

Sustainability Action Plan

A Roadmap to Healthy and
Sustainable Schools

2026-2031



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**





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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Milwaukee lies on traditional Menominee, Potawatomi, and Ho-Chunk homeland along the southwest shores of Lake Michigan, part of North America's largest system of freshwater lakes. On this site, the Milwaukee, Menominee, and Kinnickinnic rivers meet, and the people of Wisconsin's Menominee, Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, Oneida, and Mohican sovereign nations remain present to this day.



FROM THE DESK OF SUPERINTENDENT DR. BRENDA CASSELLIUS

Dear Students, Families, Staff, and Community Members,

It is with great pride that we present Milwaukee Public School's Sustainability Action Plan: A Roadmap to Healthy and Sustainable Schools. As an active participant in our community, we have a responsibility to manage public resources equitably and sustainably, and with future generations in mind.

We are also called to ensure that our children are prepared not only to live, but to thrive on a rapidly changing planet – and to see themselves as problem solvers for the world's greatest challenges. This milestone marks a significant commitment to our students, our city, and our world.

This plan reflects diverse voices from across our district and recognizes that our schools play a vital role in addressing environmental challenges. Through this comprehensive framework, we have established clear goals and actions that will guide both our educational programs and our operational practices in the years ahead.

In our classrooms, this plan will support the integration of environmental literacy and sustainability education at every grade level. It prioritizes hands-on learning opportunities that connect students to their schoolyards, facilities, and communities – fostering curiosity, stewardship, and a strong sense of place. Our students will not only learn about sustainability; they will experience it through classroom instruction, outdoor learning spaces, and eco-conscious school operations. By doing so, we will prepare them for emerging careers in environmental and sustainability fields while helping them recognize that any job can be a green job.

In our operations, we are committed to measurable improvements in energy efficiency, waste reduction, food sourcing, and resource conservation. These efforts will reduce our environmental footprint while modeling the responsible practices we seek to instill in our students.

Every decision, from facilities management to purchasing policies, will be made through the lens of environmental responsibility alongside our fiscal responsibility to taxpayers.

This Sustainability Action Plan is the result of the dedication and collaboration of the District Sustainability Committee and all of you. I extend my gratitude to the teachers, staff members, students, families, and community partners who contributed their expertise, time, and vision to this effort. Your input has been invaluable, and your ongoing engagement will be essential as we work together to make this plan a reality.

As we embark on this important journey, I am filled with optimism about what we can accomplish together. The actions we take today will create lasting benefits for our students, our schools, and our entire community. I invite you to explore this plan, embrace its vision, and join us in building a healthier, more sustainable future for all.



Dr. Brenda Casellius

SUPERINTENDENT BRENDA CASSELLIUS, ED.D
MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



FROM MAYOR CAVALIER JOHNSON

“Environmental sustainability is about creating healthy environments for Milwaukee’s residents while also supporting our long-term fiscal and economic sustainability. High quality schools in Milwaukee support that vision for our children and our future. That’s why I’m excited to support Milwaukee Public Schools’ Sustainability Action Plan: A Roadmap to Healthy and Sustainable Schools. Their Sustainability Action Plan is consistent with the City of Milwaukee’s Climate and Equity Plan, adopted in 2023. We are working together to help transform five MPS schoolyards per year from barren asphalt to living playfields complete with trees, outdoor classrooms, grassy play areas, and nature-based stormwater management systems.

We are helping MPS buildings become more energy efficient and use less fossil fuel. And we see opportunities to connect MPS curriculum and training with local area employers to help build a green economy for years to come. We commend MPS leadership and staff for embedding environmental sustainability into MPS operations, and we look forward to collaborating to make this vision a reality.”



CAVALIER JOHNSON
CITY OF MILWAUKEE MAYOR



DISTRICT SUSTAINABILITY HIGHLIGHTS



37 GREEN SCHOOLYARDS COMPLETED

Each year 5 new green schoolyards are in a different stage of the planning process and constructed every summer.



