# Doing More with Less: Low to No Cost Sustainability Initiatives

# Introductions

**Stuart, Brodsky, AIA:**
***- Principal, Wight & Company***

**Will Thompson**
***- Account Executive, Tarkett***

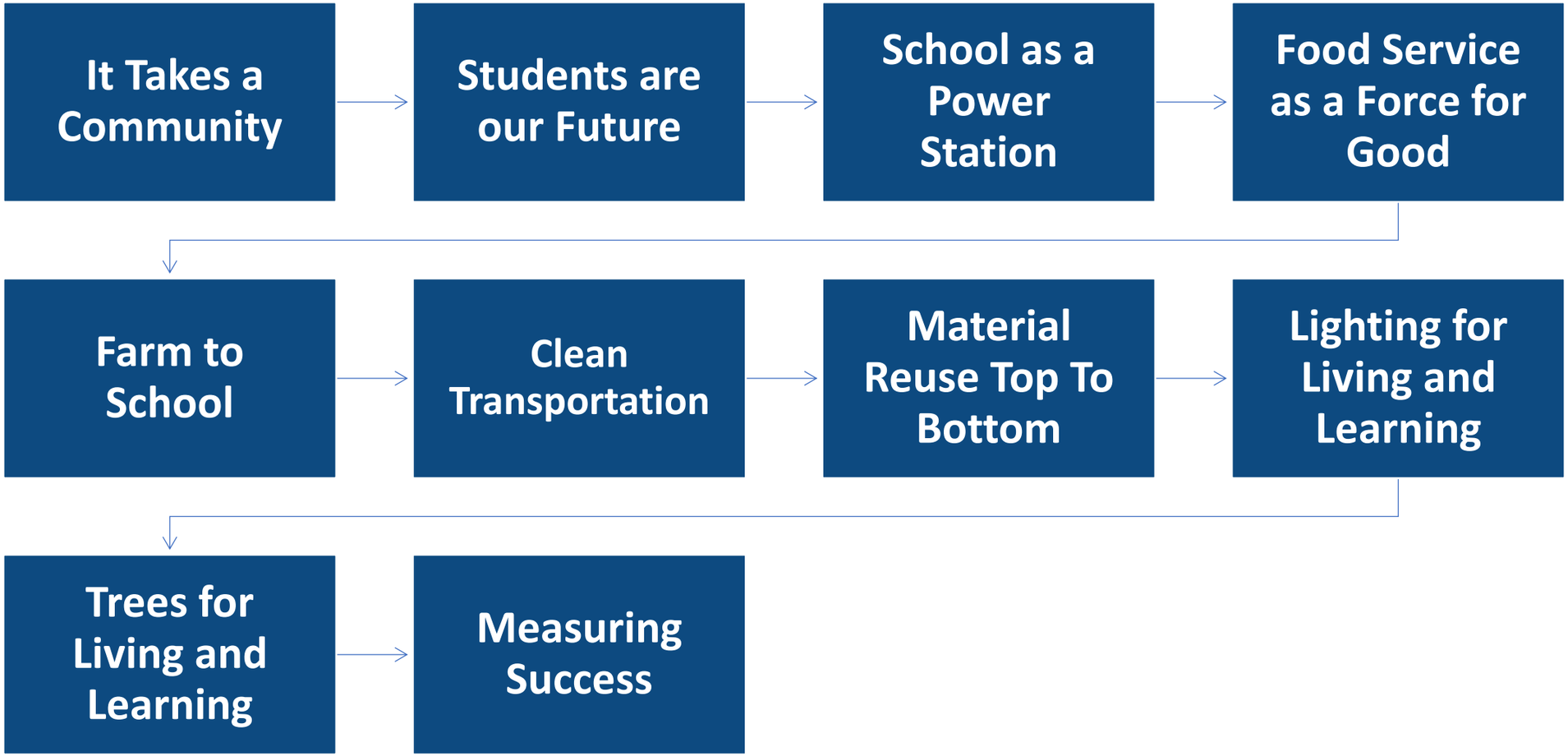
**Calvin Cornish, CEM**
***- Senior Account Executive, Johnson Controls***

**Jeremy Wickham, CETL**
***- Executive Director of Technology & Operations, North Shore School District 112***

# It’s The Journey…

# …Not The Destination

# 10 Ideas


It Takes a Community
Students are our Future
School as a Power Station
Food Service as a Force for Good
Farm to School
Clean Transportation
Material Reuse Top To Bottom
Lighting for Living and Learning
Trees for Living and Learning
Measuring Success

# 1

# It Takes a Community

Image: Peachaya Tanomsup

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

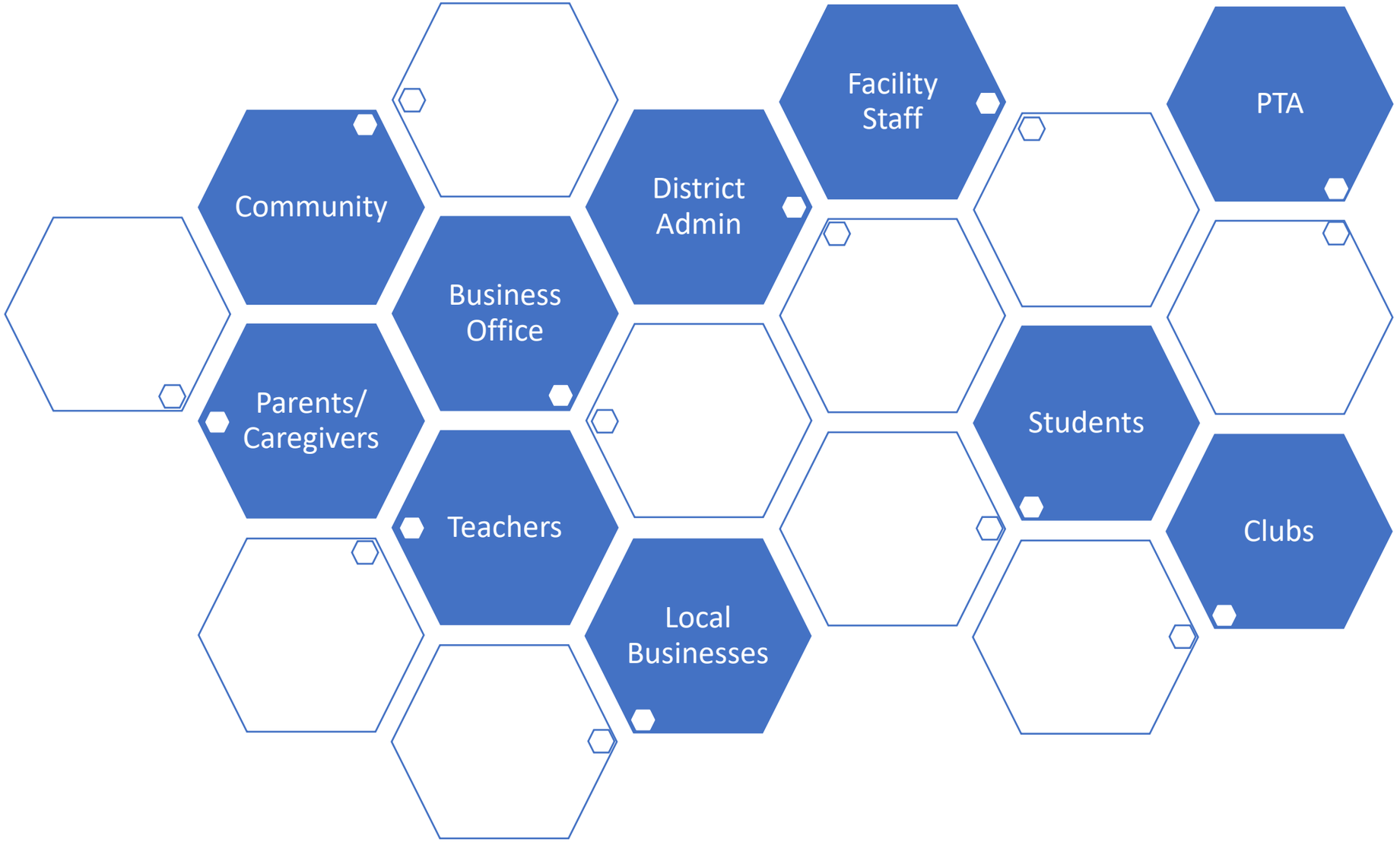
Margaret Mead

# Powered by a Green Team

A strong Green Team…

- Builds a culture of sustainability in your school
- Connects classroom learning to hands-on action
- Engages students in leadership and problem-solving
- Supports district and statewide goals for healthier schools and communities

# Building a Network



# Resources

DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION
One nature.

https://davidsuzuki.org/living-green/how-to-start-a-school-green-team/


http://www.greenschools.net/article.php-id=361.html

COEEA
Connecticut Outdoor & Environmental Education Association

https://www.coeea.org/forming-a-ct-green-leaf-team

# Resources


https://www.usgbc.org/sites/default/files/GCP_Updated1Pager.pdf

# Students are our Future

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# What is Sustainability Education?

