San Mateo County Regional Staffing Model for Sustainable and Climate Ready K-12 Schools Efforts

Last Updated August 2022

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

The United Nations has referred to the 2020s, as the "Decade of Action" — or a reinvention of life intended to thrust humanity into a more sustainable paradigm by 2030. This disruptive shift to the status quo has built momentum both in public perception, and in the practices and operations in many sectors, including government, business and industry, higher education, and faith-based organizations. A key part of this shift has been an ***investment in staffing infrastructure that can support the change management process of integrating sustainable and climate resilient principles and practices.*** These staffing models include roles such as Chief Sustainability Officers, Sustainability Directors and Coordinators, Sustainability Project Managers, and Climate Corps Fellows.

The trend toward this type of staff investment parallels the technology transition, which has unfolded over many decades with infrastructure investments such as hardware, software, internet connectivity, and staffing information technology (IT) departments. These departments are staffed with roles such as Chief Information Officers, all the way down to direct support and analytical IT roles such as help desk, technicians, and analysts. However, unlike the technology transition, which happened over decades, **the climate crisis demands immediate action to protect the present and future health and wellbeing of humanity, and the investment in staff needs to happen on a much faster time scale.**

Currently, the K-12 education system lags significantly behind the progress seen in other sectors in its adoption of sustainability staff and practices. However, many efforts at the national and state level indicate that **sustainable and climate ready efforts in schools have become an important strategy for minimizing disruptions to learning, and providing access to safe and healthy spaces for ALL children, youth, and those who educate them**, especially for students from communities that have been marginalized and those who are disproportionately impacted by environmental inequities. Examples elevating the importance of sustainability and climate resiliency for K-12 schools:

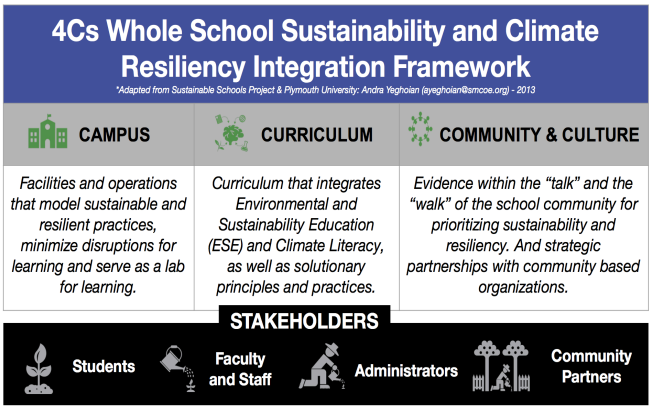
- The **U.S. Department of Education** released its Climate Adaptation Plan (2021), establishing that climate change is a present and grave threat, naming a climate leader in the department, and committing to internal action at the department as well as for those that receive federal funding.
- The **Aspen Institute's K12 Climate Action Commission** released an Action Plan (2021) that focuses on advancing equity through climate action, and calls for every school district to develop and implement a climate action plan in the next five years.
- The **State of California** has a number of mandates, policies, expectations and guidelines for California schools to integrate environmental literacy, environmental sustainability, and climate resilient practices into facilities and operations as well as curriculum and instruction.

The above examples are important and necessary but implementation is far from sufficient. To achieve comprehensive sustainable and climate-ready integration, K-12 schools must provide appropriate staffing at the state, regional, and local level to support districts and schools. **This document provides an overview of the current regional staffing model in San Mateo County, which has been designed to be replicated and taken to scale in other California counties, and it includes the proposal to expand this staffing to meet the increasing demand for services.**

SAN MATEO COUNTY CONTEXT

In 2017-18, the San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) became the first county office of education in California to launch a comprehensive Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative (ELSI). The initiative provides "backbone support" to local districts and schools to support their prioritization of student environmental literacy, and integrating environmental sustainability and climate-ready practices across a school's campus, curriculum, community, and culture. Key components of the initiative include capacity building, network strengthening, and technical assistance services — see full details in the ELSI Theory of Action. The two core strategic goals for the Environmental LIteracy and Sustainability Initiative (ELSI) include:

- **Strategic Goal #1:** Every district has a baseline assessment of sustainability and climate-ready efforts, and has developed and begun implementing a strategic plan for Whole-School Sustainable and Climate Resilient Schools Framework integration.
- **Strategic Goal #2:** Every student has access to instruction at every grade level that integrates the California Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs), culminating with opportunities for solutionary project-based learning, and providing opportunities for hands-on experiential learning with a high quality community based partner — in classrooms, on campuses, and in nearby outdoor settings



