

Developing Environmentally Sustainable Schools – Connecting a School Community

*Develop in “**Links with Community**” in Sustainable Schools online SEMP tool www.sustainableschools.qld.gov.au



Principals recognize the beginning of each school year as a time of renewal, a time to reflect, absorb, share and grow the energy from previous successes. It is a time to plan, seek and create new opportunities that will enhance these successes, to be open to the diversity of ways to support the evolution of the school as a community of learners.

Interested new families and volunteers joining the school community bring a fresh approach, new skills, energy and ideas adding to the combination of active supporters. Families that have quietly maintained a background presence in the past may emerge to become willing and active participants, demonstrating commitment and giving generously of their time & skills and contributing to the improvement of their children’s school and its learning environment.

At this early stage of the year, through revisiting annual, quadrennial & P&C plans, school leadership teams prioritize ‘wish lists’ of issues and goals to be managed, projects, activities & new ideas to be initiated. Here, community interest and expertise can be identified and invited to collaborate in the development of project planning, sourcing of funding and celebration of achievements. Schools can delineate recording processes for projects as they develop in readiness for opportunities for award nominations. These are leadership strategies that place a school community in a position to take advantage of opportunities as they emerge often without warning throughout the year. Defining a clear process that invites students, staff members, P&C members, community volunteers to contribute an issue or a solution to this list provides a focus for planning conversations and enables ownership of solutions to develop. This is a chance to build and direct a school’s volunteer work force.

Becoming familiar with and using the **online SEMP (School Environment Management Plan) tool** in the [Queensland Sustainable Schools website](http://www.sustainableschools.qld.gov.au) will enable the Principal to oversee the school’s nominated SEMP team as they prioritize the school’s unique environmental sustainability issues, embed an evolution of changes into the ethos of the school, plan and communicate solutions, link curriculum units to these issues, manage and evaluate sustainability actions and plan for the celebration of successes.

Within a school community, potentially, there exists a diversity of community building capital that is not resourced directly through annual school funds allocation. Using the “Links with Community” component of the Sustainable Schools online SEMP tool a plan can be developed to support projects & activities that enhance a school learning environment. Valuing the willingness and skills development potential of volunteers or part time employees who undertake enhancement projects or activities brings rewards beyond the successful outcomes of the activity. Valuing this becomes part of the celebration of building community in a school through the powerful opportunity of mutual active citizenship. Making a commitment to develop a school’s capacity to increase its environmental sustainability provides the perfect impetus for building up valuable links with active community members thus contributing greatly to building the strength of a community.

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Examples of community building activities strongly linked to promoting Educating for Sustainability and developing Sustainable Schools are the voluntary or part time paid positions below:

- 1. Community photographer / media liaison officer** – seek out, invite and train (*Working with Children Check, responsible photographic consent, school ethos, child protection expectations, protocol of how / when, who to upload onto the school website, school / media protocol, communication protocol with staff, students and volunteers*) a community volunteer, parent volunteer, university or TAFE student volunteer or share the role throughout the year with capable students to visually capture behaviours, activities and work related to environmental sustainability in the school. Why:
 - Positive and persistent promotion and marketing of environmentally sustainable actions & activities make great stories and is an activity that is extremely important to the speed, depth and permanency of change towards sustainability.
 - Make an early commitment to generate a store of Photos, Powerpoints, DVD's, filed and ready to use to celebrate success, educate students, staff and the wider public.
 - This preparation also makes your files ready for the numerous awards and grants, corporate sponsorship or donor opportunities that respond favourably to visual evidence of activity and progress in Educating for Environmental Sustainability.
 - A community photographer / journalist position also keeps the school in a state of readiness for local newspaper, school newsletter, website, and television news coverage for newsworthy items engendering a feeling of pride and shared success in a school community.
 - Good news told well helps to move a community forward quickly and maintains an important profile of the subject matter. People love it.
 - Profiling news develops leadership among schools as other schools and organizations pick up quickly on your successes. This adds value to submissions for funding, encouraging sponsorship and nominations for awards.
 - Win/Win - The community photographer gains the opportunity to increase their skills through hands on experience in journalism, photography, media liaison and communications. With quality support and guidance from school administration they will gain valuable references and a portfolio of articles benefiting a future career. This is a great way to promote the position.
 - Through the not for profit status of the P&C, the school can apply for a volunteers grant or environment grant to gain photography equipment and technology that benefits everybody and the environment in the end. Work hand in hand with P&C grant opportunities for school projects.
 - As the community photographer's skills develop, invite specific students to work with them to absorb some of the learning and increase student ownership of this role.

