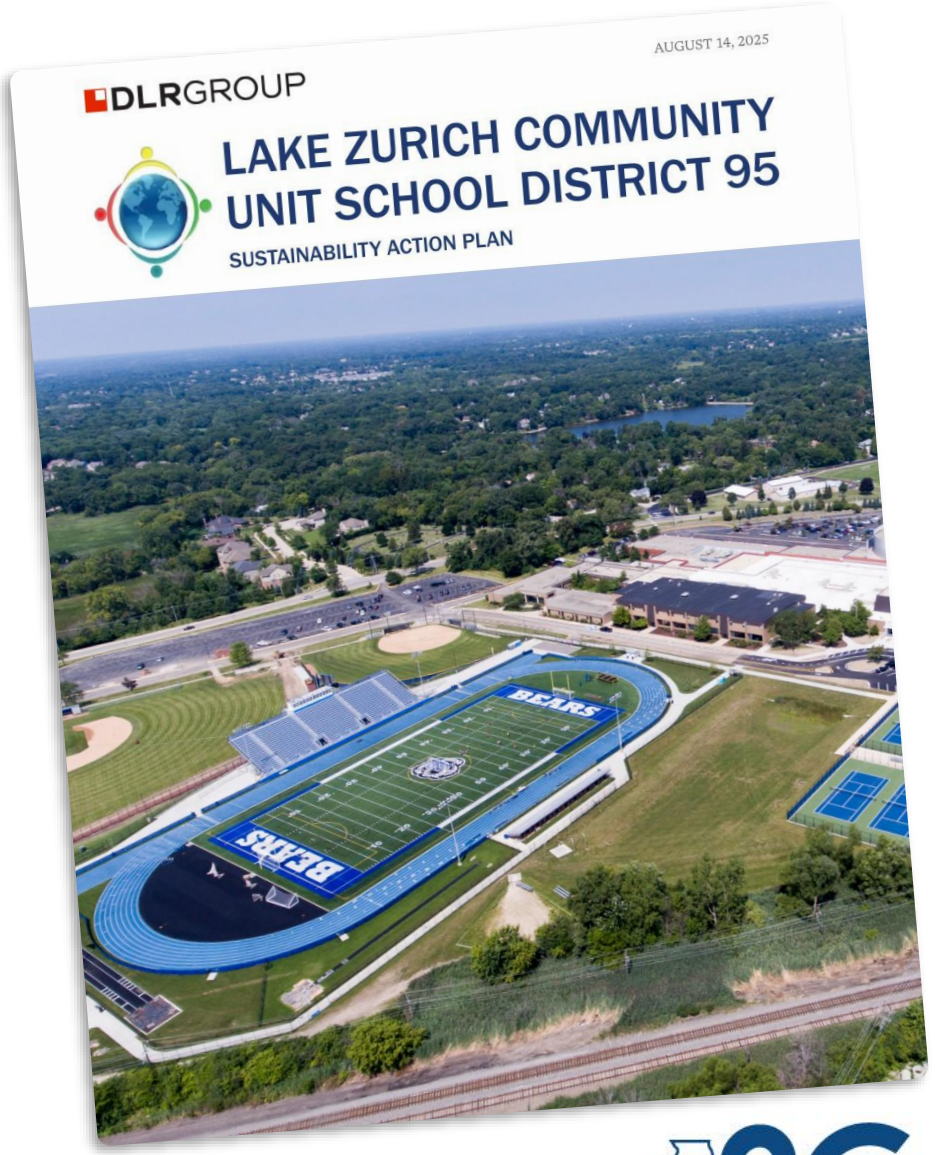
Collaborative Leadership for Change: Transforming Sustainability Goals into District-Wide Action



#iasboAC26

LEADING WITH EMPATHY

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Introductions

Keri VanSant (Moderator)
- Principal | Architect, DLR Group

Erin Burk (Speaker)
- Project Manager, DLR Group

Mary Zarr, Ed.D. (Speaker)
- Executive Director of Technology; Co-Chair of District Sustainability Committee, Lake Zurich CUSD 95

McKenna Serowka (Speaker)
- Lake Zurich High School Science Division Head; District Sustainability Committee, Lake Zurich CUSD 95

Project History

From Green Ribbon to Guidelines

District 95 + Project History

LAKE ZURICH COMMUNITY UNIT School District 95

- 9 Schools, total of 5,628 students, PreK - 22
- Environmental Stewardship key component of District Strategic Plan (Empower95) and Vision (Portrait of a Graduate)

2024: Sustainability Guidelines

- 13 focus areas, guide District maintenance/construction efforts
- *VALUES* workshop to establish District sustainability goals/priorities

