The Center for Green Schools and Princeton Review Release Free Guide to 322 Green Colleges

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"In order to solve our climate problems, we need a coalition of leaders." This was the message delivered by Boston Latin School's Youth Climate Action Network leaders, Rebecca Park and Eshe Sherley, as they addressed two dozen peer students who had gathered to envision how a rooftop sustainability learning center could shape their educational experience in and out of school. Students, teachers, non-profit leaders and even EPA Region 1 Administrator Kurt Spaulding gathered together in the new LEED certified wing of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum to dream big and discuss sustainability initiatives.

Members of BLS YouthCAN and students from around the Boston Public School district are raising their voices, pursuing leadership roles and taking the climate crisis into their own hands. These students have a vision for what the 21st century learning environment should be and they are on a mission to show others.

BLS YouthCAN is supervised by Cate Arnold, a 7th grade teacher and recently traveled to Antarctica as one of the Center for Green School's "Coolest Teachers in the World." Her students have certainly set the bar for youth led sustainability efforts in Boston, racking up a long list of accomplishments including raising over $240,000 to date, hosting a successful Youth Climate Summit for the past 4 years at MIT and being the first public school in the nation to win the Eco Schools USA Green Schools Flag Award.

The group has achieved much at their own school but they don't stop there. Last summer they designed, fundraised and led 10 Boston high school students through a summer green jobs energy audit program that culminated in energy audits at five sites and presentations back to the community on the findings. And then there is Boston's Shared Green Roof and Sustainability Learning Center. With a $6 million dollar price tag, three phased proposal and countless partners involved, this is the most ambitious youth led project I've ever seen and these students are determined to succeed. Their vision is to create a community space on the roof of their school, the oldest public high school in the nation, where students, teachers and the general public can explore education for sustainability.
When I'm not attending YouthCAN events, I spend time in Boston's other 124 schools learning about student-led sustainability initiatives.

Recently during a recycling walkthrough at the Hernandez school, a teacher shared with me how the Green Team collects recycling in each classroom and also leaves personal notes for the teacher about how they did that week, encouraging better behavior and improved recycling rates. At the O'Bryant School of Math & Science, energy is a key focus for the physics and environmental science classes where students conduct their own energy audits, counting lights and measuring appliance energy usage.

There are countless other stories like this in Boston schools and examples of successful and inspiring models where students are put in charge and given the opportunity to act. At the close of the YouthCAN led Shared Green Roof visioning event, Rebecca and Eshe closed by asking their peers to "take a step back as a student and think about what you want to do to impact the world." The students in Boston have taken pause, are on board with a shared vision for sustainability and are ready to act!

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