

Creating an E-Team at your School

Why create a group?

Why not? A group is a great way to share your ideas on important issues with other students, faculty, administration, parents and the surrounding community. You can make real differences for the environment and empower students to know they have the ability to create changes. And most importantly, it's fun!

How?

- Start an email/sign up list with prospective students.
- Hold a meeting at least once a month.
- At your first meeting, develop goals and objectives (ways to meet those goals) for your group. Also create a name for your group by taking a vote on a name so everyone has input.
- Find the “most” pressing issue for the group and focus first on that project (it is easy to spread yourselves too thin by trying to take on several projects at once).
- Give incentives for joining your group such as snacks, meeting people, website games or music, reminders of appreciation and importance of their work, etc...
- Open lines of communication with administration, other faculty, students/student government, parents, local media, and potential donors.
- Get your name out there by advertising. Use the local media to highlight your achievements. Make (environmentally friendly) stickers, shirts, etc. to sell and raise funds for projects.
- Create a website for students to join and interact with.
- Remember that even small things make a difference. For example, just having students meet to discuss environmental issues is a form of education and empowerment. Small things do make a difference!
- View the other resources provided for ideas on different initiatives your group could undertake.

Special Considerations:

- Since students are only able to work with a group for a few years, at most, it is important for a faculty or administrator to be the head/leader of such a group. This person should act as an organizer of your club's actions and ideas. Please consider that it is easy for such a person to take over too much and not allow students to learn through actively participating.
- Middle and High School students commonly have little power to change a school's rules and financial decisions. It will take creative measure to work around such issues (for example- an audit of energy use may be used to show the school how new technologies could save them money instead of just asking them to invest money).
- Inviting local environmental groups to talk with and volunteer with your group is a great way to get new ideas and expand your networking and scope.

Examples of Groups:

<http://network.earthday.net/profile/HowellHighSchoolEnvironmentalClub>

<http://mhseag.awardspace.com/about/>

<http://wildlink.wilderness.net/newsdirectory/school%20year%200708/april.htm>

*Please feel free to contact with questions me at my blog: <http://scottborden.blogspot.com>

Environmental Evaluations

Why is this project important?

When you evaluate your school you will be measuring and recording trends. An evaluation is the first step to many other projects because it tells you the foundation of what your school needs. Environmental evaluations may also be used to track trends in the progress of environmental efforts. Continuing to track your school's efforts for several years could help to show how your group has made a difference or where it could invest more effort in the future. This project may be done before each year with your group.

Things you could do:

Fill out the chart below evaluating your school's environmental efforts:

Activity	Effects on the Environment	School's Current Efforts	Ideas for Future Efforts	Rating of Importance (1 most –6 least)
Transportation (Maintenance trucks, school vans and buses, parking lots)				
Energy Use (Electricity, Natural gas, etc...)				
Waste Disposal (Recycling)				
Water Use (Bathrooms, Kitchen, Lawns)				
Food Waste (Cafeteria)				
Paper Use (printing, email, bulletin boards)				

- Fill in details. For example: How many maintenance trucks are there and what kind of vehicles are they? What types of light bulbs does your school use? Does your school use recycled paper or print on both sides? Etc...

Potential problems:

- You may need to record only things you have some control over because your school may not be willing to share sensitive information.
- Evaluations may take a large amount of time and may be better done in the classroom. They may also take multiple years to compare data.

Special considerations:

Evaluations are a great way for students and faculty to learn about their campuses and about recording and analyzing data.

Food Waste Education

Why is this project important?

Food waste affects many other environmental problems. Not only is it an issue of fairness because the developed world has too much and the developing too little but it is also an issue of land availability. With excess food waste being sent to our landfills, we need to find more space to store it. On average, 25% of the prepared food in the United States is thrown out, equaling roughly 96 billion pounds per year. In 2005, 12% of all municipal solid waste was food waste. Since our landfills are also sealed, the food decomposes slowly and releases methane gas, a gas that causes global climate change at a higher rate than carbon dioxide.

