

Ontario

Introduction to EcoSchools and the

FIVE-STEP process

GUIDE

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Ontario EcoSchools: Introduction to EcoSchools and the Five-Step Process Guide

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► INTRODUCTION

What is EcoSchools?

Keeping the natural environment healthy for future generations depends on everyone's participation. Schools and school boards have a vital role to play in achieving this goal. The Ontario EcoSchools program makes environmental protection a part of school life.

Ontario EcoSchools will help a school board to:

- ▶ promote environmental literacy for all students;
- ▶ establish environmentally sound operational practices;
- ▶ develop a process for continual improvement in environmental education and operational practices within each school, and
- ▶ incorporate an environmental education component into the school planning and review process.

Ontario EcoSchools is based on a program developed jointly by the Toronto District School Board's School Services and Facility Services departments. It introduces an environmental perspective to the choices we make in operating our schools and in planning classroom programs based on the Ontario Curriculum. It consists of four components:



The leaf within each figure symbolizes thinking and acting with the environment in mind. It also visually connects the four areas, a reminder that – as ecology teaches us – everything is connected to everything else.

Activity in the EcoSchools areas named does not in any way limit a school's commitment to other environmental undertakings!

How does EcoSchools Work?

The main goals of EcoSchools are to help schools reduce their energy consumption, minimize their waste, green their school grounds and teach staff and students to become more ecologically literate.

To achieve these goals, EcoSchools offers a five-step process. The purpose of the five-step process is to provide an organized and systematic way for schools to implement the program. The process includes: 1. *Establish the EcoTeam* 2. *Conduct the EcoReview* 3. *Develop the Action Plan* 4. *Implement the Action Plan* 5. *Monitor and Evaluate Progress*.



▶ THE FIVE-STEP PROCESS: GETTING EVERYONE ON BOARD

Step 1. Establish the EcoTeam

Who should be on our EcoTeam?

EcoTeams are the driving force of the EcoSchools program. The first step toward becoming an EcoSchool involves forming your own EcoTeam. Your team should represent your whole school community. It is suggested that you include:

- ▶ an administrator
- ▶ teachers
- ▶ students (essential)
- ▶ support staff
(e.g. lunchroom monitors, office staff)
- ▶ head custodian
- ▶ parents
- ▶ School Council representative(s)
- ▶ Student Council representative(s)
- ▶ community representative(s)
(e.g. daycare staff, regular permit holder)

Ideally, you should have at least one representative from each of these categories; however, it is understood that this may not be feasible.

What does the EcoTeam do?

- ▶ provides leadership for the school's EcoSchools initiatives (through regular meetings)
- ▶ encourages participation by the whole school
- ▶ carries out the steps of the EcoSchools process

Working together as a team:

The following two pages provide a few key tips for working together that will make your EcoTeam function more smoothly. An EcoTeam is as much about how you work together as what you get done!!

The EcoTeam drives the action. Team membership that reflects all parts of the school community is central to the success of your program.

Roles

Establishing who does what at the first meeting is important so that everyone knows who is responsible for which part of the team's function. The following roles are suggested, but you may find that your team needs to create new or different roles or choose to rotate roles for each meeting.

- ▶ **Chair:** calls meetings, sets and follows the agenda, facilitates meetings and encourages participation by all team members and keeps informed about EcoSchools resources through the website.
- ▶ **Secretary:** takes minutes at meetings, records decisions made and name of the person responsible for carrying out an action.
- ▶ **Communications/Publicity:** ensures that results of the EcoReview, the Action Plan, and events are communicated to the entire school community (e.g., submitting a monthly report for the school newsletter's EcoSchools column). This very large and important role may require more than one person.
- ▶ **Student representatives** (diverse representation recommended): offer suggestions from a student perspective, communicate information to and from the student body (e.g., through weekly announcements, bulletin boards, student council, assemblies). Students may also help develop waste and energy campaigns, take leadership for classroom initiatives (e.g. train other students in waste minimization and energy conservation practices), help with fundraising and incentives activities (e.g. contests).
- ▶ **Site Advisor** (usually the custodian and/or an administrator): gives expert advice on logistics, policy, protocol, permission requirements for special projects.
- ▶ **Everyone** is responsible for communicating decisions made by the EcoTeam to their other groups (e.g. staff meetings, student council meetings, school council meetings, custodian meetings) and for getting feedback from these groups.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL – As a school leader, the principal plays a central role in helping to make EcoSchools a genuine part of school life. While every leader has his or her own style, here are some specific supportive actions that a principal can take to instill confidence in the school’s EcoTeam:

- 1 publicly value EcoSchools as a system-wide initiative that explicitly supports making environmentally responsible practices and learning a part of school life;
- 2 be a member of the EcoTeam, or if that isn’t possible, attend the first meeting to express support;
- 3 invite and encourage staff members to become part of the EcoTeam;
- 4 encourage other staff members, students and parents to support the implementation of the EcoTeam’s Action Plan in the classroom, the office, and throughout the school;
- 5 recognize the importance of each individual’s part in the EcoTeam’s contribution to a well-run school;
- 6 invite regular reporting on EcoSchools at staff meetings and at school council meetings and, where applicable, parent association meetings.

