



## Education for Sustainability (EfS)

*Also known as*

## Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

### About Sustainability

Natural systems have limits, beyond which they cannot function as we know them. Human health and well-being are increasingly impacted as a result of global changes that are pressing against these limits, such as:

- 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. 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 provide students with the attitudes, skills, values, perspectives and knowledge they need in order to transform our societies to achieve a sustainable future.
- **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.*
- It **integrates** environmental, economic, and social issues.
- It is based on local needs, but recognizes that fulfilling local needs often has global consequences.
- Note that education **about** sustainability is just one aspect of this; to understand the concept of sustainability (and often focuses on UN-sustainability).

### 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](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 Education for Sustainability (EFS) Delivered?**

The following strategies can be utilized; there is no “right” way to begin.

- Educate about Sustainability itself, and related topics, as their own subject via short or long units.
- Use aspects of Sustainability as the context for teaching any or all subjects
- Offer Sustainability topics as the basis for student projects
- Implement sustainable practices in the classroom and school. *(Based on a model from Facing the Future)*

Well-recognized teaching pedagogies such as place-based education, service learning and experiential learning are all effective options for delivering sustainability education.

The **ULTIMATE GOAL** is that the elements needed to provide EfS are integrated into teaching and learning at the district level, and delivered via all the strategies included above. Some sustainability content is typically present in existing curriculum. It’s helpful to conduct an audit to identify what’s already there, and what’s missing. A framework should guide the effort, such as the Cloud Institute core content areas noted above.

## **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>