

SMCOE Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative

Green Team Guide

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

San Mateo County Office of Education

Purpose of This Guide

Hello Eco-Champions! This guide shares tips, suggestions, resources, and project ideas to help you start a green team or environmental club at your school. Read on to get started and have fun! SMCOE's Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative (ELSI) is here to support you. Please email elsi@smcoe.org for more information.

What is a Green Team and Why are They Important?

A green team or environmental club is a group of individuals who collaborate to raise awareness about environmental issues in their school community and take the initiative to implement and promote programs to reduce their school's environmental impact. Green teams generally consist of a mix of students and adults, including school staff, administrators, maintenance staff, parents, etc. As a result, every green team is unique. However the team is fashioned, having a mix of age groups makes for a well-rounded team of different perspectives and experiences.

Green Team Quick Start Checklist

- ☐ Set your team's goals and objectives
- ☐ Get permission and support from school administrators
- ☐ Recruit team members consisting of students, teachers, parents, and school staff, including custodians, lunch personnel, office administrators, etc.
- ☐ Name your team (or it could also be called the Green Team!)
- ☐ Establish a leader and assign roles and responsibilities to team members
- ☐ Determine the best time of day for your team to meet
- ☐ Create a calendar and set meeting dates
- ☐ Send out invitations and a green team application. An application helps students reflect on why they are interested in joining the team, establishes a formal commitment, and provides you with parent contact information. People can apply through a paper or Google Form.
- ☐ Determine project ideas for the year, including for Earth Day and Earth Month!

Strategies *for* Success!

STEP 1

Set Your Green Team's Goals and Objectives

POSSIBLE FOCUS AREAS

A green team or school environmental club has the power to influence the behavior and decisions of members of a school community, including decisions that determine a school's impact on the environment.

Which of the areas below would you be most interested in exploring as part of your green team?

Educational Awareness Campaign
Educate your school community about how to create a greener place in which to learn.

General Advocacy
Advocate for greener decisions among your facilities, purchasing or administrative departments.

Physical Project
Work together to design and implement a project to leave a lasting impact on your school or local community.

Promote Behavior Change
Create a contest or rewards program to inspire others to contribute to helping improve your school's environmental footprint.



GUIDING QUESTIONS

Use the following questions to think about which goal(s) would be appropriate to develop for your green team:

How does your school compare against other schools in your consumption of natural resources, such as water, electricity, natural gas and solid waste?

If you're not sure, you can start by devoting a portion of your team's time toward conducting an audit to gather the data necessary to figure this out. If you do know, then you may want to focus on improving the areas in which your school is not doing so well, or focus on promoting and expanding the things that your school does really well.

Do you consistently overhear students or staff sharing about things your school does not do or things that it could or should be doing?

Examples can include:

- Properly sorting waste in landfill, recycle, and compost bins
- Using compostable trays in your cafeteria instead of non-recyclable materials
- Turning off the air conditioning when it is not needed
- Recycling common school supply materials through recycling programs

Are there any open spaces that your school could better utilize to improve your environmental footprint?

Examples can include:

- Planting a rain garden to add beauty to the schoolyard and allow water to seep into the soil
- Installing a rain barrel to capture stormwater
- Planting more trees to provide shade
- Installing an outdoor classroom with tree stumps and rocks
- Removing invasive species and planting native species

Are there certain green behaviors that you have implemented successfully at home that can be implemented at your school?

STEP 2

Get Your Principal's Support and Recruit Team Members

Get administrative approval and support from your principal.
It is also beneficial to obtain the support of custodians, kitchen staff, and other facilities staff, as you may be engaging in school-wide activities related to daily operations around the campus.

Recruit team members.
Spread word throughout the school that an environmental team will be forming for all students and staff members interested in helping make the school more environmentally friendly. Adult members can serve as primary contacts for your green team to receive support from county organizations, such as the San Mateo County Office of Education and the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability.