Tips for Conducting Effective Meetings

- ▶ *Make sure to pick a time when all members of the team can meet.*
- ▶ *Meet at least once a month.*
- ▶ *Ensure that all members of the team understand the EcoSchools process and the expectations attached to their role.*
- ▶ *Establish how much time you want to spend on each agenda item and try to stick to it. Designate a timekeeper, especially when you have a packed agenda!*
- ▶ *Don’t forget to have the secretary record all major decisions and who took responsibility for them. A good way to keep everyone on track may be to put all minutes in a readily accessible EcoTeam binder.*
- ▶ *You may want to pair an adult with the student representatives on the EcoTeam to help them fulfill their role.*
- ▶ *Try to work by consensus as much as possible.*


EcoSchools emphasizes the importance of students playing an active role. Their involvement in the decision-making process gives them an opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and values needed to become responsible members of a democratic society.

Step 2. Conduct the EcoReview

After establishing roles and responsibilities, the EcoTeam’s first task is the EcoReview. The review will identify what you are doing well, and provide the evidence for what needs improvement. EcoSchools is designed to simplify the school’s task of becoming more environmentally friendly. We hope


that your EcoReview will in time go beyond the areas listed and also assess other environmental activities of particular interest at your school.

An assessment rubric and tips for conducting your EcoReview appear in the individual EcoSchools component guides.



Sample: ENERGY CONSERVATION ECOREVIEW

The following review provides an example to help you with your own school’s review based on the Energy Conservation Guidelines. The Comments Section has been used extensively to set the energy conservation targets and help craft the schools Action Plan (Step 3).

	Jomna SCHOOL	ABCDSB BOARD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INITIAL DATE	<input type="checkbox"/> FOLLOW-UP* DATE	
Guidelines	Level 1 Emerging	Level 2 Approaching Implementation	Level 3 Implemented	Level 4 Comprehensive	Comments
LIGHTS AND EQUIPMENT					
1) Lights are turned OFF when not required.	X				Some lights are turned off, but this practice is not consistent throughout the school.
2) Computer monitors are turned OFF when not in use.		X			Office and classroom PC computer monitors are often left on when not in use.
3) Printers, scanners and other electronic equipment on standby when not in use	X				Not consistently.

For a complete **SAMPLE** EcoReview and a **BLANK** EcoReview template, see the *Waste Minimization, Energy Conservation and Designing for Shade and Energy Conservation Guides* found on our website www.ontarioecoschools.org

Step 3. Develop the Action Plan

Once the EcoReviews are completed, you will have a summary of the environmental practices you have identified at your school. This information provides evidence of your

needs and is used to identify priorities for developing your actions and strategies.

Use a School Improvement Plan Template to record your Action Plan decisions and results.

SAMPLE: ECOSCHOOLS ENERGY CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN

DATE: *Oct. 14*

SCHOOL: *Jomma*

TARGETS	ACTIONS	INDICATORS	RESOURCES			BUDGET RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	RESULTS
			HUMAN	MATERIAL	\$			
1. Computer monitors are turned off when not in use	a. each classroom will have students whose responsibility is to make sure monitors are turned off when not in use b. create and deliver energy conservation messages c. Mr. Tsang's class will periodically track and report the 'monitors off' efforts of each class to the whole school	Results of student tracking	All classes will participate EcoTeam will create and deliver energy conservation messages Mr. Tsang's class will do the tracking and share their findings with the whole school	Tracking tally charts Energy conservation stickers, posters, announcements (check with board rep for resources and www.ontarioecoschools.org)	N.A.	N.A.	Awareness campaign: Oct-June First tally: Oct. 30, then monthly until last tally: early Apr	(Record according to timelines)
2. Lights are turned off when not required	a. each classroom will have monitors who turn off lights when not needed b. create and deliver energy conservation messages c. Ms. Bado's class will periodically track and report the 'lights off' efforts of each class to	Results of student tracking	All classes will participate EcoTeam will create and deliver energy conservation messages Ms. Bado's class will do the tracking and share their findings with the whole school	Tracking tally charts Energy conservation stickers, posters, announcements (check with board rep for resources and www.ontarioecoschools.org)	N.A.	N.A.	Awareness campaign: Oct-June First tally: Oct. 30, then monthly until last tally: early Apr	(Record according to timelines)

For a complete **SAMPLE** Action Plan and a **BLANK** Action Plan, see the *Waste Minimization, Energy Conservation* and *Designing for Shade and Energy Conservation Guides* found on our website www.ontarioecoschools.org.