Things you could do:

- Collect lunch food scraps for one week in a large square container. Figure out the volume of that waste (height x length x width). Next, make visual representations of the amount of food that has been wasted for that week using old cardboard boxes. The volume of the cardboard boxes should represent the amount of space the food you and your classmates have thrown away. Multiple weeks of this activity could show and encourage improvements by your classmates.
- If your school has a buffet style lunch you can encourage students to take less or try first and then come back.
- You could provide information on composting to reduce the amount of space each person or even your school's food waste takes up in a landfill.
- You could work with the cafeteria to reduce their waste (see cafeteria resources below).
- You could make drawings or posters of the amount of resources or life history (from growth to trash) of your food and hang them in the cafeteria to educate fellow students on the amount of resources it takes to make a meal.
- You could make posters or presentations on the amount of miles your food has traveled (and the amount of carbon it's produced). See link on a food miles counter below. You could also advocate for people to buy local food with this project (i.e. encourage shopping at a farmers market).

Potential problems:

- Working with the school cafeteria to reduce their waste will require an audit and ideas on the cost that such changes may cost them. This could take years and extra funding to accomplish.

Resources:

- <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/index.htm>
- http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ocapp/food_scrap/Newman-slides.pdf
- Food miles counter: <http://www.organiclinker.com/food-miles.cfm>
- For cafeteria information:
<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/materials/organics/pubs/food-guide.pdf> ,
http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/materials/organics/pubs/wast_not.pdf

Special considerations:

Remember when “educating” others please don’t make them feel guilty for waste but empowered by giving them options and encouragement. Don’t point fingers of blame but provide reasonable options for others to follow, and be a role model.

Grant Writing

Why is this project important?

Finding money to fund your dream Eco-Team project can at first seem impossible, but there are hundreds, if not thousands of companies, government organizations, and non-profit organizations who are looking to give away money. That's right, give away money. But its not as easy as finding someone to get money from. You have to have a well designed project, estimated costs, and a written proposal to convince those organizations that your project is worth funding. Sounds like a lot of work—and it is! However, doing all that work pays off (literally) and pays off in all of the learning you will do to figure out how to effectively write a grant. The ability to successfully write a grant is an important skill for people of many professions: teachers, health professionals, scientists, non-profit organizations, government organizations, professors, and so many more. Learning to write a grant in school is, therefore, a powerful tool to build skills that realistically prepare students for the future.

Things you could do:

- Research local businesses who might be willing to fund your dream project.
- Send those businesses letters requesting their partnership, outlining why your project is important, and don't forget to include what's in it for the business.
- Apply for grants that are offered by philanthropic organizations or the government. (see below for a list of websites to find these organizations).
- Get a teacher or faculty at your school interested and excited about helping you with writing your grant...maybe convince them that it is a worthy homework or extra credit assignment.

Potential challenges:

Some funders require special qualifications from people applying for grants, so you may need to have a teacher with special training to send in the grant. Many grants require a lot of time, effort, and support from adults to be successful. However, even if you are not successful in getting the funds, the learning process is worth the effort.

Resources:

- Project Learning Tree offers the GreenWorks! Grant for awesome projects:
http://www.plt.org/cms/pages/21_22_20.html
- The EPA offers environmental education grants:
http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants_apply.html

Special considerations:

- Your project has got to be pretty dynamite before applying for a grant so make sure to spend time creating the best project possible before applying for funding.
 - In order to apply for the GreenWorks! grant the signing teacher must have Project Learning Tree training. However, students who write GreenWorks! grants are usually successful in being awarded funds.
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Green Fundraising

Why is this project important?

Anyone could host a car wash or a bake sale to fund their Eco-Team project. But do these methods of fundraising align with your goals to help the Earth? Most likely your answer is no. Car washes waste water and bake sales encourage people to eat sugar-filled non-organic food that is unhealthy for our bodies and the Earth. With a Green fundraiser you can not only spread the word about Greening your school, but you can earn some cash to make that dream a reality. Plus, the added bonus of learning about fundraising, advocacy (getting your ideas out to the public), and leadership comes with planning a project like this.