- Align environmental initiatives with classroom learning
- Demonstrate real-world application for authentic educational experiences
- Explore how to document and present sustainability efforts as a part of the curriculum
- Celebrate every success story and help motivate for change


Photos Courtesy of Seven Generations Ahead

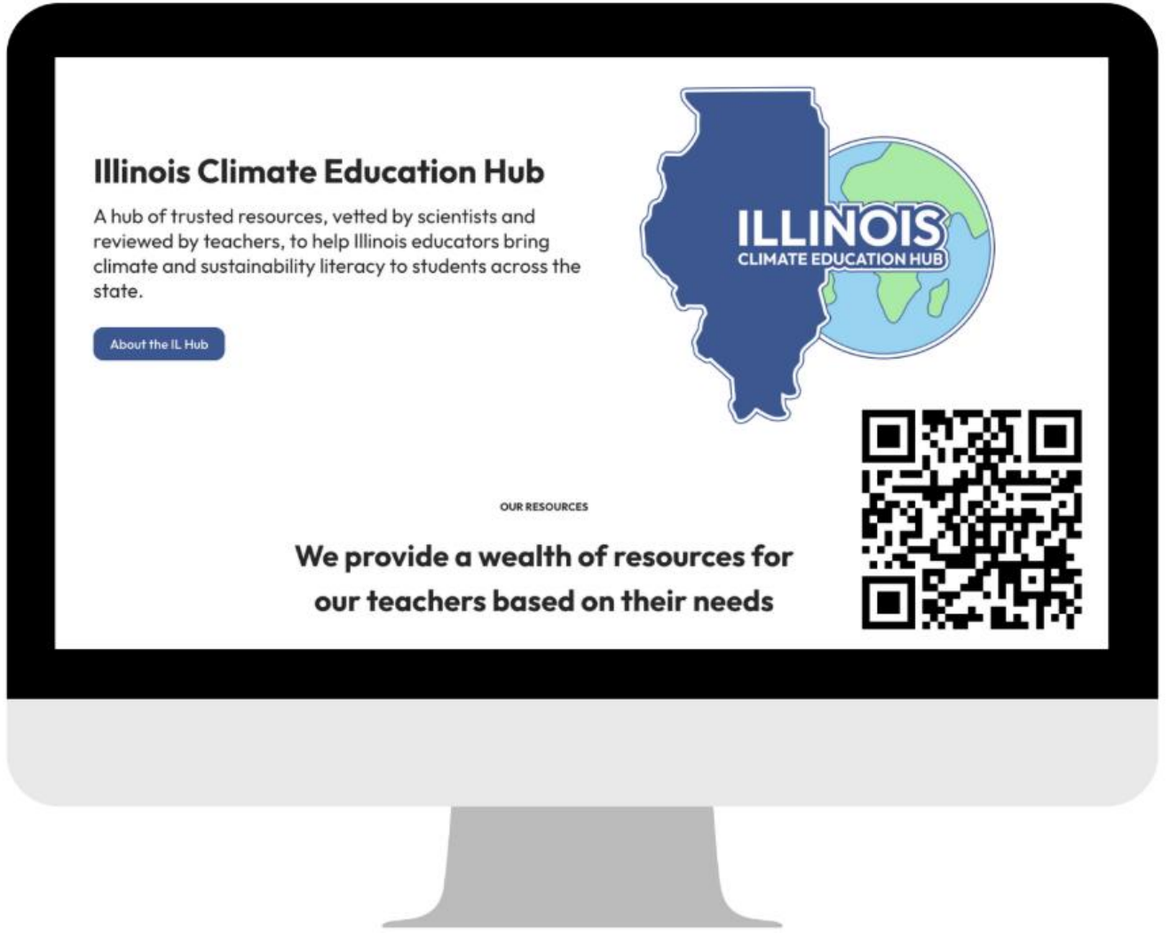
# Sustainability Education

## HB 4895

***Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, every public school shall provide instruction on climate change…***

- Amends the Courses of Study Article of the School Code.
- Shall include, but not be limited to, identifying the **environmental and ecological impacts of climate change on individuals and communities and evaluating solutions for addressing and mitigating the impact of climate change**
- Shall be in alignment with State learning standards, as appropriate.
- Effective July 1, 2025.

# Illinois Climate Education Hub




## Mission

To empower all educators to easily and effectively teach about climate change, justice, and action.

## Vision

A future where every child learns about climate change and becomes a steward of our planet.

IT'S OUR FUTURE

Seven Generations Ahead

Environmental Education Association of Illinois

Climate Education for Illinois

# Illinois

## Climate Education Hub

powered by SubjectToClimate

The Illinois Hub is a collection of trusted resources, vetted by scientists and reviewed by teachers, supporting Illinois educators in bringing climate and sustainability literacy to students across the state.

- IL place-based resources
- PD opportunities for educators
- News for students powered by The Juice

IllinoisClimateEducation.org

**Katie Nahrwold**
IL State Lead
SubjectToClimate
katie.nahrwold@subjecttoclimate.org

State Leads act as connectors, supporting specialized collaboration state by state. Emphasizing collaboration and locally meaningful climate education strengthens connections among climate educator communities nationwide.

# Sustainability Education Resources


- IL EPA and U of I Office for Math, Science, and Technology Education (MSTE)

  https://mste.illinois.edu/

- Curriculum for upper elementary and middle school
- Units are free, available online, and align with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)
- Topics include waste management, renewable energy, food waste

# Subject specific Sustainability topics in the Curriculum.

*Example curriculum topic alignment chart courtesy of Dave Wilms, retired Stevenson Science Teacher*

## Clean Renewable Energy Impacts all Areas of the Curriculum

| Area | Subject | Topics | Goals |
|---|---|---|---|
| STEM, STEAM, and Science in General | Biology | Human Impacts on the Carbon Cycle Ecological Impacts of CO2, Climate Change, and Species | Coral Bleaching - Causes and impacts Droughts/Fires, Carbon Cycle Reinforce Importance of Cycles of Nature |
| | Chemistry | Carbon for life and energy Solar and Electron Energy Levels Light Absorbancy of elements | Understand gas and element characteristics for both absorbing light in solar panels and the atmosphere not allowing heat to escape |
| | Physics | CO2 and ATM Energy Absorbancy Energy is not Created or Destroyed | Greenhouse Problem and why the energy balance issue is created by CO2 and Infrared radiation not escaping as fast as energy is coming in |
| | Math | How far can you drive on a kilowatt, how much CO2 is made by internal combustion vs. solar and EV's | How many miles could an EV travel from the energy coming off of the roof in 30 minutes? If it were an internal combustion car, how much CO2 would be produced at 25 mpg? |
| | Math | Cars, CO2, and You - A Lab I wrote which students said was the best lab that will influence their car choices later. | Financial (Gas) and environmental (Climate Change) costs of Internal Combustion engines and fossil fuels over life of car. |
| History | History of Human Energy Use | From 2-3,000 calories to 300,000 calories per person per day in today's energy intense world. | Why the energy consumption trend can be addressed with energy efficiency, nuclear,and clean energy |
| | Development and Wars over areas with energy rich resources | Why is the middle east and Russia so important politically | Uranium, Natural Gas, and Oil Deposits Why every transition from one form to another has always had incentives. |
| | History of Populations moving to abundant energy areas | Europe to US to Middle East to Indian Reservations and to Northern Alaska | Wood to Whale Oil to Wood in US to Oil in Alaska to Uranium in Southwest to Natural Gas in Russia . The geographic history of energy development. |
| | How fossil fuels impact national security | History of Wars and Energy Supply | Impact of Natural gas on Europe and the current War in Ukraine |
| Sociology | Political Science | Campaigns and fossil interests | The power of the dollar in campaigns |
| | Peer Influence | The cost status of an SUV | 250,000 lbs/CO2 each |
| | Life in a status based economy | Is more better? | Environmental Costs of Big. Just because we can do it, should we? |
| | Declining | Why is the younger generation considering having no children? | Show there are solutions to the energy crisis and an opportunity to develop a sustainable clean energy future. |

# Virtual Power Plant

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# Rooftop Solar Alternatives


- Community Solar Sites
- Community Solar Subscription
- Battery Energy Storage Systems

# Low Cost  No Cost?

The Future Energy Jobs Act, passed in 2016, created Illinois' community solar program.

The Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), passed in 2021, strengthened it. CEJA allocated funding for 250 MW of community solar (roughly 40,000 subscribers) and then about 150 MW per year.

The Clean Energy & Reliable Grid Act (CRGA), passed in 2026 to strengthen grid reliability and provide incentives to encourage 3 GW of battery storage and 4.8 GW of solar by 2035.

CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD
Fighting for Illinois Consumers

