

CASE STUDY

Boulder Valley School District: A Role Model in Action Planning for Whole School Sustainability

DISTRICT PROFILE

Location | Boulder, Colorado
Number of schools | 56 schools
Number of students | 31,000 students
Percentage Receiving Free & Reduced Price Meals

In 2008, Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) hired Ghita Carroll to serve as its Sustainability Coordinator. One of Ghita's first tasks was to create a sustainability plan. First drafted in 2009, and updated in 2015, BVSD's Sustainability Management System (SMS) has served as a comprehensive road map for the district's sustainability efforts.

THE PROBLEM

Since 2009, BVSD has implemented facilities and operations-related programs that have had a tremendous impact on sustainability. However, BVSD was struggling to incorporate education for sustainability into the district's teaching and learning program. This challenge was top-of-mind when Ghita first spoke with Green Schools National Network's (GSNN) Jennifer Seydel in September 2019 to seek help in creating a new action plan driven by whole school sustainability. Working with GSNN would enable BVSD to bring an educator's mindset to the planning process, which had been led by engineers up to this point.

OUR IMPACT

The action planning process kicked off in fall 2020 and was a true collaborative effort, with involvement from district staff, teachers, parents, and community partners. A first step was developing a progress report that detailed the current status of BVSD's sustainability work, where gaps existed, and recommendations for focus areas in the new action plan. The report was presented at BVSD's March 2021 sustainability leadership summit and was the subject of four focus groups GSNN conducted in March and April 2021, one for each area of the report (buildings, materials, transportation, and education), to consider and build on existing recommendations.

Working with GSNN, BVSD created a five-year sustainability action plan that goes beyond an operations focus to integrate best practices across the entire school system related to health, equity, and sustainability – in leadership, curriculum and instruction, culture and climate, and facilities and operations.



RESULTS

BVSD's sustainability action plan received approval from district leadership in June 2021 and the board of education in September 2021. The plan includes a new vision and mission that align with BVSD's strategic plan and each of its four focus areas includes three to four supporting goals that put in place new systems and structures, such as a professional learning plan to supports deeper learning and practice related to sustainability and an approach to identifying how and where education for sustainability can be integrated into the curriculum. Each focus area also includes indicators and measures that will be used to collect data to assess progress and make decisions. BVSD's sustainability action plan has already spurred some early successes. These include:

- Formation of a Sustainability Advisory Group.
- Creation of a sustainability dashboard, set to launch in spring 2022. The dashboard will help each school collect and track data related to healthy, equitable, and sustainable best practices. Each school has a "green report card" that allows them to see their energy, water, and waste data, and how they compare to other BVSD schools.
- Incorporation of green building design principles into BVSD's technical specifications, which will be used to assess facilities for future needs and integrated into guidance documents for building design.
- A curriculum pilot of a new K-5 biomimicry unit, with support from GSNN and the Biomimicry Institute.
- An assessment of learning spaces to determine what is needed to meet the goal of creating green schoolyards and outdoor learning spaces at all elementary schools and increasing outdoor learning spaces at all secondary schools by adding seating and shading.