2025: Sustainability Action Plan

- Putting the guidelines into action

VALUES Themes/Action Plan Framework

HUMAN HEALTH + WELLNESS

Goal: Healthy Campuses

DISTRICT HEALTH + WELLNESS

Goal: Healthy Operations

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Goal: Deeper relationships

Sustainability at District 95

District

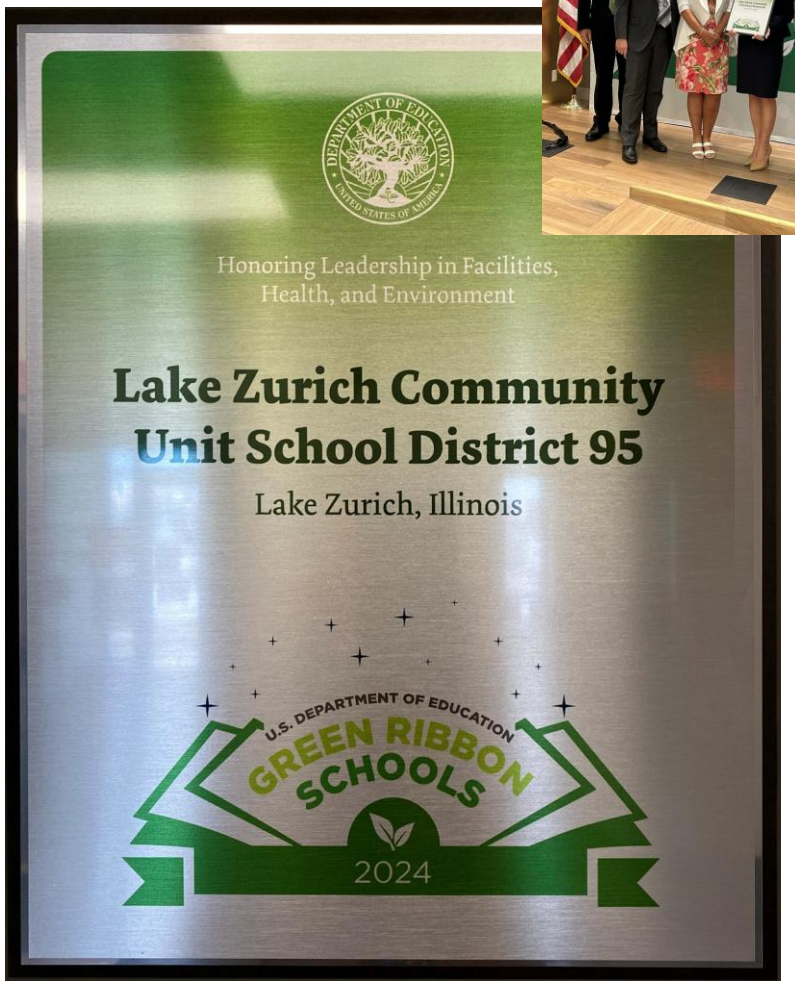
- Investments in Renewable Energy and EV infrastructure
- Integration of green initiatives into D95 Long Range Facilities Plan
- Sustainability Guidelines + Sustainability Action Plan
- Waste management vendor to incorporate composting
- Recipient of the 2024 US Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools District Award (one of only 10 in the nation)
- Planning for potential dashboard to communicate District sustainability metrics
- Board approval for adding solar to three additional school buildings

Facilities

- Ongoing IAQ monitoring and water quality testing
- Ongoing LED lighting upgrades
- Flexible seating furniture upgrades at all school buildings
- Green cleaning products

Education

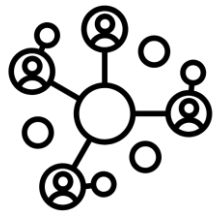
- Sustainability integrated into various programs at MS (Science, Social Studies, PLTW) and HS (Physical Science, Environmental Science, AP Environmental Science) levels
- Annual Earth Day curriculum developed by HS students



District 95 Sustainability Action Plan

An **actionable plan** to **guide future decision-making** around District investments in training, infrastructure, facilities, policies, and curriculum opportunities **over 3 years.**

This plan will build on the existing sustainable practices throughout the District, with an emphasis on innovative practices, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to continuous improvement – all aimed at creating a **sustainable and healthy learning environment for its community**.



Project Timeline

- MILESTONE MEETINGS / DECISION POINTS
- ALIGNMENT (PHASE 1)
- RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, BENCHMARKING (PHASE 2)
- ENGAGEMENTS (PHASE 3)
- REVIEW & DELIVERABLES (PHASE 4)
- DISTRICT DATES