Since the launch of this initiative in Summer 2017, progress towards sustainable and climate ready schools has increased across all 24 San Mateo County school communities (Twenty-three (23) public school districts and one (1) COE, serving approximately 90,315 students). The work has been led by a small staff that has worked in partnership with a number of local community based partners and agencies. Significant progress has been made in the first phase of the initiative by gaining buy-in and making progress in early assessment, planning, and implementation. ***However, the work has reached the next phase of maturity in many school districts and schools in San Mateo County, and*** requires a ***new approach to capacity building to further momentum.***

For example, in facilities and operations, a number of districts and schools in San Mateo County are ready to tackle sustainability projects that expand on "low hanging fruit" initiatives such as waste sorting, energy efficiency, and small-scale garden efforts, and are looking to take on broader efforts such as comprehensive zero waste campaigns, electrification and solar to battery storage, campus-wide living schoolyards, large-scale stormwater retention, and comprehensive climate action and adaptation plans. Across curriculum efforts, many schools are ready to move beyond individual classroom efforts to take a more equitable approach to ensure all students have access to environmental and climate literacy opportunities. Furthermore, in community and culture efforts, a number of school districts have launched district-wide sustainability committees. All of these efforts require more technical assistance, support and expertise.

The sections below outline the current staff for SMCOE's ELSI department, as well as the proposed increase in staff that would take this regional model to the next level.

SAN MATEO COUNTY CURRENT STAFF AND DESIRED FUTURE STAFF

Current Staff for SMCOE's County-Wide Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative

The following table outlines the current core staff for SMCOE's Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative. *It should be noted that there is also some part time administrative support for this department at SMCOE, as well as support from the Executive Director of Communications and Strategy. Additionally, this table is not intended to include what it looks like for districts and sites to have their own staff positions outside of the County Office support. For job descriptions related to that, visit the Additional Resources section below.*

Title, Link to Job Description, and High Level Overview		FTE & $$
Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Coordinator	Since 2017-18 this certificated coordinator oversees the Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative, and is the lead for programs, networks, and services. The coordinator also manages staff and partnerships.	100% FTE General Fund: $250,000 with salary and benefits
Green Facilities and Operations Analyst (GFOA)	Since March 2020, the classified GFOA specializes in providing Tier I and Tier II technical assistance services to schools and districts focused around green facilities and operations, and serving as a liaison with community based partners. *The funding for the current staff position is focused around the waste focus area with crossover to living schoolyards and gardens.*	100% FTE CSEA 887 Grant from County Government: $125,000 with salary and benefits
Climate Corps Fellows: General and Green Facilities	Since 2017-18 Fellows have served for 10-month terms (September - June), supporting coordinators and analysts in achieving goals. • 100% ELSI - Focus on Overall Initiative (2017 to Present) • 100% ELSI - Focus on Green Facilities (2020 and 2021 at 50%)	General Fund Grant
Expanded Learning and Community Partnership Coordinator	In order to address the growing demand for coordinating strategic partnership, SMCOE began piloting a position in January 2022 to help make progress towards ELSI's environmental literacy goal (Strategic Goal #2). A portion of this role goes towards developing strategic partnerships that will help every student, at every grade level, have access to an experience with an environmental education community based partner.	100% FTE (with 50% focused on ELSI) Grant

**It should be noted that SMCOE's ELSI department has also contracted at times with consultants for coaching and program management, as well as with high school and community college interns, and Ph.D. researchers.*

Proposed Staff Capacity Increase for Expanding Efforts at the County Level

In order to better meet the needs of districts, schools, and community based partners, the ELSI department is looking to expand to include additional staff outlined in the table below. These staff could be housed at SMCOE and/or some might be able to be positioned in the districts directly.

Title, Link to Job Description Example, and Explanation		FTE	Projected Expense
Sustainable and Climate Ready Facilities District Services Coordinator	This position would work with the Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Coordinator to coordinate external facing Tier I, II, and III technical assistance services for districts and schools that focus on sustainability project management within facility and operations.	Certificated or Classified 100% FTE	Average with salary and benefits: $200,000 - $250,000 (seeking funding)