Who to Invite:

- Students who have a passion for the environment and/or climate change issues
- Students who have an interest in making a positive impact on the people around them
- Students who are looking to get involved in a service-oriented school club
- Students who are natural leaders and can help recruit others

Strategies for Recruiting Team Members:

Promote: Use posters, flyers, and morning announcements.

Ask an existing club to include Green Team activities: Consider ASB, gardening, or community service clubs.

Consider designating a specific grade level as the school's Green Team.

Use a formal application process: A student green team application form and pledge helps students reflect on why they are interested in joining the team, establishes a formal commitment, and provides you with parent contact information. Feel free to use SMCOE's Sample Green Team Application or modify it for your own use.

STEP 3

Sustain your Green Team



1. **Name your team:** Come up with a name for your group that fits with your goals and with your school's personality, mascot, or location (or use Green Team!)
2. **Establish a team leader or advisor** who is responsible for communicating with administrators and monitoring meetings. This will most likely be a teacher, school staff member, or other adult.
3. **Assign other roles and responsibilities:** Establish a list of roles for team members to help divide tasks.
4. **Meetings:** Determine the best time of day for your team to meet as well as frequency. Once the team is established, meetings can generally be scheduled at least once a month. Try to hold meetings on a regular basis to keep members interested and attendance consistent.

Roles can include, but are not limited to:

- **Secretary:** Takes notes and attendance during meetings and keeps track of upcoming events.
- **Treasurer:** Keeps track of team funds, supply inventories, and progress toward related goals.
- **Promoters/Advocates:** All students should serve as promoters and advocates and share sustainable practices with the rest of the school community.
- **Artist(s)/Designer(s):** Enlist the help of artistic students to make posters or design creative elements for projects.
- **Writer(s):** Students who are interested in writing can write articles about what the team is doing for the school newspaper or newsletter.
- **Technology Specialists:** Create social media accounts for your school's green team and enlist a group of students to run them.
- **Photographer:** Have a student or two take photos at green team events.



First Green Team Meeting Ideas

- **Icebreaker Activity:** Lead an icebreaker activity so members can start getting to know each other.
- **Introductions:** Invite team members to introduce themselves. This could also be part of an icebreaker activity.
- **Brainstorm goals:** Brainstorm goals and share what members of the team would be excited to work on so the team can work toward these goals throughout the year. Provide an overview of what you expect the group to be doing during the year.
- **Discuss possible team roles:** Talk about what roles are available for members of the team. Members can write down what roles they may be interested in and roles can be assigned at the following meeting.
- **Develop a list of desired projects for the year** and decide which projects will be priorities.
- **Start to develop a campaign:** Develop plans for a campaign to communicate your team's goals and key messages.
- **Set the stage for upcoming meetings:** Provide details on upcoming outings or meetings so members know what to expect in the future.
- **Create a calendar of team activities or projects** and set realistic goals for completion throughout the school year. the school newspaper or newsletter.

Green Team *in* Action!



Daily Project Ideas

- Check classrooms to make sure lights are turned off in unoccupied rooms and that other energy conservation practices are routinely followed.
- Monitor lunch recycling, landfill, and composting stations to help fellow students learn how to properly sort materials.
  - Try to assign at least two student monitors to each bin.
  - Rotate the monitoring responsibility between students, classes, or grade levels.
  - Create a short video to share with other students how to properly sort their food waste, trash, and recycling.

Weekly or Monthly Project Ideas

- Make announcements (morning announcements, school bulletin boards, newsletters, etc.) about waste reduction, recycling, energy conservation, water conservation, and other conservation practices.
- Promote and educate the school community about packing waste free lunches.
- Host a school supply swap day.
- Check classrooms to make sure lights are turned off in unoccupied rooms and other energy conservation practices are followed.
- Identify contamination (such as liquids, straws, and other materials not accepted in the school recycling program) in recycling bins, and then create an announcement or other awareness campaign to educate students and staff about how to reduce waste and improve recycling.