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- 2. Supporting a paid part-time Community Liaison role in the school** – good communication between a Principal and a creative, enthusiastic, dedicated & skilled community liaison officer will make maximum use of this flexible role to fill many gaps in the planning ‘wish list’ of a school. Sourcing and allocating appropriate funding and finding the right person for the job is a challenge well worth the effort. Developing and embedding an environmentally sustainable community consciousness among members of a school community is the work of creating a willing culture of awareness and consideration – [enough for all forever](#) – of the Values Education of care of self, place and others. School communities vary in their state of readiness to move forward on this journey and recognizing where your school is at is a good starting point for the Principal and the SEMP team – see [Indicators of a Sustainable School](#). The more help a school creates to build a sustainable ethos, the more real and lasting changes will be.

Community Liaison role can include:

- Having regular planning contact with Principal and administration & SEMP team, P&C & teaching staff, school chaplain, community photographer.
- Undertake the role of assisting the school to recruit, train and manage volunteers and activities utilizing volunteers
- Seek and submit funding applications on behalf of school & P&C accessing resources to support activities, programs, expertise, equipment that enhance the growth of environmental sustainability.
- Have regular input into the SEMP, especially in areas related to the section “Links with Community” and assist the school to promote its sustainable journey to families and the local community.
- Liaise with the school community volunteers photographer/ medial liaison person
- Assist SEMP team to minute meetings and record all plans into SEMP
- Manage projects and funding acquittals for activities that gain successful funding
- Promote environmentally sustainable activities to local business, council, local environment organizations
- Help the school to seek corporate sponsorship / input into environmental activities in the school
- Encourage families to become involved with local environment events and activities to enhance what their children are learning at school (use of regular newsletter space).
- Seek out opportunities for students and their families to enjoy outdoor environment sports and activities on weekends and holidays, to network with local environment groups like <http://www.maroochycatchmentcentre.org.au/>

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- 3. Utilizing the role of school Chaplain to help nurture care of self, place and others concept.** Schools that support a chaplain have valuable human capital at their fingertips. Educating for Sustainability using the [QESSI concept](#) is based on the [Earth Charter](#) and engenders a sense of universal responsibility towards our planet and its future. With good communication and planning between a principal and school Chaplain, any activity that engages students and / or their families in activities that involve and benefit others in the community (including local ecology) is an opportunity to strengthen the community lives of people at risk. Consider these points:
- Chaplaincy seeks to break down barriers to the cycle of disadvantage and increase life chances / Educating for environmental sustainability seeks to raise awareness and generate an active sense of responsibility towards self, others and place.
 - Chaplaincy finds ways to support at risk students and their families to participate in community life / Educating for Sustainability creates hands on opportunities to engage students and their families in working with their community to care for their environment.
 - Chaplaincy is potentially at the ‘heart’ of Values Education / Values Education is at the heart of Educating for Environmental Sustainability
 - Chaplains are valuable ambassadors of their community / the environment belongs to everybody and is a community and individual responsibility.
 - Quiet, unspoilt places in the environment enable “inner” work to occur – inner work is about deliberately slowing down to connect to and value the people and places around us through play and deep attentive reflection (the 5th pedagogy, *Ron Tooth*).
 - Consider the incredible positive energy of the Suncoast Christian College Church & School community in its “Schoolyard Blitz” program.....find out about that and see its potential to connect community with environment.

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4. Traditional Owners knowledge of ecology.

“If you take a map of the world and mark the regions that have the greatest biodiversity, then mark those places where Indigenous peoples are living with longstanding cultural traditions, you’ll find a remarkable correlation. Biological diversity and cultural diversity are linked, and as one diminishes, so too does the other.

