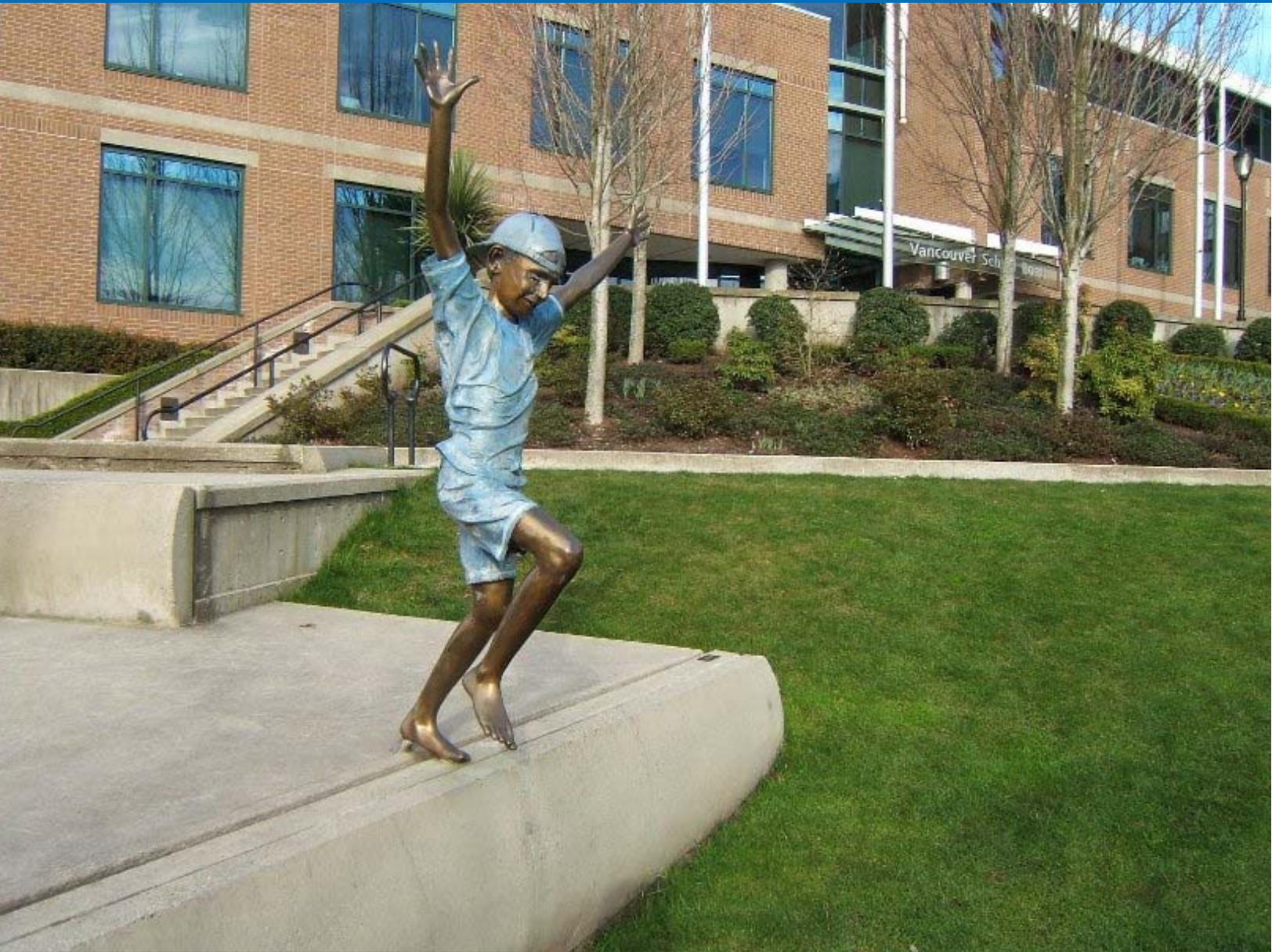


VBE Environmental Sustainability Audit

Summary Report

May 14, 2014



Prepared by



Sustainability
Solutions
Group

Cover photo by Flickr user wyn lok (2006).

Were we to confront our creaturehood squarely, how would we propose to educate?

The answer, I think is implied in the root of the word education, educe, which means "to draw out." What needs to be drawn out is our affinity for life. That affinity needs opportunities to grow and flourish, it needs to be validated, it needs to be instructed and disciplined, and it needs to be harnessed to the goal of building humane and sustainable societies. Education that builds on our affinity for life would lead to a kind of awakening of possibilities and potentials that lie dormant and unused in the industrial-utilitarian mind.