One of the most powerful strategies of any greening initiative is to create the feeling that “everybody’s doing it.”

Step 4. Implement the Action Plan

Supporting EcoTeam Members

You have used a School Improvement Plan Template to list your *Targets, Actions, Indicators, Resources, Budget Responsibilities, Timelines*, and eventually, *Results*. Next, EcoTeam members need to support one another in getting the whole school community to take part in the team’s chosen initiatives.

Be sure to obtain regular updates on progress at your team’s monthly meetings. Encourage reporting of successes, however small, but also encourage people to speak openly if they have run into barriers so that the team knows where additional help may be needed. The deep-down source of the difficulty is often a system problem rather than one caused by an individual. Examine barriers with an open mind to find solutions that keep each team member feeling supported in his/her work. And note that successes are also the fruit of good systems as well as good people!

Communication

Good communication to the whole school community is essential to a successful Ecoschools program. To bring the Action Plan to life, you need clear and engaging ways to communicate both your goals and your strategies to encourage whole school participation. The more everyone knows at the beginning, the easier it will be to enlist their participation in working toward the goals your team sets!

Tips for Communicating about EcoSchools

- ▶ *Right from the start, let people know what the EcoTeam is doing, step by step.*
- ▶ *Brainstorm to elicit ideas about the ways you want to communicate to the school community as well as within your EcoTeam. Brainstorming can break the ice at an early EcoTeam meeting and provide a lot of fun!*
- ▶ *Encourage everyone on the EcoTeam – especially the students – to think creatively about what would appeal to the people they are representing.*
- ▶ *Keep information short and to the point.*
- ▶ *Recognize environmental activities already going on at your school and include them in your EcoTeam news.*

Possible Media for Communicating Your Messages

1. *a highly visible environmental bulletin board to:*

- ▶ post EcoReview results
- ▶ declare Action Plan targets
- ▶ announce classroom greening efforts
- ▶ say “thank-you” to volunteers

2. *a strong graphic prominently displayed to record ongoing progress toward your goals* (e.g., thermometer, EcoSchools tree)

3. *a monthly EcoSchools column in the school or principal's newsletter to give prominence to EcoSchools efforts*

4. *P.A. announcements*

Sample EcoTeam P.A. announcements:

Weekly Greening News: Good morning _____ Public School! The EcoTeam is proud to announce that our school filled only 16 bags of garbage last week – down from the 20 we produced the week before! That means we have 4 fewer bags of garbage needing disposal. Special thanks to Mrs. Rogers’ grade six class. Only one pick-up of garbage was needed from that classroom all week! Great job room 206!!! Let’s see if we can get our school total down to 14 bags next week.

Eco Tip of the Day: We all know that paper comes from trees! Let’s all try to save trees every day by using less paper in our classrooms, using up the paper we already have by using both sides, and recycling paper we have used up.

Eco Fact of the Day: EcoSchools asks us to think of the many ways we can save energy. It teaches us that saving energy saves money and helps the environment:

Today let’s focus on lights. Did you know that there are 1000 classrooms in schools across our city? If in those classrooms people turned off their lights for 3 hours each week when they might otherwise have been left on, the school board would save \$32,000 per year! We would also be reducing the amount of carbon dioxide that we produce by 100 tonnes. Since carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas that causes climate change, saving energy means helping to keep our environment healthy. It all starts with each one of us remembering to turn off the lights when we don’t need them! Together we can make a huge difference!

Eco Challenge of the Week: Reduce your use of new paper in the classroom for one week. Measure the amount of paper used in an average week as a benchmark to compare with the results of the paper-saving week. Report results to the office for inclusion in P.A. Weekly Greening News.

Participation in the EcoSchools program can provide leadership opportunities that encourage students to take an interest in their school environment!

Step 5: Monitor and Evaluate Progress

The final step of your EcoTeam's work is to evaluate your progress toward reaching the targets you have named. The Action Plan asks you to name *Indicators* once you have listed your strategies for action. Before the end of the school year, monitor and evaluate your implementation results. A simple way to monitor would be to re-review your school at the end of the school year and compare the results to the indicators you listed when you started out.

This work will be valuable for the future: the information you gather will be a useful benchmark for the work of next year's EcoTeam!

Become a certified EcoSchool

EcoSchools certification provides a rigorous province-wide set of criteria to assess achievement of environmentally-responsible actions and environmental learning. For more information please see <http://certapp.ontarioecoschools.org>

Celebrate Success!

