

HEARING PACKET FOR MN GREENSTEP SCHOOLS APPROPRIATION SF2350 (Kunesh) / HF2626 (Hill/Kraft)

March 17, 2023



CONTENTS:

Cover Letter	2
Case Statement	4
What are Green Schools?	4
Need for the MN GreenStep School Program	4
Regional Balance and Equity	5
Importance of School Buildings for Health and Learning	6
Energy Savings Potential in Minnesota Schools	7
Clean Energy Savings Potential in Minnesota Schools	7
Benefits of Green Schools and the GreenStep Program	8
Overall Benefits of GreenStep Programs	8
Benefits to Districts and Schools	9
Benefits to Resource Organizations	10
Interest Map and Statements	11
Support	18
Organizations Expressing Support	18
Support Quotes	18
Testimony Support Letters and Statements	20
Best Practices	26
Connection to State Programs and Goals	29
MN Due North Plan	30
MN Climate Action Framework	31
Funding Comparison	32
Frequently Asked Questions	33

Cover Letter

Dear Dear Chair and Members,

RE: Hearing on SF2350 (Kunesh) / HF2626 (Hill/Kraft)
MN GREENSTEP SCHOOLS APPROPRIATION

The Minnesota GreenStep Schools Program appreciates the opportunity to speak before the Education Finance Committee about the MN GreenStep Schools Program. **I would like to share with you the *Vision for MN GreenStep Schools*. Picture this: *One Step at a Time...*, Teams of Schools, Districts, Students, Parents, and a supporting community of volunteers, non-profits, businesses, and local and state government agencies work together to help schools and their community take actions and build capacity to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future: preparing children for a changing economy, protecting our environment and community health, and harvesting the benefits of a clean energy future—all with guidance, assistance, and recognition from MN GreenStep Schools.**

That vision guided the development of Minnesota GreenStep Schools as a ***free and voluntary*** statewide best practices program for public and private K-12 schools and districts to:

- Reduce environmental impacts and achieve cost savings in buildings and grounds,
- Improve the health and well-being of students, staff, and community
- Provide effective environmental and sustainability education, linking to STEM careers.

MN GreenStep Schools integrates the proven, beginner-friendly MN GreenStep Cities program with the comprehensive Green Ribbon Schools framework. Schools benefit from an *accessible pathway to sustainability, a common framework*, and support to *build upon small efforts over time*. For students, staff and communities, MN GreenStep Schools *spurs sustainable behavior changes using peer network strategies*. With a partnering approach, MN GreenStep Schools helps connect schools with existing local and statewide resources and organizations.

After years of working with partners and stakeholders, the MN GreenStep Schools pilot version launched in 2020 and has gained interest across Minnesota. As of November, 2022 one or more contacts at 15 school districts, 36 schools, and 44 resource organizations throughout Minnesota have expressed interest in the pilot program, --many more than can be effectively supported with current 10% FTE staffing from interim funding. As a free, voluntary program, a fully funded MN GreenStep Schools can help level the green school playing field so that all schools (independent of region or resources) can enjoy the benefits of green schools--improved learning, health, efficiency, and environmental quality.

The SF2350 (Kunesh) / HF2626 (Hill/Kraft) MN GreenStep Schools Appropriation bills would provide ongoing base funding support for MN GreenStep Schools, to be administered through the MN Department of Education with the Minnesota Design Center at the U of MN continuing to lead the day-to-day research-based development, program operation, school technical support and recognition, and private/non-profit/public collaboration coordination. More background about the program can be found at the MN GreenStep Schools [Strategic Planning Page](http://www.mngreenstepschools.org) at www.mngreenstepschools.org.

On behalf of interested districts, schools, students, and community partners, and on behalf of the MN GreenStep Schools Steering Committee, thank you for your consideration of SF2350 (Kunesh) / HF2626 (Hill/Kraft), along with our testimony and the attached materials.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonee Kulman Brigham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jonee Kulman Brigham, AIA, LEED AP O+M

MN GreenStep Schools Program Leader

Senior Research Fellow, Minnesota Design Center, College of Design

Fellow, Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota

Case Statement

What are Green Schools?

There are many ways to define a green school. The way that MN GreenStep Schools defines it is based on the comprehensive and nationally-recognized, Green Ribbon Program.

A green school can be defined by what it does and the benefits it creates which might look different in different locations and communities.

A Green School:

- Reduces environmental impacts and achieves cost savings in buildings and grounds,
- Improves the health and well-being of students, staff, and community
- Provides effective environmental and sustainability education, linking to STEM careers.



Need for the MN GreenStep School Program

Minnesota K-12 Schools have limited coordinated guidance on how to provide environmental education and little to no mandate to green their operations to improve environmental impacts. Consequently, schools' efforts in these areas are often limited and disjointed. However, there is great potential for integrating existing environmental education curriculum and proven building and campus improvement strategies into schools. Existing green school programs, despite their strengths, only address a fraction of this potential.

GreenStep Schools fills the gap by addressing several areas of need and opportunity.

- **Need for a pathway to sustainability:** Existing green school programs in Minnesota recognize top leaders but don't provide enough tools or guidance for the average school to build a green campus. MN GreenStep Schools creates a flexible, step-by-step pathway to improvement over time.
- **Need for a Common Framework:** Despite an abundance of green school resources and programs, there is no central place to document and compare progress and recognize success across these programs. MN GreenStep Schools provides a common framework and language for schools, resource organizations, and regional or state initiatives to track progress.
- **Need for support of grass-roots, start-up efforts:** The transformation of a school or district can begin with one motivated teacher, student, administrator, or facility manager, but without support, these efforts can remain isolated or fizzle out. GreenStep Schools supports even small efforts and builds on them over time.
- **Opportunity to spur sustainable behavior outcomes:** Research shows the power of social norms and supportive peer networks as critical to achieving sustainable behavior and decisions. Existing

programs use some of these strategies, but there is far more potential to stimulate widespread improvement and that has shaped the MN GreenStep approach to recognition, featuring teams and youth leadership in project stories, and engaging local, regional, and state resource organizations.

Regional Balance and Equity

While MN GreenStep Schools will respond to interest from any school no matter its resources or region, achieving regional balance and equity in participation is an explicit goal and criteria for participation success. That means that focused outreach and support efforts will be aimed in order to:

- Get substantial participation in each region, with a focus on regional schools that can be models and catalysts for other schools in their region
- Build regionally-distributed networks of resource organizations to support schools in their development
- Track the demographics of participating schools and their project teams and amplify efforts to get green school participation that reflects the demographics of a community and the state, celebrating and highlighting the diversity of leaders within and around schools.

Vision

**All schools in Minnesota are on the path
...to be completely green.**

- ✓ Achieving neutral or restorative environmental impacts
- ✓ Protecting & enhancing health of students, staff, and communities
- ✓ Teaching environmental literacy & skills for future careers & citizenship via curriculum, buildings, grounds
- ✓ Operating as financially viable or profitable
- ✓ Enhancing community connections and sense of belonging for well-being and education

Importance of School Buildings for Health and Learning

Just as food security, nutrition, sleep, and sufficient housing are critical for students to be able to learn, so are the school buildings in which students spend so much of their lives.

The Best Practice actions in MN GreenStep Schools are based on research, and will respond as more research-based best practices are established.

From the Center for Green Schools Website, a report, "[The Impact of School Buildings on Student Health and Performance](#)," reviews existing research on school building impacts and calls for more. Here are some examples from their report on how school buildings impact health and learning:

What do we know today?