1,032,000 sq.ft of asphalt removed



4,069 trees planted



16,155 students with vibrant green spaces at school



SCHOOL BOARD RESOLUTIONS

Between 2020 to 2023, the School Board passed three resolutions committing the district to sustainable operations and integrating sustainability literacy into curriculum.

3 SUSTAINABILITY STAFF MEMBERS

Devoted to sustainability projects overseeing waste & energy reduction, green schoolyards, and curriculum integration.



80+ EDUCATORS

Completed the Climate Health Equity Course that teaches educators how to integrate environmental literacy and sustainability into the existing curriculum.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Milwaukee Public Schools Sustainability Action Plan is intended to support the coordination, integration, and recognition of sustainability efforts across the district. With a long and dedicated commitment to sustainability efforts, this Action Plan builds on previous MPS successes and milestones. The MPS Sustainability Action Plan was developed in coordination with Green Schools National Network (GSNN) and is anchored around the GSNN GreenPrint which includes four impact systems: Leadership; Curriculum & Instruction; Facilities & Operations; and Culture & Climate. The Action Plan priorities and goals were developed with those impact systems in mind, with Culture & Climate goals woven throughout the other three.

The multi-year plan was shaped with feedback and input from MPS staff, students, families, and the community, over the course of a year-long process.

This Action Plan includes 9 significant priorities with 22 strategic goals and key indicators to track progress. It directly connects to MPS's strategic priorities and builds on previously passed Board Resolutions.

In order for the priorities and goals to be met, over the next few years, every MPS employee is invited to consider their role and involvement in this bold vision.





Leadership

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 1

Strategic Integration of Sustainability

Leadership strategically supports the integration of sustainable practices and learning opportunities across MPS systems.



Strategic Goal 1

Develop and launch a centralized sustainability data dashboard.

Actions

- Identify key metrics (energy, water, waste, emissions, cost savings) and align with district key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Information Technology and Department of Facilities & Maintenance partner to pilot dashboard integration in 3–5 schools.
- Include instructional tie-ins so teachers can use relevant data in classrooms.
- Publish quarterly performance summaries to maintain transparency.

Strategic Goal 2

Designate and support MPS leaders that are focused on implementing sustainability initiatives.

Actions

- Develop clear role descriptions and expectations connected to the Sustainability Action Plan.
- Formally appoint two district-level sustainability advocates and site-level sustainability liaisons.
- Provide mentoring and access to a shared toolkit for project planning, tracking, and reporting.
- Establish an annual review process to assess progress and identify additional leadership needs.

Strategic Goal 3

Establish and maintain a Green Revolving Fund that supports sustainability programs and projects.

Actions

- Seed the fund with district cost savings from energy efficiency projects.
- Create transparent reporting mechanisms for fund allocation and return-on-investment tracking.
- Solicit proposals from schools, providing guidance and templates for project applications.
- Publicly recognize funded projects and outcomes.



Leadership

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 2

Build Capacity and Continuous Engagement

Build district-wide leadership capacity for sustainability leadership through ongoing professional development, support, and resources.



Strategic Goal 1

Strengthen sustainability leadership among staff through targeted training.

Actions

- Develop a year-round professional learning pathway covering environmental literacy, resource efficiency, and equity.
- Integrate sustainability into existing leadership academies and new staff orientation.
- Incentivize completion of training through micro-credentials or professional development recognition hours.
- Add sustainability-related activities into relevant job descriptions and expectations.
- Strive to impact perception of sustainable practices and values across the district among MPS employees.

Strategic Goal 2

Empower site-based green teams and foster collaboration.

Actions

- Create a Green Team Network with quarterly meetups, regular communications, and shared online resources.
- Appoint and support site-level green team champions.
- Investigate feasibility of offering small grants, stipends, and recognition awards for green teams to pursue measurable sustainability projects.
- Provide templates and toolkits tailored to site needs, e.g., administrative offices, schools.
- Connect green teams with district partners to scale successful programs.

