

Menlo's Sustainability Strategy

FROM

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Our Vision

When you think about Menlo's sustainability efforts, what comes to mind? You've heard us talk a lot about [Go Menlo](#), the School's mission-critical, eco-friendly commuting initiative designed to mitigate neighborhood traffic, alleviate parking constraints, and reduce our carbon footprint. As Director of Sustainability, I'm impressed by the way we've worked together to innovate and problem-solve, launching five bus routes, a new carpool app, and multiple train station shuttles throughout the morning and afternoon.

But while transportation is a key part of the equation, it is just one of the myriad ways we are advancing our School's commitment to sustainability and climate change. The overarching vision is to build a culture of sustainability where everyone on campus feels a personal and curricular connection to the environment and an impetus to protect it.

To help chart our path forward, we've partnered with the Green Schools Alliance (GSA), a network of eco-conscious K-12 schools. We are utilizing their Sustainability Tracking and Roadmap Tool (START) to benchmark where we are and where we can go if we continue to emphasize sustainability, climate, leadership, and community

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engagement in our educational programs, decision-making practices, facilities, and operations. START measures three categories—physical space, educational program, and organization and campus culture—the lenses through which I've outlined Menlo's progress and plans below. (Spoiler alert: there is much to celebrate and much more work to be done.)

Our Physical Spaces: The Campus

From solar panels, EV charging stations, and green commuting incentives to minimizing food waste, swapping out halogen lightbulbs for LEDs, and replacing the turf infill with an eco-friendly organic olive, benchmarking revealed many on-campus wins. Several of these advances were initiated by the student-led Climate Coalition, which spends our annual EcoAct Week assessing their own ecological footprints and designing projects to reduce them. We are fortunate to have a sustainability partner in Director of





Operations and Construction Loren Arms, who consistently advocates for greener physical space, building practices, and use of resources.

Looking forward, our physical focus areas include developing a sustainable purchasing plan, reducing our use of single-use plastic by 50%, limiting the use of disposable dining hall serveware, and implementing a more intentional waste diversion program. We are also working to develop several ecologically beneficial spaces across campus—in addition to our existing native gardens, food forest, and redwood forest—that can be used as laboratories for learning.

Our Educational Program: The Curriculum

Menlo's interdisciplinary approach to education engages and empowers students with the skills, agency, and confidence they need to feel less daunted by big, systemic challenges.

Clubs like Climate Coalition, Ocean Awareness and Action Club, Sustainable Fashion Club, Surfrider Club, Beekeeping Club, and Garden Club are forums for students to meet passionate peers, grow and influence the sustainability movement at Menlo and beyond, and advocate and organize around a meaningful cause. These experiences offer students a deeper understanding of the planet, their place on it, and their role in protecting it.

These values are also adopted in the classroom setting early on. Middle School students practice real-world situations while fostering a sense of civic responsibility and empathy for others through their Service Learning Program. Sixth graders investigate food sustainability through a cross-curricular lens, conducting a waste stream audit, practicing environmental stewardship and community contribution,

and getting their hands dirty on a field trip to the Santa Cruz Permaculture farm.

Ecological themes are embedded into the Upper School experience, in classroom conversations, experiential deep dives, and unique classes like Sustainable Earth Engineering, and—new this year—Environmental Economics. In my Environmental Science class, students research their impact on the environment, learn how natural disasters have influenced sustainability, and propose solutions to important global challenges.

MTerm, an immersive two-week program held each spring, invites real-world exploration and awareness building. Freshmen MTerm sets the groundwork by focusing on the earth, environment, and human activity through both on- and off-campus experiences, activities, and discussions. The following year, sophomores focus on social justice and inequity, with a glimpse into local food deserts and food insecurities in our immediate community.

Last spring, MTerm engaged rising seniors in real-world solutions to climate change, with an interdisciplinary Climate Lab pilot program that involved systems thinking, hands-on learning, mentoring, and expert-led case studies. “I gained a lot of hope and optimism, which created an incentive within me to create change for our generation and the ones to come,” said a participant.

Our Organization and Campus Culture: The Community

Menlo is fortunate to have the time and talent to take on giant, thorny issues like sustainability in a multi-dimensional, thought leadership-driven way. We are building a framework for complex problem-solving that leverages the interconnectedness of the Menlo community,





forging partnerships with stakeholders like Trustees, Senior Administrators, Facilities, faculty members, MSPA, and Student Council.

Together, we are learning how to organize around, brainstorm, grapple with, prioritize, and learn from global systemic challenges, motivated by a shared mission to inspire critical thinkers and changemakers. We recognize that widespread commitment is critical to lasting change, and that fully embracing sustainability as a core value is not an individual burden but a communal responsibility.

Menlo is in an ideal position to continue to evolve and prepare our students as future leaders, capable of making virtuous decisions when confronted with complexity. “No matter what field our students choose to enter, they will need to grapple with how interconnected we all really are,” says Director of Academic Innovation Maren Wolf. “Being able to understand as many angles as possible within the systems that underpin our society will help them to lead with a sense of morality, ethics, and awareness of their potential for impact.”

Looking Ahead

We are still in the early stages of this in-depth work, analyzing and refining as we go. As we aim to turn our goals, vision, and action items into a comprehensive Climate Action Plan, we realize that, like much of the Menlo

experience, it is more about the journey than the destination. As we ideate and iterate what we feel the next 10 years of sustainability education should look like, we are identifying potential intersections in the curriculum and creating throughlines across departments and alignment along grade levels.

From Literature of the American Wilderness and the history of the environmental movement to Modern Political Rhetoric and Environmental and Development Economics, there is much to be gained from varied perspectives. “I’d love for students to have a deep knowledge of how religion and culture and society touch this issue, not just science and math,” said Upper School History teacher Matthew Nelson.

Once students feel a sense of accountability and understand that we are all capable catalysts for change, they progress from stewards of the environment to conscientious, social beings ready to make tough decisions in the face of the earth’s limited resources.

“As we are already witnessing, the impacts of climate disruption will touch every aspect of society and thus every part of their lives,” says Head of School Than Healy. “If we are truly preparing our students for life—raising the amazing 40-year-olds the world needs—then we must keep our eyes continually focused on the horizon.”

