

## SECTION IV

# Vermont as a Case Study in Education for Sustainability

### Developing Standards for Sustainability and Place

In 1998, Vermont's State-Wide Environmental Education Programs (SWEEP) secured funding from the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation to convene Cultivating New Partnerships Project (CNP). The mission of CNP was to explore education for sustainability as a rallying point for diverse programs and help forge a consensus on overall goals and priorities. CNP was a unique collaboration of governmental and non-profit organizations including; SWEEP: State-Wide Environmental Education Programs, University of Vermont, Vermont Agriculture in the Classroom, Vermont Institutes, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Vermont Department of Education, Vermont Department of Public Service, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, and Shelburne Farms.

In 2000, because of the work of Cultivating New Partnerships, the Vermont Department of Education formally recognized the importance of Education for Sustainability by including two new academic standards into its Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities. These two standards, which apply to every K-12 student in every subject are: Sustainability (3.9), and, Understanding Place (4.6) (see box at right). Both of these standards, found in the Vital Results section, address what Vermonters felt was missing in preparing students for the 21st century.

### Shelburne Farms' Sustainable Schools Project

Shelburne Farms played a lead role in the partnership that worked on the development of these new learn-

ing standards. While adding these new standards greatly enriched the existing framework, it became clear that teachers needed professional development and resources to effectively teach the content and ideas found in both of the new standards. To meet this need, Shelburne Farms began offering training for teachers, developing curricular resources, and supporting teachers in using sustainability and the local community to integrate school curriculum, projects, and district efforts. In 2001, Shelburne Farms launched an innovative whole-school professional development model called Sustainable Schools Project (SSP), defining sustainability as "improving the quality of life for all—economically, socially, environmentally—now and for future generations." The goal of SSP is to use the lens of sustainability to integrate the "4C's": curriculum, campus practices, community partnerships, and collaboration.

## Vermont Framework of Standards

### Sustainability

**3.9 Students make decisions that demonstrate understanding of natural and human communities, the ecological, economic, political, or social systems within them, and awareness of how their personal and collective actions affect the sustainability of these interrelated systems.**

### Understanding Place

**4.6 Students demonstrate understanding of the relationship between their local environment and community heritage and how each shapes their lives.**



## Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Project

The Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Project was designed to engage youth in community planning and revitalization activities by encouraging them to draw

connections between the design and condition of their communities and impacts on their health. The project, a collaboration between Shelburne Farms' Sustainable Schools Project (SSP) and Smart Growth Vermont, began in 2004. With the support of the US Environmental Protection Agency, the project began at Champlain Elementary School in Burlington, Vermont and has since been supported by numerous funders and organizations.

Download the HN/HK Guide at:  
[www.sustainableschoolsproject.org/tools-resources/hnhk](http://www.sustainableschoolsproject.org/tools-resources/hnhk)

The Project Flow (at right) is a framework

for community investigation, revitalization, and community engagement. Through evaluating the health, safety, and sustainability of communities and initiating service-learning projects that address their findings, youth play key roles in developing solutions to community issues. Given a voice, and the opportunity to make a real difference in their community, youth (and others) make connections across curricula and their lives, become excited about their learning, and become active and engaged community citizens.

### Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Project Flow



11 • Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Project Guide © Shelburne Farms, 2007

The project has been adapted by communities around the globe, including China, California, New York, the Dominican Republic, and Kosovo. In all of its adaptations the project has supported youth voice and engagement in community decision making on a variety of local and national issues.

### Sustainable Schools Project in the Burlington School District

In 2001, with generous support from several foundations, the Sustainable Schools Project initiated a partnership with two elementary schools in the Burlington School District. SSP built upon work Shelburne Farms had done with the District decades earlier.