# Community Solar Farms

## PROS

✓No Additional Cost
✓No Construction
✓Simple credit on bill

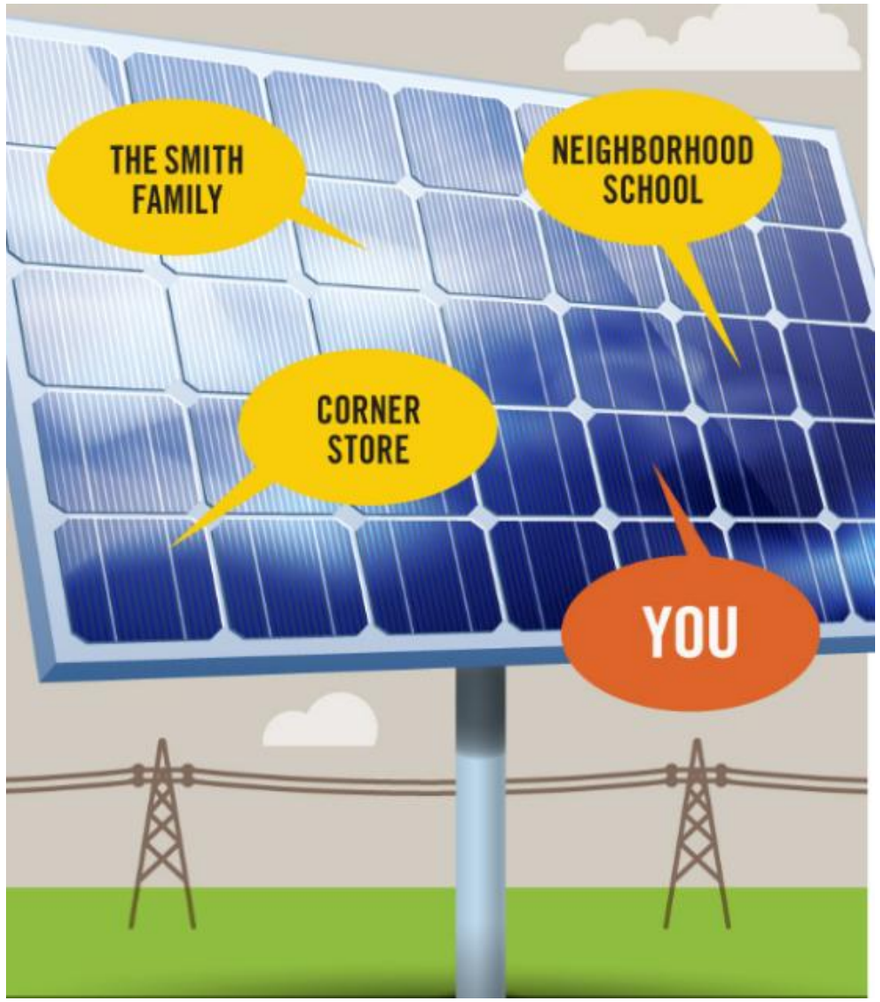
## CONS

✓Less Savings
✓Long term commitment
✓**No GREEN attributes**

## Need to Knows

✓Savings is negotiable
✓5% to 10%
✓Hosting revenues

https://www.citizensutilityboard.org/community-solar-illinois/



# Battery Energy Storage Systems(BESS)

- Battery energy storage systems (BESS) are rechargeable batteries that can store energy from various sources and distribute it on demand for energy management purposes.
- BESS can be useful without renewable sources, but they are uniquely suited for the incorporation of renewable sources into electrical systems.

# Solar + BESS

- BESS has a relatively small footprint
- Leasing space can generate revenue to fund solar or other capital projects
- Negotiate set lease fees or shared revenue agreements

# Food Service as a Force for Good

Image: Civil Eats

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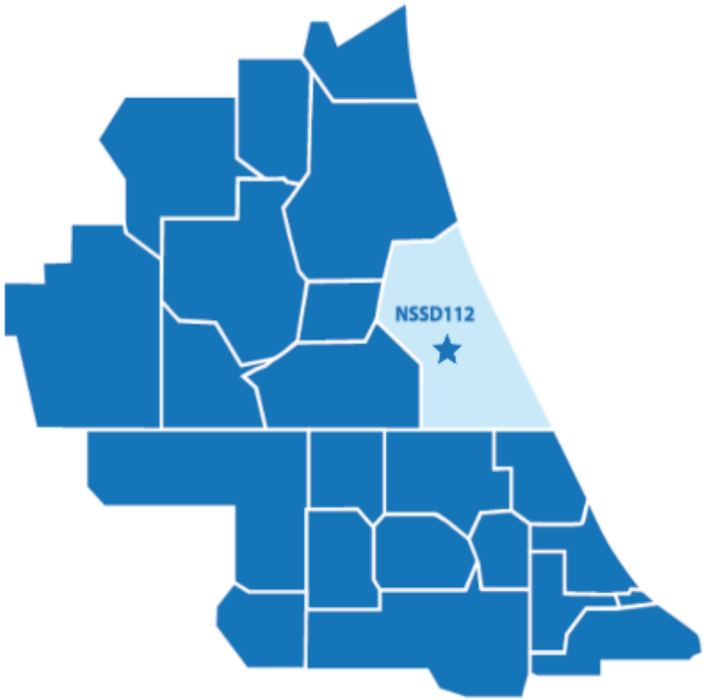
# Planning Goals and Operational Considerations

- Develop a long-term vision
- Student experience
- Equity
- Food preparation for quality
- Local Sourcing
- Scratch Cooking
- Serving sustainably
- Reusable Food ware
- Recycling
- Managing Food Waste
- Composting

# NSSD 112 District Case Study



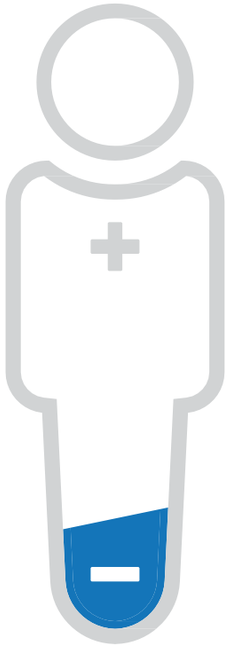

NORTH SHORE
SCHOOL DISTRICT 112
*Inspire...Innovate...Engage*

- K-8, Public School District
- 3,800 Students
- 333 Teachers
- 25 Administrators
- 1 Early Childhood Center
- 6 Elementary Schools
- 2 Middle Schools
- 635,000+ Sq. Ft. of Facilities Maintained
- 2 Swing schools maintained during construction

District Food Service Challenges

- District did not have a district wide food program
- Dissimilar quality and type of food offered - limited food production capacity only for free and reduced lunches, while other student's families pay for a restaurant provided lunch program
- Schools lacked necessary infrastructure to develop production and receiving facilities
- Facilities did not provide opportunity for features of a sustainable food service program to be incorporated into the operations

# Nutrition Impact on Academic Performance



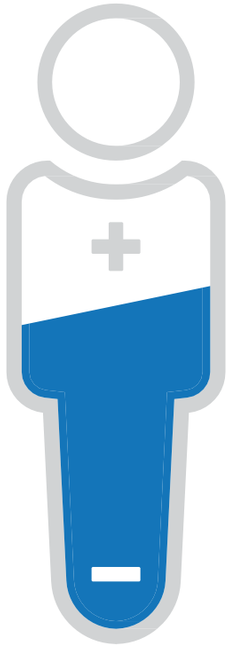
**Poor nutrition, obesity, & hunger**

**Over one-third of U.S. children are overweight or obese**

**Nutritional deficiencies negatively affect cognitive development**

**High trans/saturated fats negatively impact learning & memory**

**Access to proper nutrition improves student's cognition, concentration, and energy.**



*source: Wilder Research, 2014*

# The problem with food waste in schools

- Over 7 billion school meals are served each year in the U.S. and much of that food is going to landfills rather than nourishing students
- 1 in 9 children in Illinois are food insecure
- Methane is created when food decomposes in a landfill
- ReFED estimated that uneaten food in K-12 schools contributed to the equivalent of 2.89 million metric tons of $CO_2$ in 2019

**Wasting food also wastes:**

- Water and energy used in farming, processing, and transporting the food
- Money spent on landfill disposal
- Labor along entire supply chain

Photos Courtesy of Seven Generations Ahead

# Zero Waste Schools Program

Seven Generations Ahead

ZERO WASTE SCHOOLS
SEVEN GENERATIONS AHEAD

SGA works with school staff and students to shift operations and minds towards generating zero waste through **source reduction, recycling, composting, and food recovery.**

- Help schools plan effective waste reduction strategies
  - Zero waste kitchens
  - Reusable food ware
  - Minimize plastic use
  - Minimize food waste
- Create a Zero Waste Plan for the district
- Provide on-the-ground support for operational changes
- Educate students and staff about the How and Why of going zero waste

