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Pathways
to Greener Schools

One in five people who live in the United States—55 million children, teachers, administrators, nurses and janitors—spend their days in K–12 schools. Schools can, and should, provide a healthy environment for students and staff, promote sustainable practices, and teach students to be responsible stewards of their community, the earth and its resources.

Students Investigate

For 35 years, Project Learning Tree® (PLT) has provided environmental education, professional development, and curriculum materials to PreK-12 teachers. Every year, 30,000 teachers attend 1,500 PLT professional development workshops around the country. Designed for all grade levels and learning styles, PLT's multi-disciplinary activities help young people think critically about issues affecting the health and sustainability of our planet.

But PLT doesn't just increase student awareness of environmental issues through classroom studies. It helps students transfer their knowledge into positive environmental action in their own schools and communities.

PLT's *GreenSchools!* program combines environmental education, service-learning, and leadership opportunities for students to reduce the ecological footprint of their school, and turn their school into a model GreenSchool.

More than 700 schools nationwide have registered to become part of Project Learning Tree's *GreenSchools!* program. Across the country, elementary, middle, and high school students are learning to use their knowledge and skills from science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses to address challenges at their school. They are forming "green teams" to investigate and reduce their school's environmental footprint—and save their schools money!

PLT's *GreenSchools!* program provides a blueprint for teachers, students, school administrators, parents, and community members to engage together in creating a more green and healthy learning environment. Student-driven investigations and their ensuing action projects grow students' leadership skills, and give students a sense of empowerment and ownership of the projects they lead to green their school.

A Blueprint for Green Learning
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- Teachers and student leaders are trained together to form a team (in which teachers and administrators are the facilitators, and students are the driving force) to effectively conduct PLT's *GreenSchools!* Investigations.
- A set of five investigations, available online, enable individual students or whole classes to examine their school's energy use, waste and recycling, water consumption, school site, and environmental quality (such as indoor air quality, school transportation, and use of chemicals)—and establish benchmarks.
- Using the results of the investigations, teams select, design, and implement appropriate service-learning projects, and measure the improvements. As funding permits, Project Learning Tree provides *GreenWorks!* grants to support action projects the students lead to improve their school's environment.

"PLT's GreenSchools! *program is designed to let students analyze data and design a student-led project that will impact their school. Students are really taking charge of their own learning and becoming active participants in what is happening in their schools. These citizen scientists are the ones who are making recommendations to their school boards."*

– Christina Stallings Roberson, Oklahoma Project Learning Tree Coordinator

Students Take Action

Lowcountry Prep, a K-12 school in Pawleys Island, South Carolina, is one example of a school that's using PLT's *GreenSchools!* investigations to benefit student learning, the environment, and a school's bottom line.

Students formed teams and, once a week for six weeks, they used light meters, thermometers, scales, and other tools to gather data and conduct their research. They shared their findings with the school's board of trustees, along with recommended actions for the 2010-2011 school year. With solid data and a well-prepared presentation, they were met with excitement and unopposed support for their work.

Now the teams meet once a week to plan and carry out service-learning activities based on last year's investigations. Their plans include:

"We, as students, are the ones who are affected by changes in our schools. Expressing our opinions on what happens at our schools helps us learn to make decisions, keeps us devoted to being green, and gives us satisfaction in environmental achievements. It is a privilege for students to be given this opportunity of being taken seriously by adults."

– Elizabeth Zieser-Misenheimer, 9th grade student, Lowcountry Preparatory School, South Carolina

- Replacing light bulbs with lower-wattage CFLs (a savings of about $4,000 per year)
- Installing "shut down and boot" timers for computers not in use (after determining that leaving the computers on, even in sleep mode, cost $216 per computer per year)
- Setting up a recycling program for paper, plastic, and aluminum, after a "greenest grade" contest helped generate interest
- Setting up other contests that engage the entire school, especially students in lower grades
- Sharing information about the research they have done and what they have learned from it with the community

"This program gives the school tools to make decisions, and gives kids a sense of purpose and worthwhile achievement."

– Sandy Gresham, Science Teacher and Environmental Education School Coordinator, Lowcountry Preparatory School, South Carolina

Project Learning Tree® (PLT) provides quality curriculum materials and training in environmental education to 30,000 educators every year. Since 1976, PLT has trained over 500,000 educators across the country, reaching an estimated 75 million students. Funding for PLT's GreenSchools! *program is provided in part by the Corporation for National & Community Service through Learn and Serve America, the U.S. Forest Service, and Staples Foundation for Learning.*