



Center *for*  
Sustainable Futures

Teachers College, Columbia University

**Good to Know: Research that Matters**

# **The Benefits of Green Teams: Strategies for Educators to Enhance Sustainability Education**

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# Extracurricular activities play a central role in K-12 schools

Extracurricular activities comprise an essential and integral part of the K-12 curriculum. In these spaces, students interact over time with both peers and adults on the basis of a shared topic of interest or passion. These interactions help students to develop skills and attitudes towards learning; they also help students to translate and connect knowledge from the classroom in “real world” situations. Indeed, teachers and researchers have noted the positive association between extracurricular participation and desirable academic, social, and developmental outcomes.

In this brief we focus on Green Teams, a common example for extracurricular activity in K-12 schools.

# 50% of NYC public schools have a Green Team

A Green Team is an independent group or part of Student Government or other school club (e.g., science club) that is dedicated to improving sustainability through projects, raising awareness, and actions. A Green Team may include students, teachers, and other community members (e.g., administrators, custodians, parents).

A majority of Sustainability Coordinators (**59%**) say engaging students through Green Teams is very important to what it means to be a sustainable school.

Between 2016/17 and 2022/23, the number of schools with a Green Team have doubled (from **27%** to **50%**). *Does your school have a Green Team? Join the movement!*

# Small time investment, Big Impact

Many schools offer different formats for Green Teams to fit the teachers' capacity and students' interest.

Meeting frequency: **34%** of Green Teams meet at least once a week, **29%** meet **1-2** times per month, and **37%** meet **1-2** times per semester.

Meeting time: **41%** of Green Teams meet during lunch, **22%** meet after school, **20%** meet during the advisory period, and rest (**17%**) find other times to meet.

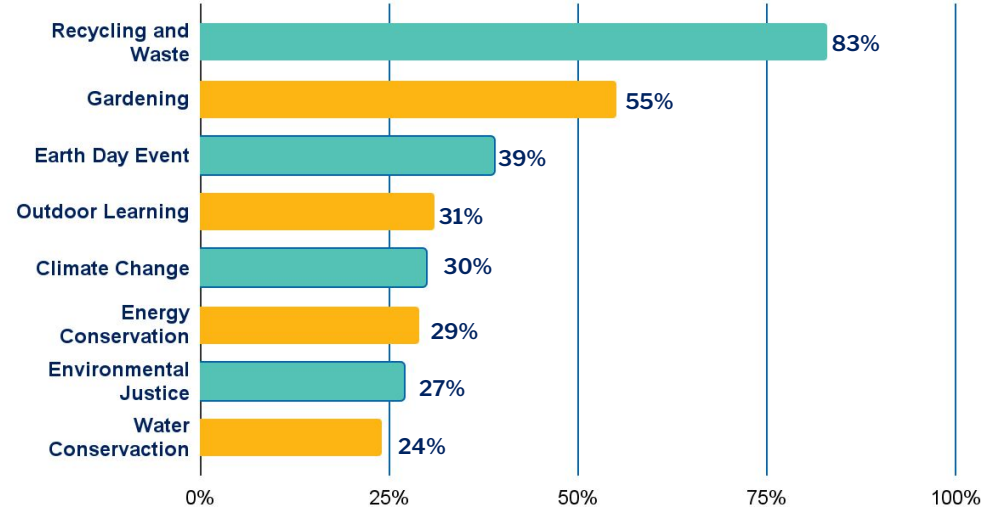
*How might you envision your engagement with the Green Team at your school?*

# Green Teams: It's not only about Recycling & waste

While almost all Green Teams (**83%**) work on improving recycling and reducing waste, many Teams also engage with gardening, climate change, and environmental justice.

Green Teams use different strategies: project-base learning (PBL), campaigns for raising awareness, competitions, and peer teaching activities.

**% Of Green Teams Focusing On Different Topics**



# A Teacher Testimonial

*“We have two green teams, one for younger students from pre-K through two, and one for the older students grades three through five. We have about 25 students in the green teams.*

*One of our projects this year is collecting wrapped food items from breakfast and also fruit. Anything that is not perishable, and then we redistribute them at the end of the day. This way we fight food waste and food insecurity. During our weekly green team meetings the students discuss anything that has to do with sustainability and climate change. We recently started a sustainability lending library, and every year we have something called Earth Day, where we have a whole exhibition of items that the students and families make in order to keep things out of the landfill.*

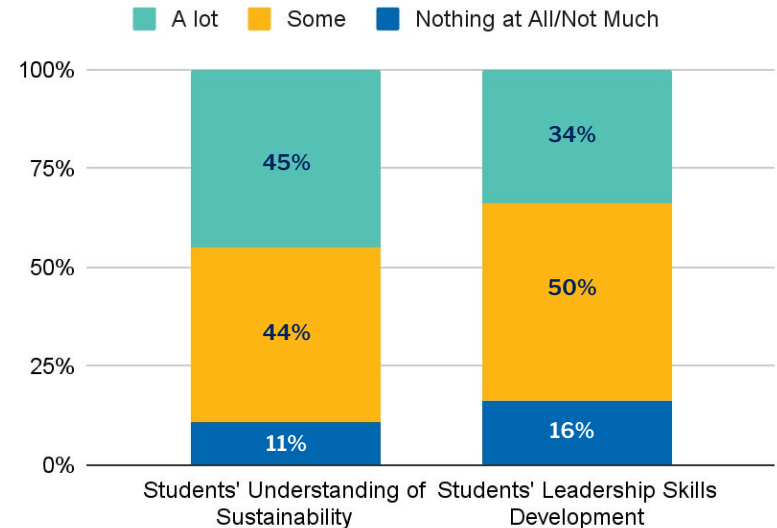
*It's my passion, and I think that it's never too early to get children started with the conversation.”*

# Green Teams have a positive impact on academic & developmental outcomes

Almost all Sustainability Coordinators believe that participation in a Green Team have a positive impact:

- **89%** say participation in Green Teams contributes to students' understanding of sustainability (**45%** a lot, **44%** some).
- **84%** say participation in Green Teams contributes to students' leadership skills (**34%** a lot, **50%** some).

## % Sustainability Coordinators saying Green Teams have impact on students



# Green Teams enhance sustainability efforts in schools

- Schools with a very active Green Team are more likely to rate their engagement with sustainability as good/excellent.
- For example, Sustainability Coordinators in schools with a very active Green Team are more likely to rate their school's energy conservation as good/excellent (**78%** vs. **58%**).

**% Sustainability Coordinators saying good/excellent**

