



Students Using Sustainable Strategies Forum

Post Forum Evaluation Report

Introduction

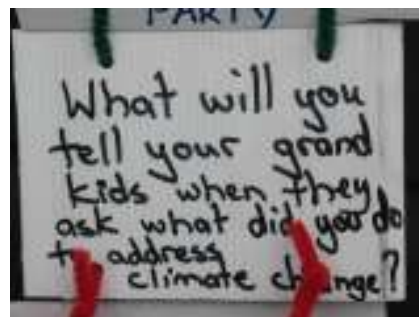
The 2008 Schools Using Sustainable Strategies Forum was held in May 08 and was attended by more than 115 students and teachers from 20 regional high schools. A post forum school support program was conducted following the Forum to assist the schools to implement simple actions in waste, water, energy and biodiversity conservation and to develop their School Environmental Management Plan (SEMP).



Objectives

The specific objectives of the Forum were to:

- Increase students and teachers awareness of best practice waste, water and energy use, resource recovery, and conservation and protection of biodiversity measures that can be implemented in schools.
- Increase students and teachers understanding of the connection between waste, water, energy and biodiversity conservation within the context of sustainability.
- Increase skills in implementation of simple waste, water and energy conservation techniques on school grounds, which assist the development of the School Environmental Management Plan.
- Develop strong support networks amongst youth and teachers attending the SUSS Forum.
- Create links between the schools and their local Councils and land and resource management agencies.



Post Forum School Support Program

The school support program involved:

- i) the SUSS Coordinator contacting the schools during term 3 to arrange a school visit;
- ii) visiting the schools to meet with students and teachers;
- iii) drafting a 'Proposed Sustainability Action Plan' from the discussion and ideas generated at the meetings and sending it back to the school for actioning;
- iv) Emailing a post forum survey form to all the SUSS schools during term 4;
- v) Contacting all the schools by phone to get an update on progress and to offer assistance as required.

14 (70%) of the 20 schools that attended the SUSS Forum were visited and as a result a draft action plan was prepared for each school. It included ongoing & new actions and information on available resources & networking details. It was unclear why 6 of the schools didn't respond to phone calls and emails to arrange a school visit but lack of time and unavailability was cited by several of them. The coordinator was successful in recontacting and obtaining evaluation and feedback from 10 (50%) of the SUSS schools (9 that had participated in the school visit program and 1 that had not). 3 other schools stated that they would complete and send the evaluation but it was not received by the end of term 4.

Post Forum Evaluation

The purpose of the post forum evaluation was to identify what had or was being achieved in schools, since the SUSS Forum 08 and how effective the post-forum support program had been in assisting and supporting school sustainability.

The evaluation questions were designed to enable a comparison with the information provided in the pre forum survey, which 19 of the 20 participating schools provided before attending the Forum.

The survey also provided the opportunity to collect retrospective feedback on the effectiveness of the 2 day forum and to ask the schools if they were interested in participating in future SUSS initiatives.

In all cases the survey was completed by the teacher who had attended the 2 day forum. The complete evaluation results are available in a separate 'Pre & Post Forum Survey Summary' document.

***Ballina High School Students
leading a Waste Audit workshop
at the 2008 SUSS Forum.***



Evaluation Summary

Only the 10 schools which completed the Post Forum evaluation have been included in this evaluation summary. Positive outcomes are almost certainly occurring at some or all of the other 10 schools. Details for all those schools visited, can be found in their 'Proposed Action Plans' (ongoing actions).

Summary of Survey Responses

◇ 8 out of the 10 schools responding now have draft School Environmental Management Plans (in the early stages of development) compared to 2 of these schools prior to the forum. This is a significant improvement.

◇ Teachers from three of the 10 schools attended the recent DECC/DET SEMP development workshop at Murwillumbah (Nov 08).

◇ 8 schools now have an active Environmental Student Group and 6 have a School Environment Committee. Prior to the forum 6 schools had a group or committee (the pre survey did not identify which).

◇ 7 schools confirmed that they had begun to implement the 'Proposed Sustainability Action Plan' which was drafted during the post forum school visit. 1 school was unsure and 1 school confirmed that it had not begun implementation to date.

◇ Some of the sustainability actions implemented since the forum include: waste audits; installation of bokashi bins, worm farms & composts; classroom paper recycling; recycling at school social events; fundraising through green awareness days & mobile phone collection & recycling; newly installed water tanks ; bricks put into toilet cisterns; a dedicated 'Environmental Classroom'; poster competitions, newsletter articles & presentations to raise school awareness; cent-a-meters in use; applications submitted to the National Solar Schools program & quotes collected for solar installation; weed removal, mulching & revegetation of school grounds; involvement in community land care projects; ongoing curriculum development incorporating sustainability; networking through the Australian Youth Climate Coalition & other groups.