Therefore the task of education, as Dave Forman stated, is to help us 'open our souls to love this glorious, luxuriant, animated, planet.' The good news is that our own nature will help us in the process if we let it.

— David Orr

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**Until you dig a hole, you plant a
tree, you water it and make it
survive, you haven't done a thing.
You are just talking.**

Wangari Maathai
Nobel Peace Prize speech

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Project

The VBE Sustainability Framework states that “The Vancouver Board of Education will be the greenest, most sustainable school district in North America.”¹ This environmental audit reviews the activities currently underway at VBE to provide a baseline from which to advance this vision. The environmental audit has five goals:

1. To inventory the Board’s sustainability activities;
2. To understand how other leading school districts in BC and North America are pursuing sustainability;
3. To compare the Board’s activities (including the Sustainability Framework & the Strategic Plan) against available standards, and where possible, other suitable reporting structures;
4. To identify successes and gaps, and areas where the Board could take more action; and
5. To define activities that are suitable for establishing indicators and targets.

1.2 Role of a Third Party Environmental Sustainability Auditor

Environmental and financial audits are similar in that an independent organization with subject matter expertise is invited to take a close look at policies, programs and practices in an organization in order to provide an outside perspective on the organization’s work. Otherwise, environmental and financial audits differ in focus and scope (Table 1). This report is an exploratory document to enable VBE to identify its approach to sustainability reporting and does not include all of the detailed steps and information provided in a comprehensive environmental audit. The AccountAbility standards (AA1000) were used to guide the approach to the environmental audit.²

Table 1: Differences between financial reporting and sustainability reporting.

Consideration	Emphasis in financial reporting	Emphasis in sustainability reporting
Time-scale	The reported year	Future orientation
Focus	Issues that organization directly controls	Wider sustainability impacts
Economic view	Material	Intangible
Data	Financial	Non-financial
Materiality	Financial significance	Any information that is significant to readers
Users	Shareholders and investors	Stakeholders

1.3 Audit Focus

The Sustainability Framework’s commitment is to be the greenest, most sustainable school district in North America. In terms of scope, ‘green’ and ‘most sustainable’ have different meanings as green tends to refer solely to environmental issues whereas sustainable incorporates social, ecological and economic issues in an integrated approach. This analysis assumes an emphasis on green and that sustainable refers to environmentally sustainable. In other words, the project is focussed primarily on environmental impact and the places where environment overlaps with economic and social impacts. As a first step in defining the scope of this analysis we identified categories describing the types of activities in which VBE is engaged and different aspects of the environment

¹ Vancouver Board of Education (2010). Sustainability Framework for the Vancouver Board of Education. Retrieved February 2014 from: <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/SUSTAINABILITY%20FRAMEWORK%202.pdf>

² AccountAbility (2008). AccountAbility Principles Standard; Assurance Standard, Stakeholder Engagement Standard. Retrieved February 2014 from: <http://www.accountability.org/standards>.

which are impacted by these activities. We then identified which of those activities were likely to impact different areas of the environment (Table 2). This analysis provided guidance for the subsequent investigations and a framework for surveys and interviews.

Table 2: Relationship between impacts and activities.

	Student Education	Staff Professional Development	Transportation	Grounds	Waste	Education	Procurement	Buildings & Maintenance	Food	Operations	Planning
Air quality											
Climate											
Water											
Forests											
Soil											
Biodiversity											

1.4 Audit Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed for the audit. A summary of methods and outcomes is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of audit methodology and outcomes.

