



THE PROJECT: SUSTAINABLE CAFETERIA

Over the past year, Environment, Climate, and Ocean Sustainability (ECOS) students presented different sustainability concepts to administrators and the architects designing a new cafeteria for Libertyville High school. We conducted a trash audit to quantify our waste and demonstrated to the group that recycling, composting, and promoting reusable containers had the greatest environmental impact. ECOS students then pivoted to creating ideas to change school culture and student behavior to promote pro-social waste stream management, such as proper sorting of compost, recycling, and trash. We saw an opportunity to implement a functional waste stream program with the new cafeteria, which was in the early planning stages.

Project Type: Waste
Students Involved: 30
Staff Involved: 3
Location: Libertyville
Grade Levels Involved: 9-12th
Number of Students Impacted: 400



We performed a waste audit to quantify the waste stream, which allowed us to calculate cost/benefit analysis, and uncover cultural barriers within the student population.



PROCESS

To inform their recommendations to the cafeteria planning committee, the club created surveys to gauge school culture and conducted a waste audit of the cafeteria. Once they had presented their recommendations, the club switched focus to education and behavioral change campaigns. They created an educational video to announce the new recycling bins and teach students how to use them properly. They also engaged the student body with a poster design competition for the posters that will mark the compost, trash, and recycling center of the new cafeteria. They also wrote and presented a petition to the School Board to develop and adopt a sustainability plan.

OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Based on the club’s recommendations, the school board agreed to re-establish the cafeteria’s recycling system, switch to reusable silverware, and include a compost plan in the design of the new cafeteria’s waste stations. Waste stations will also include a sink for people to empty liquids and rinse reusable containers. Looking forward, students hope their work will not only ensure that the cafeteria is built with a sustainability focus, but that their work will lead to district policy updates to include sustainability in decision making. Students are now more aware of proper recycling behaviors and our community is more engaged with speaking up for sustainable practices in our school district. They presented [this recording](#) at the 2024 IGA Celebration going over their final project.

PETITION TO FORMALLY INCLUDE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES AT D128

We, the students, staff, and community members of High School District 128, in acknowledgement of the District’s rising energy costs, the increasing risk of climate-related damage to infrastructure, and for the sake of shaping a more sustainable planet for the future, urge our District’s school board to take more meaningful and DARING¹ steps towards pursuing environmentally sustainable practices in our schools. We applaud the projects the D128 School Board has implemented over the last several years to help lower our global footprint, including the high efficiency lighting and parking lots at VHHS that are ready for vehicle charging stations, however we encourage the Board to take more aggressive steps, such as:

- 1. CONSIDERING SUSTAINABILITY IN CAPITAL PROJECTS**
With several capital projects on our horizon, we are asking for a formal process to be put into place requiring the Board to incorporate the three lenses of sustainability — social, economic, and environmental — before submitting capital projects for bidding.
- 2. DECARBONIZING THE DISTRICT THROUGH AGGRESSIVE GOAL-SETTING**
District 128’s DARING Mission statement alone will not help us achieve the ideals that it represents. We must be setting goals to reduce our carbon footprint in accordance with the guidance issued by the US Government’s Fifth National Climate Assessment², which asserts that we must achieve net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2050. We ask that the Board use the K12 Climate in Action³ resources to help guide the formalization and adoption of a District climate policy.
- 3. ACTIVELY PURSUING SUSTAINABILITY OPPORTUNITIES**
These opportunities include, but are not limited to: a transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy sources such as solar energy, investing in charging stations for electric cars, use of reusable cafeteria china and silverware in our cafeterias, commercial food waste composting, improved water conservation and rain-water harvesting systems, permeable pavement, the removal of buckthorn and other invasive species throughout our campus grounds, and the incorporation of sustainability into our culture and curriculum.

1 - District 128’s DARING mission aims to help students become Dreamers and Doers, Aware of Issues, Resilient and Healthy, Inquisitive, Nimble, and Globally Focused.
2 - The Fifth National Climate Assessment is the US Government’s preeminent report on climate change impacts, risks, and responses. It is a congressionally mandated interagency effort that provides the scientific foundation to support informed decision-making across the United States” as stated on the site.
3 - The K-12 Climate Action resources were created by the nonprofit organization called the Aspen Institute to help schools create climate action plans.