

# SMELC Admin Community Impact Case Study Overview



San Mateo Environmental Learning Collaborative (SMELC) - Admin Fellowship 2020

**Directions:** Your Community Impact Case Study will capture your experience in driving environmental transformation across your school community with a focus on green facilities and/or increasing environmental literacy in curriculum and instruction. Your final product will be a write-up based on the following prompts, and will range from 1,000 - 2,00 Words. This Case Study will be shared publicly.

## Fellow:

My name is Colleen Hennessy and I have been the principal of Rollingwood Elementary in San Bruno for the past five years.



1) Context		
<b>School Site</b>	Rollingwood Elementary School	School Logo
<b>School Demographics</b>	Rollingwood Elementary is a small school of about 250 students. School Demographics: 28% Hispanic 27% Asian 21% White 14% Unknown 7% Pacific Islander 2% African American 1% Native American	
<b>District</b>	San Bruno Park School District	District Logo
<b>District Demographics</b>	For the 2020-21 school year, there are 7 public schools in San Bruno Park Elementary School District, serving 2,632 students. Minority enrollment is 80% of the student body (majority Hispanic).	

<b>General Vision/Mission of School and/or district</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>District Mission Statement</b></p> <p>The San Bruno Park School District educates and empowers all students to thrive academically, socially and emotionally and be contributing members of society.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>District Vision Statement</b></p> <p>The San Bruno Park School District will engage and inspire our students to be productive critical thinkers who embrace diversity, curiosity and innovation throughout their lives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>School Vision</b></p> <p>At Rollingwood, we have high expectations for all of our students. We strive to work collaboratively with one another to help our students reach their academic potential. By bringing together parents and community for various educational and social programs, we envision a school where all of our students and families feel included. We provide a safe, friendly, encouraging and academically rigorous learning environment for our students. Rollingwood is committed to developing critical thinkers, ethical citizens and lifelong learners who are contributing members of our community.</p>
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**1) Original Goals and Intentions (50-100 words):** Share what drew you to being a leader for Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE). *Why did you originally want to join the SMELC Administrator Fellowship?*

A few years ago, my superintendent helped my school create a partnership with Skyline College to work on sustainability in my elementary school because it was seen as a need in our district. One of the first things we did was have a "Teacher Sustainability Bootcamp" to teach my staff more about the different aspects of sustainability. The County office of Education led the training and this is where I met Andra Yeghoian. Her drive and passion for sustainability is what inspired me to want to become a leader for Environmental and Sustainability Education. I started attending different workshops and conferences at the San Mateo County Office of Education and always left feeling inspired and with ideas of how to incorporate more sustainable efforts on our campus.

**2) Community Impact Project Overview** (200-400 words): Provide a brief summary of the purpose of your project and overall goals.

- **Project Overview:** Provide a brief summary of the purpose of your project and overall goals. Connect this back to how it fits into the broader goals of your school/district.
- **Project Plan:** Identify critical elements of your project plan, including priorities, change assessment, key stakeholder engagement, etc.

My project is to develop and support implementation of a zero waste plan that includes infrastructure to support zero waste efforts, as well as widespread training, tracking, and monitoring. This project aligns well with our vision for our students to become critical thinkers, ethical citizens, and lifelong learners who are contributing members of our community. The critical elements of the project are for all classrooms to have well-labeled tri-bin stations, compost bins for paper towels in all of the bathrooms, the use of reusable sporks for every student to use while on campus, collaboration with district office staff, and the training of staff, students, and families.

We have a tri-bin system in our cafeteria that has been successful in implementation, but none of our classrooms or bathrooms have compost bins. All of our classrooms and bathrooms have paper towel dispensers and the waste is going into a garbage can. We want to divert the waste of the paper towels by putting them in the compost instead.

