



Geep GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

Sharing ideas to create a more just and sustainable future through the power of environmental education

CASE STUDY

Sustainability Victoria – *ResourceSmart Schools* Victoria, Australia

CONTRIBUTORS

[Kate Greer, Manager, Education – Sustainability Victoria](#)
[Alan Reid, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education - Monash University](#)

Geep is a partnership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Environmental Protection Administration of Taiwan, and the North American Association for Environmental Education.



Sustainability Victoria – ResourceSmart Schools



GOALS KEY

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) addressed

Overview

This case study presents an overview of [ResourceSmart Schools](#), a well-established Victorian Government program that helps a wide range of schools benefit from embedding sustainability into everything they do.

ResourceSmart Schools is premised on a whole-school approach and delivers measurable environmental, financial, educational, and social outcomes. The program is focused on making resource management improvements in schools and integrating education for sustainability into each participating school's curriculum and daily operations.

This case study illustrates how:

- Robust partnership models supported ongoing program funding and innovation
- Demonstrating the impact and influences of the program, and interrogating the findings of evaluation and research, fostered program improvement
- Promoting equal access, support, and resources for environmental education enabled progress towards program goals



Photo: © Sustainability Victoria 2016



Background

Engaging with primary and secondary schools across Government, Catholic and Independent sectors in the Victorian education system, the ResourceSmart Schools program provides a common framework **to assist schools in minimizing waste, saving energy and water, protecting and enhancing biodiversity, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.** The program began in pilot projects in Victoria and New South Wales in 2002, and the subsequent Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI) co-funded by the federal and state governments.. In 2007, The Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) managed the rollout of AuSSI in Victoria. In 2008, DET formed a partnership with Sustainability Victoria (SV) to deliver AuSSI as ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic. In 2014, the program became known as ResourceSmart Schools.

Between 2011 and 2015, ResourceSmart Schools was implemented with funding from the Victorian Government's Sustainability Fund (\$8.035 million over four years). Prior to this phase, the program was being delivered primarily by one lead organization (CERES Community Environment Park), and the initiative mostly supported metropolitan schools. In efforts to improve equal across the state by reaching regional and rural schools, Sustainability Victoria introduced a place-based delivery model in 2011 and established nine regional consortia. In 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, the program received two single-year funding allocations and has undertaken a range of developmental reviews and evaluations. This phase has coincided with a change in government, with the incoming government reviewing climate change and related policies with the goal of working towards a zero net emissions target. ResourceSmart Schools is expected to play a part in this renewed government strategy.



Approach

ResourceSmart Schools is delivered as a place-based model in nine regions across Victoria. The foundation of the program is a [structured framework for participating schools](#), comprising: a core program module (whole school planning, establishing baseline data, and action teams), and **four modules** focusing on attention on what it means to be resource smart in terms of:



ENERGY



WASTE



WATER



BIODIVERSITY

Each module includes actions across curriculum, community, and campus, and is facilitated by ResourceSmart Schools staff and service providers.

Local service providers are contracted to support schools to work through the ResourceSmart Schools framework by providing in-school visits, workshops, and phone and email support. In addition, a ResourceSmart Schools professional learning program builds the capability and confidence of teachers and educators to support schools as they embed sustainability and climate change into curriculum and school operations.

Schools record their actions and their billing data using an online interface to document their progress. Once a school has demonstrated reductions in resource consumption and achieved below benchmarks they are certified with a Star. Completing all modules results in reaching [5-Star Sustainability Certification](#). An annual awards program celebrates achievements of Victorian schools and early childhood services in ResourceSmart Schools.

Evaluation Plan

ResourceSmart Schools has applied multiple approaches to developing the program logic and fine-tuning the monitoring and evaluation framework. These have included:

- Quarterly “lessons learned” team reviews,
- Progress reports from service providers
- Annual school surveys, and
- School resource use captured in ResourceSmart Schools online

In addition, research and evaluation partners of ResourceSmart Schools have undertaken a number of studies of the program. These have included:

- A literature review examining the impact of environmental education in the home and local community. [Does environmental education reach beyond the school gates?](#) (BehaviourWorks Australia, 2014).
- A study of the overall impacts and effectiveness of the ResourceSmart Schools program. [The ResourceSmart Schools Research Project.](#) (Mark Rickinson, Matt Hall, and Alan Reid – Monash University, 2014).
- An economic evaluation of the ResourceSmart Schools program. [ResourceSmart Schools Evaluation](#) (Marsden Jacob Associates, 2014).
- A literature review on organizational change in schools. Facilitating organisational change in schools. (BehaviourWorks Australia, 2015).
- A synthesis of program impacts from 2011-2015 to suggest future directions of the program. ResourceSmart Schools Review (Monash University and BehaviourWorks Australia 2015)
- A study of the research, evaluation, and monitoring options for ResourceSmart Schools’ next phase of delivery. Research, Evaluation and Monitoring frameworks. (Monash University and BehaviourWorks Australia 2016)



The school has 1500 students and 200 staff so waste management is a big difficulty. The audits of waste management that the program made the school do made a big difference. The fact that we started auditing brought about change. Previously we were not aware of what was going on... By being aware of exactly what we were throwing out we also noticed discrepancies with regard to how much we were being charged, so we saved money that way too.