# Food Waste Reduction Toolkit

## for Illinois Schools

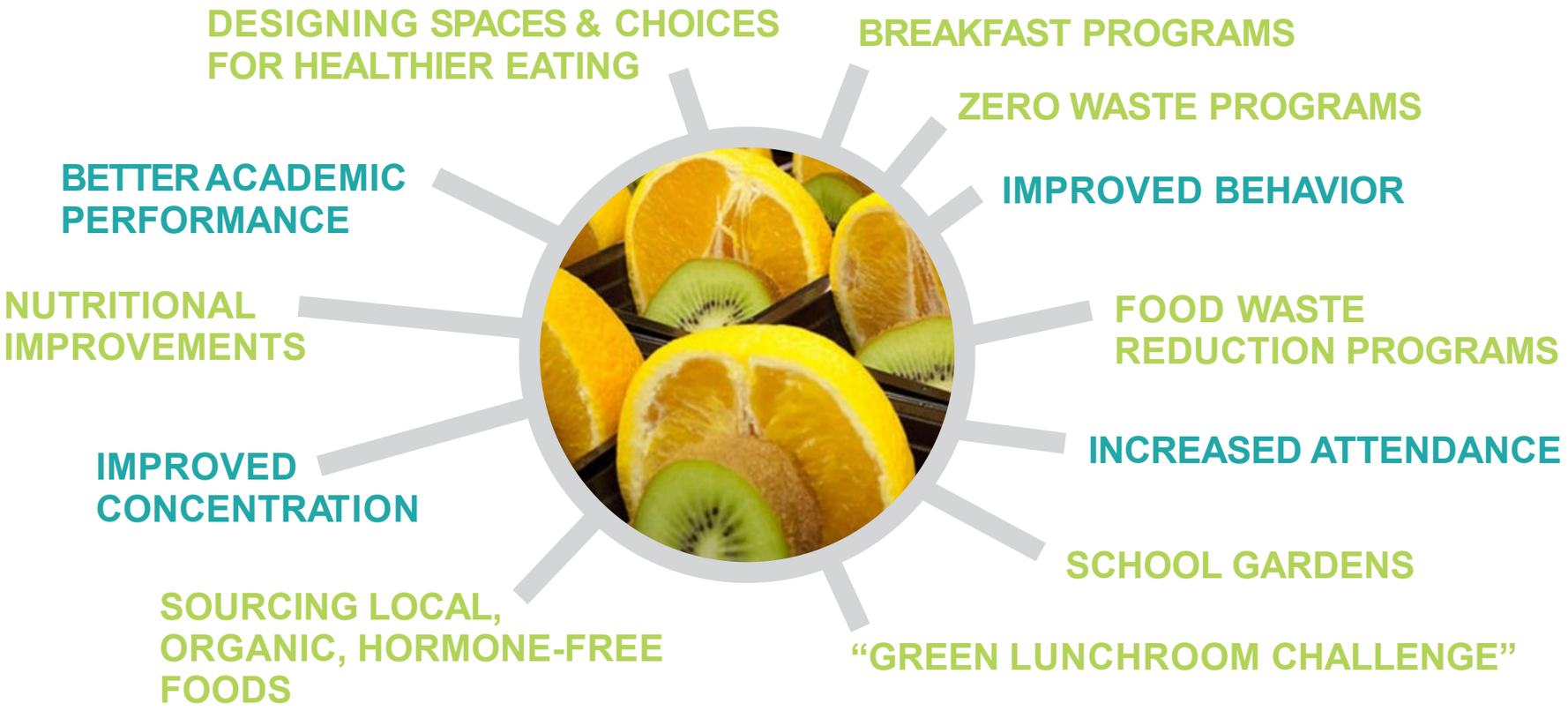

- Is a comprehensive resource to help schools take action to reduce wasted food
- Identifies the main sources of wasted food
- Provides strategies that are relatively quick and easy, as well as longer term, multi-step initiatives
- Includes case studies highlighting inspirational efforts in schools across Illinois
- Links to lots of resources

Seven Generations Ahead

https://sevengenerationsahead.org/our-work/zero-waste-schools/food-waste-reduction-toolkit/

# Benefits of a Good Planning Process

**Improve nutrition, reduce obesity, & improve access to lunch and breakfast programs.**



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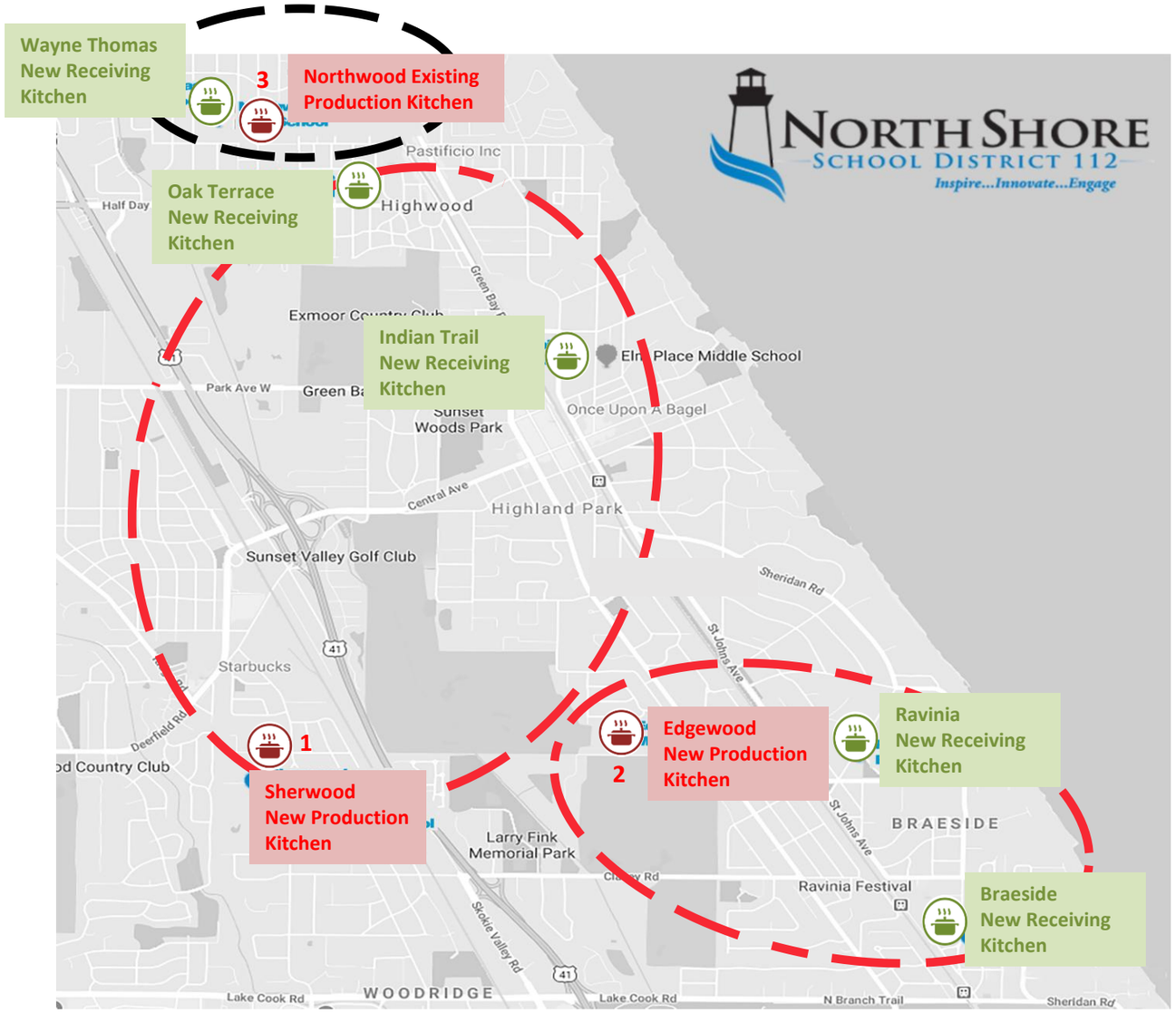
## District Wide Food Service Model Planning Process

- Developed vision based on equity, food quality, and student experience
- Explored options during long range planning phase
- Compared optional configurations, operational impacts, and cost
- Selected option that balanced feasibility with equity, food quality, and student experience

# Distributed Kitchen Planning Model



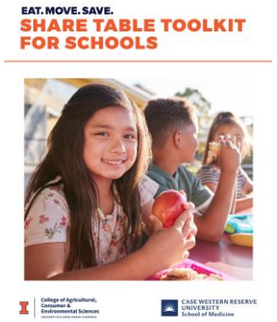

## Features

- Multiple Distribution Points
- Scratch and Speed Scratch Cooking
- Bulk Food Transport Opportunities
- Reusable Trays and Utensils
- Centralized ware wash

## Benefits

- Healthier food from centralized kitchens
- Reduced transit to maintain freshness
- Transporting in bulk reduces individual packaging
- Less food waste due to sequencing of cold option serving
- Integrated reusable food ware and waste reduction strategies

# Sustainable Food Service Resources




https://www.getfoodsmarttn.com/documents/uploads/Share_Table_Toolkit_for_Schools_Final.pdf

Seven Generations Ahead

Zero Waste Schools Resources

ZERO WASTE SCHOOLS
SEVEN GENERATIONS AHEAD

https://sevengenerationsahead.org/resource/zero-waste-schools-toolkit/

CEH

CEH Ditching Disposables Toolkit

https://ceh.org/ditching-disposables-toolkit/resources-for-ditching-disposables-toolkit/

# Farm to School

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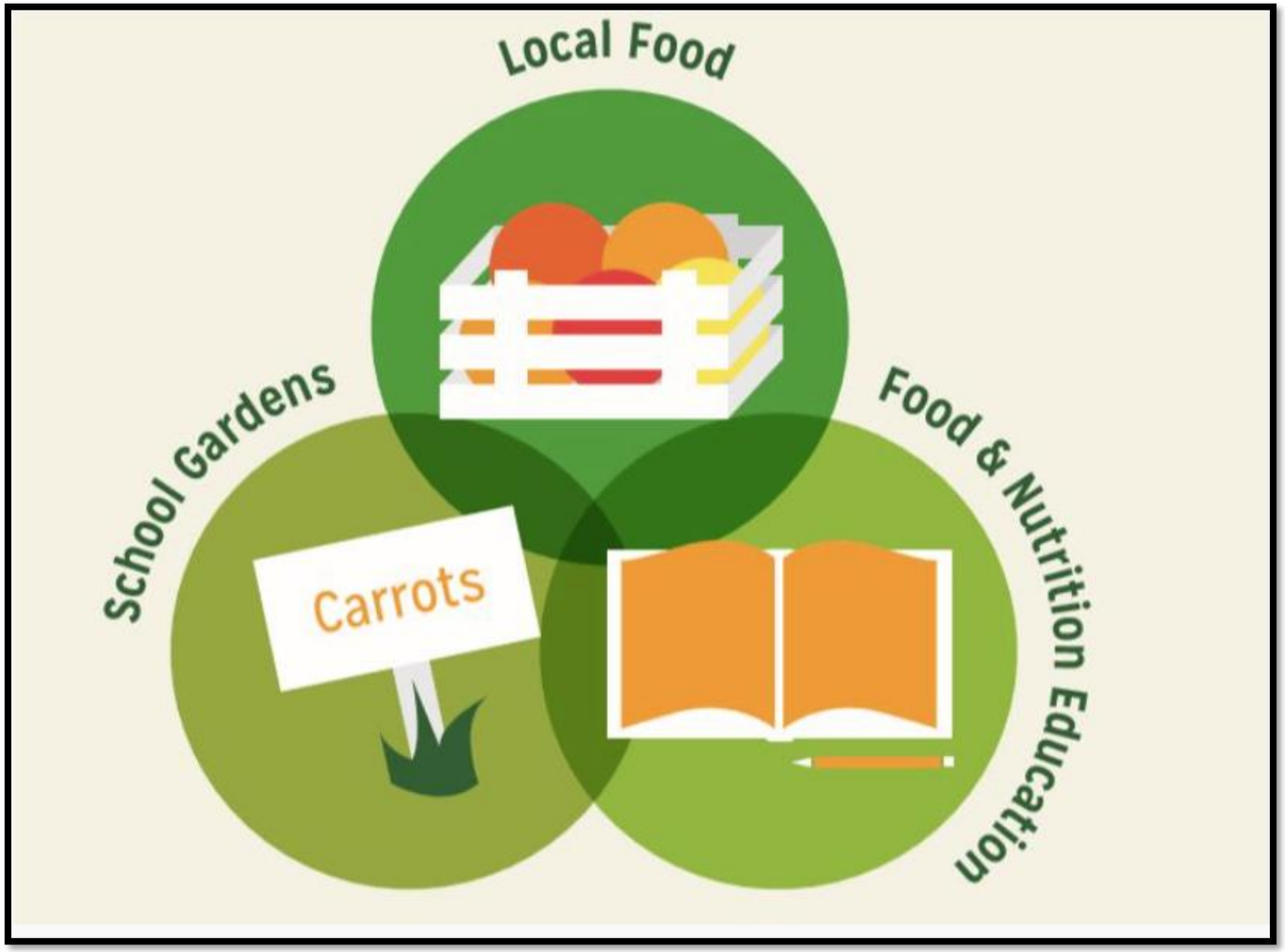
# Student Centered