In some areas, we have strong evidence to support the notion that school buildings impact student health and their ability to learn, and we know exactly how to ensure that the impacts are positive. For example, we know how to build classrooms that minimize background noise and allow voices to be heard clearly, which will allow students to hear their teachers and protect their aural health. We have clear evidence that certain aspects of school buildings have an impact on student health and learning, such as:

- When deprived of natural light, studies have shown that children's melatonin cycles are disrupted, thus likely having an impact on their alertness during school (Figueiro & Rea, 2010).
- Teachers report higher levels of comfort in their classrooms when they have access to thermal controls like thermostats or operable windows (Heschong, 2003, and Lackney, 2001).
- According to researchers at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratories, when ventilation rates are at or below minimum standards (roughly 15 cfm per student), an associated decrease of 5%-10% occurs in certain aspects of student performance tests (LBNL IAQ Resource Bank).
- In recent studies, when ventilation rates were lowered from 17 cfm/person to 10 cfm/person, researchers saw a 15% increase in symptom prevalence for Sick Building Syndrome (ibid).

Energy Savings Potential in Minnesota Schools

MN GreenStep Schools helps connect schools to advice and resources to save on energy cost and environmental impact from making their buildings more efficient. One of these resources is B3 Benchmarking (<https://mn.b3benchmarking.com>) which is a tool to help identify potential and actual energy savings in schools and other public buildings. B3 Benchmarking helps identify the schools with the greatest energy saving potential and estimate the benefits.

For example: Minnesota public schools have been benchmarked in the State of Minnesota’s B3 Benchmarking tool. The 1,522 schools that have been benchmarked spend \$167 million in energy bills. Sixteen percent of the schools are using significantly more energy than the benchmark and show a potential energy savings of \$17 million per year if they were retrofitted to the current state energy code.

Sector / Org	Total SF	Total Bldgs	Potential Improve. Bldgs	Bldg %	Potential Improv. SF	SF %	Total Usage (MMBTU/YR)	Potential Savings (MMBTU/YR)	Total Dollars (\$/YR)	Potential Annual \$ Savings
Public Schools	163,379,026	1,522	237	16%	25,837,894	16%	11,492,121	1,925,330	\$167,900,773	\$17,615,000

Table image from Willdan which operates B3 Benchmarking

Clean Energy Savings Potential in Minnesota Schools

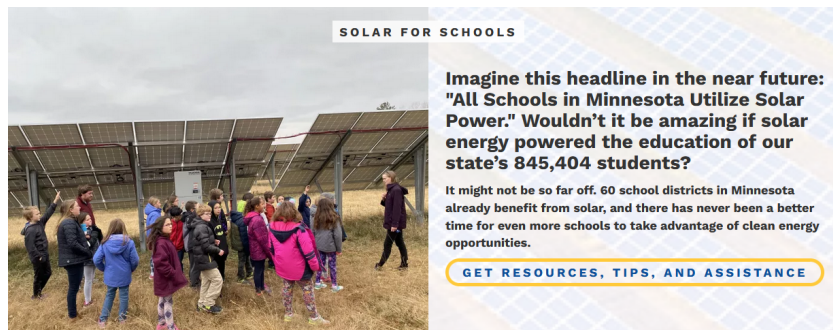


Image from CERTS, a MN GreenStep Schools Resource Organization

MN GreenStep Schools helps connect schools to clean energy advice and resources, such as Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTS), who provide advice to schools on implementing clean energy. CERTS also provides case study examples of schools that have found energy cost and environmental impact savings from clean energy, like:

- “The field and track behind Pine River-Backus High School is now home to a large solar array expected to cover about 80 percent of their electricity needs, at a discount to their typical electricity rates.”
- “Red Wing Public Schools in Minnesota generates up to 120% of its district-wide energy consumption through a 6 MW community solar garden on school district property.”
- “Chisago Lakes Schools are projected to save \$3-\$6 million in energy costs over the next 25 years with these solar projects.”

Benefits of Green Schools and the GreenStep Program

There are benefits to schools, districts, communities, resource organizations, and regional and state initiatives from green schools and the MN GreenStep Schools program.

Overall Benefits of GreenStep Programs



10 ways GreenStep benefits program participants

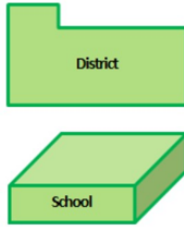
1. Serves as a **continuous improvement pathway** for participants to "go green," becoming more sustainable and resilient.
2. **Saves participants staff time** in researching proven, cost-effective actions.
3. Best Practices are **user-centered**.
4. **Reduces costs** and helps explore how to spend the same amount of money smarter.
5. Designed as a home-grown, independent program **tailored to governments of all size and location in Minnesota**.
6. **Supports sustainable economic development and local economies**.
7. **Provides maximum flexibility, total control, and choice** by councils and boards in deciding how to implement a proven best practice.
8. Participants are **supported by a peer learning network** and encouraged to learn from each other.
9. **Continuously prompts program participants** – like an exercise coach would! – to maximize opportunities to accelerate sustainability actions.
10. **Encourages public recognition** of the good work being done in Minnesota communities.

10 ways GreenStep benefits State agencies & partners

1. Local actions add up to **support state goals**.
2. Improves **environmental quality** of Minnesota's air, water, and land.
3. Develops **user-centered best practices** that share agency and partner guidance, resources, and programs out to the intended audience.
4. **Maintains documentation of implemented actions** that can support state tracking and assessment needs.
5. Provides **statewide outreach and support** to governments of all size and location in Minnesota.
6. Undergoes **continuous improvement** to ensure accurate and relevant resources and new program development.
7. We are **able to do a LOT** (with the program) **with a LITTLE** (amount of resources).
8. **Reduces costs** for local governments, tribal governments, and schools and helps explore how to spend the same amount of money smarter.
9. **Supports sustainable economic development and local economies**.
10. **Encourages community education and engagement** with residents and businesses, further sharing best practices and resources.



Benefits to Districts and Schools



Districts and Schools can earn the designation of a “GreenStep District” or a “GreenStep School” by forming a green team that meets regularly and signing a school board resolution to participate in MN GreenStep Schools. That’s all it takes to be a **Step Level 1** school.

After that, at whatever pace is comfortable, the green team documents projects (new or old) that include *Best Practice Actions (BPAs)* to earn higher recognition levels. Everyone can participate—from youth in MN GreenStep Green Clubs, to teachers in classrooms with students, parents, staff, and community organizations or businesses.

Benefits of Green Schools

Environment + Cost Efficiency + Health + Education

- Save on operating costs and improve local and regional environmental quality through waste reduction and efficient use of resources like energy and water
- Protect student, staff, and community health through adopting best practices in indoor air quality, nutrition, physical activity, and access to health resources
- Hands-on, place-based learning opportunities
- Help fulfill STEM and Environmental Education requirements
- Improve student job and career readiness with youth leadership opportunities
- Community engagement and collaboration with city, county, local organizations and businesses

MN GreenStep Schools Program Benefits*

- Helps reap green school benefits
- Free, flexible, voluntary, self-paced
- Identifies 34 best practices & 100s of actions
- Provides resources and advisors
- Hosts a peer-to-peer learning network
- Connects with member Resource Organizations
- Provides districts & schools with custom web page showing accomplishments
- Awards recognition for leadership
- Connections to training and grants

**Benefits are mostly available in pilot phase and will be enhanced in full program*

Benefits to Resource Organizations



...helping schools achieve their goals and mentoring youth

MN GreenStep Schools Resource Organizations represent the wider network of support for greening schools. They are usually offering resources or support in some form whether informational resources, in-kind time, products or services that may be of use to schools, or financial support. Their online profile includes a description of what they offer schools, with a contact person and a link for more information. They also indicate the topic areas, and regions of Minnesota they serve to facilitate searching. Resource Organizations are also a great way for students to meet and learn from the community of organizations around them.

