

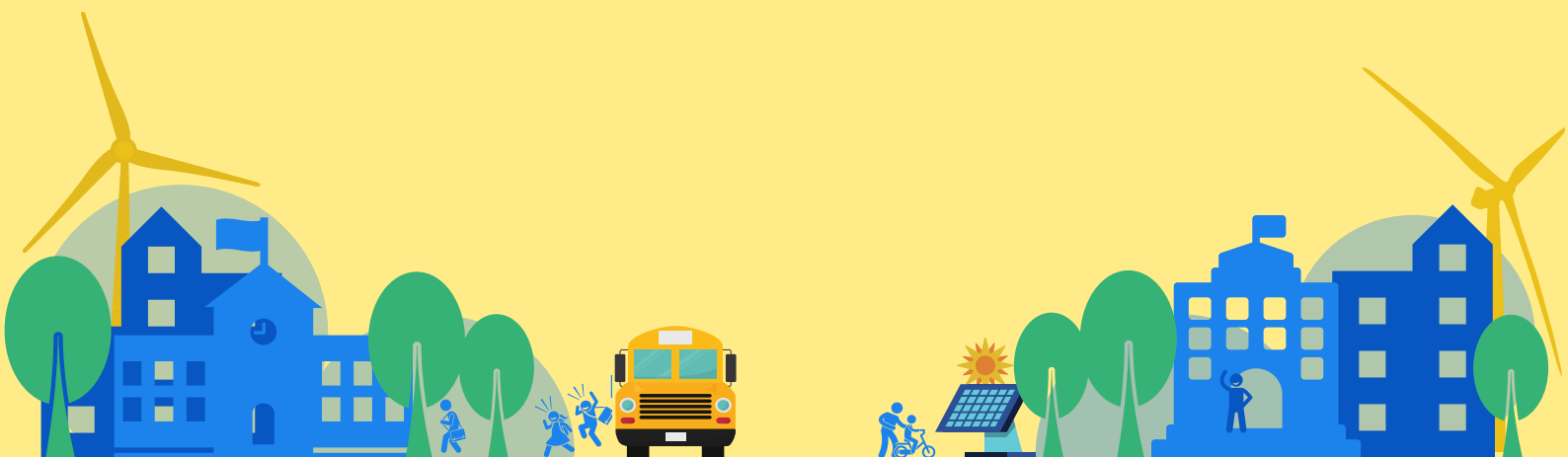


GREEN SCHOOLS  
ALLIANCE



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A  
**WHOLE SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY  
BENCHMARKING TOOL  
BUILT FOR PREK-12 SCHOOLS**



# HOW START WORKS



## 2. SET GOALS

Use your baseline to create a strategic plan for progress through the START's 3 tiers. Each metric has a Cost, Difficulty & Impact rating to help you plan according to your priorities and resources.



## 4. CONNECT & COLLABORATE

Participate in discussions with your team and share documents and resources. Connect with other schools to share ideas, resources and best practices.



## 6. PROGRESS

Update your answers any time and plan for continuous improvement.



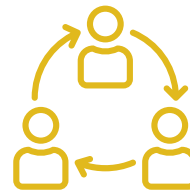
## 1. ESTABLISH A BASELINE

by answering simple Yes or No questions across START's 53 metrics. START meets you where you are, whether Beginner, Intermediate or Advanced.



## 3. ACCESS RESOURCES

Easily access 'How To' guides, curriculum resources and hands-on student activities to help you integrate each metric and engage the school community.



## 5. SHARE

You can choose to share your school's progress publicly or keep it private.



## ACHIEVE WHOLE SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY

Become a healthy, sustainable school, and an engine for positive change in your community.

## THE START FRAMEWORK: WHOLE SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY

"A Whole-School Sustainability approach requires individuals from across an organization to work together—it cannot be accomplished in a silo."



[VIEW  
THE WHOLE SCHOOL  
SUSTAINABILITY  
FRAMEWORK](#)

START's metrics are rooted in the Whole School Sustainability Framework, a research study performed by the Institute for the Built Environment at Colorado State University and adopted by the US Center for Green Schools at the US Green Building Council.

The framework is founded on the imperative that in order to be successful, schools must adopt a **whole-system approach** that integrates **sustainability into all aspects of a school organization**, specifically its:

- Educational Programs
- Organizational Culture
- Physical Place

In 2016, the Green Schools Alliance convened an inclusive committee of school-specific experts from independent and public schools across the US, including administrators, teachers and facilities managers, as well as data quality analysts, to collectively design a blueprint that would map out the full scope of Whole School Sustainability across actionable metrics and progressive levels of achievement.