Seven Generations Ahead

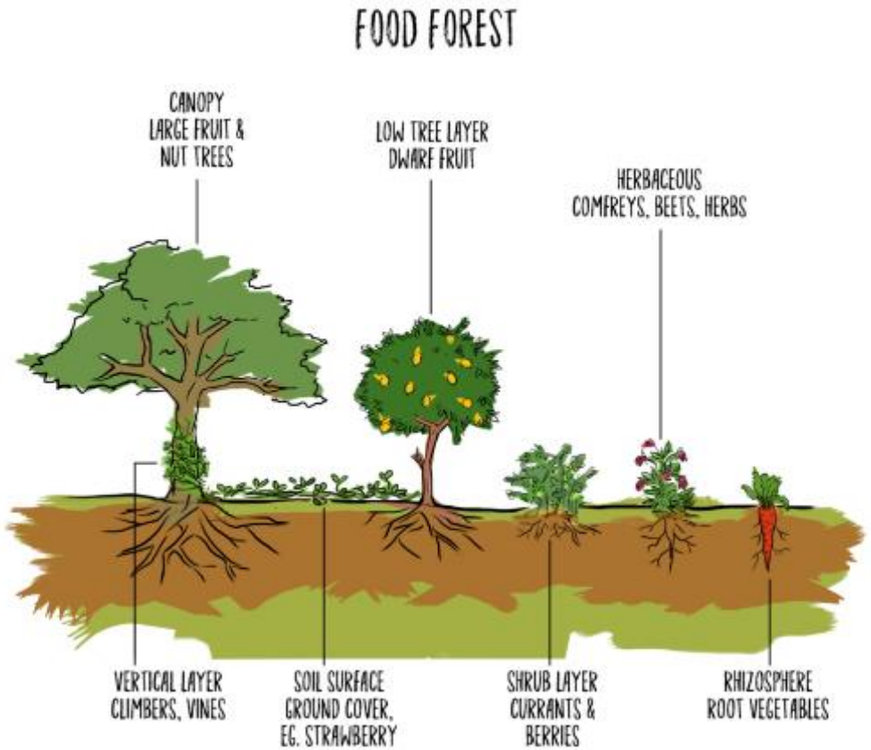
Illustration: Illinois Farm to School Network and Seven Generations Ahead

# Gardens


Photos Courtesy of Seven Generations Ahead

# Food Forests

Photos Courtesy of Seven Generations Ahead

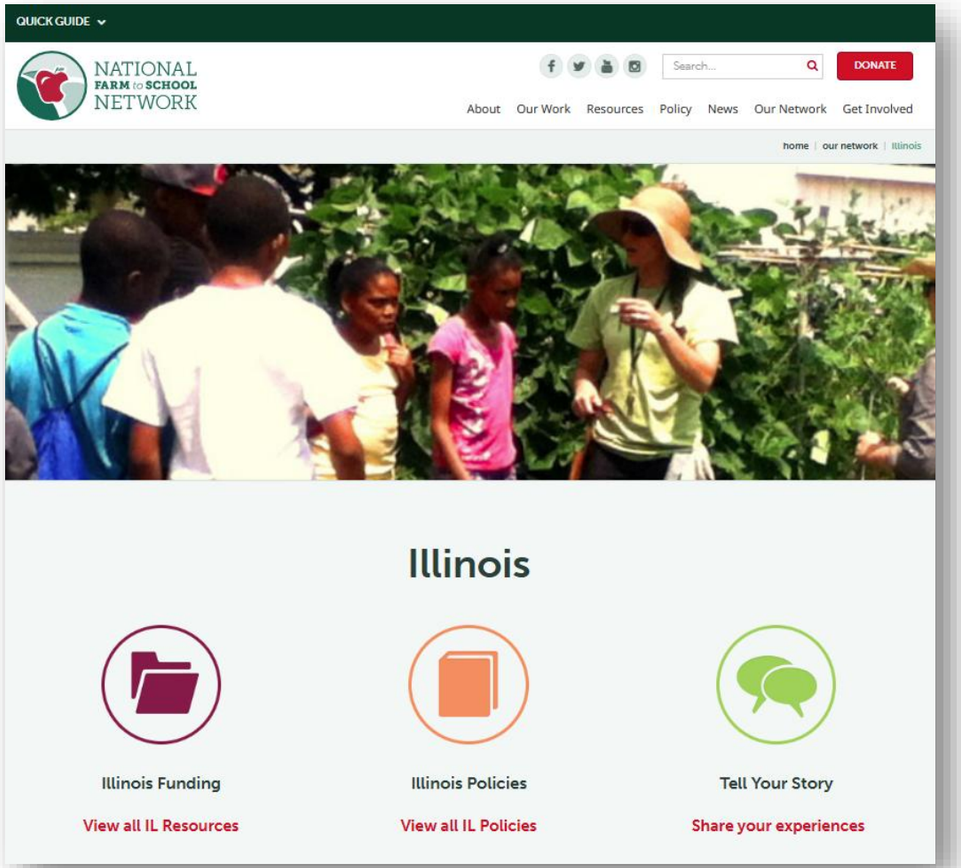



# Greenhouse

Ravinia Greenhouse

Indian Trail Garden Learning Center

# Farm to School Resources





Seven Generations Ahead

# Clean Transportation

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# Batteries on Wheels!!

# Transportation

Idling your vehicle wastes fuel and creates emissions that contribute to climate change. Idling for more than 10 seconds uses more fuel and produces more emissions than turning off your engine.


Illinois has several local ordinances restricting idling in diesel and commercial vehicles, but school buses are not specified.

Chicago limits idling to three minutes in a 60-minute period for all city fleet vehicles.

No idling signs are posted at schools in several communities in and around Chicago.


Source: Clean Air Counts, 625 Illinois Compiled Statutes (ILCS) 5/11-1429, City of Chicago Vehicle Idling Management Policy

# Transportation

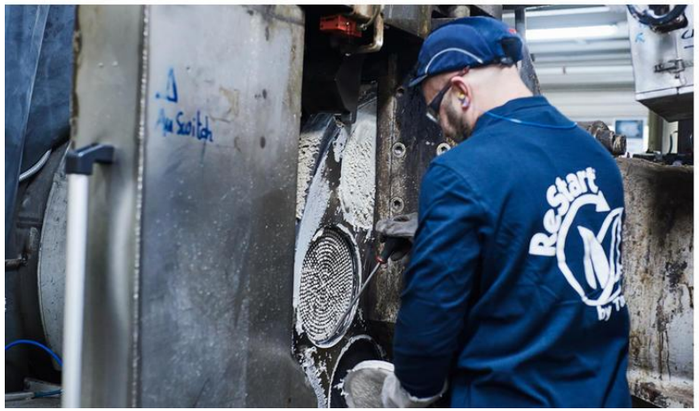
Buses are easy
- Set idle restriction policies
- Give clear guidelines

Parents not so much
- Post no idling signs
- Post a volunteer to work the lines
- Consider candy bribes (chocolate works best)

# Transportation


- Look into increasing walkability
  - ❑Transportation studies
  - ❑Community Engagement
  - ❑Adding sidewalks and crosswalks
  - ❑Be proactive in identifying problem areas
  - ❑Where will family's loose access to buses

# Material Reuse Top To Bottom

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# Recycling Commercial Furniture

**Wood**

- Solid wood tables, chairs, and cabinets can be refinished and repurposed.

**Plastic**

- Office chairs often contain recyclable plastic components.

**Glass**

- Tabletops and partitions can be recycled into new products.

**Metal**

- Filing cabinets and desk frames are highly recyclable.

**Textiles**

- Fabric-covered furniture or walls can be recycled through specialized programs or re-upholstered and repurposed.

