All computers and other electronic equipment were turned off after each day.
- In 2016, the school participated in the People, Power, Planet (PPP) program offered by McKinstry, the district's resource conservation management company. To earn power points, the school conducted energy audits in classrooms, created educational posters about energy conservation, invited students to sign pledges to reduce energy use, and displayed quotes about energy conservation.
- All regularly occupied rooms had automatic light sensors. School policy advocated turning off lights in unoccupied rooms and using daylight instead of artificial lighting whenever possible.
- Window blinds or curtains were shut at the end of the day to maintain temperature and opened in the morning to let in daylight.
- The school was inspected for potential energy waste on a regular basis, and issues were addressed promptly by maintenance staff.
- The programmable HVAC system called for weekend and vacation shutdown procedures to conserve energy.



- The district reduced use of portable heaters, microwaves, fans, and other small appliances in classrooms.
- Students and staff were regularly reminded about energy conservation practices through classroom video announcements, turn off the lights stickers, energy conservation signs, a People, Power, Planet display board, and emails to staff.
- The new school facility included motion activated lights programmed to turn off in unoccupied spaces. All classrooms featured light harvesters which dim lights in relation to the level of natural daylight.

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

- Regular all-school announcements were made to remind students and staff members to conserve water.
- Tahoma High conducted 12 Days of Sustainability that included announcements and information about water conservation.
- The school placed Turn Off Faucet signs next to all sinks as reminders to turn off the faucet while soaping hands.
- Students worked with Shadow Lake Bog to create a native plant garden.
- In 2013, the school installed a rain garden with informational signs. The school collected rain water in containers near the vegetable garden and used the harvested water to irrigate the produce.
- School community members continued to check for and report leaky faucets so they could be replaced as soon as possible.
- Student Green Team member Cort Hammond invited the head of the Washington Department of Ecology to address the Green Team about emissions created by idling cars. A “No Idling” campaign was launched in 2012.
- The new school facility included motion activated sinks and a water bottle filling station to help conserve water.

## **Sustaining Green School recognition**

Tahoma High sustained and built on its Level One waste reduction and recycling practices, Level Two energy conservation practices, and Level Three water conservation strategies. How the school built on its Level One through Three achievements each year is described below.



## Sustaining Green School 2017-18

- To establish Green School efforts at the new Tahoma High facility, Green Team students surveyed the school and identified ways to improve sustainability around campus.
- Based on their observations, the team created and displayed signs to promote waste reduction and recycling, energy conservation, and water conservation. Announcements were made via the school's news program to encourage students and staff to recycle, conserve energy and water, and report leaks.

## Sustaining Green School 2018-19

- Environmental Science students learned about environmental restoration by volunteering at Elk Run Farm and Shadow Lake Nature Preserve.
- Custodian Rick Bergum posted updated signs to help students and staff sort waste correctly.
- Green Team students created a bulletin board to promote recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, and water conservation.
- G.O.O.S (Good on One Side) boxes were set up at printing stations to encourage using blank sides of unwanted paper printed only on one side.
- Green Team students and advisor Crystal Asplund collaborated with ASB to plan an Earth Week celebration.
  - Each day was celebrated with a school spirit day and engaging activities. Earth Week celebrations were promoted via morning announcements, the Daily Bulletin, schoolwide text alerts, signs, and message boards.
  - Green Team and ASB students made an Earth Week pledge wall to encourage students to commit to reduce waste, recycle, conserve energy and water, and prevent pollution.
  - Students participated in Upcycling Day where they created art and a variety of products using old materials, Water Conservation Day, Energy Conservation Day, and Twin Day (teaming up against pollution).
  - Students made bird feeders with empty milk cartons.
- Students were encouraged to bring their own reusable water bottles instead of buying single-use plastic water bottles.



- Sean Kelly, operations supervisor, and Crystal Asplund, Green Team advisor, sent email reminders to staff encouraging them to turn off lights and equipment, unplug appliances, turn off faucets, and check for leaks before school breaks.
- To conserve energy, teachers used daylight and low light whenever possible and worked with custodians to close all blinds before weekends.
- All teachers added the People. Power. Planet pledge to their Google classroom website and encouraged students to pledge to reduce waste, recycle, and conserve energy.

## **Sustaining Green School 2021-22**

- Students in the plant science class volunteered at a sustainable community farm and donated the goods to the food bank.
- The Green Team collected pop tabs to prevent the tabs from jamming recycling equipment at Material Recovery Facilities which sort the materials. The collected pop tabs were donated to support people in need.
- At a student Green Team crafting event on Zoom, students created a variety of products using materials that would otherwise have ended up in the landfill.
- Students advocated to bring composting collection back to the school and worked with the custodial staff to ensure the correct labeling on recycling bins.
- The students organized energy audits before school breaks, assessed each classroom, and advised teachers on ways to save energy over break.
- The Green Team collaborated with the leadership group to arrange an Earth Week Spirit Week.
- Students organized an Earth Day clean-up event by coordinating with the custodial department and creating kits for volunteers. The Green Team and volunteers picked up over 40 bags of garbage.

## **Sustaining Green School 2022-23**

- In 2022-23, there were 13 student Green Team members, plus others participated periodically. The team used Instagram (@tahomagreenteam), posters, and regular announcements to share information about the team and conservation practices. The team was featured on the district website.



- The team held a free thrift store event, where they collected clothing from students and families, organized the clothes, and offered them for free to students during power hour for a week.
- To offset the school's energy use, the team held a tree planting event. The community was invited to plant selected native trees and shrubs through the TreePlenish program. The City of Maple Valley donated money to pay for tree saplings. Trees planted offset more than 50% of the school's energy use.
- For Earth Day, the team held a cleanup event where students were invited to pick up trash around campus and off campus. Located next to a protected wetlands area, any contaminants cleaned up helped prevent damaging the wetland ecosystem and prevented them from leaching into waterways.

## Awards

- Molly Bricker, student, received a King County Earth Heroes award in May 2016.
- In April 2012, Tahoma High received a Washington Green Leader School award.
- Student Cort Hammond received a King County Earth Hero award in April 2011.
- The Green Team won the President's Environmental Youth Award from Region 10 of the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 2010.