This blueprint was used to develop START: Sustainability Tracking and Roadmap Tool, a long-needed standardized benchmarking tool designed to help pre-K to 12 schools methodically create healthier, more sustainable and equitable learning environments through clearly defined steps and activities. Additionally, START's metrics align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the US Green Ribbon program.



### EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

- Curriculum
- Co-curricular activities



### ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

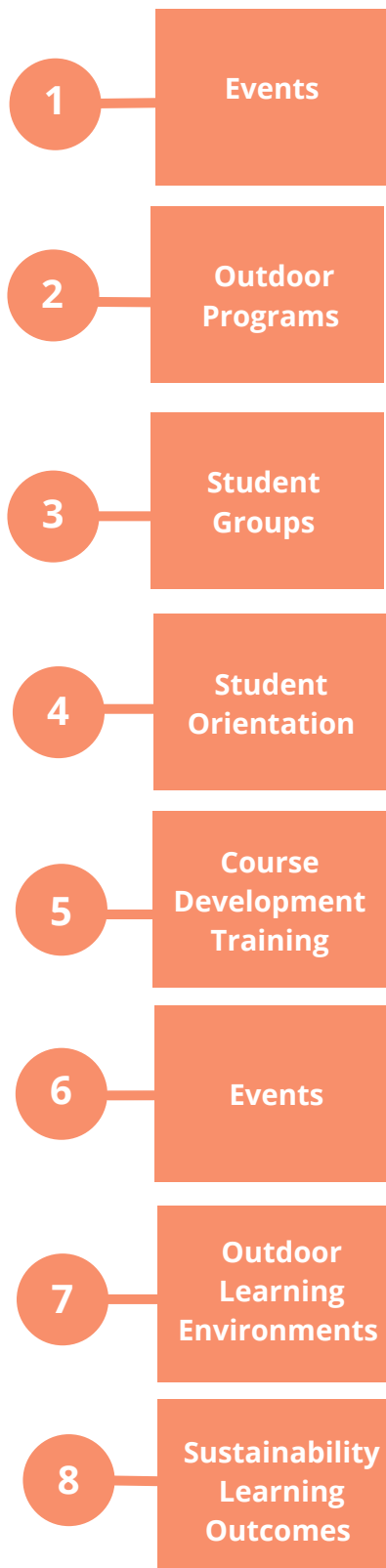
- Community engagement
- Coordination & planning
- Diversity & affordability
- Human resources
- Wellness



### PHYSICAL PLACE

- Air & Climate
- Buildings & grounds
- Energy
- Food service
- Transportation
- Waste management
- Water

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS



**Organizing and hosting sustainability-related events, with students as the intended audience.** Examples include assemblies, guest speakers, fairs, summits, symposiums, webinars, movie screenings, or even a live-streamed concert.

**Encouraging students to connect with their natural surroundings** through activities like camping, hiking, stream cleanups and outdoor summer camps. Schools will provide information about or access to outdoor programs, and will later require student participation, to promote student well-being and encourage sustainable, nature-conscious mindsets in schools and students alike.

**Building student engagement in environmental and/or sustainability activities,** such as an Enviro-Club, a Student Sustainability Council, or student-driven collection drives, carbon-offsetting initiatives or basic waste audits. These groups should be student-driven, active and engaged through recurring meetings.

**Organizing and hosting sustainability-related events,** with students as the intended audience. Examples include assemblies, guest speakers, fairs, summits, symposiums, webinars, movie screenings, or even a live-streamed concert.

**Educating and incentivizing teachers to integrate sustainability into their curriculum.** With an understanding of the broad meaning of sustainability, which encompasses economic, social and environmental factors, this training will help teachers integrate sustainability-related content into their existing courses.

**Integrating sustainability-related content into academic subjects in every grade.** Rather than offering Sustainability as a subject on its own, it is incorporated into existing courses. This metric goes hand-in-hand with Course Development Training (metric 7), in which teachers learn how to do this integration.

**Providing access to outdoor areas that are readily accessible** to classes (low cost/ low time expense), and can serve as a learning space for various existing subjects. For example, an on-campus garden or a neighborhood stream are environments that are easily integrated into the Science or Biology curricula for many age groups.

