



Arkansas Green Schools Challenge

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The first annual Arkansas Green Schools Challenge is coming to a close, and a [great article](#) was recently published on the program in February's Arkansas Green Guide magazine. The Challenge was a joint effort between the [USGBC-Arkansas Chapter](#) and the [Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators \(AAEA\)](#). Arkansas K-12 Grade schools were challenged to form a student team to find ways to green their school, while working with a USGBC member or green building professional as a mentor to implement the projects. The overall goal is to empower students and communities to be good stewards of their own environment, while promoting greener schools throughout Arkansas. In all, 41 schools from across the state began the program and 20 submitted entries for judges review last week. Prizes will be awarded in April to for winners in elementary, middle and high school categories.

You can read the full article below:

[School of Thought: Green Schools Challenge Grooms a New Generation of Sustainable Thinkers](#)

By Amanda Hoelzeman

Note: this article was cross posted from [InArkansas.com](#)

There's an educational movement going on in schools around Arkansas, and it's about more than just reading, writing and arithmetic. In addition to the core curriculum, students are being taught ways to become more eco-conscious, responsible stewards of the earth.

It all started with the Arkansas chapter of the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). Dustin Davis – a project manager for Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects as well as the chair of the USGBC's Green Schools Committee – helped get the sustainable ball rolling.

"As chair, I'm always thinking of ways that we can do more in the community," he said.

An idea came to him when he attended a national symposium for Green Schools Committee chairs. During the symposium, he met a committee chair from Virginia who had spearheaded a green schools challenge for his chapter, in which students worked with mentors to help make their schools and communities more sustainable.

"I realized this was a way to get students to interact with those in the building industry, while also promoting greener schools," Davis said.

He and the committee approached the Arkansas Education Association, which agreed to reach out to its membership. Soon, interest from schools in every corner of the state began pouring in.

"We hoped to get eight or 10 schools to sign up the first year [2011], and we got 41. I never dreamed the first year we'd have such a great response," Davis said. "We want to get students, teachers and communities to think more about sustainability. We want to educate our kids and get them thinking about their careers and green industry jobs."

Steve Kinzler, president and CEO of Polk Stanley Wilcox Architects, agrees that starting with our youngest generation is the best way to ensure a sustainable future.

"Educating the educators and educating the common public is what the USGBC is all about. Everyone cares about their kids and their kids' education, so getting in front of the students is the best way to start growing that knowledge," he said.

How It Works

Davis says that schools sign up to participate in the challenge in May. Once the new school year begins in the fall, students at participating schools must come up with a sustainable or "green" idea that will positively impact their school and/or the community, and then document the results throughout the school year. To give all the schools equal footing, each is assigned a mentor to help develop and guide their green ideas, which should cost less than \$500 to execute.

Mentors – mostly members of the USGBC Arkansas chapter – range from architects, engineers and contractors, to green building consultants, building product suppliers and landscape architects. They're asked to spend four hours a month mentoring at their assigned school or doing research. They can't count travel time into the equation, as some of the schools are several hours away.

In March, a nonbiased group of green "experts" will judge the success of each

school's based on their submitted documentation, and choose winners in four categories: best elementary school, best middle school, best high school and best overall.

Nabholz Construction has donated money to award the 2011-12 overall winning school \$750 and each of the other winning schools \$500, sums that will be used to advance the schools' green initiatives.

"Ideally, as soon as the awards are announced, we'll launch into the next year," Davis said. Schools who have already participated can improve upon their existing programs, or sign up again with another goal in mind. Davis and his committee want plenty of new schools to participate, too.

This year's projects encompass a wide range of green goals, from recycling paper and plastics and upcycling non-recyclables, to turning off lights and electronics, to walking and/or bicycling more to school.

At Paris High School, "some kids are volunteering after football games to pick up garbage and make sure it's separated properly for recycling," Davis said. "To think that kids heading out after a football game will take 30 minutes to do that without bonus points, just because it's the right thing to do, is quite impressive."

Many of the schools are focusing on conserving energy, as that's an easy-to-measure goal that can save significant chunks of money at the same time.

Students at Cedarville High School - who participate in the challenge as a part of their Environmental & Sustainable Technologies (EAST) Lab - are saving energy by identifying areas that require caulking, weatherstripping and insulation, or added insulation, said mentor Kevin Cooper, an architect at Resource Design Group in Rogers. The school is even thinking of installing an infrared thermometer to aid in the documentation of air flow in the open areas.