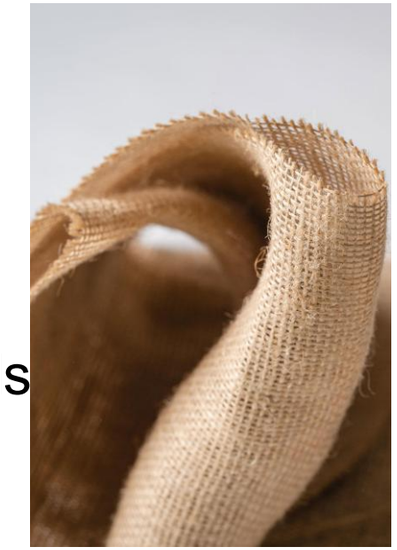
# Recycling Commercial Flooring

**Rubber Flooring**

- Ground and reused for athletic flooring and playground surfacing.

**Luxury Vinyl Tile (LVT)**

- Take-back programs reclaim LVT for use in resilient flooring products and automative mats.



**Linoleum**

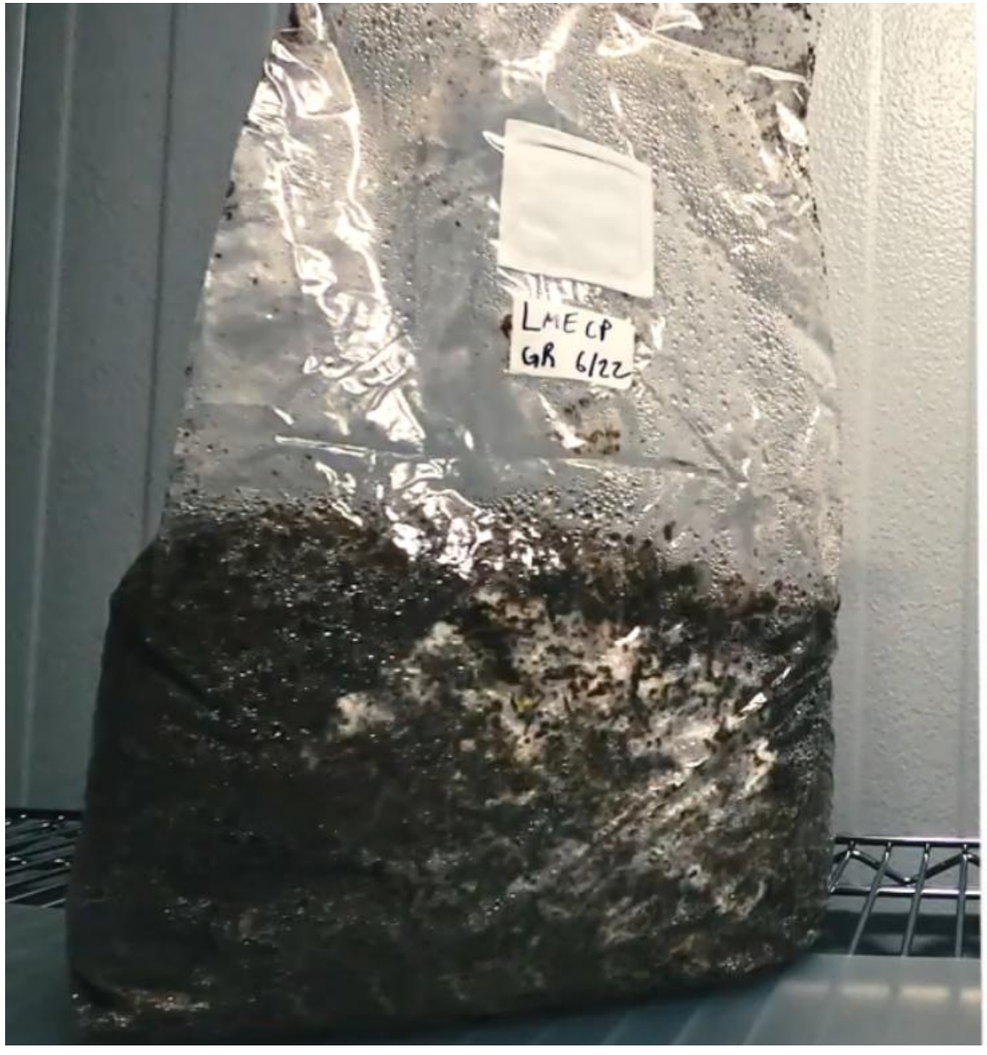
- Bio-based material that can be recycled into new linoleum or filler for other construction materials.

**VCT**

- VCT is ground, milled, pelletized and blended with other raw materials manufacture new VCT/backing.

**Carpet**

- Recycled into new carpet backing. New process: Nylon consumed by mushrooms.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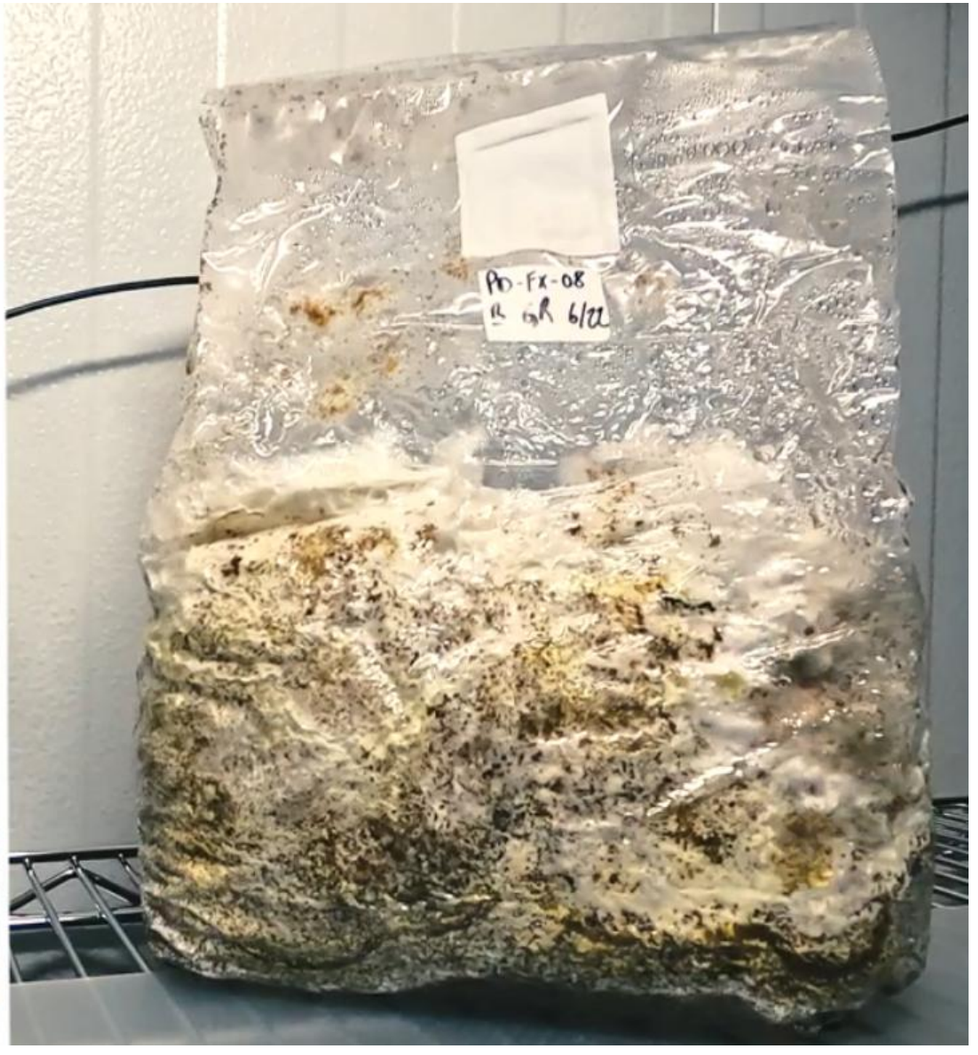
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# Material Reuse Resources

THE WASTESHED https://www.thewasteshed.com/

SCARCE https://www.scarce.org/

CHICAGO FURNITURE BANK https://www.chicagofurniturebank.org/

ReStore Habitat for Humanity Chicago https://restorechicago.org/

Rheaply https://rheaply.com/internal-reuse/

***Additional ideas for material reuse efforts in schools**:*

- *Evaluate school supply purchasing procedures*
- *Conduct end of year locker and classroom cleanouts and collect supplies for reuse.*
- *Create school supply closets*
- *Identify partners in the community to receive donations*
- *Develop a process to inventory excess furniture & supplies in warehouse and schools (e.g.,)*
- *Develop process for technology equipment and supply removal and/or recycling for older equipment at the end of its useful life.*

# Lighting for Living and Learning

Photo by: Chris Barrett
Design: Wight & Company

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# Lighting for Living and Learning

- Fluorescent lights are being eliminated in Illinois (10th state to do so)
  - January 1, 2026-Screen based and bayonet-base compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are banned.
  - January 1, 2027-Pin-base CFLs and linear fluorescent lamps are banned.