Method	Purpose	Outcomes
A. Background review of sustainability-related documents, policies, reports and guidelines.	To develop the VBE environmental policy baseline. To review relevant regional, provincial, federal and international policies.	VBE has the beginning of a systematic approach in its sustainability framework. VBE has several proposed policies that are in process and/or have not yet been approved.
B. Review of sustainability frameworks and tracking systems.	To identify appropriate frameworks for VBE's context.	There is no accepted sustainability framework for school boards. The two most appropriate indicator systems for VBE are AASHE STARS and GRI.
C. Stakeholder engagement	To identify material issues.	Interviews: In depth qualitative data was collected on issues of importance, understanding of sustainability, organizational culture, and vision.
		Student engagement: Students identified a range of existing actions, challenges and opportunities.
		Surveys: Identified priority issues, revealed stakeholder understanding of sustainability at the VBE.
		World Café: Student and teacher sustainability champions participated in a dialogue about their vision for a sustainable VBE and their priority issues.
D. Quantitative analysis of actions and initiatives at individual schools.	To identify key themes, epicenters of energy and effort.	There is an extensive grassroots sustainability 'movement' at the level of individual schools (secondary and primary) in VBE. The most frequently discussed themes are food systems, followed by transportation and waste management.
E. Review of promising practices by VBE's 'peers' in Canada and internationally.	To identify state of practice amongst other school boards.	Other studied school boards, recognised for their sustainability leadership, are in similar positions to VBE, with a range of activities and a limited systematic approach. Different districts excel in different areas, and leadership on specific themes can be found by looking to a variety of districts.
F. Comparison of key indicators and practices against 'peers' and leaders in other sectors.	To compare VBE against other school boards and organizations.	There are no standard reporting protocols for school boards, meaning that even the simplest indicators can be difficult to populate. No school boards (or equivalent organizations) that employ a systematic approach to sustainability were found in the study; there are many individual and thematic initiatives underway. Organizations in other sectors have more aggressive targets, more comprehensive indicators, and a more integrated approach.

The VBE has stakeholders that are consulted or engaged on all key policy discussions and decisions. The stakeholders consulted for the audit include:

- Students
- Parent Advisory Councils
- Teachers
- Principals and Vice-Principals
- Trustees
- Staff

Methods in C (Table 3) focused on ensuring feedback was collected from the educational stakeholder groups in ways that would work most effectively for them.

- Senior management, management, Trustees, and teachers with a particular interest/role in environmental sustainability were interviewed.
- Teachers and students were invited to a world cafe discussion, and were the focus of the on-line survey outreach (completed by over 100 respondents).
- Students were engaged in focused discussions at several schools that have active environmental programs and partnerships in place.
- Several of the stakeholders are represented on the Sustainability Advisory Committee, and this group gathered to provide feedback on their priority issues for consideration during the audit. Detailed results of the stakeholder feedback can be found in the Environmental Audit Synopsis Report in Appendix A.

While we can draw upon experiences of the past to solve the problems of today and tomorrow, the reality is that citizens of the world will have the task of learning their way towards sustainability. Education is therefore central to learning and to a more sustainable future.

— UNESCO

2. Findings

2.1 Policy Review

The policy environment at VBE has a good foundation in the VBE Sustainability Framework. There is room to clarify the policies as an integrated package to ensure that the Sustainability Framework is fully incorporated in the strategic plan and other high level VBE policies or strategies.

The two high level policies that address sustainability are the 2011-2016 Strategic Plan and the Sustainability Framework. The Strategic Plan provides specific guidance for the Sustainability Team and advances sustainability in the new school renewal plan. The Sustainability Framework provides an integrated approach to six key thematic areas and these areas are supported by a number of approved and draft policies.

Provincial policy includes the Sustainability Education Framework from the Ministry of Education, which may be affected by a K-12 curriculum review, a requirement for carbon neutrality under the Carbon Neutral Government Regulation and a LEED Gold or equivalent requirement for provincially-funded buildings. As the primary funder of VBE, the provincial government has significant indirect influence on funding allocations.

Figure 1 is a schematic of the policies directly influencing VBE's sustainability efforts, using the framework key reporting areas in the 2010 Sustainability Framework.

Policy Review Findings

- The Sustainability Framework is a comprehensive and integrated policy encompassing all of the relevant activities at VBE, however it could be reorganized for clarity and appropriate level of focus.
- The policy analysis indicates a concentration of effort at the policy level on the KRAs of Education & Organizational Culture, Energy & Climate Change and Transportation.
- Additional sustainability policies are developed on an ad-hoc basis.

