

Sustainable and Climate Resilient Schools Administrator Fellowship Case Study: Stephanie Ogden

Administrator Fellow 2021

FELLOW BIO: Stephanie Ogden



This is my 17th year as an administrator, all serving low SES schools, with 12 of those years serving alternative populations in small schools. I have always had a passion for the outdoors and I have been an outdoor guide in the state of Maine, worked with high risk youth leading outdoor programming in British Columbia, and school administrator at the urban conservation corps in San Jose.

I hold true the belief that being outdoors is a great healer, and that getting your hands dirty connects you to the earth and has the ability to ground and center all that do.

I am currently working in a beautiful alternative high school in Redwood City that houses students who prefer a smaller learning environment and want a more personalized education. We are creating an outdoor learning center/living space at Redwood to realize our North Star, where all students furthest from opportunity receive what they need to reach their full potential.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

School Site	Redwood High School	
School Demographics	Hispanic 80%, White 8%, Pacific Islander 7%, Low SES 86%, English Learners 33%	
District	Sequoia Union High School District	
District Demographics	White 39%, Hispanic 40%, Asian 9% Low SES 36%, English Learners 14%	
General Vision/Mission of School and/or district	Redwood is an innovative small school where all students are inspired and prepared to flourish in a global society.	

1) ORIGINAL GOALS AND INTENTIONS

Share what drew you to being a leader for Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools. *Why did you*

originally want to join the SCRS Administrator Fellowship (50-100 words)?

The pandemic brought challenges to all but for some the ability to provide basic needs for their families became paramount. This was evidenced by the food insecurity facing our own community. In response, RHS has worked to revitalize our outdoor learning space to create a sustainable community living schoolyard and learning center to support our families. Sustainability has been a difficult task to achieve for our outdoor space and I believed the fellowship would bring great guidance, support, and assistance for our project by providing both education and resources.

2) KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL BUILDING

A critical thread throughout this program was building knowledge and skills related to Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools Leadership. Examples include: Environmental Sustainability Education (ESE); Change Theory; Building pathways for leadership and whole school engagement through campus, curriculum, community and culture efforts; The role of educators in the climate crisis, etc. Where did you experience the most growth in your knowledge and skills related to being a general leader for sustainable and climate ready schools *(100 - 150- words)?*

The most significant growth for me came in the area of embracing all facets of sustainability. Our work is to provide a community space that flourishes regardless who is at the helm. Having a broader understanding of change theory was important to begin the work and helped with the ebb and flow of commitment (of others) throughout the process. A continued focus will be involving the District to embrace our work and to be our champion when it comes to providing resources for our goal to be a model green school and to become their own champion in becoming a model district in sustainability.

3) FELLOWS IN ACTION - COMMUNITY IMPACT PROJECT OVERVIEW

Provide a brief summary of the purpose of your project and overall goals, and a summary of why this change is necessary at this time *(200-400 words)*.

How does this project connect to the broader mission and vision of the school/district?

Redwoods vision to be an innovative small school where all students are inspired and prepared to flourish in a global society is expanding to include resilience and sustainability. We feel that this is a vital step to success for students now and in their future.

The SUHSD Board passed support for sustainable and climate resilient schools in the spring of 2021 and a green committee has been formed to keep climate change and healthy schools at the forefront of district decision making.

Why was this change necessary and relevant at this time for your school community?

As mentioned, the epidemic has changed all of our lives, and for many of those in our community it has been a struggle. Throughout the past year RHS has provided our families with food, rent, and health supports when they were needed. Although school is back in session, the need still exists. Providing a sustainable way of supporting our families facing continued food insecurity strengthens our community and provides our students and families with much needed resources.

Who are some of the key stakeholders engaged in this project?

Redwood staff and Crystal Leach, the SUHSD Associate Superintendent of Administrative Services

Community Organizations include the following:

- Friends of Redwood (the RHS Foundation)
- Each Green Corner
- SMCOE Office of Sustainability
- The 1440 Foundation
- WholeKids
- The Community Foundation of San Mateo

4) FELLOWS IN ACTION - IMPLEMENTATION STORY

Describe how implementation of your community impact project went. *If your project has not finished yet, describe how the start has gone, and how you anticipate it completing (300 - 500 words).*

General story of implementation:

In the spring of 2020, RHS staff came together to discuss how to create a sustainable community garden, including composting and chickens. The space had been reborn many times since its inception but was never maintained over time. Working with a few people/resources we partnered with Each Green Corner to draw up the plans.