# Fluorescent Bans

## What this means for existing facilities plus rebates/incentives

| State | General Service Lamps (GSL) | CFL: Screw-Base | CFL: Pin-Base | Linear Fluorescents |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| California | Active requirements above federal minimum.<br>There are currently additional requirements for CFL and LED products, outlined in Title 20. | Ban Active | Ban Active<br>Began Jan 1, 2025 | Ban Active<br>Began Jan 1, 2025 |
| Colorado | | Ban Active<br>Began Jan 1, 2025 | Ban Active<br>Began Jan 1, 2025 | Ban Active<br>All Linear Fluorescent Bans Began Jan 1, 2025 |
| Hawaii | | Ban Active<br>Began Jan 1, 2025 | Begins Jan 1, 2026 | High-CRI Ban Active<br>All others begin Jan 1, 2026 |
| Illinois | | Begins Jan 1, 2026 | Begins Jan 1, 2027 | Begins Jan 1, 2027 |
| Maine | Active requirements above federal minimum.<br>B, BA, F, & G shape lamps >=200 lumens, <=40W A & shaped lamps 200-310 lumens. | Begins Jan 1, 2026 | Begins Jan 1, 2026 | Begins Jan 1, 2026 |
| Maryland | | | Pending bill | High-CRI Ban Active |

comed℠
AN EXELON COMPANY

Ameren
ILLINOIS

# Lighting for Living and Learning

What you can do to mitigate this ban

## Convert to LEDs
## (like the rest of us)!

# How to Light Existing and New Construction

## Design Options

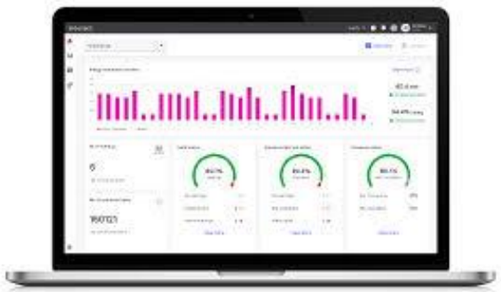
**Good Option:** Lighting Upgrade to LED door kits or new fixtures w/ Embedded Controls

*Benefits: Room-based occupancy, daylight harvesting, dimming, zoning*



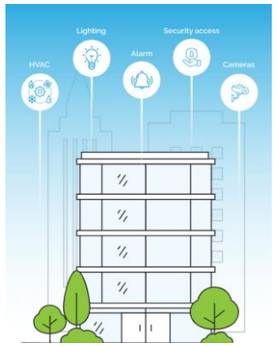
**Better Option:** Network Lighting System

*Benefits: Lighting asset management and analytics, additional energy savings*



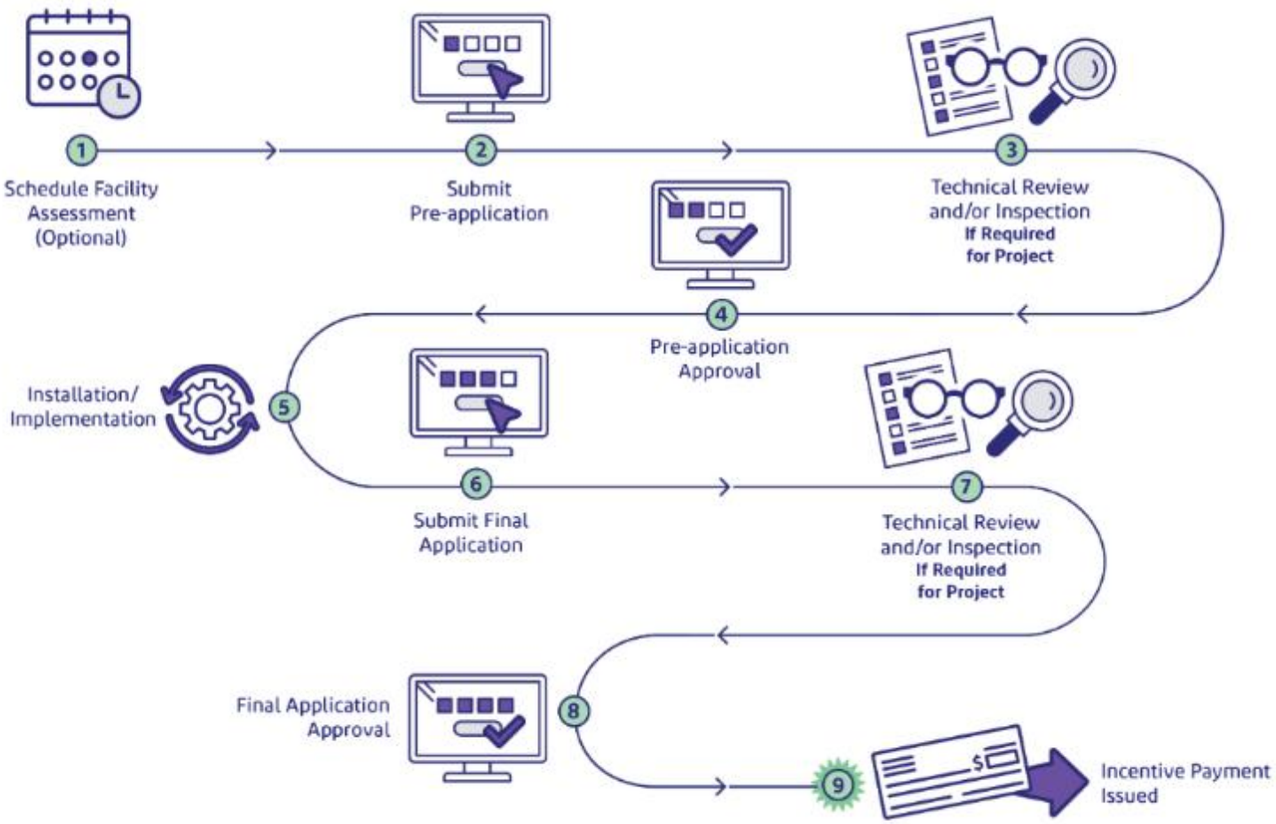
**Best Option:** Building Automation System Integration or Advanced Capabilities

*Benefits: Interaction of lighting with other building systems, advanced scheduling*



# Lighting for Living and Learning

## Standard Process for converting to LED Lighting



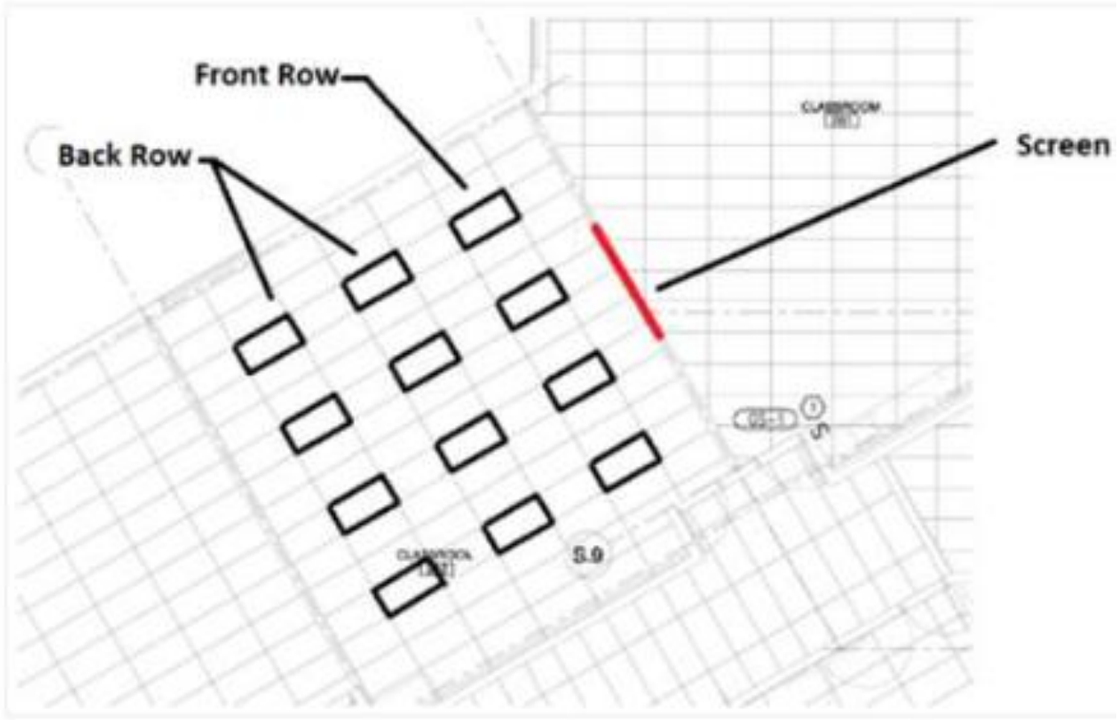
# Lighting for Living and Learning

Links to support your conversion process

- 2026 Lighting Rebates
- Indoor Lighting Incentives Worksheet
- Indoor Networked Lighting Incentives
- Authorized Providers

# Lighting for Living and Learning

- Harvesting Natural Light
  - ❑Best for eyes and energy
- Finetune Light Levels
  - ❑Too often rooms are overlit
- Nuanced Controls
  - ❑Default settings
  - ❑Provide Limited options



# Lighting for Living and Learning

**BEFORE**

- Initial illumination is ~50 FC
- On/Off operation only
- Poor visual acuity
- Cave Effect

# Lighting for Living and Learning

**AFTER**

- Classroom illumination is 37 FC
- Multiple “scenes” of light
  - AV Mode
  - Classroom Mode
  - Overhead projector
- Improved visual acuity

# Trees for Living and Learning

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# What - Trees for Living & Learning

- Climate actions for trees
- Learning Environment Benefits
- Tree planting event
- Additional support & resources

# Why - Trees for Living & Learning

## Key Reasons for a School Tree Planting Event

**Environmental Impact & Education:**

- Trees improve air quality & sequester carbon
- Provide habitats for local wildlife

**Health and Well-being:**

- Green schoolyards encourage physical activity, reduce stress, and improves mental focus.
- Shade from trees protects students from heat while playing.

**Enhanced Learning Experience:**

- Live classroom for biology and ecology lessons
- Research indicates that trees can improve concentration
- Increase student attentiveness
- Reduce behavioral issues

**Fostering Responsibility & Community:**

- Students develop a sense of ownership, responsibility, and community pride
- Participating in the care of their school environment.