**Formally or informally assessing students** according to whether or not they've achieved predetermined, **sustainability-related learning outcomes within at least 2 school subjects each year.**



# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



- 9

Nutrition

**Promoting a nutritious diet in a sustainable manner through accessible activities and programs.** Whether it's providing nutritional information for school lunches, running 'Meatless Mondays', or a farm-to-school program, each activity/program will have an educational component that ensures an enduring impact.
- 10

Outreach Campaigns

**Connecting with and improving the wider community.** Every year, schools will engage in sustainability-related outreach campaigns that pursue measurable results and have active and educational components, such as No Idling Campaigns, midnight runs, electronics-recycling campaigns or community gardens. Unlike events, campaigns may last a few weeks or even a few months, but conclude once they have fulfilled their aim.
- 11

Communications

**Providing ongoing, formal communication about the school's sustainability programs and progress to the school community.** This could be in the form of social media posts, websites, annual reports, newsletters, or in-person presentations.
- 12

Community Service

**Providing students with information about or access to community service opportunities.** Students will contribute to their wider communities through activities that benefit others (e.g. reading to the elderly), animals (e.g. caring for dogs at a shelter) or the earth (e.g. tree-planting).
- 13

Local Partnerships

**Connecting and collaborate with a non-school entity from the surrounding community** (e.g. school districts, government agencies, non-profit organizations) **to advance economic, environmental and/or social sustainability.** For example, creating donation hubs or helping with invasives-removal.
- 14

Governance

**Developing transparency and stakeholder engagement at all levels of governance, including financial oversight, personnel management, and strategic planning.** Stakeholders should have their views welcomed and considered, and be kept informed and included in the decision-making process when appropriate.
- 15

Purchasing

**Procuring sustainable products** that have environmental, social and economic benefits, and protect both public health and the environment over their whole life cycle, from the extraction of raw materials until their final disposal. This runs the gamut from food, furniture and stationery to cleaning products, clothing, transport and electricity.
- 16

Strategic Planning

**Committing to environmental, economic and social sustainability when establishing the direction and long-term goals of the school, as well as the action plans your school will use to reach them.**
- 17

Sustainability Committee

**Having a dedicated committee responsible for steering the school's environmental efforts and advancing sustainability projects on campus.**
- 18

Sustainability Coordinator

**Having a school employee responsible for managing the school's broad sustainability efforts.**

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



- 19 **Sustainability Planning**  
**Outlining your school's definition of sustainability, as well as your specific sustainability goals,** including specific sustainability targets, such as eliminating plastic cutlery from the cafeteria, or reducing greenhouse gas emissions by a specified amount within a given timeframe.
- 20 **Equity Coordination**  
**Having an equity and inclusion committee that promotes equal opportunity, fairness and freedom from bias within your school.** It will work to advance the goals of recognizing, respecting and valuing differences, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation or identity, age, religion, disability, socio-economic status, etc.
- 21 **Equity Support**  
**Implementing diversity, equity and inclusion strategies to help underrepresented or underserved groups.** (e.g. advance employee diversity, address funding disparities, ensure handicap accessibility, achievement-gap reduction, address bullying, etc.)
- 22 **Low-Income Accessibility**  
**Preventing money from being a barrier to student involvement or success in your community** - student enrollment of at least 2-5% low-income students. To achieve this, schools can offer financial assistance or flexible tuition.
- 23 **Employee Feedback**  
**Allowing the people who work at your school to provide feedback in order to address issues and cultivate a safe, healthy and happy workplace for all.**
- 24 **Employee Training**  
**Educating employees (faculty, office, grounds and other staff) in sustainability --** including environmental and social efforts and standards within the school, as well as to increase their awareness of these issues on a broader level.
- 25 **Networking**  
**Exchanging sustainability-related ideas, insights, information and best practices between schools.** The Green Schools Alliance is an example of such a network, but your school should participate in other sustainability networks too, including at least 2 school-to-school networks.
- 26 **Employee Wellness**  
**Promoting the physical and psychological wellness of all school employees,** from administrators and faculty members to office staff, facilities managers and custodians. Examples of actions include mindfulness or nutrition training, community gyms, medical screenings and services, financial planning and counselling.
- 27 **Physical Activity**  
**Providing organized physical activity opportunities to students, beyond what individual states mandate.** Schools should prioritize time spent outdoors (weather permitting) and provide a variety of before-, in- or after- school activities, such as sports teams, jogathons, yoga sessions or dance breaks.
- 28 **Student Wellness Committee**  
**Having an adult group that advances the health and well-being of students** according to the committee's priorities, and eventually implementing policies and programs for student wellness.