Phase 1: Alignment

Phase 2: Research, Analysis, Benchmarking

Phase 3: Engagement

Phase 4: Deliverable

Kick-Off

Listening Sessions
04.02-03

Sustainability Committee Workshop
05.05

Action Plan for approval
08.14

Action Plan approved by BOE
08.28

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT

01.07
Return from break

03.24-03.28
Spring break

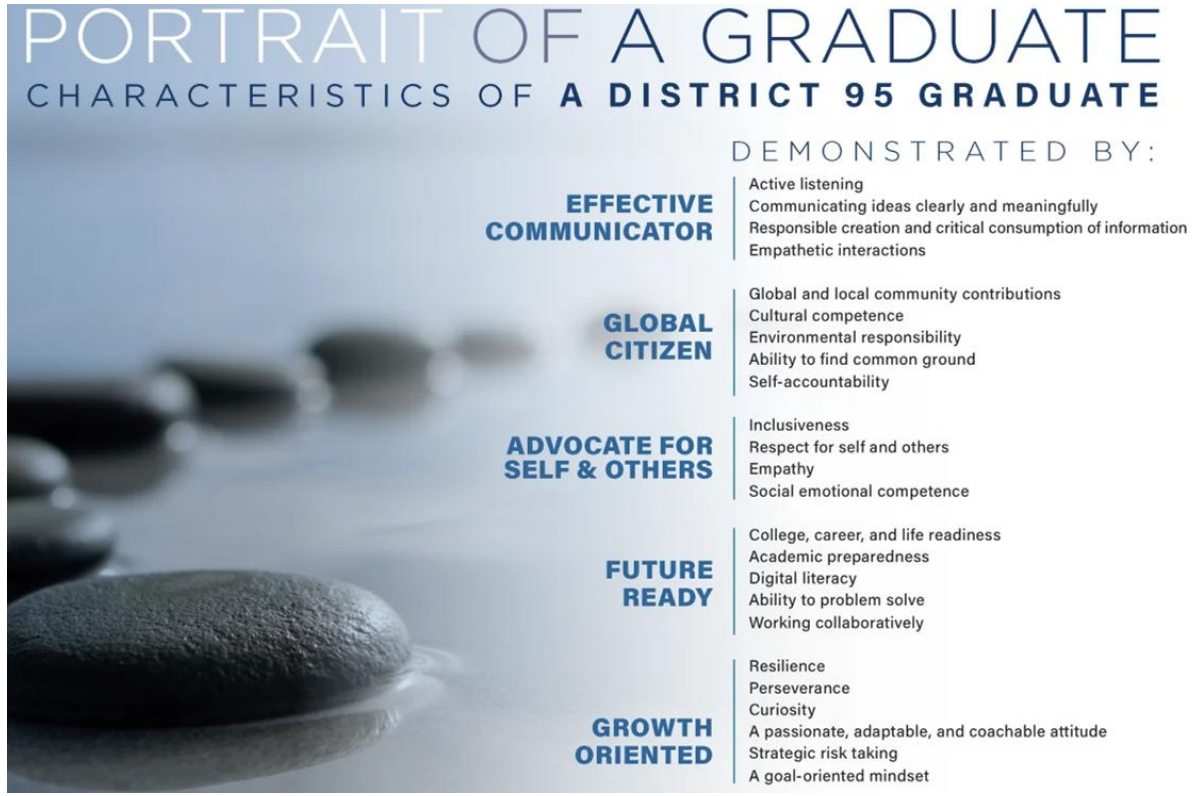
05.27
AY24-25 ends

08.2025
AY25-26 begins

Process

Alignment, Research, Engagement

Action Plan Framework



Empower95 Portrait of a Graduate

VALUES Themes

VALUES *(Vision, Advocacy, Leadership, Understanding, Engagement)*

DLRGROUP

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VALUES Framework

HUMAN HEALTH + WELLNESS

Goal: Healthy Campuses & Climate Literacy

Healthy spaces
- Furniture
- Nature and outdoor spaces
- Culture of pride & ownership

Indoor environmental quality

Healthy food practices

Integrated learning

VALUES Framework

DISTRICT HEALTH + WELLNESS

Goal: Healthy Operations & Climate Literacy

Practices and promises

- Decarbonization
- Waste reduction
- Water use

VALUES Framework

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

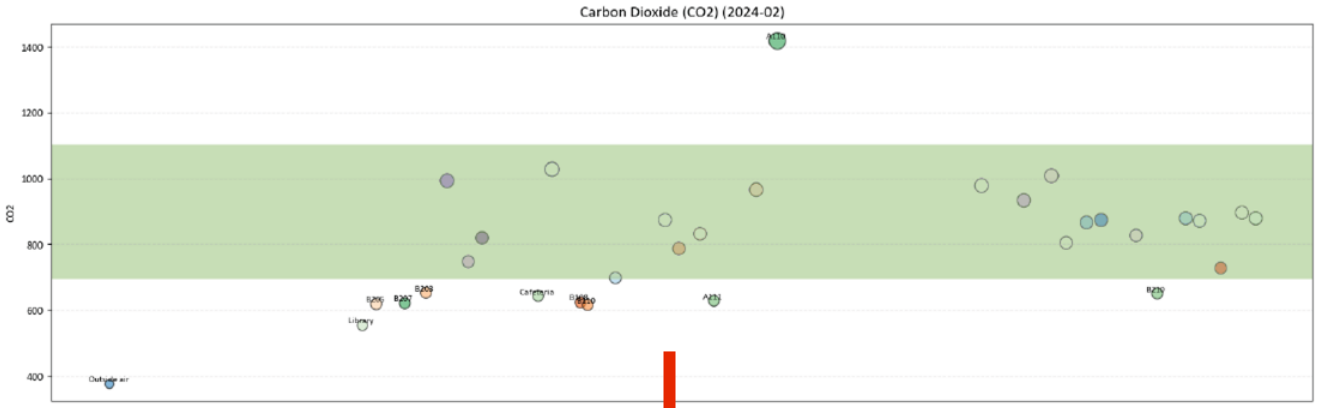
Goal: Deeper relationships & Climate Literacy

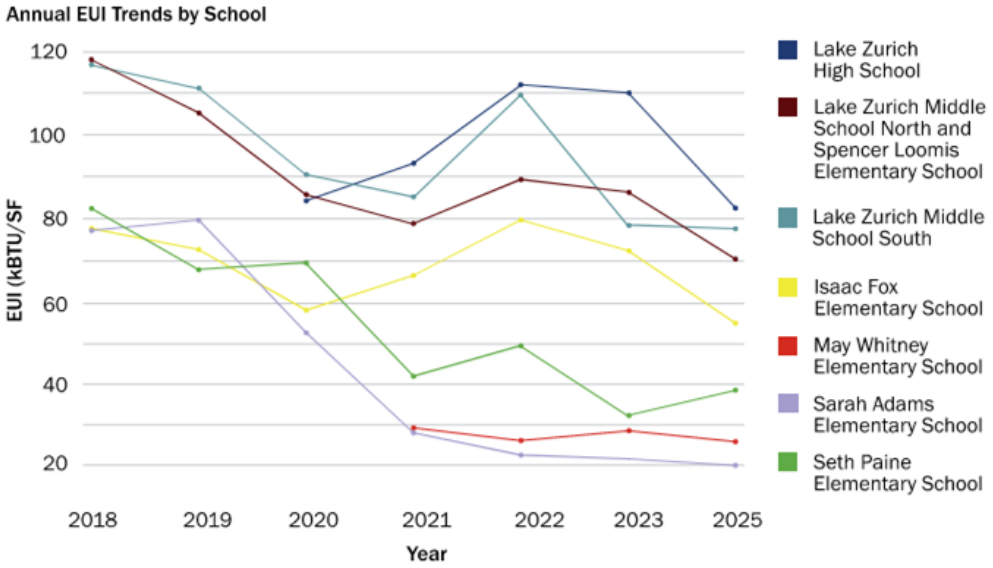
Cultural change

- Communication
- Quality and quantity

DATA ANALYSIS (EUI, IAQ)

- Analyzed 5 years of utility bills and 10 years of IAQ data provided by the District
- Benchmark for future



