

Environmental Education, Awareness & Accountability

Narrative for 2010 Golden Bell Entry Form

Submitted by the Oak Park Unified School District

Program Description

The Oak Park Unified School District believes it is important that we serve as community leaders in the area of environmental awareness and sensitivity. In addition to incorporating environmental education into our instructional program, we are working to serve as an example for our students and community. The School Board has adopted principles and practices to accomplish this goal. Some of the sustainable, renewable, energy and resource efficient programs that OPUSD has incorporated into its facilities and/or maintenance to ensure a safe and healthy environment for students and staff while focusing on using sustainable, non-toxic and environmentally friendly products include: using only organic fertilizers on our landscape and turf throughout the district; adopting an Integrated Pest Management system and using only eco-safe pest reduction products; using cleaning supplies made from all natural eco-safe substances; and, purchasing paper that has a high recycled content. In addition, our Child Nutrition (Food Services) program uses a ‘no additive’ policy and we do not serve beef or other red meat. All serving trays are also made from corn and are recycled.

Other significant environmental improvements that have been made to the district’s schools’ campuses and that will have long-term positive benefits are: the installation of a bioswale system in the high school parking lot that absorbs rainwater run-off into an infiltration system so that water and pollutants do not run into the local creek and the water is absorbed into the water table instead; the installation of solar panels at Oak Hills Elementary School to offset the power used by the greenhouse and garden located there; and, the utilization of ‘cool roof’ designs that reflect sunlight and provide substantial insulation on school buildings.

OPUSD also has an Environmental Education and Awareness Committee (EEAC), which has been responsible for the incorporation of a number of environmental initiatives on the school campuses as well as implementing community events that serve to enhance environmental education, awareness, and

accountability. For example, recycling programs are in place at the schools and the EEAC facilitated the installation of hydration stations and reusable water bottles on the campuses to reduce plastic water bottle consumption. EEAC also coordinates Earth Week activities at the schools such as walk-to-school days and plant a tree along with community events including Oak Park Clean-up Day and EarthFest, an event that includes student booths, organizations and vendors that provide information on environmental issues and products.

Evidence of Success

Students, parents, district personnel and the community have embraced the environmental initiatives that OPUSD has incorporated. For example, at school registration, many of the schools sold out of their initial allotment of stainless steel water bottles for use with the hydration stations and had to order more. In addition, the schools' and district's waste has been reduced extensively (approximately 80%) through the recycling program. Numerous OPUSD families and community members participate in the Oak Park Clean-up Day and attend the EarthFest. Many parents have also commended the district for using eco-safe cleaning products.

Innovation

This program is innovative in that it is a comprehensive, district-wide initiative that provides numerous opportunities that are exciting and fun for the students, parents and community to enhance their environmental education/awareness and reduce their carbon footprint. The solar panels installed for the greenhouse and garden were part of an Edison Challenge project developed by students at Oak Park High School and the panels were provided to the District at no cost. In addition to the programs highlighted earlier in this application, 'use a shoe' drives, recycle art projects, the "Plant a Billion Trees" campaign are other creative programs that encourage OPUSD students to look at environmental issues both locally and globally.

Sustainability

Many of the environmental initiatives implemented by OPUSD such as use of recycled and 'green' products do not increase costs, and in many cases reduce costs. The major environmental improvements

to school and district facilities are funded through a school bond that was approved by the Oak Park community. The EEAC receives funds for its programs through donations and occasional grants, as well as contributions from the schools' parent organizations. It is important to note that there are also long-term savings involved with many of these environmental programs. The 'cool roofs' that have been installed on some of the school buildings are rated to save the District about \$12,000 a year in energy costs.

Connections to District Plan

As part of the OPUSD's Teaching and Learning Action Plan, one of its primary goals is to develop and implement a district-wide plan for environmental awareness that will focus on the impact that individual students can have on conservation of resources including energy, water, carbon footprints and global warming. Under the directive of the School Board, an Environmental Education Awareness Committee was formed and is actively overseeing this process. The Committee is comprised of district personnel, parents, and community representatives and has led to increased recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, carpooling and walk-to-school days. In addition, the School Board's master facilities plan has incorporated 'green' technology and products into renovations being conducted on school campuses (i.e. 'cool roofs') as well as day-to-day operations (i.e. green cleaning products and eco-safe pest reduction.)

Communication

The Oak Park community is informed about this program through feature articles, event announcements, and photographs in our local newspaper. In addition, the superintendent chronicles the program in the schools' electronic newsletters that are distributed to their respective list serves of parents, educators, and other key stakeholders.

Replication

The OPUSD, specifically the EEAC, is able to serve as a resource for other schools and districts that would like to replicate these types of environmental education and awareness programs.