◇ Some outstanding school/student achievements include Ballina High winning the Tidy Town (schools) Award for active participation in community sustainability initiatives; Evans Head k – 12 school's involvement in the Otesha Sustainability Project & the Eco-Warriors assisting the primary school to implement a waste action plan; SUSS students setting up an inter-school network for 2009 to facilitate regional school collaboration on sustainability.

◇ The Post Forum School Visit program was rated as being 'partially effective to very effective' in supporting SEMP development and action planning through motivating, providing direction and acknowledging student's efforts and achievements. The top down approach of school management was quoted as a limiting factor.

◇ Some ideas for improving the school visit program included: more time and resources to be allocated to the program to assist in supporting the schools and maintaining momentum; provision of more up to date information on grant funding;

integration of the visit program into the curriculum so involving more students and staff in classroom sessions.

◇ Other feedback on the school visit program included: the involvement of P& C's would be valuable; include set tasks for students to follow through; the drafting of an action plan was very beneficial; the kids loved it.

◇ The most valuable aspects of the 2 day forum were quoted as: the motivation, enthusiasm and empowerment it generated; the networking opportunities; peer learning; the interactive nature of many of the activities; the sharing of ideas and experiences.

◇ All of the respondents stated that their school would be interested in attending a future forum. One teacher said SUSS 08 was the best professional development activity they had attended.

◇ All of the respondents stated that their schools would consider paying the 2 days of teacher relief for attending a future forum but the majority indicated that it could be a barrier to participation.

◇ All of the respondents indicated that their school would be interested in attending a 1 day teacher SEMP development workshop. It was suggested that it should also be open to other school community members and parents and that the workshop outcome should be that each participating school has a draft SEMP to take away.



Project Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the project, as summarised from the original project outline have been achieved to some degree and included:

1. That schools undertake appropriate steps to developing their School Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) – *most schools now have at least a draft SEMP and are in the process of developing it further. At least 3 of the respondents have engaged in further professional SEMP development since the Forum and all of them have expressed interest in attending a future SEMP training workshop. Progress has been made but priority should be given to accelerating this process.*
2. That schools develop action plans in relation to waste, water, energy use, and resource recovery and biodiversity management to ensure improvement and ongoing sustainability of these systems – *all the schools that took part in the post forum school visit program now have action plans that include some or all of the above. With one exception all of the survey respondents stated that they were implementing the action plan in their school. Separate action plans have been developed for waste and water and are already being implemented in several of the schools.*
3. That schools interact and network with the relevant agencies and management bodies to support implementation of the above mentioned action plans – *the contacts and resources available to the schools to assist them with their actions, where highlighted during the school visit and included in the action plan that was drafted and forwarded to them following the meeting, however few agencies have reported being contact by the schools. Further promotion of the expertise and assistance available to the schools is required.*
4. To promote the development of SEMP, action plans and the implementation of best practice management systems in their schools to ensure a sustainable future - *there has been an increase in the number of schools with active student environment groups and / or environmental committees to drive and promote school sustainability. Awareness raising through poster campaigns, presentations, information sessions, newsletters and school intranet sites is occurring in many of the schools.*
5. To develop a network between schools and regional environmental education providers to support promotion of programs that will enhance sustainable management in schools - *Networking at the Forum has been listed by the schools as one of the most valuable aspects of their participation. The continuation and development of that networking between schools has been limited since the Forum, probably due to time constraints and competing priorities, particularly for the older students and teachers. The need for the development of regional networking groups has been raised and is being planned for early 2009 by SUSS students involved in the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC).*

Conclusion

According to the information and feedback collected during the school visits and the collation of the responses to the post forum evaluation, it can be concluded that the projects objectives were met, to varying degrees.

The slow progress in the development of SEMP's is indicative of the competing priorities and resource constraints within the school environment, which make it difficult for an integrated whole of school approach to developing and implementing an effective SEMP. Inevitably the responsibility falls to one or two motivated individuals usually teachers to drive the process. To resolve this issue, more direct assistance to the schools to help them develop a SEMP, along with commitment to the process and support at the principal level is required.

The increased skills, knowledge and awareness of sustainability gained by those students who attended the Forum, needs to be supported and strengthened to ensure it continues to evolve. Peer learning and the 'hands on' approach have been identified as a key strength of the Forum. Assisting students to share knowledge and experience through effective networking should be prioritised at this stage.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the SUSS Steering Committee consider the following:

- i) Further assistance to schools to effectively develop and implement their SEMP by encouraging the participation of key teaching staff and other interested school community representatives, in a 1 day training workshop, which focuses on the drafting of a SEMP, the presentation of successful SEMP case studies for reference and the involvement of environmental education providers and other relevant agencies to strengthen networking and regional cooperation.
- ii) A campaign aimed at the highest level of school management, to gain their support and commitment to the SEMP process.
- iii) Working with and supporting inter school networks to empower and support students in the continuing development and implementation of action plans to increase school sustainability.
- iv) Organising a future SUSS Forum based on the outcome of the above initiatives.

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On behalf of the SUSS Forum Steering Committee.

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