The 2012 Greenest School on Earth: Green School Bali

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It's been a very exciting few weeks at Green School Bali since the Center for Green School's Rachel Gutter visited and presented us with the award as "2012 Greenest School on Earth." There were close to 400 students, staff, parents and friends gathered in our beautiful open-air bamboo coliseum for an Earth Day assembly, and only a small handful had any inkling about the announcement beforehand. Lots of hooting and hollering ensued!

We're coming towards the end of just our fourth year of operation, and on many levels we are still a work in progress. We've traveled pretty far in a relatively short time, and due to the unique nature of the school and our goal of doing everything in the most environmentally sustainable ways possible we have attracted a considerable amount of attention and media coverage from around the world. But especially early on, there were plenty of challenges, and it's still not easy. This is a physically large project, it's conceptually ambitious, and we're trying to do all of this in the middle of the jungle. It's taken a lot of hard work to get here, and there is plenty more ahead. I can't describe therefore how much it means to receive the Greenest School on Earth Award. We are truly honored and thrilled that our efforts have been acknowledged by the Center for Green Schools and the U.S. Green Building Council. Thank you and terima kasih from Bali!

Here's a little more about us: Green School offers all of the traditional subjects to an international population of 240 students in Pre-K through Grade 11 (and expanding to Grade 12 in 2012-2013) representing at least 25 countries, including a scholarship program for local Balinese children. Academic education at Green School comes wrapped in rich layers of experiential, environmental and entrepreneurial learning. As much as possible, lessons are taken out of the classroom and applied in hands-on ways that have a connection to the natural world. Our goal is simple but ambitious: to provide our students with the skills and content to be effective and successful competitors in an ever-shrinking world while at the same time expanding their sense of being more environmentally responsible citizens with a different sense of possibilities for how we can continue to develop as a fragile planet.

The campus has been designed and built to have as small an impact as possible on the environment. Therefore, only a handful of trees were cut down, and most of those were successfully replanted elsewhere (several structures still feature live trees growing through their roofs), and buildings were erected according to the natural topography of the land, so no moving of the earth was required. Bamboo is the primary structural material used, but other local, natural and renewable elements are also employed, including alang-alang thatch, volcanic stone, rammed earth, and traditional Balinese mud wall.

Open air structures allow for natural light and ventilation, and aided by ceiling fans and an innovative system of enclosable, air-conditioned bubbles, stay cool even during the hottest days in the jungle. Green School grows much of the food it consumes, including organic rice, fruit and vegetables, and we are in the process of getting ourselves off the grid through solar, micro-hydro and biogas projects around the campus. Green School is home to a number of innovative environmental initiatives, including a project in association with the Begawan Foundation to breed several endangered bird species, including the beautiful Bali Starling, in specially built aviaries, and a program that teaches local farmers traditional methods of growing organic rice. Green School students take part in these programs, a great example of "learning by doing" and getting involved with local communities.

For more information please see www.greenschool.org or email us: info@greenschool.org

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