

Green Schools

Many have been speculating for some time, and a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now proves it: climate change is happening, humans are causing it, and serious action is needed. Luckily, the serious action required to fight this climate change is relatively easy. As Earth Day approaches, ways to help resist the environmental transformation facing the world are put into focus. High schools in particular can do their part in going green.

The concept of “green schools” has recently become very popular. Green schools are designed to minimize the negative impacts that schools have on the Earth, while benefiting the learning experience and health of schools and communities. With better health comes better learning and results. A green school is simple to create, whether in an existing environment or from scratch. Environmental consciousness can be incorporated into school facilities, classrooms, food choices, transportation, and recreation.

A broad goal for a school looking to go green would be to become toxin free. Mold and other problems plague many schools. Eliminating those toxins is a great task, but the reward is well worth it: less of a strain is put on asthmatics and illnesses do not spread as quickly, decreasing the number of absentees out due to sickness. Being toxin free could also include eliminating cleaning products that contain toxic chemicals in favor of more green products, and serving food in cafeterias that is grown sans pesticides.

Schools can cut costs greatly by becoming more resourceful. As a whole, schools consume great amounts of energy, and emit masses of greenhouse gases, making them a prominent contributor to global warming. Schools could install solar panels or wind turbines to produce their own energy. That way, the emission of dangerous gases will be decreased and less money will be needed to pay electric bills. Also, reusing supplies and buying recycled products reduces the gases emitted in the manufacture of new products.

At Andean, students already take the initiative to help create a more environmentally-friendly atmosphere. At the end of every day, Sophomore Maddie Biscocho leaves school with a plastic bag filled with empty bottles. “I noticed that they got rid of the recycling bins in the cafeteria, so I figured I could do something to help and take the bottles home to recycle them myself,” said Biscocho. Biscocho brings home anywhere from 15-20 bottles a day.

Many organizations exist to encourage environmental awareness in schools. One of these is the Earth Day Network (EDN), a network that promotes environmental activities on the premise that all people deserve a healthy environment. “Our mission is to broaden the environmental movement through outreach; we want to be able to reach people in the 21st century and have them implement a green lifestyle in their communities,” said Sean Miller, education director for the EDN.

Education and working with schools is one of the chief ways the EDN labors to accomplish their mission. They promote awareness by speaking at schools throughout the country, and through a website, <http://earthday.net/greenyourschool>, created to help promote

environmental and educational change in schools. “We emphasize that we need to help not just one day a year, but all year. We’re constantly going to schools and promoting using things like solar power and recycling,” said Miller.

EDN works with the No Child Left Inside Coalition, which encourages students to learn and experience nature and the environment. Both the EDN and the No Child Left Inside Coalition support the No Child Left Inside Act, which would create federal funding for high-quality outdoor education and learning activities. “Students are getting too disconnected from nature. [Nature] is what is happening now and they need to know about it,” said Miller.

This Earth Day, it is vital to keep in mind ways to help the environment. High schools can easily do their share. Serious climate change is happening right now, but with a fair amount of effort, it can be easily combated.