## PHYSICAL PLACE



29

**Chemical Management**

**Following all city, state and federal regulations to properly dispose of hazardous, universal, and non-regulated chemical waste.**

30

**Electronic Waste**

**Reusing or recycling electronics, following regulations for their disposal, and eventually using certified 3rd parties (e.g. eStewards or Responsible Recycling) to dispose of e-waste.**

31

**Transition Waste**

**Organizing annual clean-outs (including all students) aimed at reusing or recycling, and eventually employing source-reduction strategies, for any items usually discarded at the end of the school year.**

32

**Waste Diversion**

**Diverting municipal solid waste ('garbage') from landfills or incinerators by recycling, composting, donating, exchanging or reselling.**

33

**Waste Minimization**

**Reducing the amount of waste that your school generates in the first place (rather than diverting waste after it's already been produced), e.g. through conscientious resource planning and procurement, investing in durable, quality items, adjusting consumption behaviors, improving work practices.**

34

**GHG Inventory**

**Tracking and calculating the amount of GHGs your school emits (through electricity use, food waste, meat consumption, transport emissions etc.), offset against the amount of GHGs it proactively sequesters (e.g. through tree-planting, green building materials, biochar in soils, waste diversion).**

35

**GHG Reduction**

**Decreasing the amount of greenhouse gases that your school is responsible for emitting.** Reduction should start with energy efficiency, energy conservation, and renewable energy strategies.

36

**Indoor Air Quality**

**Improving indoor air quality** through control of airborne pollutants (e.g. through ventilation-filtration systems), the introduction and distribution of adequate outdoor air, and the maintenance of acceptable indoor temperature and relative humidity.

37

**Outdoor Air Quality**

**Improving the quality of the air outside your school's buildings** by addressing outdoor pollutants, e.g. through vehicle emissions, mobile sources (e.g. lawn care equipment, stationary sources (e.g. on-site generators) and pesticides.

38

**Design & Construction**

**Adopting Integrated Design - geared towards building greener and more energy-efficient facilities** when undergoing remodeling or renovations.

## PHYSICAL PLACE



- 39

**Green Cleaning**

**Adopting cleaning products and practices that preserve environmental and human health**, using products that are Green Seal or Eco Logo certified.
- 40

**Ground Management**

**Managing school grounds in ways that protect and promote environmental health and biodiversity**, for example through Integrated Pest Management and sustainable land care.
- 41

**Energy Consumption**

**Reducing your school's energy consumption.**
- 42

**Renewable Energy**

**Transitioning to clean, renewable sources of energy to provide your school's electricity and heating.** Renewable energy can be procured from a renewable energy provider, or derive from on-campus sources (e.g. biomass technologies, or solar installations that are school-owned or school-hosted via third-party-owned purchase agreements).
- 43

**Composting**

**Implementing a school composting program**, whether on-campus composting system or paying a service to collect and compost food scraps and bulkier materials such as cardboard.
- 44

**Food Procurement**

**Sourcing food from local, ecologically-sound, fair and/or humane sources**, for example, the green- and yellow- light categories of the Real Food Challenge ® standards.
- 45

**Low-Impact Dining**

**Offering vegetarian and/or vegan dining options** for school meals, and later promoting the benefits of low-impact dining in the school community.
- 46

**Tableware & Trays**

**Eliminating unnecessary waste generated by single-use tableware**, by adopting reusable, recyclable or compostable tableware.
- 47

**Employee Transportation**

**Incentivizing sustainable commutes to work**, for example through goal-setting, subsidizing public transit, installing bikeshare stations, or adopting flexible scheduling that allows for daily changes in plans.
- 48

**Motorized Fleet**

**Using vehicles that run on alternative fuel and power technology**, such as plug-in hybrids, fully electric vehicles, or vehicles fueled by hydrogen or compressed natural gas.



## PHYSICAL PLACE



49

### Student Transportation

**Working towards the goal of the majority, if not all, of your school's student body using a form of sustainable transportation as the primary means of commuting,** such as walking, biking, carpooling or vanpooling, public transportation, school shuttles, school buses, or hybrid/ electric vehicles.

50

### Transportation Support

**Implementing structures and strategies to promote sustainable commuting to and from your school,** for example carpool matching, providing preferential parking for carpool- and/ or alternative-fuel cars, providing bike racks and storage, shower facilities and lockers, providing free or reduced public transit options or campus shuttles, and providing electric vehicle recharging stations.

51

### Drinking Water Access

**Providing access to safe, appealing drinking water on the school campus.,** ensuring water is safe (contaminant-free) and appealing (in terms of taste, odor, appearance, temperature and presentation).

52

### Stormwater Management

**Using strategies and technologies to reduce runoff of rainwater or melted snow into streets, lawns and other sites,** for example through prioritizing water-permeable surfaces on campus, and incorporating measures such as rain collection or harvesting, stormwater drains, retention ponds, bioswales or rain gardens into your school grounds.

53

### Water Consumption

**Reducing the total amount of water used at your school each year.**

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