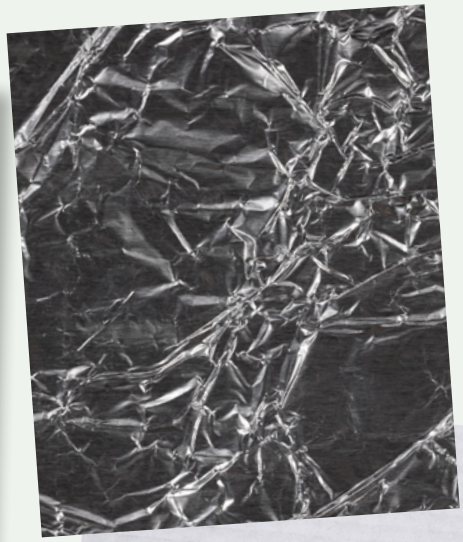
Semi-Annual or Annual Project Ideas

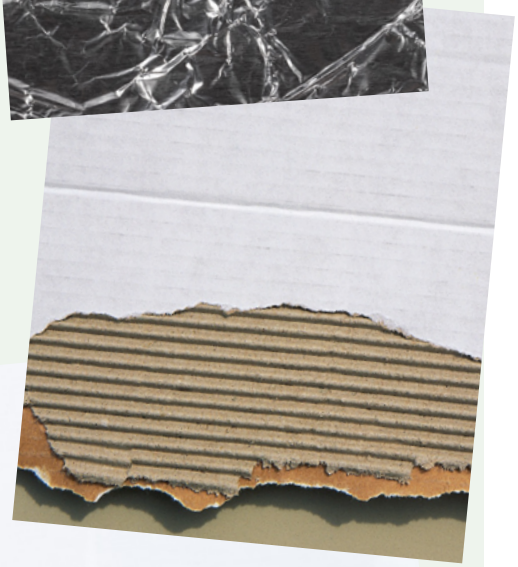
- Organize an Earth Day (or Earth Week) celebration.
- Assess waste, energy or water use, or modes of transportation to and from school with semi-annual or annual audits.
- Network with Green Teams from other schools via Zoom or in-person. The San Mateo County Office of Education plans networking events in partnership with community organizations. Email elsi@smcoe.org to get on the mailing list!

Project Ideas by Focus Area

Waste Reduction Ideas

- Tally your recycling totals on a weekly basis so that you can continually work on increasing your recycling rates throughout the school year.
- Conduct a **Waste Audit** of your campus to assess the waste created in the school building, including recyclable materials, organics/food, and landfill materials.
- Make recycling available at all school related events, such as sporting events, concerts, school dances, fairs, etc.
- Encourage individuals or other groups within your school to sign a pledge to commit to recycling consistently.
- Make notepads by collecting scrap paper that has not been used on one side and gluing it together into pads.
- Campaign to convert your cafeteria trays and flatware to reusable ones if not already using them.
- Create videos or school announcements to teach people how to properly sort their recycling and compost.
- Contact the **San Mateo County Office of Sustainability Schools Program** or **Rethink Waste** to schedule a waste presentation or assembly for your school.
- Develop a composting station in your cafeteria that will benefit a school or local garden.
- Advocate for installing a bucket in the lunch area for used milk or other beverages, so they do not end up in the landfill.
- Review the supplies commonly provided by your school to determine if there is an opportunity to work with administration to replace these items with reusables ideally, or those that are more recyclable or include more recycled content and contain fewer hazardous materials, etc.





Water Conservation Ideas

- Walk through the school and determine all the points where water is consumed.
- Conduct a School Water Audit to investigate how your school uses water, where water comes from, where water goes when it leaves the school.
- Work together to estimate the quantity of water consumed in each location.
- Establish a simple, ongoing program that would enable students to report leaking faucets or toilets so that they may be fixed.
- Propose and implement adjustments to the landscape to increase absorption; consider planting native plants or a rain garden in strategic locations.
- Create a mural, poster or 3-D display to engage other students and staff in your water conservation campaign.
- Encourage students to do a home **Home Water Use Audit** to see how much water they use every day, then give prizes for those who complete the audit and pledge to reduce their water use.

