

Greening Detroit Public Schools to Reduce Costs and Strengthen Communities

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[Detroit Public Schools \(DPS\)](#) is developing a comprehensive Sustainability Management Plan (SMP) to reduce costs, benefit communities, boost student achievement and prepare students for jobs. The SMP has six focus areas: Energy Management, Waste Management and Recycling, Indoor Environment, Outdoor Environment, Transportation, and Student Nutrition. DPS has also recently completed the construction of seven new schools pending LEED certification.

To help implement the SMP and provide resources for student, teacher, and parent engagement, DPS has partnered with Detroit's [WARM Training Center](#), a non-profit organization and USGBC National Member, for the inaugural 2012-2013 DPS Go Green Challenge.

Drawing on WARM's 30 years of expertise in supporting community members in sustainability leadership, this collaboration engages students and staff in best-practice energy management in schools. To date, 34 participating schools have formed green teams in which students are actively empowered to lead sustainability projects such as: hunting for incandescent lights to replace with CFLs; forming "energy patrols," which promote energy saving behaviors; creating school sustainability plans; and much more. The DPS Go Green Challenge doesn't stop at school doors; "Bringing it Home" project components and direct parent engagement through workshops like "No Cost/Low Cost Ways to Cut Down on Your Energy Bill" reveal the collaboration's message that "green is for everyone."

The DPS Go Green Challenge was born once DPS estimated that simple, no-cost behavioral changes could result in more than \$1 million a year in energy savings for the district. The program is voluntary and challenges schools to reduce their energy usage while lowering their utility costs. Each school that lowers usage by more than 10 percent receives a cash award, and the school that reduces usage by the highest percentage in each category receives twice the original amount. For elementary schools, a 10 percent reduction earns a \$750 prize, and the winning school earns \$1,500. Middle schools that reduce utility bills by 10 percent earn \$1,000; the winning middle school earns \$2,000. Finally, high schools that reduce costs by 10 percent earn \$1,200. The high school winner earns \$2,400.

Schools and students are supported by WARM's AmeriCorps Green School Coordinators, some of whom are USGBC Detroit Regional Chapter members. Beyond gaining powerful mentorship, high school students involved in the Challenge can earn AmeriCorps scholarships worth \$1,175 per student and paid green summer jobs. These students are responsible for managing community projects through the end of the 2012-2013 school year that are designed to incorporate sustainability principles.

The Go Green Challenge received significant press this past year, including [two articles in Triple Pundit](#) and [local news coverage](#). A [WDET local radio station podcast](#) of the Go Green Challenge is available as well.

This collaboration is especially inspiring when considering the pressing budget crisis DPS faces. DPS Energy Manager Emile Lauzzana shares the collaboration's belief that green schools are not more expensive, but rather a solution to financial crisis, emphasizing, "We can't afford NOT to go green."

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