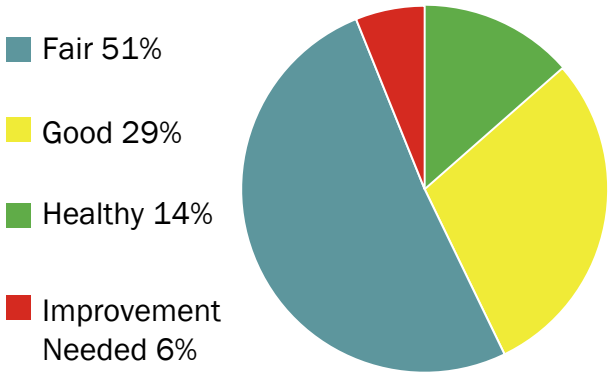


The following data is used by the Facilities team to assess Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) in school buildings:

- Carbon Dioxide (CO2)
- Carbon Monoxide (CO)
- Relative Humidity (RH)
- Temperature

In general, the IAQ at the schools analyzed was reasonable for the age of building and systems.

D95 Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Distribution



Listening Sessions

District sustainability | Strengths and challenges | Momentum, consensus, and support

2 days
16 sessions
124 voices

PK-ES, MS, HS teachers and staff
Administrative and District personnel
Community partners
MS and HS students

Waste Reduction

- Recycling
- Composting
- Cafeteria practices
- Photocopy waste

Energy Use

- Lighting
- Tech infrastructure
- Automated systems
- User demands + training

Curriculum

- Clubs, outdoor spaces
- Connecting classes
- Vertical pathways
- Visible sustainability

Space

- Outdoor space utilization
- Gardens
- Biophilic design

Heard consistently; attainable

WASTE REDUCTION

Electronics

- ⊕ *Awareness and support for re-use, recycle, and sell-back practices*
- ⊖ *Obsolescence and user maintenance / care*

ENERGY USE

Lighting

- ⊕ *Autonomy for users & automated controls*
- ⊖ *Communication & user education*

Infrastructure

- ⊕ *EV chargers, solar, geothermal*
- ⊖ *Communication & PR*

Other

- ⊕ *Users understand connection to finances*
- ⊖ *Dashboard PR*

CULTURE

Sharing and upcycling

- ⊕ *Food sharing, NPO efforts, supply sharing*
- ⊖ *Communication on efforts, staffing to support practices*

Student involvement

- ⊕ *Students are aware of topic & opportunities; strong groups exist*
- ⊖ *Clarity in definitions, connections, opportunities; resources (staff, stipends)*

Curriculum

- ⊕ *Covered across schools, classes*
- ⊖ *Clarity in definitions, connections*

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Access to nature

- ⊕ *Lots of green spaces and some OLEs*
- ⊖ *Lack of clarity, utilization, biophilia*

Potable water

- ⊕ *Filling station access and culture of use*
- ⊖ *Single-use plastic still catered*

Heard consistently; bigger lift

WASTE REDUCTION

Recycling in schools

⊕ *Readily available and visible bins, recycling efforts/clubs, possible expansion to Athletics*

⊖ *Inconsistent practices, bin types and sizes, information; mistrust of recycling process; awareness of financial burden*

Composting in schools

⊕ *Bins at each school, awareness of composting, some practices*

⊖ *Inconsistent use, bin size; lack of information, commercial composting, ownership*

Supplies in schools

⊕ *Culture of sharing; waste management taught in some areas*

⊖ *Supply lists request unneeded items; clarity around disposal*

ENERGY USE

Electronics use

⊕ *Automated device timers, knowledge of digital health*

⊖ *User practices + expectations*

COMMUNITY INTERACTION

⊕ *Strong partnerships; existing field trips & some service hour opportunities; desire for connection*

⊖ *Awareness of community businesses; staff support for service hours*

Heard inconsistently

ENERGY USE

Sources

⊕ *Generators exist at some sites*

⊖ *Maintenance; replace batteries*

Pedex/Bike Support

⊕ *Well-run bus system*

⊖ *Sites cannot support pedestrian/biker safety*

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Outdoor space

⊕ *Lots of green spaces and some OLEs*

⊖ *Lack of clarity, utilization, ownership; location and accessibility; privacy and security; cleanliness/maintenance and encouraging culture of use; requests for more walkability*