Energy Conservation Ideas

- Organize a Walk, Bike, or Carpool to School Day. Reach out to **SMCOE's Safe Routes to School program**, which provides training, resources, and support to schools to reduce traffic congestion and improve the environmental health of our communities.
- Develop a campaign to remind members of your school community to turn off lights, computers, and other electronics when not in use.
- If enough natural light is available, use it and turn off the lights.
- Use the "off" button on power strips to ensure all equipment is turned off at the end of the day (as long as it is not important to leave them on overnight).
- Conduct a school Energy Audit focusing on the energy used in the school building for lighting, electronics, and heating/cooling to determine areas in which you can make the largest impact.
- Present your findings to school administrators or relevant staff members and persuade them to investigate options to improve the school's energy usage.



Animals and Endangered Species

- Choose an animal to support and hold a fundraiser to raise money for organizations that support that animal. Examples: World Wildlife Fund, National Audubon Society (supports bird conservation), The Nature Conservancy.
- Plan a wildlife or bird watching field trip in a nearby park.
- Do a habitat restoration project with an organization such as Grassroots Ecology or Save the Bay. The best way to save endangered species is to restore their habitat.

Advocacy and Education Awareness Campaigns

- Watch this video called "Become a Solutionary," which is someone who identifies unsustainable systems and transforms them in ways that do the most good.
- Watch this video called "The Power of Advocacy" to get inspired about how to make change in your community.
- Read a book with your Green Team from the Environmental and Solutionary Books List.
- Get inspired by these Student-led Community Impact Projects that were conducted by high school students in the Youth Climate Ambassadors program.
- Plan your own campaign!





Resources *to* Kick-Start Your Team

SMCOE Resources:

- **Green Team Sample Student Application:** Use or revise this sample form if your school wants to ask students to fill out a form to join the school Green Team.
- **Bin Tally Sheet:** Use this bin tally sheet to take inventory of the bins already at your school. This will help you assess the need for any additional bins.
- **School Waste Audit:** Conduct a waste audit of your school using this resource from SMCOE. This audit will focus on the "waste" that is created in your school building, including recyclable materials, organics/food, and landfill materials. In this audit you will investigate some basic definitions about waste, what is "wasted" in our schools, and how your class reduces waste sent to landfills.

RethinkWaste:

- **Green Team Activity Menu**

NYC Department of Education Zero Waste Schools:

- **Recycling Games**
- **I-Dot Survey:** This activity is a simple and fun way to measure student environmental habits & awareness.
- **How to Pack a Zero Waste Lunch**

These Community-Based Partners offer assistance to Green Teams:

RethinkWaste offers the following for green teams:

- Green team training
- Help with lunch time bin monitoring
- Facilitation of games and activities: Bin sorting game, litter bingo, etc.
- Tour of Shoreway Environmental Center for Green team members: Virtual or in-person
- End of the semester/end of the year celebrations: pizza party, small giveaway items
- Green team aprons and trash pickers: About 4-5 aprons and pickers per school
- Replacement/additional bins, dollies, signage, etc.

Contact:
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Environmental Education Manager
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The San Mateo County Office of Sustainability offers the following for green teams:

- Green team facilitation and training
- 4R's Unit Games (for training others)
- Worm bin and backyard compost bins for school gardens
- Signage for bins
- Green teams can also borrow Reuse Kits (such Solar Oven and Paper Making Kits)

Contact:
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Flows to Bay offers the following for green teams:

- Promotes **Schoolyard Greening and Rainwater Resilient Schools**. Helps residents, businesses, teachers, and students understand the effects of stormwater pollution and how they can help prevent it.
- Reach out to them at **info@flowstobay.org**.

Contact:
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Acknowledgements

This Green Team Guide was created with the help of the following resources:

The Green Team Program Guide

King County Green Schools Program - Green Team Strategies for Success

Lincoln Public Schools

NYC Department of Education - Zero Waste Schools

NYC Department of Education Green Team Guide Resources

PepsiCo's How to Start a Green Team At Your School Guide