Strategic Goal 3

Deepen partnerships to accelerate sustainability.

Actions

- Formalize memoranda of understanding with local and regional partners (e.g., universities, nonprofits, municipal departments).
- Coordinate with community organizations to host sustainability fairs or student-led showcases.
- Align partnership initiatives with curriculum and student service-learning opportunities.



Leadership

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 3

Clear and consistent communication

Ensure consistent and visible communication that reinforces sustainability culture and accountability.



Strategic Goal 1

Establish a unified sustainability brand and communication strategy.

Actions

- Create an internal and external communication plan highlighting success stories.
- Feature student and staff voices in sustainability storytelling across district channels.
- Update and maintain the MPS sustainability website.

Strategic Goal 2

Provide transparent reporting and engagement tools.

Actions

- Publish an annual Sustainability Scorecard summarizing progress toward districtwide targets.
- Host interactive listening sessions either annually or twice a year to gather feedback.
- Utilize data visualization tools from the sustainability dashboard to communicate outcomes clearly.
- Report out to the School Board on sustainability action plan progress on an annual basis.





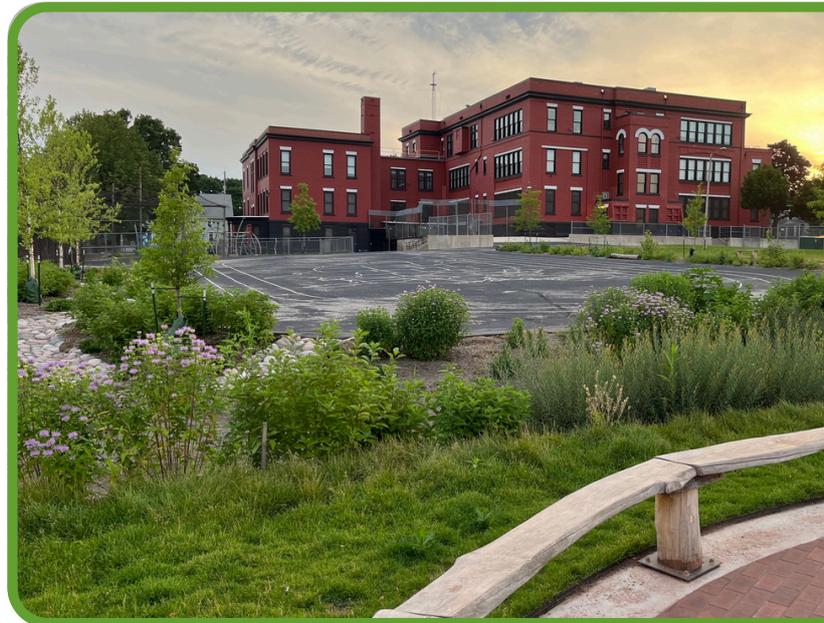
FACILITIES & OPERATIONS

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 4

Responsible Resource Management

Investigate and implement practices that improve the responsible management of district resources to support environmental stewardship and operational efficiency.



Strategic Goal 1

Pursue solid waste management practices that align with zero waste best practices to reduce landfill-bound waste through a focus on waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting.

Actions

- Develop and include district-wide zero waste management standard operating procedures in annual building engineer and service helper training.
- Develop and deliver district-wide zero waste management practices training to school and site-based staff.
- Standardize building collection bins and signage across all sites.

- Reduce single use plastics in lunchrooms by 5% by evaluating current practices and identifying opportunities for intervention.
- Reduce food waste headed to landfills by 10% by evaluating current practices and identifying opportunities for intervention.
- Increase annual staff training for school kitchen staff on policies and procedures that decrease food waste in lunchrooms such as First In, First Out (FIFO), food waste monitoring, and food rotation.
- Investigate, pilot, and evaluate a Share Table program in 15 school lunchrooms.

Strategic Goal 2

Implement energy efficiency programs, equipment, practices, and design to reduce the district's carbon emissions by 45% (from 2010 baseline) by 2030.