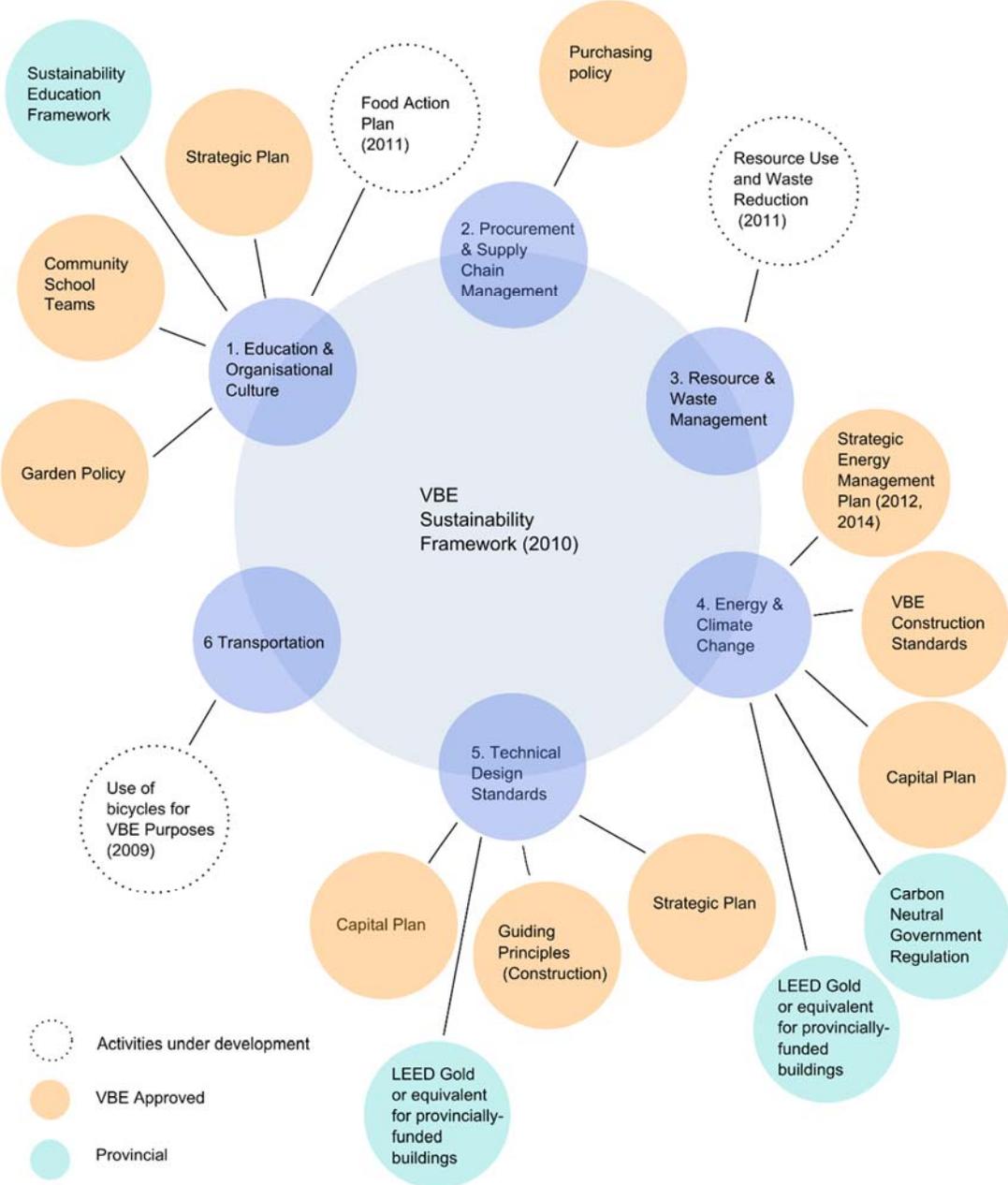


Figure 1: Policy environment at VBE in relation to the Sustainability Framework.

2.2 VBE Activities

A comprehensive inventory of sustainability projects by school was created by VBE staff, including projects in the categories of saving electricity, heating, envelope and natural gas, renewable energy, food systems, transportation, student-initiated programs and projects, waste management, and NGOs/student engagement. An analysis of these activities indicated that transportation is the most prominent theme (as represented by the number of schools doing transportation activities), with most activities in this theme occurring in elementary schools. The second most common activity is food systems, while renewable energy and student-initiated efforts been implemented to lesser extents. Secondary schools are undertaking the most initiatives per school, with 5-15 initiatives per school, while elementary schools had 5 initiatives or less.

In a pamphlet published in 1900, a California educator argued for a garden in every school. School gardens, he wrote, will teach students that "actions have consequences that private citizens should take care of public property, that labor has dignity, that nature is beautiful." They also teach economy, honesty, application, concentration, and justice. They teach what it means to be civilized.
A. Waters
A delicious revolution. Centre for Ecoliteracy.

VBE Activity Findings

- There are many related activities underway at all VBE schools.
- These activities demonstrate that environmental sustainability is a priority at many schools.
- The predominant themes of the activities are food systems and transportation.

2.3 Comparison with Peers

A review of several North American school districts and two jurisdictions outside of North America was conducted to provide some context as to how the VBE relates to its peers. Four other organizations that have relationships with VBE were also reviewed. The review was neither comprehensive nor exhaustive relative to the number of school districts and organizations in North America that are expected to have some strategic focus on environmental sustainability initiatives. Jurisdictions were selected to be part of the review because they were identified as jurisdictions of interest by VBE staff, and/or they were recognized as having promising practices in certain thematic areas. Table 4 indicates the organizations studied.

