

# BILLINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## INSPIRATION

Billings Public Schools is the largest district in the state of Montana with 33 buildings, 31 schools grades K-12, 15,500 students (10% of the student population in Montana), adult continuing education, and over 2,000 employees. They are in the top five employers for the city of Billings. This stature in the community places them in a unique position for leadership.

Rich Whitney, executive director of facilities services at Billings Public Schools, is responsible for creating a learning environment that is healthy, comfortable and promotes student achievement.

"Over the years, Billings Public Schools has worked diligently to save energy at all of our schools," Whitney says. "UnCommon Sense provided the opportunity for us to learn more ways to save energy. It also provided the opportunity for the district to share what we learned." They also looked at *UnCommon Sense* as an opportunity to address areas besides energy.

## GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

"Billings Public Schools has 28 energy star schools (out of 31 total schools). We had 20 that would have qualified before we started *UnCommon Sense*," Whitney explains. "We have improved over 10% since starting the program. Our people made it happen, with everyone working for a common goal." Whitney feels their energy conservation efforts have been very successful because they have a dedicated staff person whose job it is to continually visit the sites, to see how many computers were left on, etc. The school board made a five-year commitment to an Energy Conservation Program. The district has not increased their utility budget for two years and they don't intend to increase it next year. They have been able to absorb the utility rate increases through their savings.

Participating in *UnCommon Sense* and showing their commitment to a leadership program has also led to a change in public perception. Through a public-private partnership the district consistently has 15-20 businesses that sponsor a year's worth of recycling at the



We have a very diverse community, and creating a cultural change in that diverse community has been fun and an interesting challenge and we've really come a long way.

—Rich Whitney



middle and elementary schools. Signs on recycling trucks and sponsor logos publicize the program.

## GREATEST CHALLENGE

Shifting the culture was one of the biggest challenges for the district. The diversity between 30 different school buildings, each with a different principal, made it difficult to find consistency across the board.

Another challenge the green team has had to face is that as a public entity, in the RFP process, the cheapest is the best. There is a requirement to save money for the taxpayers; while investigating green products and sustainable practices, price was always a top consideration.

The food service arena, which creates a lot of waste, is still a frontier where they see room to improve.

## MOST UNEXPECTED RESULT

An unexpected result from *UnCommon Sense* was uncovering the large number of passionate supporters of sustainability—teachers, custodians, principals, students—who were involved at every level and wanted to share it with others. There was a noticeable lack of push back. A number of student-led green teams or recycling clubs have now been established.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

"We've got 28 of 31 schools certified as energy star, and it's very achievable to get at least two more up to energy star level," said Rich Whitney. "We also want to provide financial incentives to school custo-

dians to purchase and use green cleaning products. The school budgets are where cleaning products are funded, but if we funded cleaning products from the facilities office, maybe we could compensate five pilot schools for green cleaning products and get them in their hands and using them."

"We want to find ways to keep things fresh and exciting," added Carrie Miller, associate director of the Office of Development and Advancement. "We hope to build an incentive or award program across the district so that we can recognize different segments of the business that have done a great job at recycling or energy conservation. There is a strong spirit of competition in the district so this is a good way to keep momentum."

## BEST ADVICE ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Carrie Miller: "Get educated and get started. There's some sense that in order to be a more sustainable organization you have to have a LEED building and meet certain extremes. But there are small steps you can take to become a more sustainable organization."

## BOTTOM LINE RESULTS

- From July 08 - Jan 10 saved \$654,636: 12.35% from July 08 - Jan 09, and 18% from July 09 - Jan 10. This energy reduction is the equivalent of 538 cars removed from the road or 76,723 trees over 10 years of CO2 sequestration.
- Recycling in elementary/middle schools (2008/09): 38 tons of paper, 8 tons of cardboard, 2 tons of tin cans, 500 lbs of aluminum cans, 3,000 lbs of plastic bottles
- Recycling in high schools (2008/09): 86,000 lbs of paper, 1,400 lbs of plastic bottles and aluminum cans
- Recycled to date in 2010: 46.8 tons of paper, 20.25 tons of cardboard, 3.6 tons of tin cans, 2,250 lbs of aluminum cans, 4,500 lbs of plastic bottles
- BPS uses a local electronics recycler in town for all computers and electronics; a toxic waste and paint roundup is held in conjunction with the city in May each year
- No Idle Zones for buses, consolidation of bus routes, EPA grant for particulate filters on buses to reduce emissions
- Safe Routes to School Program implemented: The strategic partnership between the city, school district and community stakeholders will provide the foundation for future infrastructure projects to create even safer school routes.
- Overall Energy Conservation Goal: *Billings Public Schools will commit to an energy conservation program that aims to reduce energy consumption by 20% over five years*

