

**Regional Innovation Forum
Sustainable Schools Track
Summary of Forum Participant Discussion**

Portland Expo Center
March 27, 2009

Overview

The Sustainable Schools track consisted of a morning segment bus tour of local school sites, and an afternoon forum segment.

- Handouts from the 3-hour bus tour to Rosa Parks Elementary and da Vinci Middle School, Portland Public Schools, and Catlin Gabel School, are on the SOSI website:
http://www.sustainableschools.org/about/past_events.htm
- The forum is summarized below and presentations are also posted on the above page of the SOSI website.

Forum

Participants worked together for a few minutes on some questions to conclude:

- **It is the K-12 system that has the best chance to educate EVERY Oregon citizen for sustainability.**
Pre-K is also important but has fewer contact years/student, and the students are too young to get more than an important start. Community colleges and 4-year higher education institutions are important too, but only a portion of students go on to these, and the skills, knowledge, values and perspectives needed from all the basic subject areas are not as easily gained at these.
- **Oregon's sustainability efforts MUST clearly include any system in the state with an infrastructure large enough to accommodate over 20% of the state's population daily.**
The K-12 system fits this description, as it houses, transports and feeds over 20% of the total state population every day.
- **Just as parents and schools are advised to model reading so that kids will see it as valuable and successfully emulate it, schools must model sustainable practices if we want our students to learn and use them.**
Only a small number of students will be as successful without the models.

Steve Faulstick, General Manager of the Doubletree Hotel, Lloyd Center, then detailed the tremendous strides his business is making toward sustainability. The Hospitality Industry is not recognized as a source of the new "green job" market, but in fact all businesses need all employees to bring an ethic and understanding of sustainability with them. And like many other businesses, many of his employees are not educated beyond the K-12 system. The Doubletree Hotel now actively considers sustainability knowledge in their employee hiring.

Participants agreed that the global society's eco-footprint, which requires 4 Earths to be sustained over time, is a VERY important problem to address. After a brief discussion about whether today's education system contributes to an increase or decrease of our eco-footprint, they concluded that it actually supports increasing our eco-footprint. The current system tends to give them the means and expectation to use MORE resources. The education students receive must be examined and re-oriented in order to support a sustainable society.

It was also agreed that this education must come from ALL of the following:

1. Teacher in the classroom
2. People and organizations from outside the school
3. Interactions with the school facility and operations

The big challenges to making progress

The audience was asked to consider the challenges they see to implementing sustainability efforts such as were viewed on the bus tour or presented during the forum, in their own schools. There was unanimous agreement that the top 3 challenges are:

- Money (particularly to provide staff time, and also to support getting new systems in place and to allow decisions that might cost more in the short term but produce considerable cost savings in the long term)
- Time for staff
- Training

Common factors for success with school district sustainability efforts

Participants added to this list as they considered the morning site visits, and the afternoon presentations about leading schools efforts.

- Clear support and vision demonstrated from top administrators (VERY important)
- Empower (and listen to) staff and students to contribute to sustainability efforts
- Community-wide collaboration
- Leveraging opportunities (such as sending staff and students to local conferences about local sustainability-related issues)
- Inviting experts and stakeholders to join district discussions and efforts
- Partnerships to provide services, mentoring and community service opportunities for kids.
- Data collection / measuring progress, and sharing it with everyone in and outside the district
- Incentives from the district to schools, to encourage participation
- Whole systems approach; just looking at small pieces may miss the real leverage points
- Inspiring hope for what can be accomplished
- Identify leaders who have passion
- Be sure to include classified/certified staff
- Reframe “critical thinking” for sustainability

Moving forward at the state level

Bill Bradbury reiterated that it was clear from the presentations and discussion that the K-12 system is a critical sector for moving Oregon’s sustainability effort forward because:

- It includes a HUGE infrastructure with impacts to sustainability
- It educates every future employee and community member.

He noted that a couple years ago the Oregon Sustainability Board asked the 20 largest state agencies to prepare sustainability plans. He chaired the Board at that time and noted that the various agency efforts ranged from minimal to energized. As he then explained:

- The Oregon University System was among these 20 agencies, and now has a sustainability coordinator and state support for their effort. It was noted from the audience that it helps too, that there is such a strong national effort for sustainability within higher education and visible opportunities to commit via the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment and the international Talloires Declaration offered by the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future.

- The Oregon Department of Education was not in this group of 20 because the agency itself is not large and does not include the school districts. In reality when the entire system is considered it is very large with huge potential impacts, but that was not considered.

The K-12 system in Oregon is split between the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and 197 independent school districts. ODE's role is primarily restricted to the direction they might provide via the education standards. Each district funds and designs their facilities and services independently. Indeed, some of the services are even determined at an individual school level. No one entity oversees the entire K-12 system. This system is depicted with a graphic in the powerpoint presentation. The Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative (SOSI) is the only entity in Oregon at this point that bridges the educational, facilities and operational components in both the public and private school realm.

The critical role of our K-12 system as a whole, including public and private schools and districts, must be recognized at a state level!

We need visible state-level recognition that K-12 is a key sector for addressing sustainability goals. We need to learn how to educate our students for a sustainable future. This is an international effort and we should be a leader.

The audience offered suggestions about next steps for K-12 sustainability efforts at the Oregon State level:

- Establish a relationship between the Oregon Board of Education and the Oregon Sustainability Board. Options might include:
 - A K-12 representative position on the Sustainability Board
 - A person in some form of liaison position between the two Boards
 - Perhaps SOSI could initiate this with a letter to one or both Boards.
- Have ODE incorporate sustainability into the education standards. There is a national sustainability education standard to help get started, and we can learn from the progress already made in Washington State with their state education standards.
- Find a stable funding source for the Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative (SOSI)
- Seek through the legislature:
 - School facilities standards
 - Funding for an entity to coordinate a comprehensive K-12 sustainability effort for Oregon (SOSI is the logical vehicle for this)
- Build public-private partnerships (business needs a trained workforce)
- Raise awareness and interest within key entities such as the Oregon Board of Education, Governor, OSBA, COSA and OEA so that they recognize this issue
- Increase availability of case studies, assessment tools, curriculum resources
- More teacher education programs
- Explore why it is that Washington State is so far ahead of Oregon with regard to K-12 sustainability