



SUSTAINABILITY TASK FORCE PROGRESS REPORT

TO: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

FROM: Jessica Sankey, Executive Director of Operations and Mark Peterson, Director of Facilities and Sustainability, on behalf of the Sustainability Task Force

DATE: September 30, 2022

SUBJECT: Progress Report on Sustainability Charter

The Sustainability Task Force met six times from March to June 2022. We heard from local sustainability experts and engaged in deep, lively discussions. Throughout this process, we came to acknowledge the complexity of this work and the need to move with intention.

To date, few school districts across the nation have developed a climate action plan, and after going through the task force process, we understand why. Sustainability planning for a school district is complex and messy. It is a significant new undertaking, requiring an investment of time and resources e.g., additional staffing and coordination with district employees, community partners, and sustainability experts.

It is our long-term goal to develop a comprehensive climate action plan for Bellingham Public Schools, and this progress report highlights our first step in this direction.

Sustainability Task Force key purposes and recommendations:

- 1. Purpose** Recommend a vision and mission for sustainability efforts to align with The Bellingham Promise that reflects our aspirations to embed sustainability throughout the district;

Recommendation The Sustainability Task Force recommends that Bellingham Public Schools adopt the following foundational statement as a guide for decision making:

Sustainability should inform everything that we do. It is imperative we invest in actions that protect our students, staff and families. We pledge to take bold steps to build a bright and healthy future for our community through a systemic commitment to sustainability.

2. Purpose Develop a plan and timeline for benchmarking waste, water and energy usage within the district and individual buildings.

Recommendation The Sustainability Task Force recommends **subcommittees** starting fall 2022. The Facilities & Operations subcommittee will develop, refine, measure and report on benchmarking for waste, water and energy usage as well as purchasing.

3. Purpose Determine actionable sustainability priorities.

Recommendation The Sustainability Task Force recommends an **ongoing Sustainability Advisory Committee** to continue to define and refine actionable sustainability priorities. Additionally, the recommended structure for ongoing tactical work will be divided into three subcommittees:

- Facilities & Operations
- Teaching & Learning
- Habits & Culture

As a start to our comprehensive climate action plan, the Sustainability Task Force developed the following:

1. Sustainability Framework

The Bellingham Promise is our district’s compass, beginning with a vision that states “We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham’s children. We will empower every child to...achieve a fulfilling and productive life.” The mission statement begins, “We collectively commit that our students are cared for.” Sustainability is critical to our collective commitment. From the strong foundation provided by the Bellingham Promise, the Task Force recommends that Bellingham Public Schools develop a sustainability framework to guide decision-making.

In committing to care for our students, we must commit to caring for the world they live in. Our students are asking that we integrate sustainability into all district decisions and planning. Leadership is essential to elevating the urgency of sustainability. To that end, the Sustainability Task Force offers key messages:



- Our kids are counting on us for a healthy today and tomorrow. A systemic commitment to sustainability is the most powerful expression of love we can offer.
- We have a responsibility to our current and future students to provide a safe, welcoming, and effective learning environment. The climate crisis threatens the safety of the environment at large. We must take action.
- We can lead by example. To fulfill The Bellingham Promise, we can take a meaningful stance that progresses to solutions for the problems we face. We can be a regional, national, and international leader. We have the resources to make bold changes. Action to address the climate crisis brings hope.

To guide us in integrating sustainability throughout district work, the Sustainability Task Force began developing a Sustainability Framework to guide tactical work supporting sustainability and a healthier environment.

Elements of our draft Sustainability Framework include:

Foundational Statement: Sustainability should inform everything that we do. It is imperative we invest in actions that protect our students, staff, and families. We pledge to take bold steps to build a bright and healthy future for our community through a systemic commitment to sustainability.

Vision Statement: Bellingham Public Schools will meet the needs of our present community without compromising the ability of current and future Bellingham generations to meet their own needs.

*Note: this vision statement aligns with the United Nations' definition of sustainable development.

Core Values: We believe...

- sustainability must inform everything we do.
- the Earth is worth protecting.
- in teaching stewardship for current and future generations.
- in investing in actions that produce the greatest return.



Strategic Priorities: Bellingham Public Schools has a responsibility to stakeholders – students, families, and staff – to provide safe, healthy facilities and environments in which to learn, teach, work, and play. To act on this, we must:

- Strive to be a Zero-Waste School District by 2035.
- Strive to be a Carbon Positive School District by 2040.
- Strive to be a Responsible Water School District by 2040.
- Align Bellingham Public Schools policy and procedure with the of the Climate Action Plans of other agencies, such as the City of Bellingham and the United Nations.
- Act systemically and consider sustainability in every decision Bellingham Public Schools makes.

Categories for Change:

- Facilities & Operations
- Teaching & Learning
- Habits & Culture

Tactical Areas of Focus:

- Energy
- Water
- Waste

2. Develop a plan and timeline for benchmarking waste, water and energy usage within the district and individual buildings.

In the Sustainability Task Force basis for establishment, we agreed to develop a plan and timeline for benchmarking waste, water and energy usage within the district and individual buildings. Over the course of our work together, we realized that while we will continue building our benchmarking goals and schedule, we also need a robust, ongoing strategic planning process to lead our tactical work.

The Task Force recommends a cyclical system for defining, refining, measuring and reporting sustainability benchmarks for operations (waste, water, energy) and transportation. To meet this recommendation, the Task Force proposes a new committee structure for 2022-23, which includes a Sustainability Advisory Committee as well as three tactical subcommittees: Operations & Facilities, Teaching & Learning, and Habits & Culture. These subcommittees will help define baseline measurements and future goals for our district.



3. Determine actionable sustainability priorities to meet this crisis facing humanity.

The Task Force recommends strategic priorities for the BPS community to accomplish, which are referenced in section 2. We will continue to determine actionable sustainability priorities using our proposed committee structure.

The Task Force recommends progress toward goals and measurement of outcomes be advised by the ongoing structure of Advisory Group and subcommittees, and we ask for your support in taking these important next steps. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Attached are two appendices: The Sustainability Framework and The Sustainability Project History and Timeline.