- Connect with Schools in your service area to support your outreach mission
- Show interested schools how you can help them achieve their green school goals in areas of saving money, helping the environment, improving health, and enhancing education and career readiness
- Be listed as a partner on green school project stories that help communicate and spread success stories
- Recognition: Use the MN GreenStep Schools Resource Organization designation in your communication and promotional materials, be featured on the MN GreenStep Schools website and in a newsletter
- Help other similar resource organizations find you for networking and knowledge sharing

Interest Map and Statements

Interest in the Minnesota GreenStep Schools Program

Through November 2022, one or more contacts at **15 school districts, 36 schools, and 44 resource organizations** throughout Minnesota have expressed interest in the [Interest Form](#).

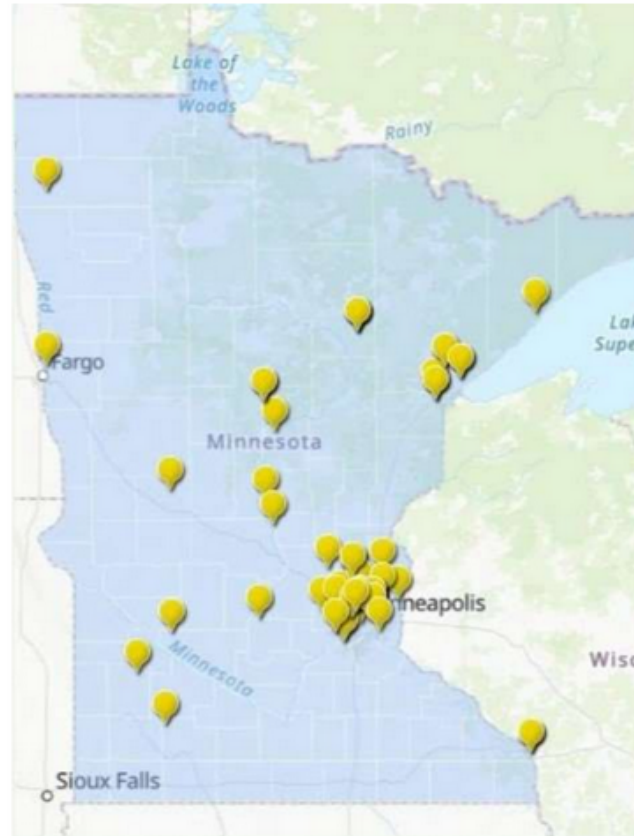
Interest from Contacts at:

MN School Districts:

La Crescent-Hokah (ISD 300)
Minneapolis Public Schools (ISD 1)
Moorhead Area Public School (ISD 152)
Pequot Lakes Public Schools (ISD 186)
Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (ISD 719)
Roseville Area School District (ISD 623)
Royalton School District (ISD 485)
Saint Paul Public Schools (ISD 625)
Shakopee Public Schools (ISD 720)
Spring Lake Park Schools (ISD 16)
Stillwater Area Public School District (ISD 834)
Wayzata Public School District (ISD 284)
West St. Paul-Mendota Hts.-Eagan (ISD 197)
Wrenshall Public School District (ISD 100)
Yellow Medicine East (ISD 2190)

MN Schools:

Andover High School
Bellaire Education Center
Carlton High School
City of Lakes Waldorf School
Discovery Woods Montessori
Eisenhower Elementary
Forest Lake Area High School
Garlough Environmental Magnet School
Harbor City International School
Heritage E-Stem Magnet School
Hiawatha Collegiate High School
Hidden Oaks Middle School
Hilltop Primary School
International Spanish Language Academy (ISLA)
Jie Ming Mandarin Immersion Academy
(a St. Paul Public Immersion School)
La Crescent-Hokah Secondary School
Little Canada Elementary
Lyndale Community School PTO
Mendota Elementary School
Moreland Arts and Health Sciences Magnet Elementary
Northern Lights Community School
Pike Lake Elementary
Pine Bend Elementary
Prairie Seeds Academy
Rockford Middle School-Center for Environmental Studies
Sartell Middle School
Scandia Elementary School
Shakopee West Middle School
Saint Francis Xavier Elementary School
St Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists
St. Stephens Catholic School
Somerset Elementary School
The Blake School, Northrup Campus
Westbrook-Walnut Grove Secondary
William M. Kelley School
Wrenshall High School



Map graphic not yet updated to show all current locations expressing interest.

Interested Resource Organizations include cities, counties, non-profits, businesses, and state agencies.

To learn more, see the [Interest Map](#) page at www.mngreenstepschools.org

What participants are saying

MN GreenStep Schools



"We love the way GreenStep Schools seeks to combat environmental issues in a variety of ways, from renewable energy to environmental education. It has realistic steps towards achieving these goals, emphasizes collaboration, and supports schools along the way. We admire how GreenStep sets high standards and has huge ambitions."

--- Holly Swiglo, Youth Leader of *Roseville Area High School Students for Climate Action*, A MN GreenStep Schools Green Club



Selected program interest statements

Here are selections from the interest form over several years that show the variety of ways districts, schools, and resource organizations are interested in the MN GreenStep Schools Program.

Interest: "What is your interest in MN GreenStep Schools?"
Looking for ways for my High School students to become involved in conservation practices in our communities. - Steven Petrich, ISD 2190
We are committed to sustainable practices at all 8 of our schools, I would like to get our district involved in the program, to learn more about best green practices. - Lisa Johnson, School District 197
Serve on MN Green Steps Team for City of La Crescent, Advisor Student Green Steps Team at La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools - Jason Ludwigson, ISD 300
I'm interested in possible district participation in a pilot MN GreenStep Schools program. Over the past year, I have been working with multi-age groups of students, partnering with community members, business leaders and sustainability leaders in Stillwater to explore innovative ways we can build a healthier, more connected community and reveal and promote sustainability in our community. I recently joined the Stillwater GreenSteps working group and am looking for resources to connect our school district with the GreenSteps initiative. I would love to see our benchmark data infused in our math and science classes and put emphasis on place-based science and data-driven community impact project-based learning throughout our district. - Julie Balfanz, Stillwater Public Schools

