

# Learnings from a Learning Institution

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Things are buzzing in the facilities department and the administration building at [Boston Public School \(BPS\)](#) as everyone is preparing for the students to return for the 2012 school year. I'm now one month into my [Center for Green Schools UTC Fellowship](#) in Boston, and I'm finally figuring out how to describe my role. It's been a challenging yet exciting first few months, and I'm being inspired more and more every day by amazing students and devoted school leaders. While the web of BPS sustainability initiatives is a hard one to navigate, I've been able to learn so much from my peers as well as the kids who make BPS so special and are very appreciative of my role in the district.

The biggest challenge so far has been distilling the vast amount of knowledge to be gained from working in such a large learning and teaching institution. Sometimes I feel like I'm pulling teeth to get out the amazing stories, successes and challenges with sustainability that have occurred over the 15 or 20 years of teacher and staff tenure. But for the most part, my co-workers are open to sharing their work and ideas for improvements. Through more than 25 interviews and countless interactions with students being trained for green jobs in the energy field, I've learned some key lessons about sustainability and leadership. Here is some advice I take to heart:

- Start small but dream big
- There is great power in keeping an open mind and being creative
- Find and follow the money
- Don't be shy - put on a green spandex suit or a CO2 Hazmat Pollution costume and get people's attention
- Use data to make your case
- Double-sided printing is not as standard as previously thought
- Communicate, communicate and communicate some more
- Everyone has a role with sustainability, so make sure to include everyone
- Take shorter showers
- Take partnerships with local organizations seriously
- Make lots of friends
- Don't forget, what we do is all about the students

I can hardly wait to share more of what I continue to learn in my role here (the costume is already reserved) and I'm equally eager to learn more from Boston's teachers, community partners and inspirational students. What lessons, if any, have you learned about greening an institution?

*With the belief that change occurs when you make it someone's job, the [Center for Green Schools Fellowship program](#) is a unique initiative that provides school districts with a fully-funded, dedicated sustainability expert for three years. The Fellows collaborate with district leadership to ensure school districts have the tools and resources to not only implement improvements to facilities and operations, but to sustain these improvements over the years. United Technologies Corp., founding sponsor of the Center for Green Schools, has fully funded the first class of Fellows, located in the Boston and Sacramento public school districts.*

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