Additional Green Facilities and Operations Analysts (GFOA)	Additional Green Facilities and Operations Analysts (GFOA) that can focus primarily on Tier I and Tier II technical assistance services for specific sustainable and climate ready focus areas and serve as a liaison with community based partners. Currently seeking to expand to include this role for additional topics: (energy and transportation, water resiliency, food, construction and renovation, living schoolyards)	Classified 100% FTE	Average with salary and benefits per employee: $100,000 - $125,000 (seeking funding for additional positions)
Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools Project Management Specialist	Sustainability Project Management Specialists that can provide Tier III technical assistance project management services to districts and school sites for sustainable and climate ready facilities projects, district-wide community and culture efforts, and/or curriculum and instruction integration.	Classified or Certificated 100% FTE	Average with salary and benefits per employee: $100,000 - $125,000 (seeking funding)
District Sustainability Coordinator (or Director)	Different from a project management specialist, a District Sustainability Coordinator is working across the whole school model, focusing on district-wide sustainability efforts across the campus (facilities and operations), curriculum, community and culture. In addition to overseeing the initiative, the role also acts as a liaison between the site-level sustainability leadership efforts and district leadership and decision-making teams.	Classified or Certificated 100% FTE	Average with salary and benefits per employee: $100,000 - $200,000 (seeking funding)
Additional Climate Corps Fellows (currently filled)	As desired, additional staff capacity could be met with additional Climate Corps Fellows. These fellows can be most useful for short term projects such as landscape analysis data collections, one-time projects such as campus sustainability dashboards, or for site level programs such as gardens, sustainability electives, etc.	10 month Fellowship	$35 - $40,000 per Climate Corps Fellow (seeking funding for additional positions)

**It should be noted that the increase of staffing requires additional resources such as office space, and supplies.*

HOW TO ACHIEVE THE PROPOSED MODEL FOR INCREASING STAFF

Different potential structures for increasing staff capacity for leading sustainable and climate ready school efforts include, but are not limited to the "concept" examples below. There could also be a phased approach to any of the concepts below, for example starting in Concept I, then moving to Concept II, then moving to Concept III.

CONCEPT I: SMCOE Employs All Staff and Districts Contract for Technical Assistance Services
In this model, SMCOE employs the positions and San Mateo County districts and schools contract for technical assistance services**.**

Position	Employer	Serves
Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Coordinator	COE	County-Wide
Sustainable and Climate Ready Facilities Coordinator	COE	County-Wide

Green Facilities and Operations Analysts (GFOA)	COE	County-Wide
Sustainability Project Management Specialist	COE	Districts contract with COE for Tier III Project Management Services
Climate Corps Fellows	COE or District	County-Wide or District

- **Advantages**: COEs can work on a per project basis with each school district, and can prioritize a distribution of projects and resources with a focus on equity to protect those disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices and climate impacts. COEs are also well-positioned to form cross-sector partnerships that efficiently coordinate and deploy technical assistance resources and funding for sustainable and climate ready practices in facilities and operations.
- **Disadvantages:** Districts do not make a long-term investment in their own sustainability staff, and continue to rely on outside agencies to lead sustainability and climate ready efforts.

CONCEPT II: SMCOE or a Community Based Partner (CBP) Employs Coordinator, CBP Employs GFOAs/Project Managers, and Districts Contract for Technical Assistance Services

In this model, SMCOE, funds some positions, and a CBP (i.e. County Office of Sustainability, Non-Profit, Regional EPA, etc.) employs other positions. Districts and schools contract with CBP Sustainable and Climate Ready District Facilities Coordinator, CBPs employ GFOA/Sustainability Project Managers, and districts contract with CBP for technical assistance services for sustainable and climate ready facilities and operations efforts.

Position	Employer	Serves
Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Coordinator	COE	County-Wide
Sustainable and Climate Ready Facilities Coordinator	CBP or Government Agency	County-Wide
Green Facilities and Operations Analysts (GFOA)	COE or CBP	County-Wide
Sustainability Project Management Specialist	CBP or Government Agency	Districts contract with CBP for Tier III Project Management Services
Climate Corps Fellows	COE or CBP	County-Wide or District

- **Advantages**: CBP can specialize in green facilities and operations expertise, and can remain more focused on specific mission driven efforts.
- **Disadvantages:** Districts do not make a long-term investment in their own sustainability staff, and continue to rely on outside agencies to lead sustainability and climate ready efforts.

CONCEPT III: SMCOE Employs Coordinator and Districts Employ GFOAs/Project Managers

In this model, SMCOE employs some positions; however, school districts invest in the Sustainability Project Management Specialist positions and/or Climate Corps Fellow.