Things you could do:

- Sell organic cookies and brownies at a bake sale while informing people of why you have added costs to your products.
- Sell eco-friendly products such as energy efficient light bulbs, water efficient faucets, power strips with on/off button, LED Christmas lights, stainless steel water bottles, or reusable bags.
- Offer services to neighbors of your school. For example, sell and install clothes lines, energy efficient light bulbs, water efficient faucets in neighborhood houses; or host a seminar educating others about taking care of the Earth.
- Host a clothing drive and resell items.
- Host a school musical event, poetry festival, art festival, talent show or all of the above. Attendees could donate for admission with a suggested donation fee of \$3-5. Students could host a booth that educates those about their cause and/or sell products and services mentioned above. School families, school neighbors, local businesses, and local environmental organizations could be invited to attend the event.
- Partner with local businesses who might be willing to fund your project or event.
- Partner with the existing recycling coordinator at your school to improve collection, take recycling to center to receive cash for your recycling deposit.

Potential challenges:

Many of these suggestions require partnership with teachers and administrators at your school. Make sure to have a strong relationship with them to make your fundraiser successful.

Resources:

- Greenraising is a website that specifically helps schools with Green fundraising projects: <http://www.greenraising.com/>
- <http://www.motherearthfundraising.com/>
- <http://www.growkids.org/>
- <http://www.ecolabelfundraising.com/>

Special considerations:

- Your project has got to be pretty dynamite before making the effort to raise funds, so make sure to spend time preparing solid reasons why people will want to give you money for your project
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Letter Campaign to your Representatives

Why is this project important?

Writing letter or emails to your representatives is a clear way to make your voice heard. If done in a group it can really make a difference and join together like-minded people. It is also a form of educating others as they join your “cause.” When others decide to join the project it empowers them. They too may feel as though they have made a difference.

Things you could do:

- Educate yourselves on some environmental issues in local, state or even federal politics (see politicians’ link below). Each member could present on one issue and then have a vote on which issues the group would like to campaign for.
- Write and send emails or letters together as a group and share ideas about what you would like them to say (see the link below about a format for emails/letters).
- Share any emails or letters you receive back as a group to show that they were received. If you are not happy with your representative’s response, send them again and again until you get a response that you are satisfied with.
- You could make a “youtube” video, play, CD, or posters representing your feelings on an issue and send them to your representatives to further your message.

Potential problems:

- Your group may not be able to decide on one campaign and you may need to write letters about more than one.
- Your representatives may not respond or may respond in a general and unconvincing manner. However, it is important that if you really feel passionate that you continue working for that cause.
- Students could make inappropriate letters, emails, “youtube” videos, or other extra things to send to representatives under your group’s name. The adult leader may want to check all documents being sent out for appropriateness.

Resources:

- <http://www.actupny.org/documents/LW.html> http://www.bringbackkirk.com/bjo_tips.html
- Politicians’ Link: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html>
- Format Example: <http://www.cahp.girl-wonder.org/letter-campaign/>

Special considerations:

- The idea of sending letters or emails to political representatives could also be widened to include companies or others of influence who may be able to support different business or political practices.
 - Emails may not be as effective because they are not physical objects in a politician’s hands. However, they will drastically reduce waste and may cost your group less to produce.
 - Creating petitions can be an effective way to show support for anything that you would like to change in your own school. Follow the same guidelines highlighted here for such projects.
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Paper Waste Reduction

Why is this project important?

Every step to create and dispose of paper has an environmental impact – cutting trees for wood, processing the pulp, producing the paper, and transporting it to markets. Paper manufacturing is the 3rd largest industry user of fossil fuels worldwide.* Pulp and paper mills in the US produce approximately 245,000 metric tons of toxic air pollutant every year.* And overall, producing one ton of paper uses 98 tons of various resources.* Unfortunately, we use a lot of paper. The average American consumes more than 748 pounds of paper per year*. Educating others about an issue is a great way to encourage them to join your cause and create big changes. One person's actions have an effect, but we can create bigger impacts together. For example, letting people know that recycled paper uses 64% less energy than making paper from virgin wood pulp may lead to them purchasing recycled.