—Teacher, Independent Primary and Secondary School

Outcomes

Research and evaluation of ResourceSmart Schools have suggested that the program has a “strong track record and rationale leading to success” (ResourceSmart Schools Review, 2015).

Key outcomes of the ResourceSmart Schools program have included:

- **High levels of school participation.** ResourceSmart Schools has been accessed by 1212 (54%) of Victoria’s 2229 schools and by 58 early childhood services. In 2015-16, 883 schools and 33 early childhood services actively participated in the program.
- **Reduced school expenditures.** Between 2011 and 2015 the level of resource savings across participating schools was substantial. According to an independent 2014 economic evaluation, the program contributed to reduced school expenditures on resources and waste by approximately \$12.6 million. In 2015, Victorian schools participating in ResourceSmart Schools saved \$3.9 million – approximately 10% of costs - across all resource areas (6.6 million kilowatt hours of electricity; 27,941 gigajoules of gas; 17,368 tons of waste to landfill; 195,199 kiloliters of water). Program evaluation results have suggested that without the ResourceSmart Schools program, participating schools would not have the information, resources, and wherewithal to achieve like savings in resources (Marsden Jacob Associates, 2014)
- **Resource conservation improvements.** Sampled schools participating in the ResourceSmart Schools program have had strong or moderate improvements in terms of waste management (72%), biodiversity (63%), water (61%) and energy (55%) (Monash Research Project)
- **Integration of sustainability into the school curriculum.** Sixty-nine percent (69%) of sampled schools indicated that they had made significant or moderate progress with embedding sustainability content into the school curriculum.
- **Improved student learning outcomes.** Sixty-two percent (62%) of participating schools have made moderate or significant progress with improving student learning outcomes with regard to sustainability (Monash Research Project)
- **Sustainability embedded into school decision-making.** Sixty-three percent (63%) of sampled schools made significant or moderate progress in embedding sustainability into school decision-making (Monash Research Project).
- **Increased community connections.** Participating ResourceSmart schools repeatedly highlight the fact that the program helped them build connections and links to the wider community (ResourceSmart Schools Review, 2015)

Photo: © Sustainability Victoria 2016



It was by far the best PD I've ever attended. Not only was it engaging, interactive, relevant and content rich, but every person in that room were passionate about both education and sustainability

—ResourceSmart School Facilitator in response to a ResourceSmart Schools professional development session

Lessons Learned

Through the implementation of the ResourceSmart program, key lessons learned include:

- **There is a need for articulating the value of a sustainability focus in schools.** It may be challenging to convince people across a variety of levels (policymakers, funders, principals) of why environmental and sustainability education is fundamentally important and what resources are needed to deliver it effectively.
- **Students have been motivated to engage with sustainability.** Students have generally connected easily to sustainability and shown excitement about sustainability priorities and actions. They often take pride at getting involved, and become committed to taking responsibility for managing the resource use in their schools.
- **Teachers can achieve broad change.** A teacher or a small team of teachers or parents can drive broad change through a school, drawing largely on their passion and commitment. This is particularly true when they are given support.
- **There is a strong business case for robust environmental management policies and actions in schools.** Beyond preparing students for the future and contributing to student well-being, sustainability efforts help schools reduce costs. This is crucial for the longevity of the ResourceSmart Schools program. It has been able to survive and deliver meaningful environmental outcomes with financial savings outweighing costs.
- **Change management in large-scale programs requires careful consideration.** The norm of these programs is to deliver activities that generate measurable impact, rather than to deliver and describe a change management process and trace the influences on program outcomes. A challenge is to flip this into the program purpose and throughout all modules - to build skills in planning for and managing change.
- **Programs can benefit from being “owned” by many.** ResourceSmart Schools is not delivered and “owned” by one organization or one champion. There are many roles, many organizations, and many people who have come and gone, but the program has remained. It relies on a lot of people coming together to negotiate and manage change, and think about the purposes, priorities, and practices of schools.

Partners have included the following organizations:



Resources

Online Education Resources:

- ResourceSmart Schools
www.resourcesmartschools.vic.gov.au
- ResourceSmart Schools website:
<http://www.resourcesmartschools.vic.gov.au/>
- ResourceSmart Schools Modules:
<http://www.resourcesmartschools.vic.gov.au/about/completing-modules/>
- ResourceSmart Schools certification process:
<http://www.resourcesmartschools.vic.gov.au/about/certification-process/>

Research and Evaluation:

- BehaviourWorks Australia (2014). Does environmental education reach beyond the school gates?
<http://www.behaviourworksaustralia.org/projects/environmental-education-and-intergenerational-transfer/>
- BehaviourWorks Australia (2015). Creating organisational change in schools.
- Mark Rickinson, Matt Hall, and Alan Reid – Monash University (2014). The ResourceSmart Schools Research Project.
<http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/services-and-advice/schools/research>
- Marsden Jacob Associates (2014). ResourceSmart Schools Evaluation
<http://sustainability.ceres.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/SV-RSS-Evaluation-MJA-Final-Report.pdf>
- Monash University and BehaviourWorks Australia (2015). ResourceSmart Schools Review.
- Monash University and BehaviourWorks Australia (2016). ResourceSmart Schools: Research, Evaluation and Monitoring frameworks.

Contact:

Education Team
Sustainability Victoria
www.sustainability.vic.gov.au
03 8626 8700