Actions

- Establish a performance tracking system that turns energy, waste, water, and emissions data into actionable insights for operation improvement and decision-making.
- Establish emission data collection process for bus transportation.
- Create procedures to pursue energy efficiency and conservation projects within the Department of Facilities and Maintenance (DFMS). Track emissions and cost savings through annual reporting.
- Evaluate opportunities to implement renewable energy technologies, such as geothermal and solar, into cyclic infrastructure upgrades.



FACILITIES & OPERATIONS

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 5

Healthy Learning Environments

Promote safe and healthy learning environments that support student health and the pursuit of academic excellence, while providing opportunities for students to learn from their surroundings.



Strategic Goal 1

Adopt sustainable building standards and guidelines for capital improvement, new construction and maintenance projects to ensure that all school buildings meet basic standards of health, safety, and sustainability.

Actions

- Evaluate national green building standards such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and WELL (WELL Building Standard).
- Evaluate how to adapt Milwaukee County's Sustainable Building Standards for use in Milwaukee Public Schools.
- Investigate pathways for developing sustainable building standards and updating master specifications.

Strategic Goal 2

Improve indoor environmental air quality across all district facilities.

Actions

- Adopt a district indoor environmental air quality management plan and School Board policy.
- Investigate the deployment of indoor air quality sensors in all school buildings.
- Develop and implement a district-wide anti-idling policy.
- Conduct indoor air quality assessments of all school buildings.
- Develop proactive management procedures to utilize and maintain the existing fleet of Fellowes AeraMAX Pro AM 3 and AM4 air filtration units. This plan will optimize high efficiency filtration of airborne cold and flu viruses in classrooms and offices.
- Evaluate current cleaning practices and identify opportunities to implement green practices to protect health without harming the environment.
- Continue to strengthen partnerships with entities such as the University of Wisconsin - Madison, University of Milwaukee-Zilber School of Public Health, the City of Milwaukee Health Department, Children's Health Alliance-Love My Air Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Asthma Coalition, and MKE FreshAir Collective.

Strategic Goal 3

Expand regular access to nature-based schoolyards and green outdoor spaces for all students.

Actions

- Explore feasibility of installing green schoolyards to every school in the district.
- Connect schools with natural spaces on their schoolyards, in their neighborhoods, and in the greater Milwaukee area through field trip guides.
- Increase access to the Green Schoolyard Redevelopment Program through a planning guide.
- Inventory District green spaces, gardens, and tree canopy and develop a plan for expansion.
- Create a robust resource guide for school-based green teams to initiate scalable sustainability projects that connect students to outdoor spaces at their schools.



FACILITIES & OPERATIONS

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 6

Integrated Food Experiences

Prioritize a nutritious, planet friendly, and culturally relevant menu that improves children's health, fosters environmental stewardship, and promotes social equity through integrated food experiences that link human health, planetary health, and the food system.



Strategic Goal 1

Prioritize a nutritious, planet-friendly, and culturally relevant menu that emphasizes planet-forward meals and increases scratch cooking on-site.

Actions

- Increase on-site scratch cooking across district schools.
- Implement one meatless lunch per week using plant-based proteins in place of meat.
- Increase local foods at school by 10%, selecting foods grown within 250 miles of the district, and supports the local economy through food purchases.
- Create bidding pathways for local food items that are desired on menus.

Strategic Goal 2

Integrate experiential food education that connects food to the curriculum, engages students in growing food and cooking meals, and educates students on the connections between health, agriculture, and the environment by leveraging community partnerships.

Actions

- Develop a school toolkit to increase the use of school-based garden beds and hydroponic farms year-round.
- Investigate how to integrate school-grown food into lunch and/or tasting menus.
- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations to support district Farm-to-School initiatives.
- Leverage existing partnerships to increase nutrition, cooking, and urban agriculture lessons.





Curriculum and Instruction

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 7

Curriculum Integration

Strategic integration of environmental literacy and sustainability education across existing curriculum in multiple content areas and grade levels to ensure a cohesive, districtwide approach.