Our district currently orders the sporks for the cafeteria that come wrapped in plastic, and include a spork, straw, and napkin in the package. We have found that these packets are very wasteful. For instance, If a student wants an individual item such as a napkin, they need to open a packet and all of the other items are then wasted. Our PTA has agreed to order reusable sporks for all students to help minimize the amount of plastic wasted on a daily basis. However, we realized that in order for our project to be more successful on a larger scale, we needed to engage the school district administrators and school board to help implement some of our ideas. Students in grades third-fifth collected and sorted the waste from the cafeteria for five days. They then compiled the information and presented to the school board asking for them to help reduce the waste in the cafeteria by ordering individual items. We need the district to agree to order napkin dispensers so the students do not need to rely on the packets for their napkins. We would also like to have the ketchup to be distributed by a pump instead of individual packets. The upper grade students also presented their findings to the rest of the school to help educate them on the importance of not wasting the materials in the cafeteria.

*Students presenting to the superintendent and school board members about their findings from the cafeteria waste.*



*Students presenting findings to their fellow students.*



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

- What were obstacles you/your group faced during implementation of your project and how did you overcome them? Include items that may not have gone “as planned” throughout your project.
- What were successes you/your group had and what contributed to your success?
- And what do you hope to finish it out if it is not finished yet?

Our project is not yet complete. There were a few obstacles that came up along the way. One of the main hiccups is that I needed to go on medical leave earlier than expected due to having a high-risk pregnancy. I was put on leave before school started this fall and there is an interim principal in my place while I am out on leave and he is faced with the pressing issue of running a school during a pandemic. I plan to be back in early February and will pick up where I left off.

We were also stalled when the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020. We had planned on doing a waste audit to get our baseline numbers for the project, but were unable to once students were moved to distance learning. As of December 2020, students are still in distance learning, but we plan on completing the waste audit once students are back on campus.

The sporks were not ordered last spring because we were off campus and not sure when we would be returning. The new PTA board has reapproved the purchase of the sporks and they will be ordered this year.

Since I have started my project, there has been turn over in the head of food service, maintenance operations, and the office of superintendent. All three of these district leadership roles play an important part in our plan and the work I had done with the previous person in each role will need to be readdressed.



Before our campus was closed due to the pandemic, we had some champion teachers that really supported the efforts and came up with ways to help educate the students and get them excited about sustainability. Teachers took their students on trash walks, where they would walk around the campus to pick up garbage. Some teachers also came up with the idea and implemented “Wasteless Wednesdays”. This is where we encouraged all students to use only reusable packaging in their lunches that came from home. If they bought food from the cafeteria, we encouraged them to make sustainable choices such as not to waste ketchup packets or sporks if they were not going to use them. Each Wednesday, teachers would give a few students a raffle ticket for doing a great job on not creating waste with their lunch. Those students with raffle tickets would be able to sit on the stage in the cafeteria and eat their lunches with a teacher on Thursdays.

Once I return, I plan on completing all aspects of my project. We will be putting the tri-bin system in all classrooms, the compost bins in the bathrooms, have the reusable sporks ordered, speak with the district leadership about ordering napkin dispensers, changing ketchup packets to a pump, and have training the custodial staff. We will also educate families on the tri-bin system in hopes that they can continue the efforts at home and not just at school. We had some bins donated in the spring that will be distributed around the school to also increase the availability of recycling in the hallways, office, and staff room and not just in the classrooms.