Food services

⊕ *One vendor open to collaboration; students enjoy food*

⊖ *Healthier food options (non-GMO), ingredient and allergy lists*

Bus/Car Idling

⊕ *"Clean Idle" buses; willingness to explore alternative fuels*

⊖ *Weather disincentives; cars idle; congestion spots*

WASTE REDUCTION

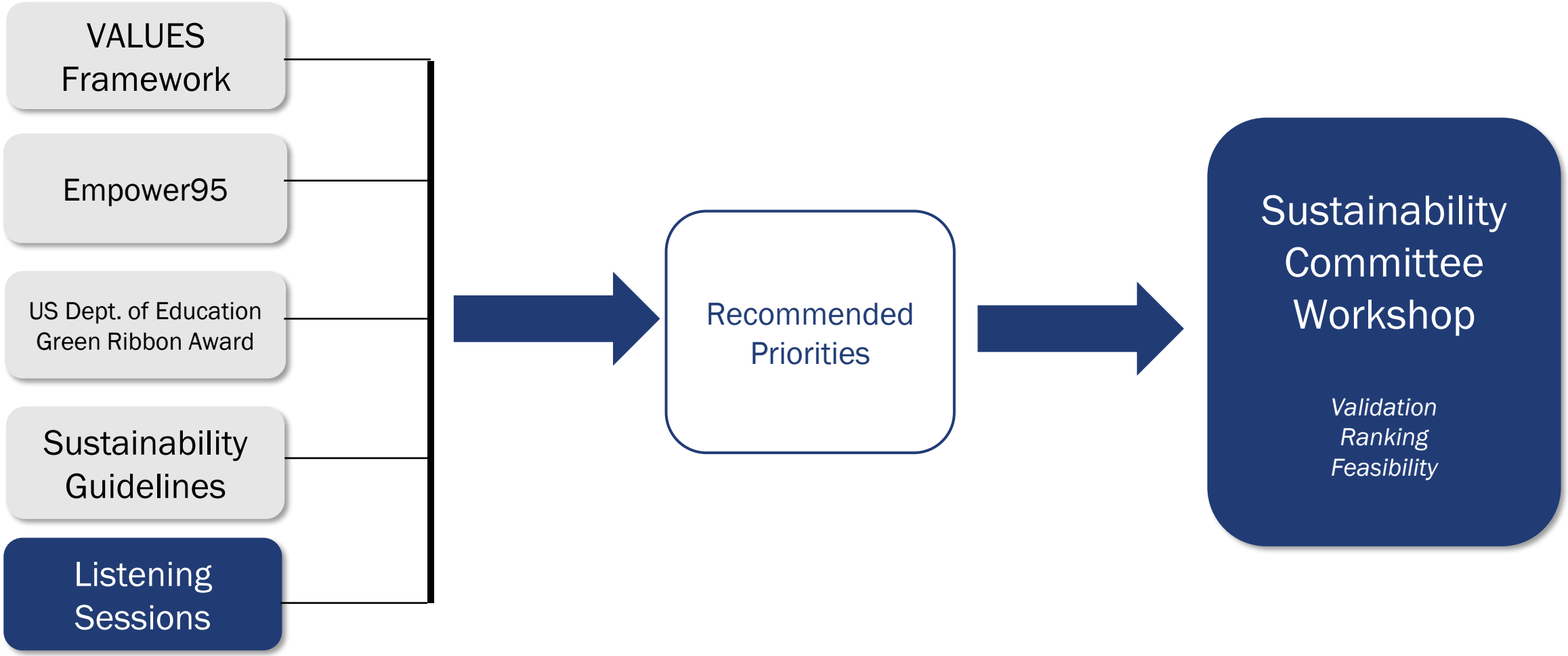
Cafeteria/Culinary spaces

⊕ *One vendor open to collaboration; food waste is popular topic; some sites offer unpackaged utensils*

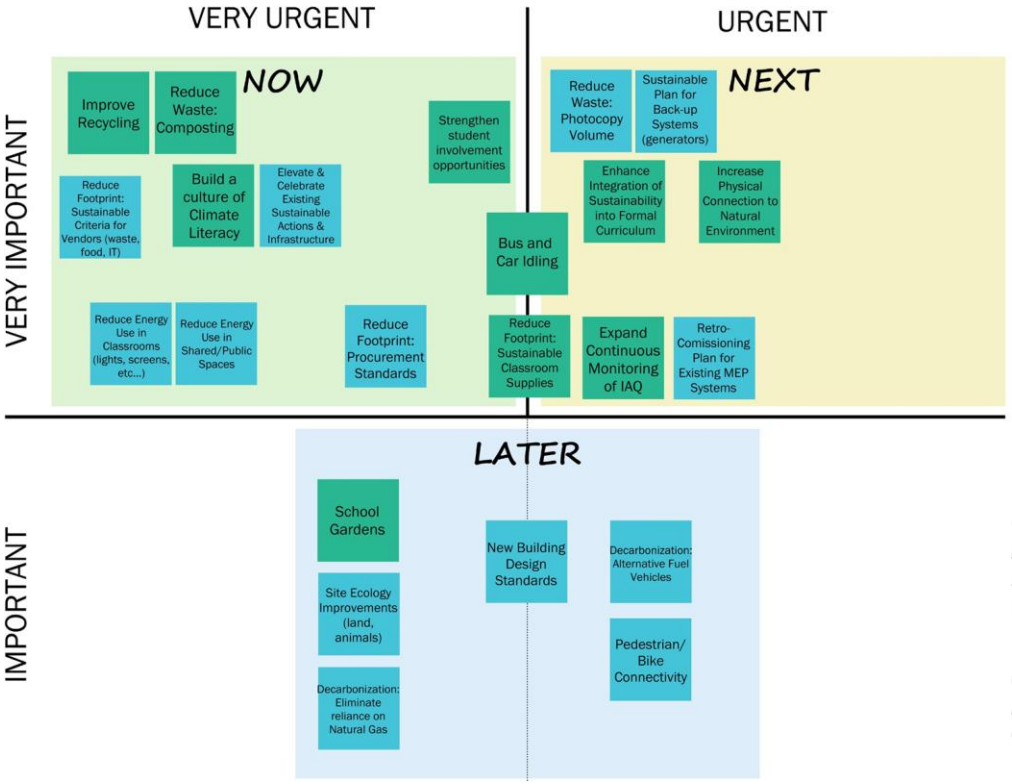
⊖ *Trade-offs to switching to reusable products; composting upgrades; culinary space design*