### Champlain Elementary School

*"All I'm trying to do is teach kids that the fate of the earth is in their hands and they can actually do something about it. This is no small task; especially on those days when shaken by the morning headlines, it is difficult to maintain my own sense of hope. I am fortunate to live in a place where people are trying to make our city, as our Mayor says, "a better place for our kids, our grandkids,*

*other people's kids and grandkids." I imagine young children experiencing the power of collective effort and discovering how that effort can make a difference in people's lives. Will it help them to become empowered adults who, as Martin Luther King preached, reject cynicism and despair? I hope so."*

— BRENT SCLAFANI

Beginning in 2002, Champlain teachers explored how to use the lens of sustainability to enhance their curriculum, improve campus practices, and deepen community partnerships and collaboration. The school community focused on several key areas, including increasing students' sense of place and pride in their community, civic engagement and service-learning, and integrating sustainability and literacy. SSP offered teacher professional development in curriculum design and content understanding of sustainability concepts and issues. Teachers participated in sustainability internships where they developed new units of study and school-wide projects such as the school's Living Machine and accompanying manual. SSP piloted many promising programs at Champlain including Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids, a series of after-school sessions, a sustainability-themed

parent series, and a school-wide composting initiative. SSP continues to support Champlain Elementary School in their quest to implement education for sustainability.

### **Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes Elementary**

*On a crisp fall morning in Burlington, Vermont, a group of second and third grade students set out from their school on North Street for a field trip back in time. The students arrived at what was once the Russian-Jewish bakery, established in the 1800s by a family of Lithuanian immigrants. Down the street, another group of students headed out in the opposite direction, in search of the once essential trolley car heading downtown. A third group fanned out to explore Hyman Bloomberg's Shoe Store, while another headed toward the water, to the site of the Lake Champlain lumber port. While none of these businesses are still operating today, they came back to life on this blustery afternoon. The historical reenactment of North Street's heyday was made possible by community volunteers. Students were able to speak with the bakers and shopkeepers, the recent immigrants, and the laborers of their neighborhood. The characters told the stories of their own immigra-*





*tion, migration, and settlement, described daily life, and answered questions from curious eight-year-olds, who wondered things like, "What does it mean when the sign says, "No Irish Need Apply'?" Students filled their "passports" with stamps as they journeyed from a scene of workers at the lumber yard, to the home of textile workers, to a conversation with a French Canadian nurse. This thoughtfully orchestrated "learning journey" allowed students to deepen their understanding of the Big Idea of "change over time."*

Since 2004, with the support of SSP staff, the Lawrence Barnes Elementary School (now the Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes) has been slowly infusing sustainability into many aspects of their practices. Building on the successes at Champlain Elementary, families began participating in evening programs, such as book groups on sustainability themes, the PTO began community-wide dinners and wellness programs, and students spent increasingly more time in the community engaged in service-learning projects.

In 2009, the school reimaged itself as the country's first kindergarten through 5th grade public magnet school with a sustainability theme. The school is sustained by a collaborative partnership between families, many local community partners, Shelburne Farms, and the Burlington School District. The school engages young citizens in making a difference in their community by exploring social, economic, and environmental issues through integrated, hands-on curriculum steeped in service-learning.

The Lawrence Barnes teachers started with small steps. They looked at opportunities to apply the lens of sustainability to their curriculum, mapped the K-5 scope and sequence, and located the Big Ideas of Sustainability in the state education standards. Classroom teachers participated in workshops on sustain-

ability where they met with local resource people—the director of the Food Shelf, farmers, waste managers, livable wage advocates, urban planners; read articles on education for sustainability and place-based education, and analyzed student work for evidence of understanding sustainability concepts.

In addition to the two pilot schools SSP works with schools, locally and internationally, to infuse sustainability into curriculum and campus practices, and to build capacity and networks of practitioners thereby expanding the scope and sequence of EFS.

### **A culture of sustainability**

In Vermont, sustainability is part of the culture and fabric of communities. The state is recognized globally as a progressive leader in education, civic engagement, and economic development. Many organizations have developed in the region to work toward creating sustainability communities in the state and beyond. Vermont has placed enduring value in being connected to place, creating businesses and organizations that reflect the landscape and rich heritage of the state, and welcoming diverse perspectives and lifestyles. When EFS is put into practice in Vermont classrooms it creates a positive feedback loop, where it defines the values students see in the community and positions them to be active participants in this sustainably-minded society. While Vermont continues to lead the nation, there are many promising examples across the country and world that provide inspiration and hope.