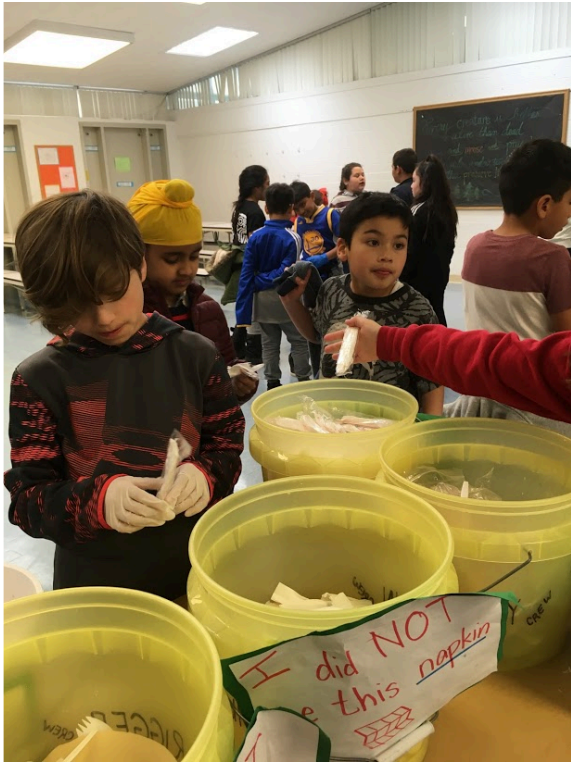
There are some other next steps that were not part of my original plan that I hope to work on as well once I return. With the pandemic still going strong, I would like to increase the use of our garden to become more outdoor classroom space. We have one section of stumps for a class to use, but I would like to place more around the campus. We have garden beds that were used by an after school garden club, but I would like all students to have access to them.

#### ***Collecting and Sorting Waste for 5 days in the Cafeteria***

Upper grade students sorted their own trash, and helped the younger students sort theirs. The trash was sorted into unused plastic sporks, unused plastic straws, unused napkins, unused complete packets, and all other plastic. The bin for all other plastic included plastic from home lunch.

#### **Total Counts from Sorting**

In total, over 5 days, we counted 138 complete packets that were taken but not used, 177 unused sporks, 166 unused straws, and 191 unused napkins. *In a year, that's approximately:*  
*5,520 unused packets*  
*7,082 unused sporks*  
*6,640 unused straws*  
*7,240 unused napkins*



*Donated Bins*



*Garden Beds*



#### 4) Metrics and Outcome (200 - 500 Words):

- **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:** A lot of the groundwork has been done for the project that should allow a fairly quick implementation once I am back from my leave. We have the bins on campus, they just need to be labeled and placed in the classrooms. After working with the head of maintenance, we now have clear bags to use for composting. The champion teachers are still on my campus and are willing to continue the important work on sustainability.

**Ecological Benefit:** Once we are able to do the waste audit, we will be able to measure the benefit more accurately. We do have a sense of how much we will be able to reduce waste in the cafeteria based on the collection done by the students over 5 days. In a year, we will be able to save approximately 5,520 unused packets, 7,082 unused sporks, 6,640 unused straws, and 7,240 unused napkins.

**Educational Benefit:** Even though we were not able to complete the project, there was evidence that our efforts did not go to waste. We had a pancake breakfast at our school (precovid) and I was standing at the bins to ensure that the waste was properly sorted. I was very impressed by how many of our students knew how to sort almost everything and I was shocked to see how many parents had no idea how to properly sort their waste. It was evident that our teaching the students how to sort has been effective because they definitely had stronger skills at sorting compared to the adults. The experience at the pancake breakfast solidified the fact that we need to ensure that our students have the tools to educate their families on the proper sorting. One thing we can do is to have the students do a waste audit at home.

Another benefit is that our PTA has taken notice of our efforts to reduce waste. They now use either paper to cover tables or leave them empty when setting up for events instead of using plastic tablecloths to cover the 24 tables in the cafeteria.

There was also a notable increase in the amount of transitional kindergarteners and kindergarteners that would bring reusable lunch packaging during the 19-20 school year compared to the 18-19 school year. I believe this due in part to the tours I would give to incoming parents and I would talk about our school-wide effort to reduce waste. It was also advertised in our weekly newsletter for families.

#### **5) Final Reflection and Commitments (100 - 250 words):**

- What is your enduring understanding about leading for Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE)?
- What are your commitments for next year and beyond for (ESE)?

Students need to understand how their decisions and actions have an impact on our school, community, and the greater environment. Part of my job as a leader is to help inform students about their impact and how they can make a positive change in our world. My commitment is to continue the work of implementing more sustainable practices in my school and district, and continue to collaborate with my colleagues and staff. I also commit to educate the students, staff, and families on making more sustainable efforts and how they can look at the world through a sustainable lens.