Table 4: Jurisdictions Studied		
Other BC School Districts	Other School Districts	Other Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delta School District, BC • Abbotsford School District, BC • School District No. 38 (Richmond), BC • Surrey School District No. 36, BC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toronto District School Board, ON • Portland Public Schools, OR • San Francisco Unified School District, CA • Australia (state level) • Sweden (state level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Vancouver • Vancity Credit Union • Province of British Columbia • University of British Columbia

Interviews and background research were performed for each organization. Study details are found in Appendix B. A qualitative comparison of VBE against the other school districts (Appendix C) indicates that in most categories VBE is comparable with its peers, all of whom have similar types of initiatives, with varying degrees of implementation. Table 5 summarises this comparison. If VBE is in a leadership position the label “leading” is applied and highlighted; if other school boards have similar types of initiatives, the label “middle” is applied; and if other school boards have more advanced efforts, targets or policies, the label “lagging” is applied to VBE. The non-school board institutions are not included in Table 5 but are included in Appendix C for comparison.

Table 5: Results of a comparison of VBE with other school boards.

Area	Current Status	Comments or rationale
Policy		
Sustainability policy	Leading	VBE has a Sustainability Framework and Strategic Plan that support sustainability initiatives. Sustainability Framework key result areas are comprehensive and inclusive, and consider education and operations initiatives. Food and supply management initiatives are advanced relative to peers. A Sustainability Advisory Committee is in place, with VBE stakeholder members. This framework is unique amongst the school boards considered.
Supporting policies and plans	Middle	Other school boards have thematic, supporting policies on purchasing, climate action, energy management, waste management and others, as extensive, or more extensive than VBE.
Senior staff position	Middle	Like several other school boards, VBE has senior staff focused on sustainability for operations, and teaching and student support. Larger institutions may have an executive level position defined for sustainability (e.g. UBC has an Associate Provost of Sustainability).
Staff support	Middle	
Reporting frameworks	Leading	VBE has retained a third-party auditor to assess and report on sustainability performance, a unique effort amongst the school boards.
Annual reporting	Middle	Various school boards report on energy and climate but no school boards report annually on environmental sustainability in a comprehensive manner.
Partnerships	Middle	Similar to other school boards, VBE has leveraged partnerships and resources with external organizations for its sustainability efforts.
Goals/targets		
Overall	Leading	VBE has an ambitious vision to be the greenest, most sustainable school district in North America, a unique vision.
Waste management	Lagging	SFUSD and Richmond have aggressive waste management targets.
Energy & climate	Middle	VBE has targets to reduce energy and GHG emissions, like other school boards.
Transportation	Lagging	San Francisco Unified School District has a target to be 75% car free by 2020.
Procurement	Lagging	San Francisco will transition to 100% approved green cleaning products.
School greening	Lagging	San Francisco has a target of a green schoolyard garden in every school.
Education & organizational culture	Middle	San Francisco has a specific focus on eco-literacy, but there are no clear targets amongst the school boards.
Technical design	Middle	VBE LEED standards for new buildings, like other school boards.
Initiatives		
Waste management	Middle	Most school boards have a range of efforts related to waste management.
Energy & climate	Middle	VBE has a history of energy reduction and management initiatives, with overall electricity and natural gas reductions, and pilot projects for different systems and technologies. This effort is similar to other school boards.
Transportation	Middle	Four school boards have extensive transportation initiatives.
Procurement	Middle	Procurement efforts focus on cleaning and paper, no clear leaders.
School greening	Middle	A high percentage of schools in both the Toronto School Board and VBE have school gardens or school grounds greening programs.
Education & organizational culture	Middle	There is a great deal of support for student-led initiatives at all levels in the organization. There are similar efforts at all of the other school boards.
Technical design	Middle	VBE has on-site operations staff with understanding of building systems. VBE has developed and implemented design standards. Other school boards are using LEED Gold and Portland participates in the Better Buildings Challenge.

The comparison was conducted using elements of a systematic approach to environmental sustainability including a high level policy, supporting policies, supporting staff, reporting framework, thematic goals or targets and initiatives. This comparison approach is qualitative, differing from a traditional benchmarking approach which is predominantly quantitative. All information was verified by each school board.