to use the program to help build support for solar on the Wayzata schools - Polly Andersen, Wayzata Public School District
I am interested in getting MPS as a district or individual schools involved. - Eliza Pessereau, Minneapolis Public Schools
Everything and anything involved in teaching kids about the environment, and how we can help. - Craig Schmidt, Hilltop Primary School- Westonka ISD 277
I am familiar with the greenstep cities program and interested to hear more about how to participate. SPPS is currently working on creating a sustainability advisory taskforce for the District with many stakeholders involved to help guide climate action. - Chelsea Moody, Saint Paul Public Schools
I was involved in GreenStep Cities when I was the Public Works Director for the City of Moorhead. I am interested in pursuing this for the School District in Moorhead. - Steve Moore, Moorhead Area Public School (ISD 152)
helping my children's schools make greener choices/efforts - Kim Benton, [Parent]
Can be a resource to Edina schools, teachers, and students on what we are doing to meet the community's climate mitigation goals. Can also get in touch with our Recycling and our Water Resources Coordinators - Tara Brown, City of Edina
Support organization, resource organization - Steph Leonard, U.S. Green Building Council
We are excited to support this work to ensure schools are all invested in environmental education and sustainable practices. - Jenna Totz, Minnesota Association for Environmental Education
Connecting with youth, schools, districts on climate and energy training and curricula resources - Kristen Poppleton, Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy
interested in partnering to meet city's greenstep cities goals and to improve community - Eric Eckman, city of Golden Valley
I'm a YES! Team coach and a science teacher--I want my students to "go green"! - Tracy Bockbrader, Carlton High School, ISD 93
I would like to support ISD 423 and the GreenStep Schools project. - John Paulson, City of Hutchinson
To get a program adopted in the school to promote clean energy - Shannon Mortenson, City of Warren
I would like my courses (z.umn.edu/ee1701) to be taught in high schools for credits to be transferred to UMN. - Ned Mohan, University of Minnesota
Participating in working groups and advising process to ensure integration of University resources in this effort. - Barrett Colombo, Institute on the Environment

<p>Being a professional development provider for GreenStep schools on outdoor learning at NO COST to the schools, as we are a non-profit foundation - Tom Westerhaus, Jeffers Foundation (see website: jeffersfoundation.org)</p>
<p>mobilizing community residents to support solar on schools and other energy efficiency measures - Chuck Prentice, MN350.org</p>
<p>Serving as a Best Practice Advisor (or equivalent), promoting Tree Campus K-12 in the same way that DNR fosters Tree City USA participation in GreenStep Cities. Another optional best practice action could be participation in Project Learning Tree's GreenSchools. - Emma Schultz, Minnesota DNR</p>
<p>Support GreenStep Schools in any way we can as a local government entity - Amanda Erickson, City of Elk River</p>
<p>My job at Anoka County is to administer our school recycling program, including waste audits, the grant program, and educational programs. MN GreenStep Schools is a great way to connect with schools in the County who are focused on environmental sustainability. - Katie Stelzner, Anoka County Recycling and Resource Solutions</p>
<p>I am assisting with the GreenStep Cities program in Moorhead, and I think the GreenStep Schools program would be an excellent opportunity to get our schools involved with sustainability efforts. Education about sustainability and environmental issues in our K-12 schools is incredibly important in order to influence change among the next generation. - Gabrielle Lommel, City of Moorhead</p>
<p>We have numerous resources for schools, including our recycling program which offers grants and educational materials. We also have the Green Partners environmental education program, which provides funding and supplies for projects focusing on topics from water quality to trees to energy conservation. The county has additional resources and funding opportunities for schools around natural resource protection and forestry. We would be happy to share our resources with schools in Hennepin County. - Kira Berglund, Hennepin County Environment & Energy</p>
<p>McKinstry is an energy services company interested in partnering with K-12 entities seek solutions that generate renewable energy and cost-effectively reduce energy consumption & GHG emissions. - Eric Rehm, McKinstry</p>
<p>I manage our School Waste Prevention and Recycling Grant Program for Dakota County schools to assist them in ways to reduce waste and improve recycling. We have recently added a requirement for schools to start a Green Team (if they don't have one already) in order to receive grants. I am always looking for ways to keep these teams and their waste reduction/recycling program efforts sustainable. - Ali Vandercook, Dakota County</p>
<p>Our climate curriculum is an information-based novel. It is a free download and we would love for people to know about it and have access to it. - Dawn Pape, We All Need Food and Water</p>
<p>Provide resources for renewable energy and sustainability. - Doug Shoemaker, Minnesota Renewable Energy Society (MRES)</p>
<p>Partnering with youth - Emily Ziring, City of St. Louis Park</p>

We implement AmeriCorps statewide and have hundreds of members serving in schools who might be able to assist with this program. - Dean Kephart, ServeMinnesota
We'd be happy to be a resource to the program or members - Ted Redmond, paleBLUEdot LLC
Horticulture education and school gardens - Marianne Hohenner, U of MN Extension Winona County Volunteer Master Gardener
Fork Farms would love to work with Schools and Districts in MN to help educate children about agriculture, hydroponics and sustainability, with our hydroponic technology, called the 'flex farm' and our NGSS aligned K-12 curriculum; which is designed to be used with the flex farm. We are passionate about the education and involvement of kids in the food-growing process so that they may foster a greater understanding and connection to fresh food and sustainability. - Abigail Thompson, Fork Farms
We are an environmental coalition for local environmental groups within and outside of schools. We would love to collaborate on projects or help your organization. Here is our linktree https://linktr.ee/ghenvirocoalition . Our main social media platform is instagram @ghenviro.coalition - Mina Adabag, Greater Twin Cities High School Environmental Coalition
We're a business that can support schools and districts with Energy Projects for renovation or new builds: Studies/Assessments, Retro-commissioning, Efficient Design Solutions (efficiency improvements AND renewables), Implementation, and Funding/Financing: Grants, Rebates, IRA federal tax incentives, Performance Contracts, Purchase Power Agreements, Energy as a Service. - Kristin Duerr, ICS
I will be supporting and promoting GreenStep Schools and GreenStep Cities throughout the hubbard county area schools and city governments. - Christina Hill, Global Change Consulting
Forest Lake is a GreenStep City and I believe being a GreenStep School would be a nice connection to the community. Students in the FLHS Environmental Club YES! Team are passionate and active in the school and community to education and practice environmental sustainability. The school district supports green action; currently, the district has received funding for implementing a storm water reuse program. We also have solar panels throughout our district. All high school students receive climate education through the Earth & Space Science course required for graduation. - Devon Vojtech, Forest Lake Area High School
We are an Environmental based charter school and would like to continue to implement as much sustainability as possible. - Heidi Auel, Discovery Woods School
I would love to be involved and support additional, large scale environmental initiatives for young children. - Sue Powell, GARLOUGH ENVIRONMENTAL MAGNET SCHOOL
We are a current YES! team and are interested in making our school more environmentally friendly - Patrick merrick, Westbrook Walnut Grove
To make our school a better place - David Miller, St Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists

