

The [Efficient and Healthy Schools Program](#) aims to motivate and empower K-12 schools to reduce energy costs and improve student and teacher health. The Program connects schools with practical solutions and provides technical assistance and resources to significantly improve school facilities. It is led by the U.S. Department of Energy Building Technologies Office with technical support from Berkeley Lab and New Buildings Institute.



CASE STUDY:

Solutions Strategist Bellingham Public Schools

Project Details

Location: Bellingham, WA

Number of Students: 11,000

Number of Schools in District: 22

Locale: Small city

Percent Free and Reduced Price Meal: 35%

Percent Title 1 Schools: 40%

Plan Dates: 2023–2028

Key Resources/Influences:

- Washington State Outdoor School Study
- Center for Green Schools Whole School Sustainability Framework
- Green Schools National Network GreenPrint™
- Boulder Valley School District Action Plan
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- Bellingham Climate Action Plan

Key Plan Areas:

- Energy, water, and greenhouse gas emissions benchmarking
- Environmental, sustainability, and climate change education (ESCE) curriculum
- Waste system improvements
- Stakeholder engagement

Project Scope & Approach

In April 2023, Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) released a draft of the district’s first five-year Climate Action Plan. Since the early 2000s however, BPS has been taking steps to reduce the environmental impact of their buildings and operations, leading to the first capital projects bond to include energy efficiency upgrades in 2013. Other efforts have included adopting the Washington Sustainable Schools Protocol standards, installing programmable LED lighting, and enrolling in the Energy Conservation Services Management Program with their local utility. In fall 2022, a Sustainability Task Force composed of students, staff, community members, and experts presented a sustainability framework that led to the formation of a 30-member BPS Sustainability Advisory Committee. This facilitator-led group developed the 2023–2028 Climate Action Plan, which separates work into three areas of focus: facilities & operations, teaching & learning, and habits & culture.

Project Outcomes & Lessons Learned

The BPS Plan provides a five-year roadmap indicating steps taken to date by the district, centering the document on why it is necessary, and outlining specific actions and target areas that will be the focus of the district’s efforts. These focus areas each contain an overarching goal, three tactical goals, and a set of indicators, measures, and strategies to reach the goals. This will allow recurring check-in on progress toward goals, and allow the district to adjust as needed.

Participants in the planning process suggested the following best practices for other districts: prioritize a community-based approach, such as engaging student voices (preferably one from each high school); utilize expertise within the community to achieve impactful results; provide ample time to develop the Plan (at least one year); and conduct ongoing implementation meetings once the Plan is approved.

Learn more about the BPS Sustainability Advisory Committee here:

<https://bellingshamschools.org/about/committees-advisory-groups/sustainability-advisory-committee/>

STUDENT SUPPORT:

“Learning about the natural environment gives people hope and direction to take home.”

Linnea Boriss, Whatcom Middle School student

“Environmental justice is just as important as math and science.”

Grace Pahl, Whatcom Middle School student

“Climate education is empowering. We need to take action now.”

Amelia Wermus, Bellingham High School student