Photocopy waste

Alignment – Engagement – Recommendations



Sustainability Committee Workshop



BUILD A CULTURE OF CLIMATE LITERACY

CELEBRATE + ELEVATE EXISTING SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS + INFRASTRUCTURE

STRENGTHEN STUDENT INVOLVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

IMPROVE RECYCLING

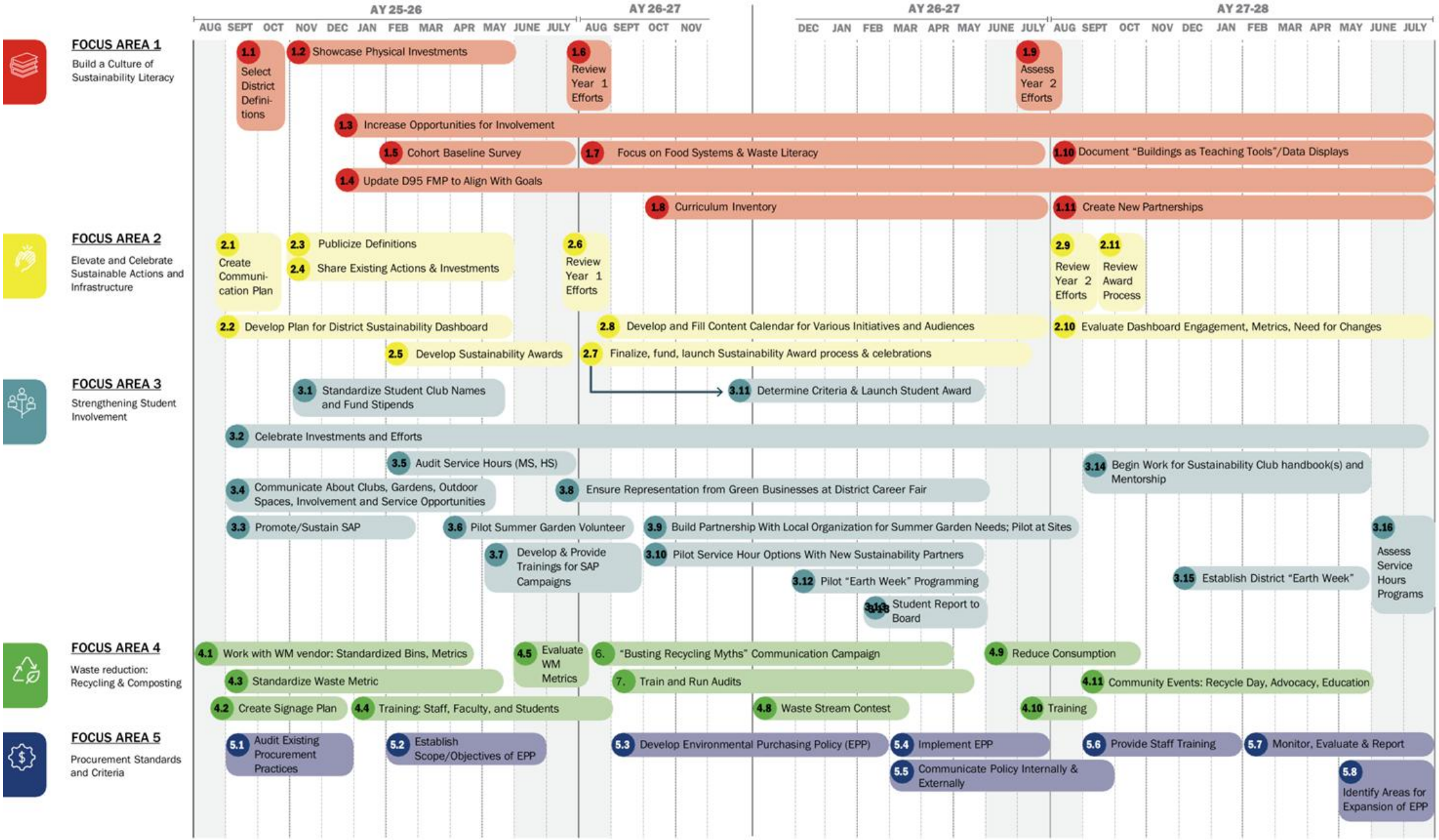
REDUCE WASTE: COMPOSTING

REDUCE FOOTPRINT: PROCUREMENT STANDARDS

REDUCE FOOTPRINT: SUSTAINABLE CRITERIA FOR VENDORS

Sustainability Action Plan

SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN ROADMAP



FOCUS AREA 1:

SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY

"Sustainability is like Social Emotional Learning (SEL) – it is in everything."

-Teacher in Listening Session

Year 1: Select District-wide definition of Sustainability, Understand baseline literacy throughout District,

Year 2: Assess effectiveness of sustainability literacy efforts in year 1

Year 3: Document examples of "Building as Teaching Tool" and Data Displays

Goal: Establish baseline levels of sustainability literacy to build consensus around policies and practices and lead to stronger connections between daily choices and real-world impact.

Drivers:

- Portrait of a Graduate: Global Citizen and Future Ready
- D95 Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP)
- Sustainability Guidelines 12.4

FOCUS AREA 1 | UPDATE

SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY

Selected District-wide definition of Sustainability:

Sustainability is the intentional and responsible practice of meeting present needs while protecting the resources and opportunities future generations need to thrive.

Working on Sustainability Literacy survey for various stakeholder groups to determine baseline data.

FOCUS AREA 2:

ELEVATE AND CELEBRATE

"Little kids can do great things."

-Teacher in Listening Sessions

Year 1: Communication plan, Dashboard, Definitions, Develop District Sustainability Award process

Year 2: Continue developing content, report progress, launch awards and selection process

Year 3: Dashboard communication plan and integration opportunities for curriculum

Goal: Elevate existing actions to create baseline understanding; celebrate achievements; acknowledge growth opportunities

Drivers:

- Portrait of a Graduate: Effective Communicator
- Existing accomplishments and practices, e.g. IAQ monitoring

FOCUS AREA 2 | UPDATE:

ELEVATE AND CELEBRATE

Team Meetings Work Focus Schedule:

- **November:** Began Development of Communications & Branding
- **January:** Begin Preliminary Sustainability Awards & Celebrations Protocol
- **February:** Begin Preliminary Sustainability Dashboard Design Features
- **April:** Develop Calendar for Sustainability Awards & Celebrations

FOCUS AREA 3:

STRENGTHEN STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

"This [sustainability] session is actually the most helpful thing to do, to teach kids."