<p>Student at University of Minnesota Twin Cities studying sustainability and carrying out project similar to the goals of MN GreenStep Schools. My project entails educating and encouraging involvement of the school my child attends in becoming more sustainable and perhaps being a member of MN GreenStep Schools. - Emily Lobato, St. Stephens Catholic School</p>
<p>Seeking to continue making our school as sustainable and eco-friendly as possible - Brian Scott , Harbor City International School</p>
<p>we have a club for 3rd and 4th graders about helping the environment - looking for resources - Tricia Crider, Somerset Elementary School</p>
<p>Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs Best Practices, Improve Health and Wellness - Mollie Schelligner, Moreland Arts and Health Sciences Magnet Elementary</p>
<p>Climate change management info for middle school students. - Ann Meany, City of Lakes Waldorf School</p>
<p>I've worked with the Andover Leos (student led volunteer group) on a Sustainability Month project for the month of February. This seems like a logical next step! - Tammy Peterson, Andover High School</p>
<p>Making steps to become a green school - Quannel Cooper, Pine Bend Elementary</p>
<p>We started a "Life Lab Garden" at West Middle School and looking for more resources to grow our program. - Tara Orstad, Shakopee West Middle School</p>
<p>To connect with local experts to enhance science, social studies and health curriculum. Providing students with a chance to learn from, discuss content , and engage with hands on activities. - Andrea Egelkraut, Bellaire Education Center</p>
<p>Our PTO maintains our school garden and we're always looking for ways to enhance our space and improve the engagement with our students and community. - Stephen McHenry, Lyndale Community School PTO</p>
<p>To improve our school wide practices and to improve our Green Ribbon application. - Brian Scott, Harbor City International School</p>
<p>I have a background in environmental communications and have participated on school green teams. Professionally, I am curious about the program's structure, implementation, etc. and how I might become involved. Personally, I would love to use the program to further green efforts at my children's elementary school in Minneapolis. - Kim Richards, Minneapolis Public Schools</p>
<p>Interested in the resources available as we continue our sustainable mission. - Jamie Madson, Rockford Middle School-Center for Environmental Studies</p>
<p>I'd like to establish my high school as a GreenStep School and enter it into your program. - Kathryn Kaiser, The Blake School, Northrup Campus</p>
<p>I'd like to see the elementary school in our city be a GreenStep School. Scandia, as a city, is a GreenStep City. - Ann Rinkenberger, Scandia Elementary School</p>

I am a parent (and a youth studies researcher at the UMN so I have dual interest here). We are in the beginning stages of establishing an after-school environment club that will use the GreenStep schools framework to engage elementary aged youth in learning, leadership and action about the environment. We'd like to learn more about how to establish a GSS group and what the process would be for becoming a GS "school" - Katie Johnston-Goodstar, Parent/Club at Little Canada Elementary

For my CAS (Creativity, Activity, and Service) project for the IB Program, I am trying to get my school to run on solar energy and am currently looking for all resources that could help me complete my project. I believe MN GreenStep Schools can help with this - Dave Francischelli, IB Student, Environmental Club President

Our goal is to follow the program in order to make our school more sustainable, whether that be through reducing our carbon footprint, or doing other small projects. - Matt Breen, Teacher at Minnetonka High School

Support

Organizations Expressing Support

The Minnesota GreenStep Schools team is grateful for the support of our network of community leaders interested in green schools that have expressed support for the program throughout the program's development and pilot launch.

Providing In-Kind Advisory and Technical Support:

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- Minnesota Department of Education
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Department of Commerce

Additional Organizations Expressing Support:

- Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA)
- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)
- Environmental Quality Board (EQB)
- Minnesota Association for Environmental Education (MAEE)
- US Green Building Council-Minnesota (USGBC-MN)

Support Quotes

The green economy is one of the fastest growing parts of the American economy and preparing the students of Minnesota for that future is critical to their success and the economic health of the state. GreenStep Schools is an innovative program to achieve that goal. It creates a one-stop shop that integrates the many one-off efforts to green schools, which are admirable attempts but uncoordinated and less effective as a result. This program will take what has worked so well at the municipal scale [in GreenStep Cities] into our schools, where students can acquire the skills they will need in order to thrive in the future. I urge your support of GreenStep Schools. It will be transformative for Minnesota's schools and its students.

- Thomas Fisher, Director, Minnesota Design Center, University of Minnesota

MN GreenStep Schools will provide a framework that our school will make great efforts to achieve.

- Mollie Schelligner' Moreland Arts and Health Sciences Magnet Elementary

I am so pleased to see the Minnesota GreenStep Schools initiative moving forward. I know it will be embraced by students and schools around the state.

- Tom Hoff, Southwest West Central (SWWC) Service Cooperative, Marshall, MN

We are excited to support this work [GreenStep Schools] to ensure schools are all invested in environmental education and sustainable practices.

- Jenna Totz, Minnesota Association for Environmental Education (MAEE)

The Green Step Schools program advances student achievement, builds healthy school environments and preserves precious natural resources. It has the right team and builds off a proven model. The Institute on the Environment is committed to its successful deployment across all of Minnesota.

- Jessica Hellmann, Director, Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota

The best approach to getting kids to take part is to make them part of the process.

- Donna Hanson-Kaasa, Northern Lights Community School, Warba, MN

Thank you GreenStep Schools for your commitment to healthy kids and communities!

- Heidi Ferris' Growing Green Hearts LLC

GreenStep Cities has been instrumental in moving Falcon Heights forward towards becoming more sustainable and resilient. It's imperative that all of us do our part to make our corner of the world a better place. Schools have the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, save money, and educate our children about addressing perplexing global challenges. GreenStep Schools will be the guiding initiative to help with this endeavor.

- Peter Lindstrom, City of Falcon Heights

Green Steps Schools is an innovative partnership that is critical to preparing students to be leaders on issues of sustainability and resilience.

- Barrett Colombo' Institute on the Environment

This is a great program concept and I think every school district in the State should participate!

- Ted Redmond' paleBLUEdot LLC

MN GreenStep Schools is an organization doing incredible work to empower Minnesota schools to use best practices in sustainability.

- Abigail Thompson' Fork Farms

The New City School community believes in responsible citizenship and stewardship of our environment. We want to support the healthy sustenance of our neighborhood and our city and eagerly join this movement of schools and organizations for better world and NEW CITY!

- Andrew Grantias' New City School

MN GreenStep Schools is exactly what we need to create cleaner, more sustainable communities. Sustainability education and application is essential to instilling strong values of environmental stewardship in younger generations. I support MN GreenStep Schools who are striving to start the conversation and make true change in our communities.

- Emily Lobato' St. Stephens Catholic School

Testimony Support Letters and Statements

Holly Swiglo, Ivy Song, and Emilia Gusdal

Seniors at Roseville Area High School

Leaders and Founders of Roseville Area High School Students For Climate Action



Legislative Testimony

SF2350 (Kunesh)/ HF2626 (Hill/Kraft)

Dear Chair and Members,

We are writing in support of the SF2350 (Kunesh)/ HF2626 (Hill/Kraft) bills for an act relating to education finance; appropriating money for the Minnesota GreenStep Schools program.

As student activists who have spent the past few years working to increase our school's sustainability, we know firsthand that becoming a sustainable school is not easy and that school officials often have little motivation to do so. GreenStep Schools combats this by assisting schools and motivating them to take action. We are confident that if our school district belonged to GreenStep, we students wouldn't have had to take on the burden of making our school sustainable. We would already be there.

Many young people today deal with climate anxiety - struggling to find hope while witnessing an apparent lack of action amidst catastrophe. When students see their schools take action to reduce their environmental impact, it inspires them. It teaches them to care for the environment - a value they will keep with them throughout the rest of their lives. If students see things like composting and solar at their schools from a young age, they will begin to view these initiatives as the norm, and wonder why they aren't implemented elsewhere. If their school can do it, why can't their library or place of worship? When schools become more sustainable, it fosters the next generation of environmental leaders.

For this reason, all schools must have access to the tools they need to become more sustainable. Typically, only wealthy schools can afford to invest in things like solar, but GreenStep is available to everyone - and could reach even more schools and students with increased funding.

Considering Minnesota's vast number of schools and school districts, we are confident that schools have large environmental impacts. Imagine if every school in the state was able to install solar panels, compost their food waste, and offer plant-based options for lunch. Through increasing funding for MN GreenStep Schools, we can make this a reality.

