

# Ravenswood City School District

## Green Ribbon Recognition, Spring 2021

*Text by Julie DiMaio, Climate Corps Fellow, 2020-2021*

For our continuing series on change-makers in San Mateo County, we interviewed three of the leaders in the Ravenswood City School District (RCSD) in East Palo Alto - Will Eger, Chief Business Officer; Nico Janek, STEM Coach; and Delma Camacho, Director of Operations - to discuss their [California Green Ribbon Schools \(CA-GRS\) bronze-level recognition](#) and sustainability efforts in their district. Sustainability in RCSD is truly a collaborative process and these three represent a cross-section of those involved.

 A-Z Bus Sales, Inc. @A\_ZBusSales · Nov 22  
Happy Friday! Congratulations @RavenswoodCSD. This was the first of 7 #BlueBird CNG #schoolbuses awarded with a Bay Area Air Quality District grant and proudly delivered by A-Z Bus Sales.  
#schoolbustransportation #california #cng #azbussales



Will, relatively new to the district, expressed gratitude for the guidance and support from the SMCOE team while working on the Green Ribbon Schools (CA-GRS) application and broader sustainability, climate justice, and resiliency efforts. When Will joined RCSD, he wanted to begin working on addressing the climate crisis, but first needed to capture an accurate picture of the current situation.

Nico, during her eight years supporting TK-5 grade teachers and maker spaces at each school within RCSD, had participated in many programs with SMCOE, including presenting at Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) roll-outs and coaching teams in the [Solutionary Teacher Fellowship Program](#). She welcomed the opportunity to work on the CA-GRS.

Delma got involved in the process after working with SMCOE's Green Facilities and Operations Analyst (Naomi Stern) on outdoor learning spaces as part of their COVID-19 recovery plan. Delmas was excited to see that SMCOE offers so much other technical assistance and support for green facilities. She looks forward to learning even more about green facilities now that she and Nico have both joined SMCOE's [Sustainable and Climate Resilient Schools Administrator Fellowship](#). She feels a personal responsibility to do even more to create sustainable and climate-resilient campuses.

**Below is a summary of their collective responses to a number of interview questions.**

### What inspired them to apply for the CA-GRS program?

Will says he has been personally inspired by the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#), and in particular, wanted to work on helping the district reduce their carbon emissions from energy use and their transportation fleet. He hoped completing the CA-GRS benchmarking process would help them get a sense of where they were in each focus area in order to find where changes might make the biggest impact. Delma agreed that they were already moving in the right direction with past fleet changes (switch to compressed natural gas)

and energy efficiency, as well as tree-planting campaigns. Her hope was that the application process would also help identify areas of opportunity like the garden and outdoor classroom at Los Robles McNair. East Palo Alto is vulnerable to poor air quality and sea-level rise so Nico was hoping this Green Ribbon benchmarking would help pull together a clear picture of what they were doing with mitigation and adaptation practices, so they could then strategically plan for making the campus and community more climate-resilient.

## How has the CA-GRS process led to change in the district?

There are already many grassroots efforts happening at separate schools. CA-GRS is a chance to highlight those efforts and bring them central. They have green teams at all of the schools and a district-level green working group. When students are back on campuses, they look forward to adding students to the green teams. They would like to see the sustainability efforts become institutionalized so they will continue to thrive despite potential staff turnover. They would like to continue strengthening the connection between instruction and operations. For example, composting, sorting, and local food initiatives can be supported by teachers who help students understand the why behind the initiatives. However, students can also advocate for initiatives that they would like to see on their campuses as they learn more about sustainable practices.

Now that they have benchmark data in all the focus areas, they can consider their next steps. For example, solar panels will be installed on all campuses beginning this summer. These will not only provide energy and help offset their carbon footprint but provide much-needed shade for playgrounds and parking areas. Though nothing has been decided, there are opportunities in food services, as well, including more fresh, local food that would decrease packaging and waste and provide healthy choices. They may explore more meatless options as well.

## Would you recommend other school districts use the CA-GRS for benchmarking?

In response to this, all three were unanimous. “Yes!” The challenges are learning opportunities and are important steps towards more sustainable and climate-resilient schools. For example, they are able to more accurately assess energy use now that they have consolidated their electric bills. They highly recommend working with the SMCOE team and using the SMCOE resources to help document all of the inspiring efforts already happening and make strategic plans for the future.

**RCSD “is focused on  
creating a better world  
for our kids”**

In closing, Will said the RCSD “is focused on creating a better world for our kids...All school districts have a moral obligation...to really think about what they are doing to make sure they’re not just preparing students academically for the future but making sure the future they have is not going to be wildfires, rising seas, and mass extinction....School districts really have a clear moral obligation to be thinking about their overall carbon footprint and what they are doing to address the climate crisis.”