



Education for Sustainability (EfS)

Also known as

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

About Sustainability

Natural systems have limits, beyond which they no longer function. Human health and well-being are increasingly impacted as a result of global changes such as the following, that are pressing against these limits:

- climate change
- peak petroleum
- population growth
- urbanization
- land use changes
- resource depletion (e.g. soil, fresh water, fisheries)
- biodiversity loss

In the long term, societies have no choice but to understand and operate within the limits of the natural systems, which requires respecting the interdependence of economy, society and the environment.

- The most direct impact of sustainability challenges today is to the health of living things, such as ourselves, and to our economy (whereby this is sometimes due to underlying environmental issues).
- The legacy we leave to future generations and their sustainability is contained in the environment.

Why Educate for Sustainability?

Our students deserve an education that provides them with the attitudes, skills, values, perspectives and knowledge necessary to understand and successfully manage these many interconnected global systems and changes. In the short term, students find this education more relevant and engaging which increases learning. Ultimately,

- EVERY organization needs all employees to have this education to help them support a sustainable future.
- EVERY citizen needs this education to be able to contribute to a sustainable society.

The K-12 system must provide the foundation.

What is Education for Sustainability?

- Education **for** Sustainability (EfS) utilizes the entire education system to transform our societies to achieve a sustainable future.
- Note that education **about** sustainability is just one aspect; to understand the concept of sustainability.
- **Every academic subject** contributes to education for sustainability.
- **A sustainable facility and practices contribute** to Education for Sustainability too, providing a living laboratory in which students can deepen their understanding of sustainability.
Without this, students learn through observation that although such practices make sense in theory, they are not valued enough to actually implement.
- EfS requires **RE-ORIENTING education** to include the principles, skills, perspectives, and values needed for sustainability, while updating or eliminating obsolete things.
- It **integrates** environmental, economic, and social issues.
- It is based on local needs, but recognizes that fulfilling local needs often has global consequences.

United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)

The UN Decade seeks to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21st Century. <http://www.unesco.org/en/esd> The Decade encompasses the 4 major thrusts of education for sustainability first articulated in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21:

1. Improve access to quality education
2. Reorient existing education programs
3. Develop public understanding and awareness of sustainability; and
4. Provide practical training.

The United States participates in the UN Decade through the US Partnership, which includes a K-12 and Teacher Education Sector Team. Learn more and view resources, including national education standards for sustainability at their website: http://www.uspartnership.org/main/show_passage/33

Sustainability Education

Is-

- Integrative
- Multidisciplinary
- Inside and outside of the classroom
- Linked to content standards in multiple areas
- Highly motivating to students

But it might not be every one of these things all the time.

It may include, but is not only-

- Environmental Education
- Science education
- Social Studies
- Advanced or enrichment curriculum
- An add-on module

It is NOT-

- Based on a particular political bias

Core Content Areas: Education for Sustainability

These nine content areas do a great job of encompassing the key aspects needed for sustainability, and can be spread throughout the various academic subjects. *(from the Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education)*

- **Cultural Preservation and Transformation**
How the preservation and transformation of cultural identities and practices contribute to sustainable communities.
- **Responsible Local/Global Citizenship**
The rights, responsibilities and actions associated with leadership and participation toward healthy, sustainable communities.
- **The Dynamics of Systems & Change**
A system is made up of two or more parts in a dynamic relationship that forms a whole. The elements ‘hang together’ and change because they continually affect each other over time.
- **Sustainable Economics**
An evolving study and practice of the connections between economic, social and natural systems...
- **Healthy Commons**
The Commons are that upon which we all depend and for which we are all responsible (i.e., air, water, public health, etc.).
- **Natural Laws and Ecological Principles**
Nature’s laws and science principles that help us to understand the interconnectedness of humans and all of the Earth’s systems...
- **Inventing and Affecting the Future**
The vital role of vision, imagination and intention in creating the desired future.
- **Multiple Perspectives**
Valuing and learning from the life experiences and cultures of others, as well as our own...
- **Sense of Place**
Connecting to and valuing the places in which we live...

How is Sustainability Education Delivered?

There is no “right” way to get started. Sustainability content is typically already present in existing curriculum and it’s helpful to start with an audit of what’s there. The following delivery options are all being utilized.

- Sustainability itself, and related topics, as their own subject
Examples: 1-2 day lessons, 1-2 week integrated thematic units or full courses
- Sustainability as the context within which to teach core subjects
- Sustainability projects
Examples: culminating/senior projects, service learning requirements, place-based learning

ULTIMATE GOAL: Content areas needed to understand and practice Sustainability are integrated into instruction at the district level, using all the strategies included above. An EfS framework of some sort should guide the effort, such as the core content areas listed above or the national EfS standards.

How Do We Enable Schools to Provide Education for Sustainability?

- Provide professional development for educators
- Provide educators with resources and curriculum to teach for sustainability, and integrate them into the foundation of the school and district education program.
- Integrate Education for Sustainability into pre-service education through Colleges of Education
- Ensure that state standards incorporate the needed elements to educate for sustainability.
- Recognize the contribution of a sustainable school facility and practices to student education.

For more information on Education for Sustainability: Visit the many links accessible from the Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative website: <http://sustainableschools.org/resources/education/susedother.htm>