Comparison with Peers Findings

- No single school district included in the study is clearly leading the way on all environmental sustainability issues.
- There are many initiatives that could be transferred from one jurisdiction to another.
- There would be considerable benefit from an inter-school board dialogue focused on sustainability.
- Taken together, these jurisdictions offer a comprehensive set of measures that can provide guidance on what the greenest school district should be achieving.

We must also turn to ourselves as individuals and as education professionals to make change and develop a new ethic—a responsible attitude towards caring for the Earth.

Canadians of all generations and from all sectors of society should be given opportunities to engage in environmental learning within and beyond the classroom walls where critical questions can be asked and sustained and meaningful dialogue can take place.

British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006

3. Recommendations

Opportunities to advance VBE's leadership were identified to include:

- Sustainability should be prioritized amongst other VBE initiatives.
- Clear, focused, achievable yet ambitious targets.
- A reporting and accountability system, for reporting to senior management, Trustees, and stakeholders, on performance against targets, key indicators, and progress on priority projects.
- More investment in curriculum, education, learning and teaching initiatives focused on sustainability is required. Investment could be in the form of increased staffing, increased professional development opportunities, innovative curricular offerings, expanded partnerships, and others.
- Climate action and climate change adaptation plans.
- Encouragement and engagement of each school to participate more fully in sustainability initiatives is needed. This could include: incorporation of sustainability projects in school plans; an evaluation, reward, and incentive system to encourage participation, sustainability-specific curricula, and others.
- Communications between the sustainability team and the rest of the district, particularly schools. The communications should focus on: sustainability goals, policies, and priorities; support and resources available; engagement about roll-out of district-wide initiatives; improved understanding of what schools and other departments need to more fully implement sustainability initiatives; and others.
- A focus on establishing and growing strategic partnerships to support implementation of VBE priorities, particularly with the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, post-secondary education sector, non-profits, and funders.
- Key planning documents related to each key performance area, including food, waste and energy (all in progress) need to be finalized and gaps with plans in other KPAs filled. This will clarify priority actions, develop a comprehensive plan in response to target achievement, clarify who is accountable for achievement of each action, identify priority partnership opportunities, and others.

Eleven high-level recommendations were created to address identified issues and opportunities.

3.1 Definition of Greenest School District

The ambition to be the greenest school district has implications for every aspect of VBE and it is important to articulate clearly the vision and ambition in a definition.

Recommendation 1: *Adopt a definition of greenest, most sustainable school district.*

The following components of VBE's operations and programming should make up the definition of greenest school district:

- Integrating ecoliteracy into curricula and school programming.
 - Empowering administration, staff and students in sustainable behaviours and decision-making.
 - Requiring sustainable purchasing and investment.
 - Refining operations and school grounds maintenance and programming to be efficient and sustainable.
 - Participating in an inter-jurisdictional sustainability achievement framework.
 - Implementing a sustainability effort tracking and evaluation system.
 - Becoming the school district that others look to for sustainability leadership.
-

3.2 The Importance of Sustainability Leadership

Declarations on sustainability, the environment and climate change exist for higher education, corporations, municipalities and health care, but there is no analogous program, declaration or network for school boards. This leadership will facilitate new partnerships, transfer of best practices and innovation and advance efforts at promoting environmental sustainability across Canada.

Recommendation 2: *Work with leadership from other school districts across North America to develop a sustainability framework for school boards.*

While there are declarations and frameworks in other sectors that have gained significant traction, no analogous framework was identified for K-12 education. VBE could be the leader in this effort. The framework should include vision and goal statements, as well as targets and reporting recommendations.

There are many demands on VBE and it can be challenging for staff and teachers to understand their role in the implementation of the Sustainability Framework. In order to ensure VBE is the greenest school board, a clear and consistent signal from the organization's senior levels is required. VBE staff would benefit from having sustainability clearly defined and prioritized in their work.

Recommendation 3: *Work with teachers and the Ministry of Education to advance ecoliteracy inside and outside of the classroom.*

All education is environmental education in that our relationship to nature is a cross-cutting theme. Ecoliteracy, short for ecological literacy, is a way of thinking about the world in terms of its interdependent natural and humans systems.

Recommendation 4: *Make sustainability a key priority of VBE programming and operations and clearly articulate how sustainability actions are prioritised amongst other high priority actions, and appropriately staff, resource, and support sustainability initiatives.*

3.3 VBE Sustainability Framework Amendments

The VBE Sustainability Framework was confirmed as Board policy in September 2010. It provides a contextual framework for what is and is not included in VBE's sustainability work, and it established the Board's vision of being the greenest, most sustainable school district in North America.

