

Schools work to teach, implement green practices

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A plan to help Oregon's schools operate ecologically and economically could also ready the state's next generation of workers for a new industry.

Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative, which has its roots in the Oregon Solutions Network established by Gov. Ted Kulongoski six years ago, is geared to helping schools:

- Cut spending on energy systems, waste disposal and water through sustainable practices.
- Integrate sustainability into regular school curricula.
- Model sustainability to students and their communities.
- Identify and purchase from Oregon companies that sell sustainable goods and services.

The Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative, commonly called SOSI ("so-see"), is much smaller than the scope of its work.

Running on an annual budget of less than \$40,000, SOSI is led by Lori Stole, a chemical engineer by training who's worked in the semiconductor and plastics industries. Before working with schools, she worked on an industry initiative to manage electronics waste.

Stole and her small team concentrated first on developing a sustainability management system for school districts and educational service districts. It's a logical step for helping Oregon schools use existing programs like recycling or composting food waste as a launching pad for system-wide sustainable practices.

"A lot of school districts do green initiatives like recycling or a garden," said Stole, who started out working with the Beaverton schools her children attend. "These

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initiatives are usually led by someone with passion, but they aren't integrated into how the district works. Just like financial management, if you want it to be strategically part of how you operate, you need a written plan to set goals, and you need to track progress and reassess as you go."

SOSI will soon launch a pilot project for its management system with some of the state's education service districts. Stole and her group are also working with the Oregon School Boards Association on model school board policies for encouraging sustainable practices.

Saving money and doing the right thing are strong motivations for schools that already have sustainability projects underway.

But teaching sustainability both in lesson plans and, by example, throughout school facilities, should also prepare the state's future workers for one of its most promising new industries.

"It's a critically important area of economic development," said Larry Chalfan, executive director and founder of the Zero Waste Alliance.

Chalfan was CEO of Oki Semiconductor Manufacturing in Tualatin, and began leading his company towards sustainable practices more than 10 years ago.

Retired now, Chalfan volunteers as the head of Zero Waste Alliance, a nonprofit group funded by universities, businesses and government agencies to help groups become more competitive by adopting sustainable practices.

Some of Oregon's schools and districts have already taken the notion of sustainability far beyond recycling.

The Gladstone district, for example, is



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Lori Stole oversees the Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative.

integrating science education with the construction of an extension to its high school.

Gladstone is close to completing a 22,000-square-foot addition to the high school building, adding 15 percent more space. The extension, funded by a \$40 million bond passed two years ago, will open for use in March.

As part of the project, the district put in a system that captures rainwater from the building's roof, directing it first into a pond and then into bioswales.

The system is designed to mitigate any pollutants from re-entering the storm water system. It's also valuable for science instruction, said Bob Stewart, superintendent of the Gladstone district.

The high school extension will have a solar-collection system on the roof. Students

will take advantage of that too. "Kids will be able to design and build their own [system], and then plug it into the grid to see how it's doing," Stewart said.

The Gladstone district also purchased an empty grocery store and other retail space across the street from the high school for an early-childhood education center.

The building has been remodeled sustainably, and very little has gone to the landfill. But its deeper sustainable purpose is a social one, said Stewart.

"We're thinking about the social and economic aspects of our world, about how to create opportunity for all," said Stewart. "That's how we become truly sustainable."

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