Things you could do:

- Create educational videos or blogs for your school.
- Encourage the school to start a paper recycling program and ensure that all classrooms have a collection bin.
- Encourage paperless homework and classroom information by using more email.
- Ensure that your copiers and printers have double-sided copying and double-sided is set as the default setting.
- Have a collection of single sided paper so the other side can be used for printing on.
 - Ensure that the directions for printing on single-sided paper is visible on printers.
 - Encourage the use of this paper by sharing facts about paper waste (above) with your teachers and the administration staff.
- Check the lunchroom and lunch service for any paper waste and talk to them about ways to reduce it.
- Use a petition to encourage the school to buy recycled paper for printers.
 - Include facts about recycled paper's benefits to the environment and the potential costs (see resources below).
- Provide signs to encourage others to use less toilet paper in the bathrooms. Change from paper towels to electric blowers in your bathroom.

Potential challenges:

- Recycled paper may cost more money than new paper.
- Teachers, administration, and students may believe they do not have the time to deal with this issue or to print on an already used piece of paper.
- Collecting paper to be recycled will require a work force and potentially money.

Resources:

- <http://www.environmentalpaper.org/documents/REDUCE-BUSINESS-GUIDE.pdf>
- <http://www.id2.ca/downloads/eco-design-paper-facts.pdf> *
- www.greenlinepaper.com

Special considerations:

- Remember- first reduce, then reuse, and finally if there is no other option, recycle.
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Recycling Program

Why is this project important?

It is true that recycling takes energy to create new (and commonly less structurally sound) products out of old ones. For this reason, any recycling program should advocate first reducing our waste, then reusing any materials (such as reusable water bottles), and then recycling. But that is not to say that recycling is bad. In fact, just the opposite is true. Recycling reduces our carbon output, needed materials for production, educates people on waste reduction, and perhaps most importantly gives many people an opportunity to participate in environmental stewardship.

Things you could do:

- If your school already has a recycling project you could work to expand the amount students use it, the types of materials collected, and its' accessibility.
- If you are hoping to start a new recycling program you will need to take several additional steps, including:
 - Talking with the administration about why they don't provide recycling.
 - Collect all recycling you can find by students and record the weight of it for one week. You may need to find first what is recyclable in your area, and then start with only 3 or 4 materials and expand later. This will help when you talk with collection companies about costs and with your administration about the need for such a program.
 - Find companies that would be willing to collect your recycling and record details (days they collect, what they collect, where they would collect it, cost).
 - Create a plan of where bins would go, what would be collected, and how (where is the work force coming from?). Then write up a proposal with an estimated price tag (remember that reducing solid waste pick up may create a small cost savings to the school).
 - Present your ideas to the administration and then begin looking for funding. Ask the administration, look at grants below, and be creative.
- Look at the EPA websites below for further details and for any questions.

Potential problems:

- This process may take a long time, so be prepared for it and make sure you have students from several different grades working on it so your group doesn't all graduate before it is completed.
- Finding a work force may be the hardest part. Be sensitive to this as you are asking for either creating new jobs or expanding the roles of your custodians.

Resources:

- <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/partnerships/wastewise/pubs/howtopdf.pdf>
- <http://www.epa.gov/highschool/waste.htm>
- Example: <http://www.athenshigh.org/clubs/recycling.html>

Special considerations:

The more professional and organized your plan is the better chance it will be accepted. This is a great learning opportunity for your group and the school alike.

Bike or Walk to School Day

Why is this project important?