Another crucial role of GreenStep is assisting schools in providing quality environmental education. We were fortunate to be able to take AP Environmental Science at our school, and can truly say that we wouldn't be where we are today without it. Through this class, we discovered our passion for the natural world and realized we want to dedicate the rest of our lives to protecting it. Environmental education prepared us to live in a world where climate change is a reality, and gave us the tools we need to combat it as well as live more sustainable lives. Ensuring quality environmental education for all students is one of the most important things we can do to raise environmental leaders and ultimately solve our world's environmental problems.

As student activists, we have faced many challenges, but through it all, our friends at MN GreenStep Schools have been some of the most supportive people in our network. MN GreenStep Schools brings us hope for a better world. In a time of environmental despair, there is nothing we need more.



March 15, 2023

As the 2023 president of the American Institute of Architects Minnesota, which represents more than 2,300 architecture and design professionals throughout the state, I am writing in support of the SF2350 (Kunesh)/ HF2626 (Hill/Kraft) bills for an act relating to education finance; appropriating money for the Minnesota GreenStep Schools program.

Architects and developers have seen many positive impacts in communities that have implemented GreenStep programs. The GreenStep model gives cities a path to make significant progress on sustainability issues in a clear, incremental model. Resources are made available to help GreenStep cities succeed, and this program takes GreenStep to another constituency that can make significant strides in reducing their climate impact.

In its pilot form, the GreenStep Schools program made a significant impact on participants, not only in the form of sustainability actions, but in helping educate students about ways they can contribute to sustainability initiatives. This dual benefit makes the GreenStep Schools program doubly impactful, and likely to have a positive impact for multiple generations.

Our public schools need new tools to help advance their sustainability initiatives; by providing base funding for GreenStep initiatives, it removes the pressure for schools to find funds within existing budgets to take their next step forward.

As architects, we also expect that school expansions, remodels, and new buildings in communities where the GreenStep Schools programs have inspired students will incorporate more sustainability and resilience considerations.

Schools that participated in the pilot are already seeing cost savings and increases in student wellbeing, while learning about the science and engineering behind sustainability, potentially inspiring them to consider future careers as architects, engineers, or other partners in the AEC industry.

Expanding from a pilot to a fully-funded program will also expand the reach of the program to communities that may not have the resources to compete for a spot in a pilot program, but could benefit significantly from the guidance and roadmap GreenStep schools provide.

Helping the next generation of Minnesotans embrace sustainability in their schools will help them embrace it throughout their lives. We urge you to fund the GreenStep Schools program fully for our future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sam Olbekson".

Sam Olbekson, AIA, AICAE, NOMA
President, AIA Minnesota
Founder and CEO, Full Circle Indigenous Planning + Design

AIA Minnesota
105 5th Avenue South
Suite 485
Minneapolis, MN 55401

T (612) 338 6763
F (612) 338 7981

www.aia-mn.org



March 14, 2023

To the Chair and Members:

I am writing as a Minnesota constituent, a PTA officer, and a clean-energy architect and executive to share Willdan's support for Minnesota's GreenStep Schools program in SF2350 (Kunesh)/HF2626 (Hill/Kraft). The U.S. economy is currently decarbonizing. By funding the GreenStep Schools program, Minnesota can continue as a leader in the clean energy arena and prosper for years to come.

Schools are at the heart of our communities. They demonstrate to our youth what our values are and prepare them for the future. The GreenStep Schools program will promote energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainability to benefit our communities across Minnesota in a myriad of ways.

Green schools:

- Are healthier for students and promote learning
- Reduce the energy costs paid by school districts, freeing up educational resources to directly benefit students
- Promote the knowledge, skills, and growth opportunities needed to support a decarbonized economy

My division of Willdan was founded as The Weidt Group in 1979, in Chaska, Minnesota, with a focus on sustainable and energy-efficient design. Minnesota policies that required utility companies to invest in energy efficiency were instrumental in our growth from a handful of architects to a major national energy efficiency firm. Those policies also enabled us to take our Minnesota-grown expertise across the Midwest to California, the Carolinas, and 10 other states. As a result, our division expanded from 60 to 120 people in the last four years—with half of those employees residing in Minnesota.

I believe that the GreenStep Schools program will benefit our schools and students, allow Minnesota to continue as a national leader in the clean energy economy, and will support job creation, which is critical to Minnesota's future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Baker', written in a cursive style.

Chris Baker, AIA, PE | Project Executive
WILLDAN GROUP, INC.

877.938.1588 | 5800 Baker Road, Suite 100, Minnetonka, Minnesota 55345 | www.willdan.com

March 9, 2023

To: State of Minnesota Legislators

From: Tom Fisher, Director



Re: GreenStep Schools

I write in strong support of GreenStep Schools as a critical part of ensuring the Minnesota's preparation for the fast-growing green economy.

The green economy is one of the fastest growing parts of the American economy and preparing the students of Minnesota for that future is critical to their success and the economic health of the state.

GreenStep Schools is an innovative program to achieve that goal. It creates a one-stop shop that integrates the many one-off efforts to green schools, which are admirable attempts but uncoordinated and less effective as a result.

This program will take what has worked so well at the municipal scale in GreenStep Cities into our schools, where students can acquire the skills they will need in order to thrive in the future.

It will be transformative for Minnesota's schools and its students. It offers a win-win-win solution to several challenges. It will help us educate students about energy conservation, it will help schools save energy, and it will enable communities to prepare from a promising economic future.

I urge your support of GreenStep Schools.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Institute on the Environment

325 LES Bldg
1954 Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108

March 9, 2023

To: Minnesota Legislators as You Consider Supporting GreenStep Schools

Dear Chairs and Members,

I write in strong support of funding the expansion and development of the Minnesota GreenStep Schools program, which follows the successful example of the Minnesota GreenStep Cities voluntary best practices and recognition model. We urgently need more students to get involved with hands-on projects, as they will with GreenStep Schools, to spark their interest in working on energy transition and sustainability jobs. Research by Clean Energy Environment Minnesota's shows clean energy jobs are growing at or faster than other sectors in the state, and we know that the Inflation Reduction Act will spur even more growth. Education research shows that hands-on experiences drive student learning and shape their career ideas.

GreenStep Schools will help teachers, students and school volunteers to learn how to best support students in getting involved in greening their own schools and communities. The program does not mandate what schools need to do, but instead sets forth a menu of best practices and ideas that students, supported by their teachers, school staff and communities, can choose for themselves. The friendly competition, easy-to-use platform and network building aspects of GreenStep Schools will help spur more green teams and green projects across Minnesota. Each school that gets involved will also choose the pace and type of projects they tackle.

I know that a GreenSteps approach works, from my own experience. In 2009, while I was serving on the city council in Falcon Heights, our city became a pilot in the then-new Minnesota GreenStep Cities program. The program gave us the impetus to raise our environmental ambitions. Councilmembers and city staff reviewed GreenStep Cities guidance, and with strong support from high school and University students in our community, the city moved forward with achievable projects, such as LED streetlights, solar on our city hall, a bike path on Fairview and a community garden. Through the GreenSteps web portal and social media, we shared our successes and learned from others.

I have gotten to know many K-12 educators across the state through my work at the University of Minnesota, as we collaborate on putting in place new sustainability and energy transition curricula for our students. Sharing the latest resources for school greening activities and curriculum is something that will help expand and accelerate progress.