Position	Employer	Serves
Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Coordinator	COE	County-Wide

Sustainable and Climate Ready Facilities Coordinator	COE	County-Wide
Green Facilities and Operations Analysts (GFOA)	COE	County-Wide
Sustainability Project Management Specialist	District(s)	Districts who have invested in the position (can be job share)
Climate Corps Fellows	COE or District	County-Wide or District

- **Advantages**: SMCOE already serves in this type of support role and is well-positioned to provide expertise and coordination as an intermediary between governmental and non-governmental (NGO) agencies focused on sustainability and climate resiliency. SMCOE can provide landscape analysis data, and help coordinate larger funding opportunities for the region that can be implemented in partnership with district GFOAs/Sustainability Project Managers. Districts begin making a long-term investment in their own sustainability staff, and have the opportunity to split responsibilities across multiple school districts under the support and guidance of SMCOE.
- **Disadvantages:** In the near term, small-to-medium sized districts are unlikely to fund full-time sustainability project managers, and will likely need to share across multiple districts. This may be challenging to pilot initially, and employees may be challenged to balance needs across multiple school districts.

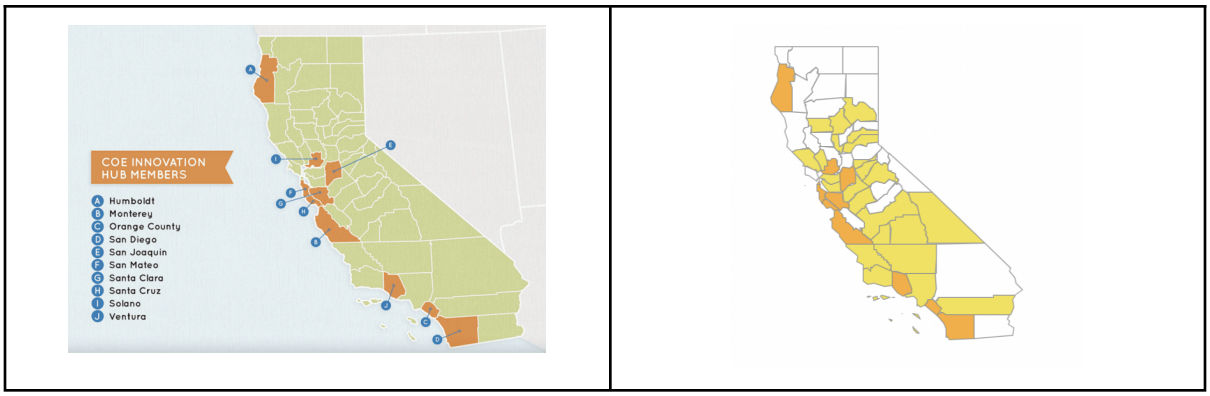
OTHER IDEAS: Funds are raised by COE or Districts to provide a stipend for district and school administrators who can be trained by COE Coordinators in this sustainability specialization. This would be similar to previous capacity building fellowship programs, but come with a higher stipend and specific expectations for specific sustainability projects (i.e. energy resiliency, water resiliency, etc.).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCALING EFFORTS ACROSS CALIFORNIA

While the staffing models in this document have been developed with the intention that the positions and services remain within San Mateo County, each of these models has been designed to be applicable beyond the context of San Mateo County. Meaning that other COEs could replicate these models to serve the districts and schools within their region. The long-term vision would be every COE implementing a staffing model that has an Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Coordinator, as well as a Sustainable and Climate Ready Facilities Coordinator. A good starting point for taking this model to scale is to start with County Offices of Education (COEs) that have already made an investment in environmental literacy and sustainability, and to those that have not yet launched an initiative, but are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental injustice.

Scaling to Regions with an Already Existing Initiative

There are a number of COEs who have invested in some form of a high-impact county-wide sustainability or environmental literacy initiative in the past decade. These leading COEs are part of the California Environmental Literacy Initiative's (CAELI) County Office of Education (COE) Innovation Hub, and/or part of the CAELI state-wide Environmental Literacy COE Community of Practice (COP).



CAELI's COE Innovation Hub (left) and COEs participating in CAELI state-wide Environmental Literacy COE COP (right)

While the majority of these COEs have approached their efforts from the lens of curriculum and instruction, there are many that have begun to advance sustainable and climate ready facilities and operations efforts within their region too. For some this has begun with efforts to green their own COE facilities and operations, and for others this involves external support to districts and schools in achieving Green Ribbon Schools Award Program recognition, or with implementing sustainability initiatives such as zero waste or living schoolyards. An infusion of funding from the state, and local funding sources would help these COEs invest in the qualified staff to take their facilities and operations efforts to the next level.