The preamble and principles provide a very strong foundation for sustainability work at the VBE. Strong links between environmental and social justice issues are made, as well as clear connections between the primary responsibility of VBE as educator and other roles and activities required to operationalise this responsibility.

The six key result areas (KRAs) provide a mix of process and issue-based areas of work. It is recommended that the KRAs and their goals be amended in order to: demonstrate the overall importance of education and culture to the VBE's sustainability work; demonstrate leadership that responds to best practices from other jurisdictions; and remedy some gaps and overlaps in the issues considered. Appendix D outlines the recommended changes to the Sustainability Framework and KRAs. Goal language has been refined in order to strengthen the commitment and intent, and to be more inclusive of all of the issues considered within each KRA.

Recommendation 5: *Refresh the Sustainability Framework to include revised key result areas and goals.*

As the overarching policy document, the sustainability framework can provide the structure for a systematic organizational approach.

It is further recommended that the revised Sustainability Framework include performance metrics. Metrics are important to give qualitative and quantitative feedback on areas of focus for implementation of the goals described in each KRA. They can also enable comparison to peers when selected indicators are common, and data is collected consistently across different jurisdictions.

Suggested organizational metrics, as well as metrics for each KRA, are provided in the draft revised Sustainability Framework, Appendix D, with further descriptive detail in Appendix E. Between 4 and 11 metrics are proposed for each of the KRAs. Some are already being tracked by VBE through existing initiatives, some may be easily created through existing data, and some may require new information collection. The suggested list of metrics and indicators would be developed and refined as the information required for each is assessed and evaluated.

The objective of this list of metrics is to demonstrate the nature and breadth of sustainable activities and the variety of information that could be used to track progress towards the vision of being the ‘greenest, most sustainable school district in North America’. As an action plan is developed, some of these metrics may be non-viable or require revision. While this may be expected, it still remains that some form of robust monitoring framework will be needed to make progress and to achieve the VSE’s vision.

The metrics are informed by the following resources:

- Relevant sustainability frameworks, drawing most strongly from the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the Greenest City Action Plan (GCAP), and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education’s (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS);
- Results from the VBE background review, policy research, interviews, and survey indicating topics of high importance, relevance and interest to stakeholders; and
- Results from the best practices review providing measures that should be considered in order for VBE to articulate its leadership position on key metrics relative to peers.

Metrics were selected based on these characteristics:

- Accuracy, availability and accessibility of data of known quality;
- Ease of understanding for stakeholders;
- Representative of what is intended for measurement;
- Relevant to stakeholders, decision-makers, and local and global sustainability issues;
- Responsive to policy/practice changes implemented by VBE;
- Geographically and temporally comparable;
- Attached to a clear and ambitious goal; and
- Is actionable.

In addition to the 11 high-level recommendations and the metrics suggested in Appendix D, complementary suggestions for VBE aspirational sustainability objectives are found in Appendix G.

Recommendation 6: *Compile a set of metrics to track progress.*

Progress on goals and targets is most easily and effectively tracked with a defined set of indicators.

3.4 A Systematic Approach to Sustainability

Embedding the greenest school board commitment into the organization is an ongoing learning experience with ups and downs. A management system is an effective approach to this challenge, a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, evaluating and revising plans.

Recommendation 7: *Adopt a systematic sustainability approach to enable focus, prioritization and accountability.*

This system should include: comprehensive key result areas (KRA); goals; indicators; ambitious targets; regular reporting on progress; accountability mechanisms; ongoing engagement of stakeholders; preparation of annual or multi-year action plans; and tracking, corrective action, and evolution of the approach over time. Ultimately, the sustainability management system should result in significant improvements to environmental performance in all KRAs, and should demonstrate that VBE's performance meets or exceeds other leading districts in North America.

The Sustainability Framework includes goals, key result areas, indicators and targets. Other considerations to implement the framework include:

- **A reporting regime:** A reporting regime needs to be developed, including an annual report to stakeholders that assesses the indicators, tracks progress against targets and assesses progress. This report will provide the basis for revising targets and prioritizing actions every 1 or 2 years.

Reporting regime	Frequency
Annual reporting to Committee	1 year
Annual Work and Budget Planning	1 year
Revised action plan	2-3 years
Revised targets	3-5 years
Revised goals and indicators	5 years—possibly as needed

- **Policy integration:** The sustainability framework and the greenest school board will be integrated into all planning processes at VBE so that there are no policy disconnects between goals and objectives.
- **Job descriptions:** Broaden the responsibility for the greenest school board mandate throughout the organization by incorporating relevant responsibilities into job descriptions.