Beth Mercer-Taylor

Sustainability Education Co-Director, Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota
City of Falcon Heights Environment Commission Chair

Best Practices

There are [34 Best Practices](#) in the MN GreenStep Schools Program that form a menu of options to pursue. Each Best Practice has a list of associated Best Practice Actions that come with resources to support those actions



0. Organizational Leadership

0.1 Green Team: Participating districts and schools form a green team made up of diverse roles and stakeholders.

0.2 GreenStep School Resolution: The district passes a resolution to participate in GreenStep, signed by participating schools.

0.3 Widespread Communication: District/School communicate activities and accomplishments to families, students, staff, and stakeholders.

0.4 Equity And Diversity: District/School Proactively plans for equitable and diverse participation in the program and projects

0.5 Green School Strategic Plan: District/School creates a strategic plan and reviews it annually.

0.6 Community Leadership: District/School contribute their experience to professional and community organizations to foster green school capacity beyond their borders.

0.7 Advanced Recognition: District/School seek advanced recognition through programs like Green Ribbon, LEED, or others.



1. Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs

1.1 Energy Efficiency: District/School has very little wasted energy.

1.2 Clean Energy: District/School uses clean energy sources such as solar panels.

1.3 Waste Reduction: District/School has very little solid waste and recycles a variety of materials.

1.4 Material Safety: District/School has very little hazardous waste and safely manages it.

1.5 Water Efficiency: District/School has very little wasted water indoors and in the school yard.

1.6 Onsite Stormwater Management: Schoolyards include areas that are natural and help rain soak deep into the ground.

1.7 Community Spaces: Schools and schoolyards include areas that the community can use.

1.8 Green Product Purchasing: District/School purchases green products such as recycled office paper, low or non-toxic cleaning supplies, furniture built to green standards, or efficient computers.

1.9 Commuting Efficiency: Many students and staff walk, bike, carpool or bus to school.

1.10 Transportation Efficiency: District/School has efficient transportation use and reduces its environmental impacts.

1.11 Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience: District/School has planned and prepared for extreme weather, adaptation to changing climatic conditions, and has fostered strong community connections.

1.12 Climate Mitigation and Planning: District/School has assessed their greenhouse gas emissions, planned for their reduction, and is taking action toward that goal.



2. Improved Health and Wellness

2.1 Drinking Water Safety: District/School monitors drinking water quality and prevents water contaminants.

2.2 Indoor Air Quality: District/School has programs to protect air quality such as using a strong ventilation standard, a comprehensive Indoor Air Quality Management Program, an asthma management program, and a no-smoking policy.

2.3 Indoor Environmental Comfort: School provides comfortable learning spaces in terms of natural and artificial lighting, temperature, humidity, acoustics (sound quality), window views to nature, furniture and equipment.

2.4 Chemical Safety: School minimizes and manages chemical exposure and handling to protect students and staff from wood preservatives, mercury in devices, pesticides, and other potential hazards.

2.5 Physical Activity: Students have ample physical education or outdoor time during each school day.

2.6 Nourishment Access: District/School provides breakfast and free or reduced lunches as needed to make sure all students are nourished.

2.7 Nutrition: District/School provides nutritious and healthy meals and snacks.

2.8 Sustainable Food: District/School purchases food with green features such as organic, fair trade, or locally grown.

2.9. Health Resources and Planning: District/School has health resources (e.g. a nurse or health aid) and has an overall health plan that includes mental health, positive school climate, inclusivity, equity, and safety.



3. Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

3.1 Integrated Environmental Education: Environmental education is integrated throughout the curriculum.

3.2 Outdoor Learning: Outdoor learning experiences are provided .

3.3 Teacher Training: Environmental education training is offered to teachers.

3.4. Environmental Career Preparation: The curriculum connects to environmental career readiness.

3.5 Community Projects: Students conduct environmental community engagement projects .

3.6 Community Engagement: The district/school partners with community organizations to advance green school achievement.

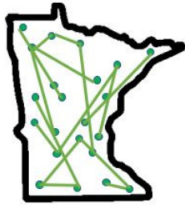
Connection to State Programs and Goals

MN GreenStep Programs, including MN GreenStep Schools are intended to support communities of practice—those local, on-the-ground teams who do the day to day work of implementing change.

These communities of practice are most effective when they are connected.

- **Connected with peers across the state** so schools teams can learn from each other what works and how to overcome challenges
- **Connected to shared statewide goals** so that local teams can benefit from the resources that come with aligned statewide efforts like the Due North plan, or the Climate Action Framework.
- **Connected in place, across sectors** so that local schools, cities, businesses, counties, and other local organizations can work together to improve schools and communities.

Connecting Communities of Practice



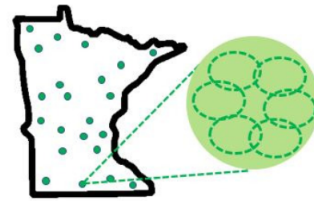
Connect Communities of Practice Across the State

for **peer-to-peer** learning, and friendly competition across organizations (i.e. cities to cities, schools to schools, etc.)



Connect Communities of Practice to Common Statewide Goals

for **local-to-state** coordination of resources and planning (i.e. state climate goals with local climate action, state health goals with local health action, etc.)



Connect Communities of Practice within a Region

for **place-based** coordination in a locality (i.e. cities, tribal nations, schools, counties, watersheds, businesses, farms, utilities, etc.)

MN Due North Plan

There are many ways that GreenStep programs support the Due North Education Plan.

- By being free, voluntary, and flexible, MN GreenStep Schools levels the playing field, making the benefits of green schools available to students and schools independent of their region or resources.
- Physical and Mental Health are even more important post-pandemic. One of the four outcome areas of MN GreenStep Schools is on improving student, staff, and community health, for example integrating with the State’s Indoor Air Quality best practices for schools.
- Equity is an explicit goal of MN GreenStep Schools, and will be a criteria for how the program proceeds, as well as a part of how schools shape their project development and stories, with teams of all regions, backgrounds, and approaches represented.
- Classrooms, school buildings and grounds are not just a background for learning—they are a critical part of providing a safe and nurturing environment where students can learn and teachers can teach. Green schools promote healthy environments with access to daylight and views, high indoor air quality, comfortable temperature and humidity, and acoustics that allow for concentration and attention.
- Providing a 21st Century Education is supported by engaging students with environmental education, the operation of their schools, and connections to STEM and other growing green economy careers.

Advancing the *Due North Education Plan*



The *Due North Education Plan*, launched in 2021, serves as a guide toward a future where every child receives a high-quality education, no matter their race or zip code. In each of the seven priorities developed, the GreenStep programs have identified over 180 best practices that support Due North plan priorities.



Plan Priorities	Total related GreenStep Cities Best Practices	Total related GreenStep Schools Best Practices
Meet the Needs of Students During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic	0	13
Every Student Receives a World-Class Education	3	26
Every Student Learns in a Safe and Nurturing Environment	6	28
Every Student Learns in a Classroom with Caring and Qualified Teachers	0	17
Expand Access to Opportunities for Students of Color and Indigenous Students	1	23
Expand Access to Opportunities for Students in Greater Minnesota	3	25
Fund a 21st Century Education	9	34
Totals	22	166

MN Climate Action Framework

Throughout the Minnesota Climate Action Framework, MN GreenStep programs are referenced as strategies to bridge goals and objectives to local actions. Schools have a big role to play in Minnesota Climate Action.