Scaling to Regions Vulnerable to Climate Impacts and Environmental Inequity

A critical starting point for taking this work to scale across California is supporting these efforts in counties that are most vulnerable to climate impacts, in particular high heat and wildfire. These counties have experienced disruption to learning from school closures, and need immediate support to increase staff capacity in addressing these climate concerns. This shift from emergency triage mode, to a more proactive approach will increase resiliency in these regions, and reduce the costs of emergency response. Additionally, it is recommended that investments be made in regions that are experiencing high levels of environmental inequity - this can be identified from CalEnviroScreen data.

Investment in Training and Capacity Building Programs

Another critical aspect of being able to take this work to scale across California, is developing the workforce to take on these roles. This will include investments in training programs that can focus on different approaches to capacity building programs, for example:

- **Sustainability and Climate Resilience Training for Business Services Personnel:** Programs that can train current business and services personnel such as CBOs and Facilities Managers to adopt sustainable and climate ready project management skills. The advantage to this approach is that these professionals already have expertise in school finance and/or school facilities management.
- **School Finance and Facilities Management Training for Sustainability Project Managers:** A different approach is to take already existing sustainability project managers (likely from municipal and county jurisdictions or the business sector) and provide them with training in school finance and school facilities management.
- **Training for Entry-Level Professionals:** There is a need for entry-level and early career roles for managing sustainability efforts within schools, which is already being achieved through one-to-two year fellowship roles at COEs, school districts, and sites (i.e. through SEI Climate Corps, SEI Education Outside, California Climate Action Corps, AmeriCorps, and FoodCorps).

This type of training could be made available through a number of different pathways:

- State agencies such as the CA Department of Education, or the CA Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), CA Office of Sustainability, or the Division of State Architect (see NBI Getting to Zero in Schools).
- Leading COEs could be given grant funding to provide training programs.
- Higher Education institutions specializing in sustainability degrees such as MBA/MPA, MA in Environmental Literacy, and supplemental certificate programs (i.e. Presidio Graduate School, San Joaquin Teachers College, etc.).
- Non-Profit Agencies that already offer capacity building and fellowship style programs such as the US Green Building Council (USCBG) Center for Green Schools, Green Schools National Network, or Center for Ecoliteracy's Sustainable Food Programs, or SEI's Climate Corps and Workforce Development.

It is highly recommended that staff roles such as Green Facilities and Operations Analysts or Sustainability Project Managers have experience or background with other aspects of school operations such as curriculum and instruction, community engagement programs, and school climate and culture. Training programs through the state that take place in K-12 settings (i.e. through SEI Climate Corps, or California Climate Action Corps), or certificate programs through higher education institutions such as Presidio Graduate School can help support this type of capacity building.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1) District and Site Level Sustainability Job Descriptions and District-Wide Sustainability Committee Support:

- District Sustainability Coordinator Job Description Example
- Site-Level Sustainability Champion Job Description Example
- District-Wide Sustainability Committee Overview
- District-Wide Sustainability Committee Case Studies

2) Additional resources for understanding policy, funding, strategic planning, decision making, and recognition for sustainability and climate resilient efforts in schools:

- Sustainable/Green Board Policies and Resolutions Overview and San Mateo County Analysis
- Facilities Master Plan Overview and San Mateo County Analysis
- Bond and Parcel Measures Overview and San Mateo County Analysis
- District-Wide Sustainability Committees: Overview and San Mateo County District Case Studies
- Green Ribbon: General Overview, Technical Assistance Webpage and Resources

3) San Mateo County Technical Assistance Resources for Sustainable and Climate Action Plans:

- ELSI Technical Assistance Overview
- Climate Action Plans: Overview and San Mateo County Jurisdiction Analysis
- Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools Technical Assistance Resources
    - Baseline Assessment: Overview to Purpose and Process, SMUHSD Example
    - Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools Action Plans: Overview to Purpose and Process, Template, SMCOE Example, Menu of Strategies
    - Sustainable and Climate Ready Schools Toolkit Website (includes focus area pages)

    - SCRS Partnership Network for Technical Assistance (TA): Network Overview, Network Webpage, SCRS Partner Technical Assistance Analysis
- Campus Sustainability Dashboard Overview and Examples, 2021-22 Grant Program Overview

4) Additional resources for Identifying Support at State Level:

- CA Department of Education Organization Chart and Website
- CA Governor's Office of Sustainability
- CA Division of State Architect and Office of Public School Construction