-Student in Listening Sessions

Year 1: Standardize clubs, invest in stipends; involve students in SAP campaigns (materials, training, communication), audit service hours, summer garden pilot

Year 2: Develop trainings for continued SAP efforts, strengthen community partnerships, pilot new service hour options, launch awards and pilot an Earth Week

Year 3: Student-led *Sustainability Handbook*, District-wide Earth Week, assess service hour program requirements

Goal: Increase equitable access to involvement opportunities, build a student base of support, empower students with SAP, celebrate students

Drivers:

- Portrait of a Graduate (all areas)
- Core values
- Sustainability Guidelines

FOCUS AREA 3 | UPDATE:

STRENGTHEN STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Student voice, clubs, leadership, embedding sustainability in student culture:

- Surveyed individual schools for information on all environmental/sustainability related clubs
- Ensured student voice and leadership opportunities in/on all Environmental/Sustainability Committees/Clubs
- Determining viability of standardizing club names across all schools
- Determining need for any increase in number of faculty sponsor positions (negotiating year for stipends with teachers' union)

FOCUS AREA 4:

WASTE REDUCTION: RECYCLING & COMPOSTING

> "We need to change our mindset from 'me' to 'we'."
>
> -Teacher in Listening Sessions

Year 1: Standardize bins, processes, and metrics

Year 2: Launch Recycling Myths campaign

Year 3: Shift focus to reducing overall consumption

Goal: Standardize and streamline communication and processes around waste management practices to improve waste reduction metrics across the district.

Drivers:

- Board of Education Policy 4:150 - Facility Management and Building Programs
- D95 Long Range Facilities Plan

FOCUS AREA 4 | UPDATE:

WASTE REDUCTION: RECYCLING & COMPOSTING

- Identified the current focus of composting and recycling at selected pilot school
  - Learning from our expert what processes are in place
  - Consistent recycling containers throughout building except cafeteria (working to change)
  - Generated questions of focus for both composting and recycling
- Met with Waste Management and provided them with questions
  - Scheduled professional learning for committee
- Identified next steps for composting
- Identified draft plan for a “Recycling Refresh”

Recycling Refresh

Collaboration is essential for successful programs

Proposed 4 step process

Clarifying process with WM

Staff retraining

Student Instruction

Model and Practice

FOCUS AREA 5:

PROCUREMENT STANDARDS & CRITERIA

"Sustainability cannot just be another poster on the wall."

-School leader in Sustainability Committee Workshop

Year 1: Audit Existing Procurement Practices; identify (3) vendors or supply/equipment categories for inclusion in procurement standards

Year 2: Develop Environmental Purchasing Policy (EPP) for (3) categories identified in Year 1, communication and implementation of policy

Year 3: Train staff on contents and use of EPP; Identify areas for expansion of EPP; Evaluate outcomes of EPP and report results

Goal: Give preference to environmentally friendly products and services and encourage environmentally friendly supply chains.

Drivers:

- Sustainability Guidelines 3, 4, 5 & 8
- District Core Values of Equity, Integrity, & Accountability

FOCUS AREA 5 | UPDATE:

PROCUREMENT STANDARDS & CRITERIA

September - January - Audited District practices and protocols for existing procurement practices

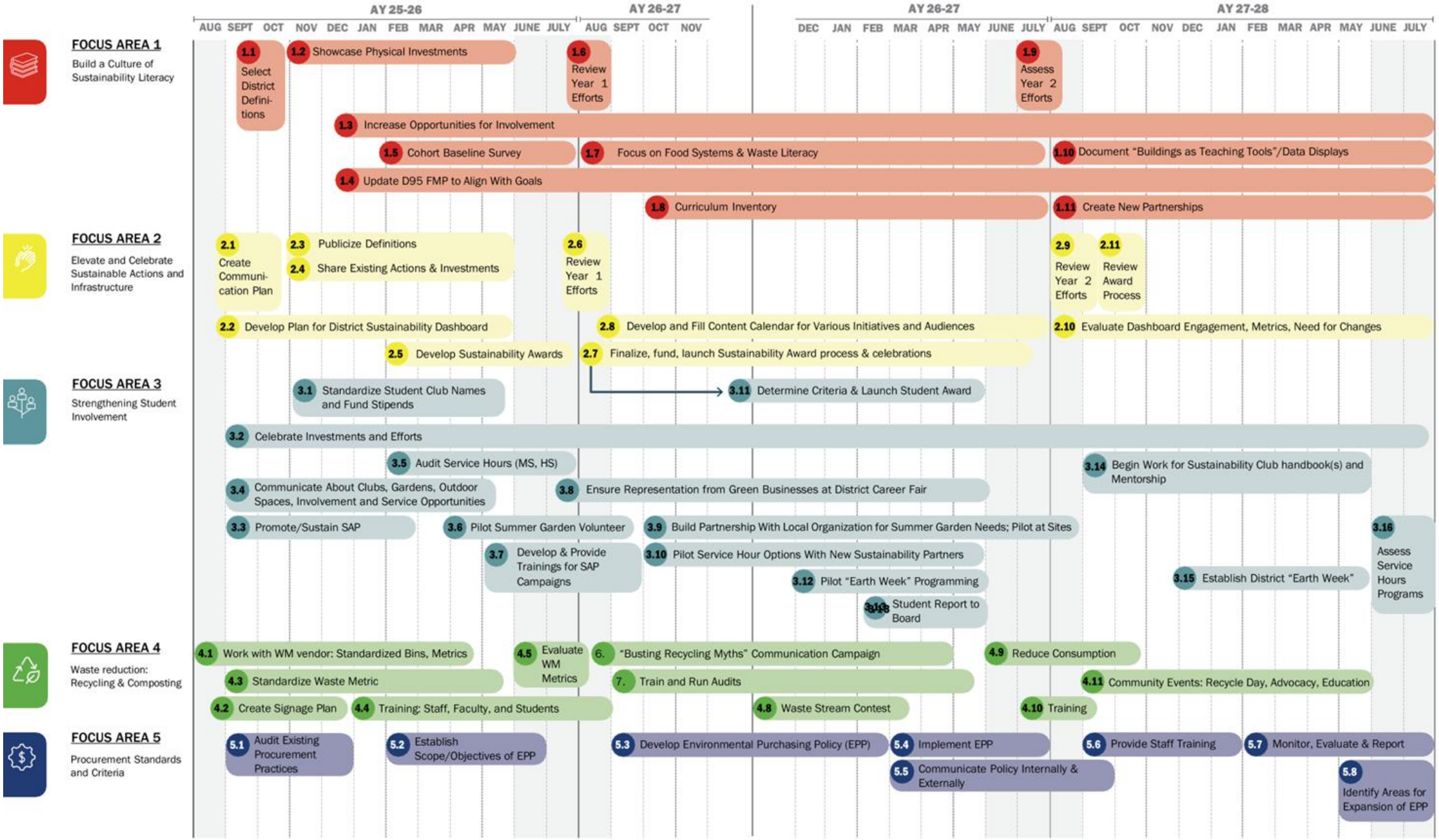
January - Secure procurement specialist for consultation