- Clean Transportation: Electric school buses and safe routes to school that encourage non-vehicular commuting.
- Climate-Smart Natural and Working Lands: School grounds can improve landscape design and landcare practices to prevent pollution, and improve local environmental quality and habitat.
- Resilient Communities: Schools are often hubs for community resilience and represent a key place for family education about community resilience.
- Clean Energy and Efficient Buildings: Most existing schools could save money and reduce their energy footprint with efficiency upgrades. The growth of solar on schools can save further costs and impacts, and there is a growing body of curriculum that can integrate these improvements with learning.
- Healthy Lives and Communities: Schools can support and model healthy living, and green schoolyards can provide green space and recreation for students and the community at large.
- Clean Economy: Green schools can model and teach the favorable economics of clean energy and prepare students for work in the growing green economy.

Moving Minnesota's Climate Action Framework Forward



"We will use the Climate Action Framework to work with tribal nations, the legislature, cities, counties, and communities to build ambitious solutions that reflect the urgency of the issue and ensure all Minnesotans benefit. We will not be moving forward alone."

Governor Tim Walz

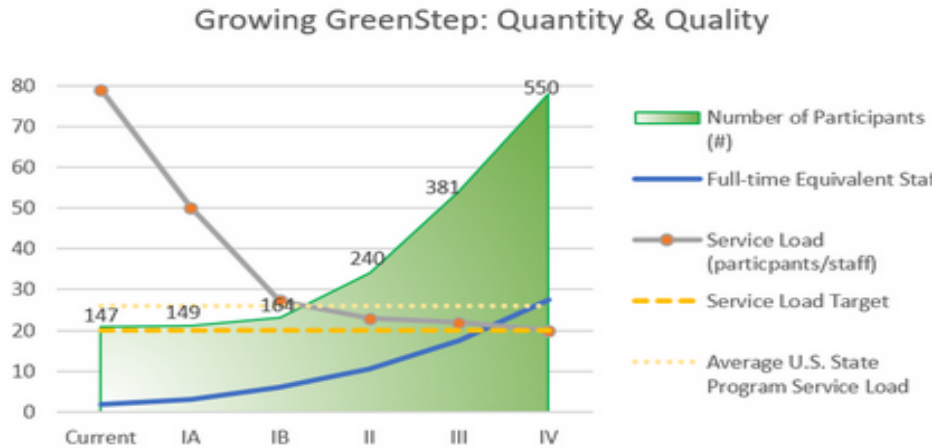
Explore the Matrix

Minnesota's Climate Action Framework, published in 2022, highlights the need to take action across all sectors and areas of the state to address climate change. In each of the six goals developed, the GreenStep programs have identified nearly 600 best practices and actions that support nearly every framework goal, initiative, and recommended action.

Framework Goals	Total related GreenStep Cities Best Practice Actions	Total related GreenStep Schools Best Practices
Clean Transportation	72	17
Climate-Smart Natural and Working Lands	138	30
Resilient Communities	83	49
Clean Energy and Efficient Buildings	50	29
Healthy Lives and Communities	35	46
Clean Economy	20	19
Totals	398	190

Funding Comparison







Staffing varies for green city and school programs in other states, but a recent survey of programs showed an average participant to staff ratio (service load was 26. To provide deep assistance and specialized resources, the GreenStep programs goal is 20. That means MN GreenStep Schools could comfortably support 50 schools/districts with the 2.5 FTE that this bill would provide, and more as GreenStep expands its staffing across programs.



How are we doing so far? We have been able to accomplish a lot, with a little. At 1.85 FTE across program partners and 147 GreenStep participants, our current service load (participants per staff) is at 80. Among other statewide programs (CT, NJ, NY, MA, PA), our peers average 26 participants per staff. Our goal is to provide deep assistance and specialized resources at a load of 20 participants per program staff across the Minnesota GreenStep partnership.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

The GreenStep idea is not unique to our state. In fact, 15 other states have programs that assist and recognize municipal sustainability efforts, at least two other states have programs for K-12 schools, and another with a program for businesses. The Sustainable States Network helps these statewide programs connect and learn from each other. Here are a few successful programs:

Program	Year Started	Number of Participants	Number of Staff	Annual Operating Budget
 SUSTAINABLE JERSEY	2009	219 municipalities 321 schools	23	\$4,474,324
 Sustainable CT Local Actions. Statewide Impact.	2017	129 municipalities	8.3	\$1,400,000 <small>(Does not include staff)</small>
 NEW YORK STATE Climate Smart Communities	2009	367 towns, cities, villages, and counties	15	\$15,000,000 <small>(Does not include staff)</small>
 NEW YORK STATE Clean Energy Communities	2016	809 towns, cities, villages, and counties	24	\$16,000,000 <small>(Does not include staff)</small>
 SUSTAINABLE MARYLAND	2011	88 municipalities	3	\$500,000 <small>(Does not include staff)</small>
 Sustainable PENNSYLVANIA	2013	123 municipalities 250 businesses	12	\$1,227,995

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How is MN GreenStep Schools different from MN GreenStep Cities?

A: MN GreenStep Schools has things in common with MN GreenStep Cities. In fact, it was based on the proven, successful delivery model of MN GreenStep Cities that is a beginner-friendly, free, voluntary, and flexible best practice framework that challenges, assists, and recognizes cities as they progress in their green city achievements. What is different between the two programs are the specific best practice categories and actions so that the menu of options is related to the schools sector and its unique opportunities, including environmental education and engaging students in learning about and improving their school and community. There are also other differences, like the inclusion of resource organizations and youth green clubs as supporting participants to reflect the way that cities, non-profits, businesses and youth themselves can partner with schools to improve their environment, health, and education. There are other differences, but the two programs are very compatible, and in fact, encourage city-school collaboration.

Q: Doesn't GreenStep Schools already have funding?

A: Only interim funding. After an initial program start up grant, MN GreenStep Schools has been provided with interim funding from the MN GreenStep Cities program (at 10% FTE) during the pilot phase. This keeps the website open, but full program funding is needed to meet the needs of the many districts and schools that have expressed interest in the program. See the Funding Comparison Section to see what a state green schools program needs to operate.

Q: How is MN GreenStep Schools different from other existing green school programs like Green Ribbon Schools or LEED?

A: While Green Ribbon Schools (a Federal green school award) provides a comprehensive framework and awards four exceptional schools per state per year, it is a one-time award and requires an advanced level of effort and achievement. In contrast, MN GreenStep Schools meets the needs of schools at every level, providing support and recognition of step-by-step progress. The good news is that MN GreenStep Schools was built to be compatible with the nationally-recognized Green Ribbon program categories, so that as a school progresses in MN GreenStep Schools, it will help them build achievements to prepare a MN Green Ribbon application. MN GreenStep Schools has worked with the Minnesota Department of Education that

administers the Green Ribbon award in Minnesota from the outset to ensure compatibility of the programs.

LEED is another program that can be used to support green schools. As stated on the Center for Green Schools website, "LEED is the world's premier green building certification system and applies to all buildings at all phases of development (design, construction, operations and maintenance)." While LEED is considered an advanced program, they have many resources and tools to help schools and the MN chapter of USGBC (which publishes LEED) has been a partner to MN GreenStep Schools throughout the development to foster productive connections with LEED resources. MN GreenStep Schools encourages schools to seek LEED recognition when they are ready.

Connecting the dots; Not reinventing the wheel: There are many other existing organizations that can support schools as they make green improvements. MN GreenStep Schools is set up to connect schools to existing resources, experts, and resource organizations using a common framework, to help organize and facilitate those connections.