Karen Bley is the school counselor at Leverett Elementary in Fayetteville and is also the director of the school's "Green Team" activities. Their focus for the challenge is on education, so they're creating a video that details tips for energy savings at home. They want to post the video online for parents and members of the community to watch.

Other schools are doing more outdoor-focused projects. "The welding shop at one school is going to build a bike rack and encourage students to walk or bike to school," Davis said. In one small town, the school has set up several points in town at which junior and senior high school students will walk groups of younger children to the elementary school in the mornings.

Davis is optimistic about the outcome of the challenge. "Hopefully, it will create happier schools with kids more involved and dedicated." As for teachers and administration, Davis says the benefits lie in money savings, LEED and tax credits, and in tying the green challenge into the core curriculum—into math, science and even reading and English.

A Model School

One of the schools that has excelled at the challenge is Wooster Elementary, a small public school just north of Conway, in Faulkner County, with an enrollment of around 480 K-fifth-graders.

Kevin McMahan, a LEED AP and managing partner with Federal Practice Group LLC, is the school's mentor, and WES first-grade teacher Ashley Hammett is the program director.

Driving through rural Wooster, the school can be seen jutting out of the top of a hill. It's clear that this school - with its tall, peaked roofs, sharp, nontraditional angles and ample windows - is not your ordinary schoolhouse.

A quick conversation with the school's principal, Kelli Martin, confirms the details. WES was designed by Jackson Brown King Architects of Little Rock and built by Dayco Construction of Damascus in 2008. It features exposed building systems, makes the most of daylight, and has carbon dioxide sensors in each of its 27 classrooms to provide students with a healthy exchange of fresh air.

In 2009, it became the first school in the state to achieve LEED for Schools Silver certification. Because of its LEED status, the school already had a number of green programs in place, but Hammett said there were certain things they could improve upon with the challenge.

Upon entering kindergarten, WES students are educated to recycle their waste. Hammett decided to up the ante by having her first-graders collect drink pouches - like Capri Sun - to send to TerraCycle, a national company whose goal is to eliminate waste by creating recycling systems for previously non-recyclable or hard-to-recycle items. TerraCycle upcycles the waste into usable items like messenger bags or tote bags and cuts the school a small check for their efforts.

"They get so excited to collect them," Hammett said of her first-graders and the drink pouches, "they'll even bring them from home."

For water savings, educators emphasize flushing the toilet only once and taking five-second drinks at the water fountain.

The class also started a "Turn It Off" campaign, where students make a conscious effort to turn off the TV, SMART Boards and lights when they leave a room, despite the fact that the lights are already on timers. Posters placed near

switches and doors remind students of their commitment to the environment.

The overflowing recycling trailer outside – obtained through a grant from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality via the Faulkner County Solid Waste Management District – is another reminder. The school’s Green Team, which is comprised of third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, is responsible for getting the recycling into the bin every week, said Hammett, who points out that the school also encourages the community to use the trailer.

The program extends beyond the classroom in other ways as well. The first year the school was open, Martin says, the school hosted a “Trashion Show” for the community, and students strutted the runway wearing outfits and accessories they made out of recycled materials. “It was so much fun,” she laughed.

Hammett and the other first-grade teachers, Lynzie Brewer and Megan Girdler, are also working to put together a newsletter that will give parents tips for going green and teaching sustainability at home.

An electronics recycling drive is taking place soon, too, and Hammett hopes to get plenty of donations from the community that she can send to Recycling Fundraiser, in exchange for money to purchase new technology equipment. But Hammett is realistic and says she has no idea how much, if any, money they’ll make.

“It’s not about the money. My first priority is to get the kids involved in recycling.”

It’s this type of mentality that will hopefully make Arkansas’ youngest generation more attuned to the needs of our planet and our increasingly precarious environmental situation.

“Green schools are more than buildings. They are places where children learn the wonders of the world and teachers prepare the next generation of leaders and citizens,” said Linda Smith, executive director of the USGBC Arkansas Chapter. “Both educating our children at an early age and personally involving them in the environmental responsibility of their own school will surely benefit communities across Arkansas for generations to come.”

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