February - Procurement sub-committee presentation to District Sustainability Committee regarding work progress and review best practices in procurement standards

March-April - Determine at least three categories of vendors and/or supply categories to be targeted for preliminary procurement standards development

May-August - Begin development of Environmental Purchasing Policy

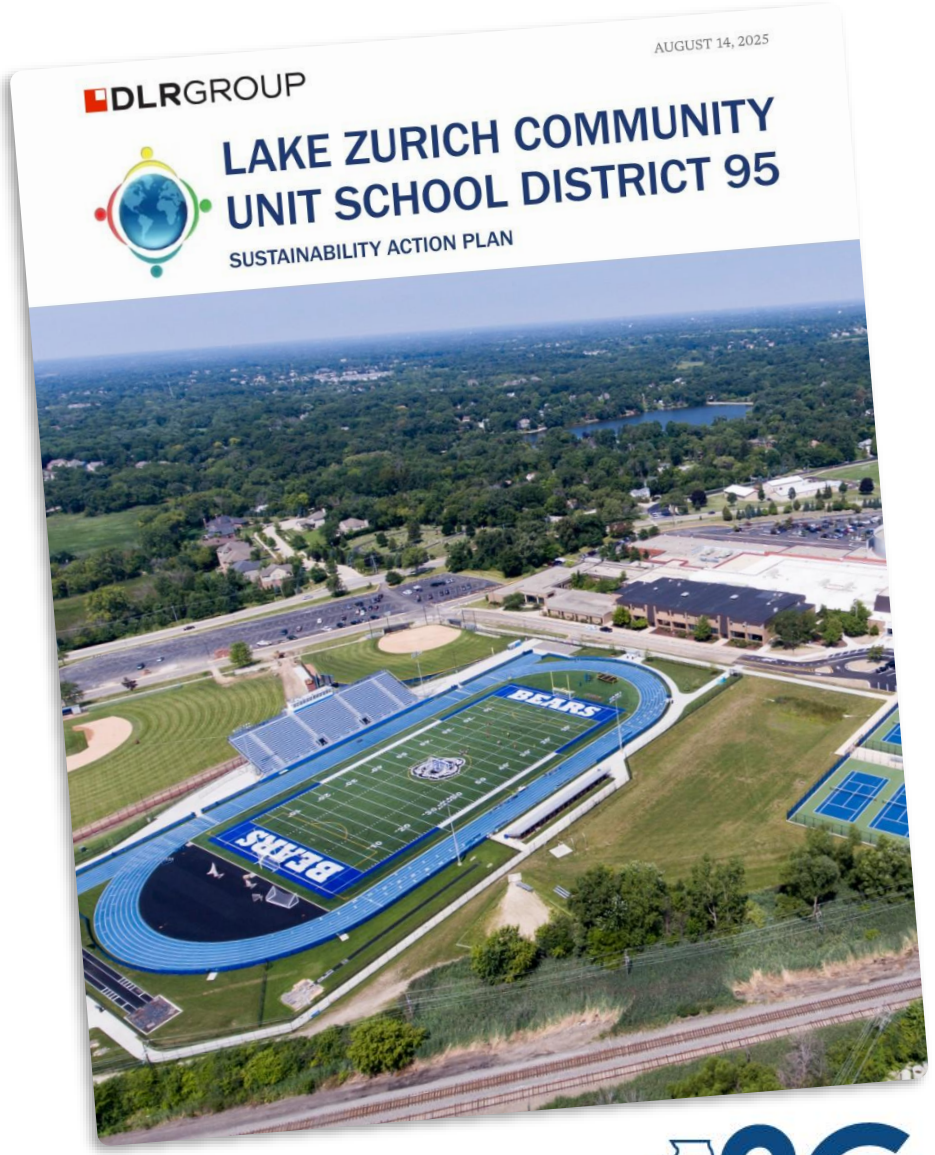
SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN ROADMAP



LAKE ZURICH COMMUNITY UNIT School District 95

DLRGROUP

Collaborative Leadership for Change:
Transforming Sustainability Goals into District-Wide Action



Questions?

Presenters:

MODERATOR INFO:

Keri VanSant, Principal; DLR Group
(312) 909-1578; kvansant@DLRGroup.com

PANELISTS INFO:

Mary Zarr, Ed.D. Executive Director of Technology;
Co-Chair of District Sustainability Committee, Lake Zurich CUSD 95
Mary.Zarr@lz95.org

McKenna Serowka, Lake Zurich HS Science Division Head
District Sustainability Committee, Lake Zurich CUSD 95
(847) 540-4618; McKenna.Serowka@lz95.org

Erin Burk, Project Manager; DLR Group
(312) 780-1032; eburk@DLRGroup.com