



Healthy schools, Healthy environments

What is Sustainability?

There are multiple ways to define sustainability, but all include a respect for the future. Schools, as stewards of our next generation, need to understand and embrace sustainability in order to help students build a healthy future for their communities and the planet.

Below are several different approaches to understanding sustainability.

Sustainable Development is development that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

- United Nations Brundtland Commission, 1987

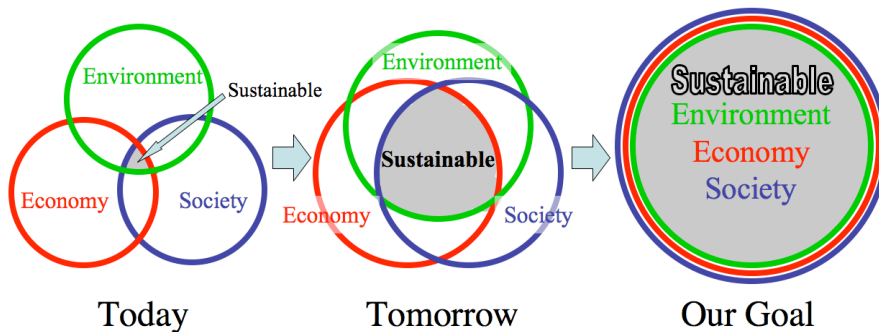
“What about the seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will they have?... We say that the faces of coming generations are looking up from the earth. So when you put your feet down, you put them down very carefully - because there are generations coming one after the other. If you think in these terms, then you'll walk a lot more carefully, be more respectful of this earth.”

- Oren Lyons, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Chief

Sustainability is the ability to achieve continuing economic prosperity while protecting the natural systems of the planet and providing a high quality of life for its people.

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE



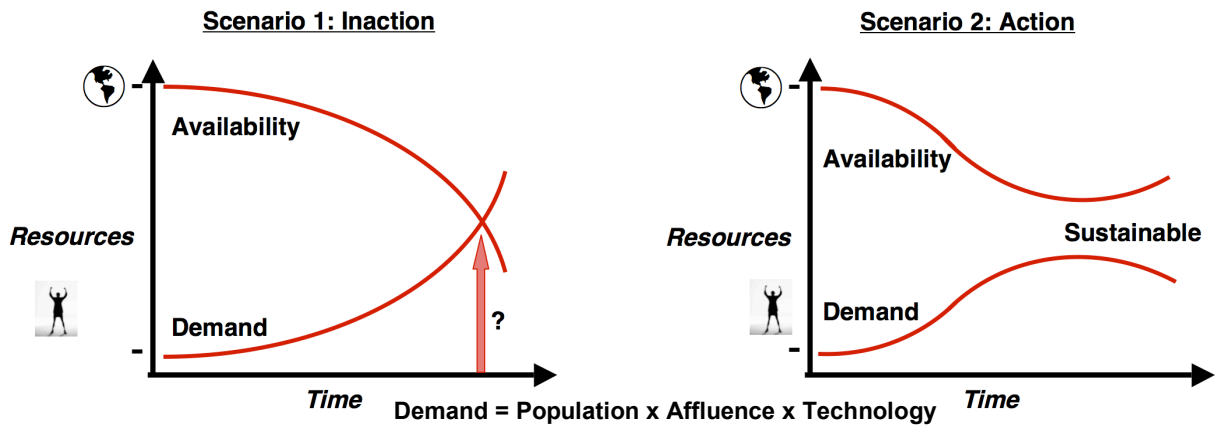
Sustainability is a journey. To achieve sustainability, a school, government, or any other entity must appreciate the interdependence of environment, economy and society.

GREEN vs. SUSTAINABLE

	Green	Sustainable
Focus	Details (exclusive)	Whole Systems (inclusive, visionary)
Implementation	Tactical (implementation of strategy)	Strategic (articulation of vision)
Scope	Environment	Environment, Economy, Society
Definition of Success	Subjective (no common definition)	Objective (can be clearly defined)

Why the difference matters: Only sustainability, which includes the interdependent pieces of environment, economy, and society, as well as a measurable point of success, can provide long-term viable conditions for all life on earth.

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY



If our society is to avoid a systemic demand for resources that exceeds availability (Scenario 1), institutions, governments, businesses, and individuals need to work together to implement sustainable practices (Scenario 2). There is no better time than now.

Sustainability requires that human activity, at a minimum, only uses nature's resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally. To do this it is necessary to "Close the Loop".

According to the World Wildlife Federation's Living Planet Report, if everyone in the world lived as Americans do we would need 5 planets to support us.

Closing the Loop (Following Nature's Model)

In a closed-loop system there is *zero waste*, allowing the cycle to continue indefinitely. Without a closed-loop, waste seeps out of the system, eventually resulting in a system shutdown.

A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY: The Natural Step

Developed in 1989 by Swedish oncologist Karl-Henrik Robert, the Natural Step is a framework that can help guide our actions. Robert, through a peer-reviewed process, determined four guiding principles that define sustainability in scientific terms:

In a sustainable global society, the ecosphere is not subject to systematically increasing...

1. Concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust

Examples: Fossil fuels, metals, and minerals

2. Concentrations of substances produced by society (synthetics)

Examples: Persistent substances (DDT, PCB's...), plastics, Freon

3. Degradation by physical means

Examples: Over-harvesting (forests, oceans...), eliminating biodiversity

and in that society,

4. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their basic needs

Examples: Overpopulation, unlivable wages, environmental and social inequity

To learn more about the Natural Step visit: www.ortns.org.