



Parent Green Teams

How Parents Can Create a Green Revolution in Schools

D3 Green Schools Group

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Why Is Parent Involvement Important?

Parents are important stakeholders in NYC public schools, not only to support existing initiatives but also to innovate and initiate new ideas and policies in sustainability and sustainability education. They have the power to add capacity, innovate schools and strengthen communities. They can develop partnerships with external organizations, provide additional resources and supplies through fundraising, and extend the capacity of administrators and teachers to roll out ambitious green programs. Manhattan's Upper West Side District 3 has a long tradition of initiating innovative sustainability programs. This guide intends to inform and inspire other parents to transform their schools into sustainable schools.

District 3 Green Schools Group

The District 3 Green Schools Group is a dedicated coalition of parent volunteers working to green their D3 public schools. Many of our schools have model programs in the areas of waste reduction and recycling, schoolyard gardens, environmental justice, energy conservation and environmental education. Some of the schools were the first in the city to pilot organics collection and served as a model for the now city-wide school organics collection program.

Meetings are held 6 times per year to learn from one another, but also to hear from expert panels, government representatives and to tour facilities such as the SIMS recycling plant. This provides a wonderful opportunity to assist one another and learn from each other's successes and failures in our own D3 community and to make sure that our district continues to lead the way in greening efforts.

For more information contact Megan Nordgrén megan.nordgren@gmail.com or find the D3 Green Schools Group on Facebook: [@SustainableNYCSchools](https://www.facebook.com/SustainableNYCSchools)

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Ways to Get Involved

There are many ways and degrees of parent engagement. This ranges from support to existing efforts in the fields of waste management, school gardens, nutrition and such or in generating new ideas and policies to make schools greener for all children.

Some of the different areas our D3 Green Schools Group parents are taking action in their schools are included below.

Zero Waste Schools:

- **Give Presentations to Students** (by individual classes is most effective, but can also be done by grade) demonstrating where waste goes and how it affects oceans, climate, etc. Can also present on the compost cycle, showing kids how their food waste turns into good dirt that can then grow more food.
- **Monitor Cafeteria:** Parents can set up schedules to have regular parent monitors in the cafeteria to encourage students to place waste in correct bins.
- **Work with Student Green Team to Conduct Audit:** Help students make a plan to audit individual classroom waste and compliance with recycling and implement it.
- **Class Green Parent:** In addition to a regular class parent, appoint a parent to be the go-to person for Zero Waste and sustainability issues. This parent will help teacher implement Zero Waste in the classroom.
- **Make School Events Zero Waste:** Make sure bins and signs are properly placed at school-wide events. Encourage parents to dispose of their waste in correct bins to help make the home-school connection.
- **Draft and Adopt PTA Sustainability Policy:** Make parents aware of the Zero Waste and other Sustainability Goals through the adoption of a PTA Sustainability Policy.
- **Sell Reusable Snack/Lunch Bags:** This can reduce cafeteria waste and also be a school fundraiser.
- **Collect Compost Scraps from Home:** Allow parents to drop off food scraps from home in school organics bins (schools usually have them outside at drop-off) on a regular schedule: 1-2 times per week, or even once per month.
- **Textile Collection:** Work with one of the textile collection companies such as Wearable Collections to place a bin in the school for families to drop off textiles (and possibly make some money for the school!).
- **Make Art from Waste:** Work with the art teachers to hold a fashion show of “clothes” made from recycled materials (such as paper bags), or hold an art show of sculptures made from waste.
- **TerraCycle:** Collect wrappers and other common waste items that cannot be recycled through the citywide program and send to TerraCycle (and possibly make some money for the school!).
- **Hold a Shredding Event:** Work with one of the paper shredding companies to hold a shred- fest once per year. This is good to do following tax time when many families have private documents to dispose of (and possibly make some money for the school!).



