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AUSD Green Schools Program Wins Golden Bell Award

Parents, teachers, staff receive award for cutting-edge recycling program

Alameda, Calif. – Wednesday, October 22 – The Alameda Green Schools Challenge (AGSC), a comprehensive recycling program set up by parents and teachers in the Alameda Unified School District (AUSD), has won a 2014 Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association (CSBA).

The CSBA gives the Golden Bell Awards annually to "outstanding programs and governance practices" in school districts and county offices of education throughout the state. Just 50 to 60 programs receive the award yearly, after applications are reviewed by a 26-member panel and validated with on-site visits.

"This is awesome news," says Interim Superintendent Sean McPhetridge. "The Green Schools Challenge is an amazing program that is led by amazing people. They very much deserve this award for their vision and commitment, as well as their persistence in founding, sustaining, and growing this initiative."

Roots of the Program

The Alameda Green Schools Challenge was started by a group of parents and teachers in 2009 who wanted AUSD to begin sending its green waste (such as food scraps, soiled paper, cardboard packaging, and paper towels) to a composting facility, as well as increase its rate of recycling glass, aluminum, plastic, and paper. At the time, the district averaged only a 41% recycling rate – meaning that about 60% of its waste was being sent to landfills, which contaminate local air and groundwater and emit methane, a potent greenhouse gas, as trash breaks down.

Working with principals, teachers, custodians, parents, students, and the waste management company, a team of volunteers, along with district staff, set up a pilot food scrap (or "green waste") diversion program at five schools. The program – including the color of the bins – was designed to match that of the residential service to make it easier for students and staff to learn and adopt.

Within six months, the pilot programs had increased their recycling and composting rate from an average of 30% to nearly 64%. Within three years, the program had expanded to all the elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in the district. Each school had a "Green Team" comprised of a principal, teacher liaison, custodian, and at least one parent volunteer. Program volunteers had also created lesson plans, including books, videos, and other visuals, for every elementary grade, as well as

posters and bin labels, all with the goal of creating a uniform program across the school district.

Within five years, the district was diverting 68% of its waste (by volume) from the landfill, with some schools able to divert as much as 85% of their garbage to recycling or compost. These rates are well above the county average of 43%. The program is now branching out both to Transitional Kindergarten classes and to the district office.

"On behalf of the Board of Education, we congratulate the entire Green Team from Alameda Unified," says Board President Margie Sherratt. "Their efforts have been strong and consistent, teaching not only the students but our entire educational community the value of their green initiatives. This is truly a well-deserved award."

"Teaching a New Generation"

Due to the tremendous amount of work they have put into the Green Schools Challenge, AUSD requested that the official designees of the Golden Bell Award be *Michele Kuttner* (2nd grade teacher, Bay Farm Elementary School, Go Green Coordinator, and Alameda Green Schools Challenge Steering Committee member) and *Chantal Currid* (a parent volunteer with the Alameda Green Schools Challenge).

In addition, the following individuals are being recognized as part of the award team: *Margie Sherratt* (president, Board of Education); *Sean McPhetridge* (Interim Superintendent, AUSD); *Jerome Thomas* (AUSD Custodial Operations Lead); *Thomas Miro* (science teacher, Lincoln Middle School); *Ruth Abbe* (board member, Community Action for a Sustainable Alameda and member, Alameda Green Schools Challenge Steering Committee) and *Lori Garrett* (Outdoor Learning Center Coordinator).

The AGSC will be honored at an awards ceremony in San Francisco in mid-December as part of the CSBA's Annual Conference.

"One of the things that excites me about this program is the way it has introduced change in the culture of our schools," McPhetridge says. "Through the Green Schools Challenge, we are teaching a new generation of young people how to dispose of their waste in an environmentally responsible manner. At the same time, the lessons implicit in the program are awakening our young people to the need to reduce the amount of waste they produce in the first place. These are precious lessons and ones that will benefit not just our school district, but also the entire planet."

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