Currently December Update: Center for Green Schools Fellowship Program

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The most effective way to positively transform our learning environment is to ensure that school districts have the tools and resources to not only implement improvements to facilities and operations, but to maintain and scale them over the years. This sustained transformation simply cannot occur without a dedicated, internal champion who can change the culture of a school district from the inside. The Center has launched a short video explaining the impact of the Center for Green Schools Fellowship Program, featuring our two 2011 Center for Green Schools UTC Fellows, who were hired to address this particular need in school districts.

The Center for Green Schools Fellowship Program enables school districts to transform the way their facilities are built and operated by placing experienced, well-trained sustainability directors in district offices. With the help of these new staff, districts can begin or accelerate various initiatives that they may not otherwise have been able to move forward. The two 2011 Fellows, Farah McDill and Phoebe Beierle, began their work in June with a four-day inaugural training workshop in USGBC offices in Washington, D.C. Since then, they have hit the ground running in Sacramento and Boston, respectively, and have become the go-to individuals for the districts on all things green.

In mid-October, Farah directed a day-long working session with district departmental leaders in Sacramento City Unified School District to set goals for the team and to share information about current efforts (you can read more about the event on her blog entry.) Informed by dozens of interviews with staff, teachers and principals, Farah led an engaging and productive meeting that is helping to direct her work on the various initiatives with the schools, including school gardens, renewable energy projects, waste management improvements, and student- and teacher-led green school audits. Earth Day 2012 will bring an event at which school green teams will present to the district leadership their proposals for school improvements that will enable the district to act on its commitment to sustainability.

In Boston, Phoebe has been spending the fall convening various groups that work within Boston Public Schools to coordinate a more comprehensive sustainability strategy for the district. She pulled together the first meeting between 12 groups working on environmental education and sustainability education in Boston schools in September, and she has been critical in the implementation of PLUG Load energy usage curriculum at pilot schools. She is also leading the effort to incorporate recycling into Boston Public Schools' waste hauling contracts. And on Sept. 30, Phoebe assisted the Center for Green Schools in hosting a Research Summit on Childhood Health and School Buildings, a discussion to reconnect and advance the work of a 2006 report entitled "Green Schools: Attributes for Health and Learning."

The coming year will bring Phoebe and Farah from the planning stage into implementation, recording and tracking progress, and the Center for Green Schools looks forward to sharing their host school districts' successes and lessons learned. As was made plain to us during the Fellowship Training in June, where we were joined by 40 sustainability leaders working in schools around the country, the experiences of the Fellows apply to much of the work we are all doing to advance green schools.

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