August 2021

- Creation of the RHS Green Team (admin, staff, students)
- The assignment of a teacher to Environmental Champion for RHS

Fall 2021 Work Projects

- Removed crab grass from garden and chicken/composting area (20+ tons)
- Cleaned out existing greenhouse and area
- Created and laid out garden design
- Construction class laid foundation for new chicken coops
- Painted existing structure to hold tools/painted bridge to remove old graffiti
- Brought in mulch and cardboard to layer ground planting areas
- Removed all unusable supplies such as broken tables/tools/equipment
- Installed new irrigation system and placed irrigation stumps in zoned areas
- Planted blueberry and fruit tree rows in garden
- Continued creek cleanup and removal of non-natives including arunda
- Completed construction on 5 of the 6 raised beds
- Planted natives along creek line
- Built and installed frame of first handwashing station
- Built outdoor white board to be installed in chicken/composting area

Challenges and obstacles and how you overcame them

- How to move the district to embrace our project. The key was persistence and finding an explanation (story) that people could understand. In our case, as a small school, we used the

analogy that supporting our living space with funding was like supporting the big schools with sports team funding. It made sense to the District staff and we began to receive the necessary supports to move forward with our project.

- How to remove the significant amounts of crabgrass that continually grew back over existing beds. Worked with the district, who removed more than 20 tons of dirt and grass in order to take everything to dirt in both the garden and chicken areas. Creating a large in ground garden bed that will be zoned with rotation crops to work towards elimination of the crab grass.
- The pipes leading to our new irrigation system stopped working and needed to be repaired in order to hook up to new system. The district is supporting the repair.
- The design of the outdoor shade sails to be installed over our learning center was really awful with a price quote that would purchase a house in other areas of the country. Nixed the company and still looking for the design we want - also supported by the district.
- Managing grant funds and expenditures. Most of the grants went into the RHS Foundation but managing is time consuming. Learning how to prioritize grant applications as some take a considerable amount of time to complete. Created a system using a gantt chart to help plan work around deadlines and properly allocate resources in order to manage all the nuts and bolts - literally.

Successes and what contributed to success:

- Recognition from the district that a teacher alone could not maintain the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre space and obtaining the support of the district with the project. The district agreed to support the project if we would apply for grants to contribute to financial support.
- Establishing strong relationships with community partners - mostly by telling our story and inviting people to our space. It is quite a magical place.
- Applied for local and national grants receiving more than \$46,000 to date, with another \$20,000 to be distributed over two years. Also held a community fundraiser which brought in \$8500. Creating a database of responses to grant questions makes it easier and quicker to apply.
- Possible success: Connecting with the ClimateCorps and having the funds to support a corp member who will help with creating our sustainable living space. The job is posted now and we are receiving applications - very hopeful.

Next Steps for this project:

Continue with the planting and building until completed spring of 2022 including:

- Finish chicken coop and outdoor run

- Build composting bins
- Build remaining raised beds
- Revamp of the greenhouse to include ventilation and misting system
- Install rain barrels
- Chickens to be reintroduced in February.



5) FELLOWS IN ACTION - METRICS AND OUTCOMES

- **Overall Assessment:** How would you characterize the success of your project?
- **Ecological Benefit:** If possible, how were you able to measure the ecological benefit (reduced GHG emissions, reduced waste, increased biodiversity, etc.)
- **Student and Staff Learning:** *Reflect on evidence of student and staff learning from this project, and how this project shifted your community to further integrate environmental literacy.*

Overall Assessment: The project is still in the beginning phases but we have received incredible support and we are certainly on the path to our dream of a sustainable outdoor living and learning space.

Ecological Benefit:

- Using reusable wood to build
- Using ecologically friendly practices
- Converting crabgrass to more functional ecological spaces
- How many tons of food can we get out to support the community

Educational Benefit:

- Curriculum: Science Classes, REAL Classes, and all subject areas welcome
- Construction classes have played a big role in this process and have developed necessary skills
- Community connections and community education such as 4H, and community based partners

6) REFLECTION AND COMMITMENTS

What is your enduring understanding about leading for Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools? And what are your commitments for next year and beyond for this important work?

Reflection:

- You cannot do this work alone! Support from the district has been critical. Support from community based partners is also critical. Support from other school communities and high schools in the district has been great to move the work along.
- I am good at asking for help, so this aligns to my skill set, but this process really reinforced for me that this type of change work in a community is all about relationships and partnerships.
- Finding the right way to communicate the importance of this work and the right language to get people to understand how this is relevant to my community but to the bigger community as well. Finding the story that people can understand is so important.
- Understanding how to navigate all the details of grants, and partnerships, and figuring out what to do with all the “stuff” when what you really need is people and staff to implement.

Commitments:

- Help make this space a community space that has ownership from the district, the community, and also has a dedicated staff person.
- Make a sustainable transition plan for the space that carries this legacy beyond my time as a leader and really institutionalize it as part of the community. We cannot see the space revert back again to like it was when I came onboard.