School Gardens:

- **Organize Garden Work Events:** Get the community involved in building and/or maintaining school gardens by holding weekend or after-school garden work events.
- **Register Garden with GrowNYC Grow to Learn:** This is a great resource for funding, supplies and technical help.
- **Create a Parent Garden Committee:** Provide as much maintenance help as possible to make the garden a sustainable feature of the school. Assist with garden classroom programs.
- **Hold Harvest Festivals:** Celebrate what the students are growing through a Harvest Festival.

- **Highlight Garden Activities at School Events:** Have a garden table at fall and spring fairs, and other PTA events.
- **Curriculum:** Many teachers are not comfortable gardening, and almost all teachers are overextended by their classroom demands. Help them use the garden as easily as possible by helping them find appropriate curriculum to use.
- **Help Create a Pollinator Garden:** Work with parents/teachers/students to design and build a pollinator garden, and teach students how beneficial it is for nature.
- **Teach About Monarch Butterflies:** The monarch cycle is a fascinating way to learn about nature and our connection to other geographic regions.
- **Bring in Bees/Worms/Insects/Chickens:** Bring in programs that expose students to nature in a variety of ways.
- **Fundraise to Support the Garden:** Help fundraise to create and/or maintain a school garden by writing grants, holding an online crowdfunding campaign, holding small fundraisers such as flower sales, or lobbying to get the PTA to contribute money.

Nutrition and Wellness:

- **Create a PTA Wellness Committee:** Bring together parents and staff to implement Wellness policies.
- **Develop School Wellness Policies:** Create policies for healthy snacks/classroom celebrations to reduce consumption of sugar and processed foods at school.



- **Change Cafeteria to Alternative Menu:** NYCDOE Schoolfood has many menus from which schools can choose, including many that are more nutritious than the standard menu.
- **Register School with Garden to Cafe Program:** This will allow food grown in the schools to be served to students.
- **Hold Cooking Classes for Families:** Provide parents with healthy and nutritious cooking techniques for their families.
- **Hold Cooking Classes for Students:** Provide students with basic cooking skills and nutrition knowledge to help them make healthier food choices.
- **Add Tower Garden to Cafeteria:** Growing leafy greens and herbs right in the cafeteria is a wonderful way to regularly expose students to nutritious foods.

Healthy Classrooms/Safe Cleaning:

- **Get Bleach Out of Classrooms:** Bleach products are unhealthy for students (and teachers) and are not allowed in schools according to NYS regulations. Remind teachers that they should not be asking families to supply them. Provide safer alternatives.
- **Make Your Own Healthy Cleaning Products:** Provide classrooms with homemade safe, effective cleaning products, along with microfiber cleaning cloths.
- **Sell Healthy Cleaning Products:** Sell green cleaning products to parents as a fundraiser and to teach about the dangers of toxic cleaning products (and possibly make some money for the school!).

- **Hold Workshops on Making Cleaning Products for Parents and Students:** Students love to make their own products, and can even choose their own essential oils. It even inspires them to clean at home!

Partnership Development:

- **Research Non-Profits and Outside Organizations that Can Provide Services to the School**
- **Establish Partnerships with Organizations that Improve Sustainability:** Some examples are:
 - NWF Eco-Schools
 - New York Sun Works
 - Solar One

Field Trip Planning:

- **Help Teachers Schedule Field Trips Related to Sustainability:** There are amazing field trip opportunities in New York City. A few of these include:
 - Sims Recycling Plant
 - Battery Urban Farm
 - Urban Park Rangers
 - Wave Hill

Environmental Justice Awareness:

- **Help Students Understand Their Connection to Community:** Bring in speakers to discuss how their actions affect other parts of the city (e.g. food being trucked through South Bronx).
- **Arrange Field Trips on this Topic**

Make Sure Items Sold by PTA are Sustainable:

- **Ensure that All PTA Items Sold as Fundraisers are Sustainably Produced:**
 - T-shirts and other clothing should be organic or made from recycled materials.
 - Paper products should be made of recycled content.
 - Avoid plastic. For example, instead purchase stainless steel water bottles.
 - Source of sustainable branded goods: www.ecoplum.com
- **Bulk Purchase School Supplies for Classrooms and Ensure Products are Sustainable**