**School Beautification:**

- Trees improve the aesthetic value of the campus
- More welcoming and attractive for families.

# How - Tree Planting

**Here are five effective, science-based climate actions you can take for trees:**

1. Plant a tree, but not just any tree. Right tree in the right place.
2. Care for existing trees by properly watering, mulching, and pruning.
3. Protect large, old trees! They provide the most benefits it is better to preserve than to replace.
4. Advocate for trees. Talk with your community about the importance of preserving and planting.
5. Support organizations that plant and protect trees, like your local arboretum.

# Trees for Living & Learning

**Tree Planting Events**

1. **Great activity for classes or Sustainability Club to engage in on school grounds**
2. **Empower students to take a hands-on role and having a visible impact on creating a sustainable future**
3. **Teach public engagement and organization through tree-planting events in the community**

Tree-Plenish

# Host a Tree Planting Event

**Tree-Plenish**

- **Established program for community events**
- **No cost to student or school**
- **Offset your schools' energy consumption**
- **Planning throughout the year with an event in the spring**
- **Internship Opportunities**

# Tree Planting

**Chicago Regional Tree Initiative**
The Chicago Region Trees Initiative is The Morton Arboretum's urban and community forestry program, working to improve people's lives by supporting the health, diversity, and equitable distribution of trees in the Chicago region and throughout Illinois.

**OpenLands**
Openlands protects the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water, protect natural habitats and wildlife, and help balance and enrich our lives.

# Tree Planting Reources

| General Resource Links | |
|---|---|
| Chicago Regional Tree Initiative | https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/chicago-region-trees-initiative/ |
| The Arboretum's Plant Clinic | https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/expert-advice/ |
| TreePlenish | https://www.tree-plenish.com/host-an-event |
| OpenLands | https://openlands.org/ |
| Tree Planters Grant | https://openlands.org/programs/treeplanters-grant/ |
| Trees Forever | https://treesforever.org/illinoisira/ |

| Resources for Native Plant & Tree Sales | |
|---|---|
| Dupage Wild Ones | https://dupage.wildones.org/native-plant-sales/ |
| Lake County | https://www.lcfpd.org/plant-sale/ |
| Kane-Dupage Conservation District | https://kanedupageswcd.org/kd/ |
| Illinois DNR Mason State Nursery | https://dnr2.illinois.gov/masonstatenursery |
| Arbor Day Foundation | https://www.arborday.org/our-work/tree-campus-k-12/get-started |

# Measuring Success


John Hersey HS Illinois Green Ribbon Award Winner https://irp.cdn-website.com/ec21af5c/files/uploaded/Hersey_High_School_Project_Profile-3.pdf

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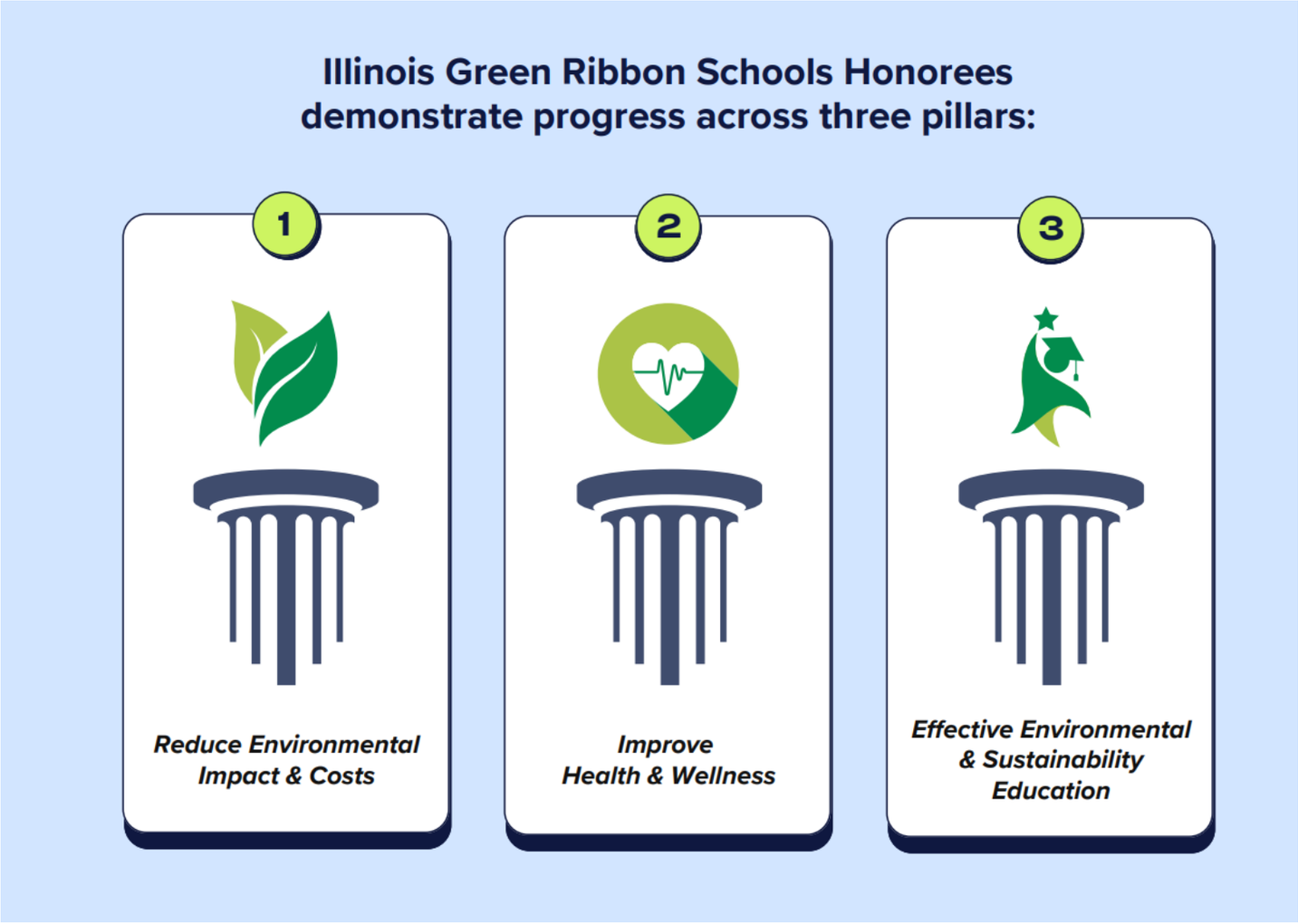
# Illinois Green Ribbon Schools




ILLINOIS GREEN ALLIANCE

# Illinois Green Ribbon Schools

## Strategic Planning is Key

https://www.illinoisgreenalliance.org/green-ribbon-schools

- Start Early
- Share the load
- Find a champion
- Celebrate what your District or School has done

# Common Projects

- Memorialize what you are already doing
  - Curriculum and Instruction
  - LED Lighting upgrades with ComEd incentives
  - Green cleaning
  - Recycling
  - Composting
  - Planting trees
  - Recycling of clothing/fabric (SWALCO)
  - You might be surprised if you begin to investigate what is already taking place in your district

# Illinois Process

- State level partnership
  - Illinois State Board of Education
  - Illinois Board of Higher Education
  - Illinois Green Alliance

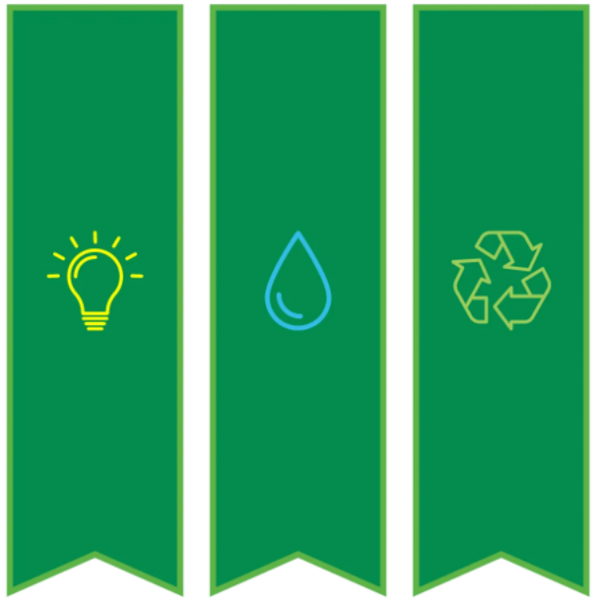
- Illinois application process
  - Applications open in fall
  - Reviewed by pillar experts
  - Honor and recognition

# IGSP

ILLINOIS GREEN SCHOOLS PROJECT

## Is your school interested in sustainability but not ready for Green Ribbon just yet?

Sign up for the Illinois Green Schools Project to get started on the pathway to school sustainability!



## What is the Illinois Green Schools Project?

**The Illinois Green Schools Project (IGSP)** is an annual sustainability action and recognition program for K-12 schools in Illinois. We help educators engage students and school stakeholders in hands-on projects that improve health, efficiency, and environmental impact.

*https://www.illinoisgreenalliance.org/illinois-green-schools-project-home*

# Questions and Answers

*We thank you for your time!*

# Presenters:


Stuart, Brodsky, AIA, Principal, Wight & Company
*312-622-4808, sbrodsky@wightco.com*

Will Thompson (Speaker), *Account Executive, Tarkett,*
*312-350-2394, will.thompson@tarkett.com*

Calvin Cornish, CEM, Senior Account Executive, Johnson Controls,
*630-800-9448, calvin.cornishjr@jci.com*

Jeremy Wickham, CETL, Executive Director of Technology & Operations, North Shore School District 112
*224.765.3030, jwickham@nssd112.org*