Strategic Goal 1

Conduct a curriculum audit to systematically review and evaluate the current curriculum to identify where environmental literacy and sustainability education are being taught, and opportunities for integration.

Actions

- Assign the Climate Education Coach to lead the K-12 curriculum audit across all core subjects.
- Develop and utilize a standardized audit tool to ensure consistent data collection across grade levels.
- Generate a comprehensive report on findings to be used by the Academic Advisory Committee.
- Align existing curriculum with Wisconsin Environmental Literacy Standards.

Strategic Goal 2

Establish an Environmental and Sustainability Curriculum Academic Advisory Committee.

Actions

- Issue a formal call for participation to recruit diverse stakeholders.
- Develop a clear charter and by-laws for the committee.
- Charge the committee with prioritizing and creating a phased 3-year plan for integrating missing environmental literacy concepts into the curriculum, based on the audit results.
- Ensure all external educational programs are aligned with curriculum and safety standards.

Strategic Goal 3

Evaluate the impact of integrating environmental literacy and sustainability into the curriculum on student engagement and sustainability mindset.

Actions

- Select and implement a research-backed instrument to annually measure changes in student sustainability mindset, values, and perceived self-efficacy.
- Establish a system for collecting qualitative feedback from teachers and students.
- Analyze data annually to produce a concise impact report.



Curriculum and Instruction

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 8

Schoolyards and Facilities as Living Classrooms

Utilize schoolyards, school buildings, and the surrounding community spaces as extensions of the classroom.



Strategic Goal 1

Develop and maintain ready-to-use K-12 resources and materials that support authentic solutionary oriented learning.

Actions

- Curate, vet and promote online, searchable repository of existing, high-quality lessons (K-12).
- Develop interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning (PBL) units focusing on locally relevant topics.
- Establish a physical lending library of experiential learning equipment accessible to all school sites.
- Integrate environmental literacy standards into the district's core curriculum maps.
- Create and support annual Climate Action Days throughout the district.
- Cultivate and sustain strategic partnerships that advance environmental literacy and sustainability education.

Strategic Goal 2

Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for educators.

Actions

- Instruct educators with a minimum of one sustainability-focused training module in the annual professional development requirements.
- Host site-based workshops to activate green schoolyards.
- Offer a biannual teacher education course entitled *Climate Health Equity for Educators* for teaching staff to understand climate literacy as it pertains to district curriculum goals.





Curriculum and Instruction

IMPACT SYSTEM

Priority 9

Career Pathways and Future-Ready Skills for a Green Workforce

Prepare students for emerging careers in the environmental sector and sustainable workforce.



Strategic Goal 1

Provide work-based learning opportunities for students in grades 9-12 that contribute to building a more sustainable society and economy.

Actions

- Ensure green job opportunities are part of existing student job fairs.
- Require all high school students to complete a career exploration activity that is connected to green careers.

Strategic Goal 2

Adopt the Seal of Climate Literacy to recognize high school students for their knowledge and skills to act on the challenges of a changing climate.

Actions

- Garner support from students and educators for Seal adoption.
- Understand process for district adoption.
- Secure approval from the School Board.
- Establish a pathway for students to earn the required service-learning hours.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to those organizations and individuals that assisted with developing this plan and who serve in partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools to make this important work possible:

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- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Urban Ecology Center
- Milwaukee Public Museum
- University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
- University of Wisconsin - Madison
- University of Milwaukee-Zilber School of Public Health
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Wisconsin Association of Environmental Education
- Green & Healthy Schools Wisconsin
- Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful
- University of Wisconsin Sea Grant
- Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
- Resource Central
- Focus on Energy
- Slipstream Inc.
- City of Milwaukee Health Department
- City of Milwaukee Public Works
- Compost Crusader
- WasteCap Resource Solutions
- Children's Health Alliance-Love My Air Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Asthma Coalition
- MKE FreshAir Collective
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Milwaukee Zoological Society

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