3.5 Action Prioritization

VBE has many sustainability (and other) activities under way (and potential for many more) and prioritizing efforts is difficult. Based on the feedback from the consultations and the policy analysis, a series of criteria against which to evaluate potential actions were identified. These criteria are formulated using a structured decision-making tool called multi-criteria analysis (MCA). MCA is a simple structure for rating the performance of actions against criteria and weighting the importance of those criteria. The overall framework is the VBE Action Prioritisation Tool, which the sustainability team can customise as needed. As an example, the framework is populated with suggested actions from the community engagement. A static example from the tool is provided in Appendix E.

Recommendation 8: *Prioritize goals and targets so that efforts can be focused on projects, plans, policies, strategies and initiatives with highest impact.*

With limited staff and financial resources, a more selective approach can be used to prioritise those activities that advance the overall vision and goals.

3.6 Partnerships

Staff efforts have been made to develop an MOU with the City of Vancouver on sustainability. There are other opportunities for partnerships on environmental sustainability with Vancouver Parks Board, University of British Columbia, BCIT, Vancity, as well as a range of non-profit organizations.

Recommendation 9: *Focus sustainability staff time on securing strategic partnerships, leveraging staff and volunteer resources from other organizations, seeking funding opportunities, setting policy and strategic plans, and other activities that will clarify strategic direction and build the overall capacity for education and support to educators.*

There are many organizations that share similar goals with and can support VBE in its efforts. This is critical, given the highly constrained fiscal environment.

3.7 Outreach and Communication

Outreach and communication is a critical element of successfully engaging all stakeholders and needs to be a pillar of the greenest school board goal. A focus on outreach ensures an engaged community, a transparent process and builds buy-in and ownership amongst stakeholders and community organizations.

Recommendation 10: *Invest in communications and engagement for district-wide sustainability initiatives to ensure successful roll-out, uptake and participation.*

Investments should be made to build a culture of sustainability in the organization and stakeholders by embedding sustainability content and expectations in training, orientation, professional development, committees and other areas. Sustainable choices should become the default, easy, expected option in decision-making. VBE systems, incentives, evaluations, training and orientation, performance management, and other systems should reinforce this.

3.8 Project and Programming Funding

The major barrier to sustainability action implementation that was heard in the interviews was lack of funding. In order to fund and implement sustainability projects that will help VBE achieve its goal, it will have to be more proactive in generating and securing funding.

Recommendation 11: *Secure reliable funding mechanisms for sustainability programming and projects.*

Increasing numbers of institutions and organizations in the public sector are using reserves or revolving loan funds to drive down long-term operating costs in a systematic fashion. VBE can use the same approach to provide ongoing financing for sustainability projects and programs, some of which could generate financial returns.

4. Conclusions

At a high level, VBE is positioned as a leader, including the sustainability framework, this environmental audit, and its ambitious goal to be the greenest school board in North America. However, there is considerable work required to translate this aspiration into a similar leadership position in VBE's operations, the education that VBE provides to its students and its role in the community.

Elementary and secondary schools are hives of sustainability activity, with actions often generated by students and teachers. Harnessing the champions and the popular activities will bolster the VBE's sustainability outcomes while solidifying its direction.

VBE can undertake further efforts to systematise its approach to environmental sustainability, creating a system of metrics against which to track progress, incorporating relevant responsibilities into job descriptions, developing a regular reporting regime, and filling in policy gaps. These measures will further incorporate environmental sustainability into the DNA of the organization.

The assessment of promising practices amongst other school boards indicates that there are similar and parallel efforts to advance sustainability underway in those jurisdictions. Of the school boards studied, none stood out clearly as leaders of the pack. There is an opportunity for VBE to lead the creation of a school board sustainability framework with other leading school boards.

VBE faces considerable challenges; the most notable being financial resource constraints. Other assets abound, however, including the dynamism and creativity of educators and students. VBE is not alone in this journey and it will benefit from aligning and coordinating its efforts with partner organizations in the Vancouver area. The City of Vancouver, UBC and Vancity have staked out leadership ambitions of a similar magnitude to those of VBE and there are many opportunities for combined efforts.

Becoming the greenest school district in North America is no small feat. The effort will require fostering a culture of sustainability throughout the VBE operations, staff and students. VBE can be successful in this endeavour by providing the needed direction on sustainability while drawing inspiration from the actions and character of its own students and teachers who are already demonstrating sustainability leadership.