This project will encourage carbon-free forms of transportation that can help to reduce carbon output (a green house gas that adds to global climate change). According to the Progressive Policy Institute, the average car produces one pound of CO₂ for every mile driven. That's enough to fill 120 party balloons! Reducing the number of cars on the road is part of the solution. This project also promotes healthy living through exercise and limiting air pollution created by cars. Additionally, this project could be used to raise awareness of global climate change and availability of alternative transportation.

Things you could do:

- Organize a bike or walk to school day. Pick a date (the end of the week may work better because you can advertise throughout the week at school).
- Advertise for the event through the loud speaker at school, the local radio station, school newspaper, websites, word of mouth, and/or posters.
- Hold a meeting place after school to celebrate alternative modes of transportation and take pictures for any newspaper or other media outlet to show that it was a success.
- Create bike and pedestrian maps that outline safe routes from your local hot spots to your school and publicize them (see the “walktoschool-usa.org” link below).
- Make it an annual event or even a monthly event.
- Come up with ways to promote more hybrid or alternatively fueled public transportation at your school.
- Install more bike parking stations at your school.

Potential problems:

- Many parents do not want their children walking or riding to school because of related risks. Plan the event by suggesting students meet in one local place and then walk or ride their bikes or suggest they come to school with a partner (ideally a neighbor).
- Some students may be unable to do this due to their distance from school. For such students you may want to promote carpooling with other students in their area who are in the same position.
- Driving to school may be considered a cultural norm or valued event at many schools. It may take several years of this project, plenty of educating others on why it is important or even creative methods to get students to break out of their norm. Be creative and expect some resistance.

Resources:

- <http://www.walktoschool-usa.org/>
- http://www.examiner.com/a-1351473~City_urges_students_to_bicycle_to_school.html
- http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/DNPA/kidswalk/pdf/kidswalk_programs_3_31_06.pdf

Special considerations:

- In CA there are strict biking rules (i.e. you must wear a helmet if you are under the age of 18, etc.). Make sure students are aware of these laws and are following them.
 - October is international walk to school month and your school could join thousands of others in this event (see resource above).
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Watershed Protection

Why is this project important?

A watershed is area of land where all water under it and all water that drains in it goes to the same place. All living things in that area of land are connected through their basic need for water. Protecting such an area is not only protecting the needs and wants of people (drinking water, recreation, farming, brushing your teeth, etc...) but also the needs and wants of wildlife that live there. Watersheds are therefore important areas to protect because your efforts will have more widespread impact upon other environmental issues related to both humans and animals.

Things you could do:

1. Learning more about your watershed (using the EPA resources below) and take walks around your rivers and streams to get to know them.
2. Volunteer with a watershed group near your home (find them online through a Google search, search your phone directory, or use the EPA websites provided).
3. Organize, or participate in, a clean up of your local rivers, streams, or ocean front.
4. Prepare a presentation for your school or a civic group to spread the word about the importance of your watershed. Highlight how to avoid dumping hazardous materials (such as oil) down the drain or allowing it to leak into a waterway.
5. Create Wildlife Habitat in your backyard using the EPA resources below.
6. Check the EPA resources below for other ideas.

Potential problems:

Funding may be needed to purchase gloves, trash bags, and other supplies for clean ups. Meeting for these events after school may conflict with athletics or other extra-curricular events. Your school may not want to be exposed for poorly dealing with runoff. Present any ideas to your school as opportunities for them to look good and be a leader in the field. Remember that sometimes working with others is the best way to get what you want.

Resources:

- EPA Resources- <http://www.epa.gov/owow/adopt/earthday/index.html> & <http://www.epa.gov/adopt/resources/>
- Funding- <http://www.epa.gov/owow/funding.html> , <http://cfpub.epa.gov/fedfund/> and http://www.plt.org/cms/pages/21_22_18.html

Special considerations:

- These programs could easily become yearly events and may need a faculty willing to commit for several years.
 - Many of the suggestions for things you can do above are practical and require little to no funding. Educating others and yourself should be your first step.
 - Be prepared to search through the EPA website if you have further questions. The site is very extensive and provides a section for answering questions when they come up.
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