

Environmental Sustainability and AIMS Schools

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AIMS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

Schools within the Association of Independent Maryland and DC Schools (AIMS) endorse the goal of preparing students to navigate the challenges they will face in the future. In this era of significant and expanding ecological stress, here at home and around the globe, environmental sustainability is a core concern facing our society. AIMS schools recognize that an understanding of the natural world and the impact humans have upon it is an educational and institutional value. Accordingly, we encourage our schools to foster and support substantive environmental education experiences for all students and to seek to model sustainable practices within our physical plant operations and our school leadership practices.

Within our schools, AIMS endorses programs that focus on the interrelatedness of all species and the vital role that every human being plays in sustaining a healthy biosphere. To further the environmental ethic within our communities, AIMS urges school leaders to cultivate in all members of the school community an attitude of environmental responsibility, to embrace sustainable campus practices, and to promote student learning of environmental sustainability in the classroom, on the campus grounds, in the surrounding watershed, and within the wider world.

A PARTIAL LIST OF MODEL PRACTICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A school's entry into a commitment to sustainability begins with the educational program. Students at every age, and in every discipline, can be engaged in areas of research, analysis, and expression that touch upon issues of environmental sustainability and responsibility. Areas of curricular and co-curricular development might include one or more of the following, in an age-appropriate design:

- An inventory of the natural life of the campus, both indoors and out.
- An inventory of the ways that fuels and energy are used on the campus.
- An inventory of landscapes on the campus – water, forest, field, lawn, garden.
- An exploration of the ways that campus use might affect the health of the local watershed.
- An exploration of recycling practices on the campus.
- A review of dining service practices and their impact.
- Incorporating aspects of the natural world in the arts curriculum.

- Environmental education units or electives within the STEM program.
- Outdoor education challenge programs as part of the PE and leadership programs.
- Units or elective courses on nature writing.
- Units or electives on the history of environmental advocacy, parks and preserves, conservation movements, politics, and the law.
- Opportunities for independent study or coursework at neighboring schools or colleges.
- Service projects that engage participants in environmental learning and positive action.
- Professional development programs for faculty in sustainability and environmental education.

SCHOOL LEADERS

Consistent with its mission, resources, geographical circumstances, and current strategic planning cycle, each AIMS school seeks ways to develop leadership that explores and supports environmental teaching and learning with a goal of increasing sustainability over time.

Areas of growth and engagement for the head of school and senior administrators might include one or more of the following:

- The head of school and senior administrators explore ways to dedicate time and focus to supporting environmental sustainability. Administrative vision and determination are critical in helping school community members to understand the importance of environmental sustainability to the school's mission and to its students. The administration can help ensure that environmental sustainability becomes an operational and strategic priority.
- The head and senior administrators provide ways for all members of the school community to have access to environmental sustainability education and professional development, including the administrative team, facilities personnel, faculty, staff, students, and parents.
- The administration seeks to develop and integrate meaningful and comprehensive environmental sustainability education within the school's curriculum.
- By communicating the school's evolving vision of environmental sustainability, the administration ensures that the school devotes attention and focus to this issue.
- The administration explores ways to build meaningful partnerships and connections with local, regional, national, and international environmental education organizations, seeking to develop and share resources.
- The school evaluates its environmental sustainability efforts regularly. Many organizations offer environmental sustainability audits and report cards.

Areas of growth and engagement for the board of trustees might include one or more of the following:

- Working with the head of school, the board explores developing a formal sustainability statement, either within the mission statement or separately, which both defines environmental learning in relation to the school's mission and articulates a rationale for sustainability's importance to the school. Such a statement could be widely distributed, including to parents and alumni, and would support clarity and consistency regarding the school's commitment to environmental sustainability.
- The composition of the board can support a growth mindset and a learning attitude toward issues of environmental sustainability. The board might consider the development an environmental sustainability "dashboard" and ways of modeling sustainability values to the entire school community.
- The board ensures that environmental sustainability is an important part of the head of school's responsibilities, and provides the necessary financial resources and expertise to support a physically sustainable campus and educational program.
- The board's agenda reflects the importance of environmental sustainability by dedicating the time necessary for trustees to stay informed about sustainability best practices and to make well-considered sustainability policy decisions for the school community.

Areas of engagement for school families might include one or more of the following:

- The school strives to regularly communicate to families its commitment to environmental sustainability, beginning in the admission process.
- Families are encouraged to understand and support the school's commitment to environmental sustainability.
- Families are offered meaningful opportunities to learn about and support the school's environmental sustainability efforts.

As an organization seeking to advance our independent schools individually and collectively, AIMS encourages our member institutions to embrace a regional and national role in supporting environmental sustainability education in ways that are appropriate and achievable for each individual school. AIMS urges our schools to have the courage, the determination, and the vision, consistent with their individual missions, to promote an ethic of environmental responsibility, in order to support institutional success and a healthy, sustainable planet.

The Association of Independent Maryland & DC Schools (AIMS) is an association of 121 independent, college preparatory schools in Maryland and the District of Columbia, representing nearly 50,000 students and 8,000 teachers, administrators, and staff. It was organized in 1967. AIMS works in cooperation with the Maryland State Department of Education and is a member of the Maryland chapter of the Council for American Private Education and the National Association of Independent Schools.