

# Small sustainability effort reaps big rewards

Ellen Robinson | Posted: Friday, April 18, 2014 6:00 am

With a vision of making environmental protection “second nature” in young minds, Grades of Green began in 2008 at Grand View Elementary in Manhattan Beach by four moms wanting a better world for their children.

The organization’s founding mothers include Kim Martin, Suzanne Kretschmer, Lisa Coppedge and Shaya Kirkpatrick. The women's shared vision has blossomed from implementing a small green program at their children's school into a nonprofit that offers guidance and resource connections that help student-led green initiatives. To date Grades of Green has reached 151,736 students from 237 schools in 36 states. The group that started with four Manhattan Beach moms now includes 43 members from the South Bay.

Group member Allie Bussjaeger said it's simple and free for schools to get involved in making their campuses green.

“It's as easy as signing up on our website, and it's free,” said Bussjaeger. “All they have to do is create a profile and register their school and that opens up our website to them. We have more than 40 green activities and we also provide guidance and connect them with resources that they need to get started on whatever green-initiative that they bring.”

Earth Day is a very special day for Grades of Green, organization member Jan Dunbar said.

“Earth Day is Grades of Green's birthday,” she said. “Grades of Green, as a nonprofit, was born and launched its website on Earth Day 2010.”

Today, the same four women lead the organization and assure that Grades of Green covers all facets of environmental stewardship, including trash, electricity, chemical, water and emissions reduction.

In just four years, Grades of Green has grown to establish a track record of innovation through its website that is filled with green activities and resources to help facilitate student-led environmental projects. The goal is to help students develop green initiatives in their own schools that lead to sustainable programs that produce measurable results and cost savings to their schools. The activities featured on the site provide students with instructions, photos, videos and artwork that give them immediate start-up capabilities.

“The site's activities are designed to inspire and empower students by teaching them small things they

can do today to make a difference on Planet Earth for generations to come,” Bussjaeger said.

In addition to the website, Grades of Green offers a Youth Corps Program for students who want a higher-level of involvement as green leaders. Grades of Green also has a Programs Team that will go into schools who don't have the finances or volunteer support to implement sustainability measures on their own. The Programs Team is funded through sponsorships and donations.

The organization's flagship program is an annual Trash Free Lunch Challenge competition held among Los Angeles County schools. The challenge is which school can produce the highest reduction in its lunchtime trash. Twenty-four new schools competed to reduce lunchtime waste and the winning three schools receive education grants, courtesy of Chevron. Perras Middle School in Redondo Beach was named one of the three finalists earlier this month and will learn later this week whether it receives a \$1,000 or \$750 grant.

During the past two years, participating schools have decreased lunchtime trash by an average of 70 percent with the winning schools reducing trash by more than 90 percent. Cumulatively the competing schools have diverted more 30,000 bags of trash from the landfill. Grades of Green provides the schools with the education and tools they need to be successful and the students and schools do the rest. Students are taught how to bring trash-free lunches and kids who buy lunches at school sort their waste into recyclables, compost, liquid and landfill.

Among the 237 schools that have launched green programs by joining Grades of Green, Dunbar says the group is very proud of having successfully assisted each of the Manhattan Beach schools with green-initiatives. The most recent has been the implementation of a recycling program at Mira Costa High School.

For more information or sign your school up for Grades of Green, visit [gradesofgreen.org](http://gradesofgreen.org).