Awareness of the need to protect Earth's diminishing biological richness has focused greater attention on Indigenous peoples for a couple of reasons; their homelands are increasingly understood as places worthy of protected status, and their knowledge of these areas is unique and unparalleled.

Human ecology -- the study of human/nature interactions -- generates insight into the interface between peoples and the more-than-human world. As such, it is critically relevant to achieving global sustainability. Tremendous environmental information is stored in the minds and cultures of local and Indigenous peoples. Human ecology, then, entails exploring systems of perception, cognition, belief, symbols, and uses of the natural environment. It illuminates human intercourse with the environment, thereby shedding light on knowledge systems as they relate to the natural world.”

Humanities and Sustainability Workshop 13 May 2003 Paul Faulstich - notes on **Human Ecology Perspectives on Sustainability (Paul Faulstich)**

Environmental custodianship of country stems from the reciprocal belief that as the earth looks after people, so people should look after the earth. This is the heart of Traditional Indigenous Culture. “Indigenous knowledge is essential to the way we manage our land and waterways”, (*Beverly Hand Kabi Kabi elder*). “The Connections of Aboriginal Traditional Owners to the landscape and their ecological knowledge are recognized and respected”, (*Sunshine Coast DRAFT waterways & Coastal Management strategy 2010 – 2020, Natural Waterways Principals*)

Generating opportunities for a school and its community to build educational partnerships with local traditional owners will open up authentic learning experiences in environmental sustainability. It can be a way to engage families in developing respect for culture and environment, heighten school experience for all students, be an opportunity to enhance cultural pride for indigenous students and stimulate reconciliation in communities.

5. Volunteer Grant writers role

Grants and awards take a lot of time and patience to research, investigate, seek letters of support, prepare submissions and budgets and conclude acquittals. Grants and award opportunities are often thrown at schools to be completed with very short deadlines. Projects that are managed on behalf of a grant or award can be lengthy, competitive, are a legal entity and can be completely exhausting for the individual/s who manages the project. Grants and awards that have taken weeks to prepare do not always get good results. In well resourced organizations, project management that includes the acquisition of funding is highly valued and project managers well paid.

However, having identified these challenges, schools that maintain a strong position to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise (and this includes corporate sponsorship) have the competitive edge over a more ad hoc approach.

Among families of a school community or community volunteers there can be a person or two who is retired, semi-retired or considering returning the workforce after raising young children. Often there is a volunteer who enjoys a good challenge with a fantastic outcome and has office skills needing expression.

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There are people who are not only willing but who will take advantage of the opportunity to practice a new skill in readiness for the workforce. Submission writing is one such activity that is an all round win/win opportunity. Training is available in councils, and support can be found among P&C executives and school administration staff.

Seek someone to fill this position and treat them as a highly regarded volunteer. Give them excellent references at the end of their successful term. Ensure they work within P&C guidelines and are guided by the Principal. Many grants suit not for profit organizations, many awards have a schools category. Create a team approach to acquiring funds. Direct others (P&C) to become aware of the abundant opportunities that exist and design projects that include a wide range of outcomes connected with a common foundation of core school community business. Find a place for these projects in the 10 year budget planner of the P&C. Alternatively, pay an expert to help seek funds.

Utilizing the school Tuckshop as a Sustainable Schools Resource

<http://www.qast.org.au>

Qld Association of School Tuckshops (QAST) published information in 2010 assisting schools to include the canteen or tuckshop in plans that engage the whole school in the reduction of its ecological footprint. Efforts to support P&C as employers of tuckshop managers to encourage sustainability practices (or stronger – implement a sustainable packaging policy) and awareness raising of sustainable living are two fold. Litter free food packaging, also known as “Nude Food”, includes natural food that comes in it’s own natural packaging, thus sits in the green & amber categories in the Qld Healthy Food and Drink Strategy mandated for school tuckshops and sporting communities. As awareness around non-recyclable packaging grows (through student learning and community / commercial interest) this generates actions that result in less waste going to landfill – recycling, worm farming, composting organics, nude food attitude coming from home, utilizing organic packaging to grow and plant seedlings in a school garden. A lower ecological footprint is the result of these strategies.

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