It is important to acknowledge the volunteer efforts of individuals and groups in the school community by recognizing and celebrating both short- and longer-term achievements. This can be accomplished through P.A. announcements, awarding certificates or prizes, and posting names of groups or individuals, as well as by acknowledging efforts at a special event or as part of a year-end celebration. For inspiration, see the Ontario EcoSchools *Making Connections: Elementary learning activities in, about, and for the environment*. Download it at www.ontarioecoschools.org.

Tips for Monitoring Progress and Celebrating Success

- ▶ Create an "EcoSchools tree" in your front hall. Award leaves for the tree to classes that have made significant contributions toward becoming an EcoSchool.
- ▶ Designate an EcoClass of the month or award a class during an assembly.
- ▶ Hold a competition between classes or challenge another school to produce less waste or save more energy.

Suggested timeline for Ontario EcoSchools certification



Student Engagement: This symbol indicates areas where student engagement and leadership opportunities are present.

September-October	October-January	February-March	March-April
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish the EcoTeam Register your school online – http://certapp.ontarioecoschools.org Ask for support – contact parent’s council, staff meetings, community organizations, EcoSchools board representative Develop a communication strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Initial EcoReviews (Energy Conservation and Waste Minimization) Based on the results of the EcoReviews, complete and implement Action Plans for Energy Conservation and Waste Minimization Gather submissions for Curriculum section – complete online templates and save/upload student work Start planning for School Ground Greening Brainstorm and start Environmental Stewardship campaigns/activities Conduct a Waste Audit and communicate results Input results of Initial EcoReviews and other information as applicable into online application Deadline: January 31st to input results of Initial EcoReviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to implement Action Plans Continue inputting information/answers into certification application Gather/upload Portfolio requirements Communicate feedback! Tell the school how they are doing and strategies for improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Follow-up EcoReviews (Energy Conservation and Waste Minimization) Complete certification application Review completed online certification application Submit application from “Application Summary” page Save a copy of the Application Summary page for your records Assemble/upload all Portfolio requirements by April 30th Prepare for site visit Your board representative will advise you of the time/date of the site visit (May or June) if applicable Deadline: April 30th for submitting application (Early bird deadline - April 23).

How Ontario EcoSchools supports School Board implementation of Ministry of Education's initiatives

Character Development

- *Respect* for the environment supports overall development of respect for diversity
- *Inclusive*: diverse representation supported on EcoTeam
- *Initiative + Leadership*: student engagement and leadership are key elements of the program
- *Integrity*: whole school engagement encourages follow through on objectives
- *Optimism*: actions taken work towards a better future
- *Responsibility*: program requires monitoring practices and providing feedback
- *Citizenship development*: student engagement focus develops citizenship skills

Environmental Education Framework Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow

Schools and school boards implementing EcoSchools accomplish the majority of framework's goals and strategies



Safe Schools Strategy

- *Outdoor experiential learning* environments shown to decrease behavioural issues¹
- *Bullying prevention* supported through whole school engagement initiatives and inclusive EcoTeam
- Schools with maintained school grounds increase *safety*

Healthy Schools

- Promotes *active ways* to get to school
- Waste-free lunches provide healthier alternatives to processed foods
- *Anti-idling* campaigns help support healthier air quality on school grounds
- *Outdoor* school ground greening projects can support Daily Physical Activity (DPA) programs
- *Sun safety* is increased through tree planting emphasized in School Ground Greening

School Effectiveness Framework indicators

- 1.3: self-assessment skills are built into the EcoSchools program
- 2.4-2.5: inquiry-based learning and healthy learning environments are key elements
- 3.2-3.4: Student voice and engagement are central elements of the program
- 4.4: authentic learning
- 6.1-6.4: Parents and community members are engaged and valued partners of the program EcoSchools supports School Improvement Plans

Growing Success/Learning for All

- Learning skills are supported by the EcoSchools program

French-language Education

- EcoEcoles de l'Ontario offers program resources, teacher workshops and certification for French language schools and programs in line with *Politique d'Aménagement*

First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education

- EcoSchools can provide increased student engagement and appreciation for FNMI perspectives in relation to the environment

Catholic Education

- Implementation of EcoSchools supports "A Responsible Citizen" graduate expectations

Student Success

- *Specialist High Skills Major*: supports the Environment SHSM

Literacy and Numeracy

- Guidelines and resources for waste and energy conservation support development of literacy and numeracy skills with real world context

Integrated Curriculum

- Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat identifies environment as a theme for *interdisciplinary planning process*



1. Lieberman & Hoody. *Closing the Achievement Gap*. California: Science Wizards, 1998.

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