



King County Green Schools Program

# Success Story

Reduce • Reuse • Recycle • Rethink

## West Mercer Elementary School

**School district:** Mercer Island  
**School location:** Mercer Island

**Began participating in the Green Schools Program:**  
March 2010

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

**Level Two of the Green Schools Program:** Achieved in  
June 2013

**Level Three of the Green Schools Program:** Achieved  
in May 2015

**Sustaining Green School:** Achieved in

- 2017-18
- 2018-19
- 2019-20
- 2022-23



Student Green Team members wearing Green Team aprons to help with lunchroom monitoring



Teacher Stacy Sikora with student Green Team members

### Waste Reduction and Recycling (Level One)

- West Mercer achieved a recycling rate of 47%, then increased its rate to 53% in 2018-19.
- Before starting to reduce waste and recycling in its lunchroom, West Mercer sent approximately 680 pounds of lunchroom trash to the landfill each week. The school decreased its landfill contribution from lunch by almost 90%, and reduced lunchroom trash to 70 pounds per week.
- Waste-free Wednesdays were promoted in weekly announcements to encourage students to reduce wasted food and pack lunches from home in reusable containers.
- The student Green Team created a video for the school news channel demonstrating how to sort correctly into lunchroom garbage, recycling, and composting bins.



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- Signs were posted near copy machines and printers reminding staff members to reduce paper use and waste by using both sides of paper whenever possible.
- Each classroom received a bin to collect paper used only on one side, so students could use the blank sides.
- The school recycled empty printer cartridges with Rapid Refill, a buy-back program.
- First-grade teacher Nancy Burrill collected bottle caps and used them to teach patterning and other math lessons.
- In 2014, the Green Team educated students and staff about how much water goes into making plastic and the importance of recycling plastic bottles. Several classes competed to see which could collect the most plastic water bottles for recycling.
- In 2018, a Green Schools Program representative attended a Green Team meeting and taught a lesson about sorting recyclable and compostable items.
- The school hosted the King County “Our Planet, R Choices” assembly.

## Energy Conservation (Level Two)

- Students in all grade levels signed energy conservation pledges.
- Second-grade Green Team students created a *Kids First News* video report on how to conserve energy which aired during morning announcements.
- The Green Team delivered energy conservation checklists to all classrooms.
- Students and staff maintained a bulletin board showcasing energy conservation practices and the school’s energy use.
- “No idle” signs were posted near the drop off/pick up area to encourage turning off vehicle engines while waiting.
- Classes emphasized using only task lighting during writer’s workshop periods.

## Water Conservation (Level Three)

- Water conservation tips were displayed on a student reader board and shared by the Green Team during morning announcements.
- The student Green Team assessed the water flow rate of school restroom faucets and determined they were all at a low-flow rate to conserve water.



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- Volunteers purchased and planted native and drought-tolerant plants which the Green Team identified with signs around the school campus.
- The school held a school courtyard clean-up event where students, parents, and teachers picked up litter.
- For Earth Day, Green Team students designed a scavenger hunt about native plant identification. Students in teacher Stacy Sikora's class added native plants on the hillside beside the school.
- The district recognized West Mercer for its native plant efforts:  
<http://www.mercerlandschools.org/Page/11705>.
- To conserve water, irrigation was completed in early morning or evening, and sprinklers were regularly checked to ensure they watered lawns, and not concrete.
- The Healthy Ways to School Committee led the school's participation in the International Walk to School Day event in October 2010.
- To conserve water, the staff lounge dishwasher was only run on full loads.
- When water fixture replacements were needed, low-flow equipment was installed.

## **Sustaining Green School recognition**

West Mercer Elementary 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**

- The Green Team set up buckets to collect paper towels and other compostable materials in classrooms, and helped custodians empty the buckets daily.
- The school PTA worked with Green Team students to organize and promote a walk and bike to school day in March.

## **Sustaining Green School 2018-19**

- The school participated in Crayola's ColorCycle program. The Green Team set containers for collection of used markers to send to Crayola to be recycled.



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- The PTSA provided each class with a set of reusable party supplies, and the Green Team worked with parents to reduce waste at classroom parties.
- The school held a walk or bike to school day to reduce carbon emissions.

## **Sustaining Green School 2019-20**

- Teachers continued to educate students in their classrooms about correct sorting of recyclable materials and garbage. Students and teachers helped students sort items in the cafeteria.
- The school continued to use reusable trays and utensils in the cafeteria.
- Teachers continued to remind students about water and energy conservation practices. As a class job, students were asked to turn off lights and equipment.
- Some grades included lessons on watersheds, water sources, and ecosystems.
- To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, the Green Team designed and shared daily activities, posted by teachers on padlet, an online platform and on Seesaw, a platform for student digital portfolios and family communications.
- The Earth Week celebration took place in May 2020, with each day featuring a theme: Monday - conservation at home, with students using a Bingo game to track and share what they did; Tuesday - water conservation; Wednesday - animal habitats; Thursday - Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle; Friday - Observe the world, especially local neighborhoods, and take steps to make a difference.

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

- A student Green Team of 12 students led by teachers Miriam Eve and Zen Morrison decided to focus on paper reduction, reusing, and recycling. The team:
  - Created and shared lunchtime presentations on why conserving natural resources matters and what students can do to create a sustainable planet.
  - Made videos and posters about what materials can be reused, recycled, and composted.



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- Created a video for staff to show how to use the staff room recycling and composting bins.
- Emptied classroom recycling bins once each week into larger bins that custodial staff placed in the outdoor recycling container.
- Created a scrap paper box in each classroom for paper used only on one side, to bring back a pre-Covid practice of using the blank sides of paper.
- The Green Team helped clean up the playground monthly during meeting time.
- Staff and students were reminded to turn off lights in empty rooms, unplug electronics before school breaks, and keep doors and windows closed when heating was on.
- Students participated in Nature Vision field trips and posted Nature Vision information to encourage water conservation practices.