

Omaha Public Schools Environmental Stewardship Survey Report

December 2021

Overview

This survey was conducted in December of 2021 as part of the initial phase of the process to create an Environmental Stewardship Plan. The objective was to collect information from OPS employees about their views on environmental stewardship and their awareness of and engagement with OPS environmental stewardship efforts. The survey was developed by Verdis Group over many years and can be used to generally compare within an organization over time as well as across organizations with whom the survey has been conducted.

The survey uses five questions to assess five dimensions of engagement, which culminate in an overall “score” that can be used as a metric to measure progress in this area over time. The five dimensions are shown below, along with their “score” (i.e., the percentage of respondents who selected one of the top two levels of awareness, knowledge, etc.). Key findings from across the survey are summarized on page 2, followed by detailed results by question.

Dimensions	2021
Awareness of Efforts (very/moderately aware) at the organization to be better stewards of the environment	23
Knowledge (very/moderately knowledgeable) about ways to be a better steward of the environment at work	59
Behavioral Frequency (always/most of the time) self-reported key environmental stewardship behaviors	67
Perceived Norm (always/most of the time) perceptions of how often others engage in key behaviors	35
Awareness of Environmental Stewardship (very/moderately familiar) familiarity with the concept of environmental stewardship	46
Overall Score	46

Key Findings

20% of 9,000 employees participated in the survey

81% of respondents believe it is important for OPS to take active steps toward environmental stewardship

Low awareness of efforts, higher knowledge of individual action. Only 23% of respondents indicated that they were very or moderately aware of OPS district efforts to be better stewards of the environment. However, 59% indicate they were very or moderately knowledgeable about ways they personally could be better stewards of the environment at work. Likewise, 67% indicated they participated in key behaviors always or most of the time.

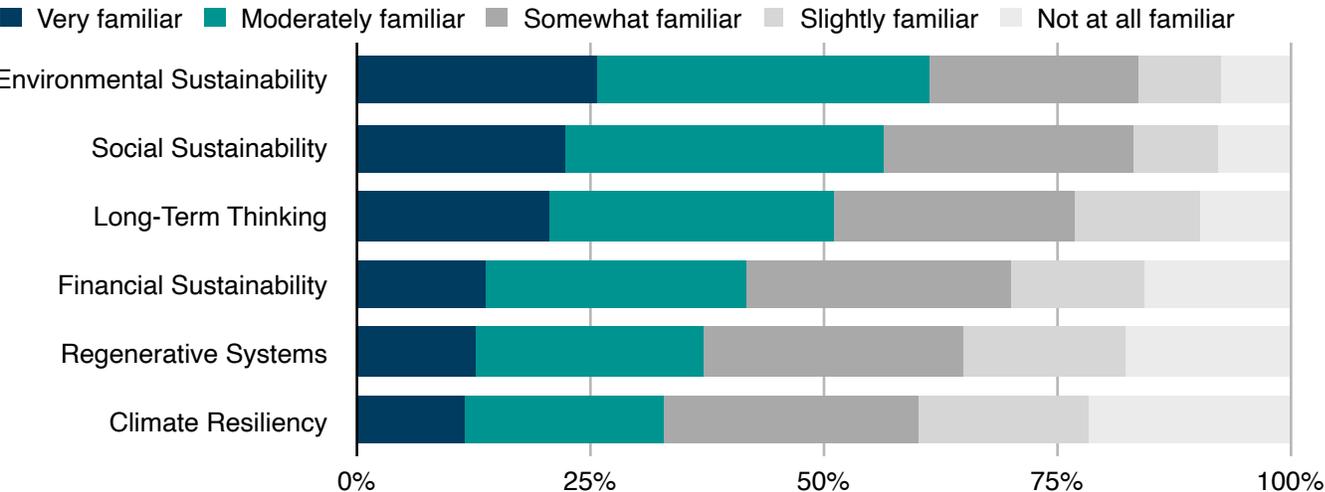
High importance, lower mission alignment. While 81% of respondents indicated they believe it is important for OPS to take active steps toward environmental stewardship, only 56% believe it aligns with the district’s mission to prepare students for success in college, career, and life.

High awareness of diversity and inclusion. Respondents indicated a significantly higher awareness of district efforts (and knowledge of personal practices) toward diversity and inclusion than other aspects of the broader definition of environmental stewardship.

Waste management a focus area in open-ended responses. Waste and recycling are often the most commonly associated topics related to environmental stewardship because they are visible and most people interact with waste systems on a regular basis. Many open-ended comments referred to waste management issues (both successes and opportunities).

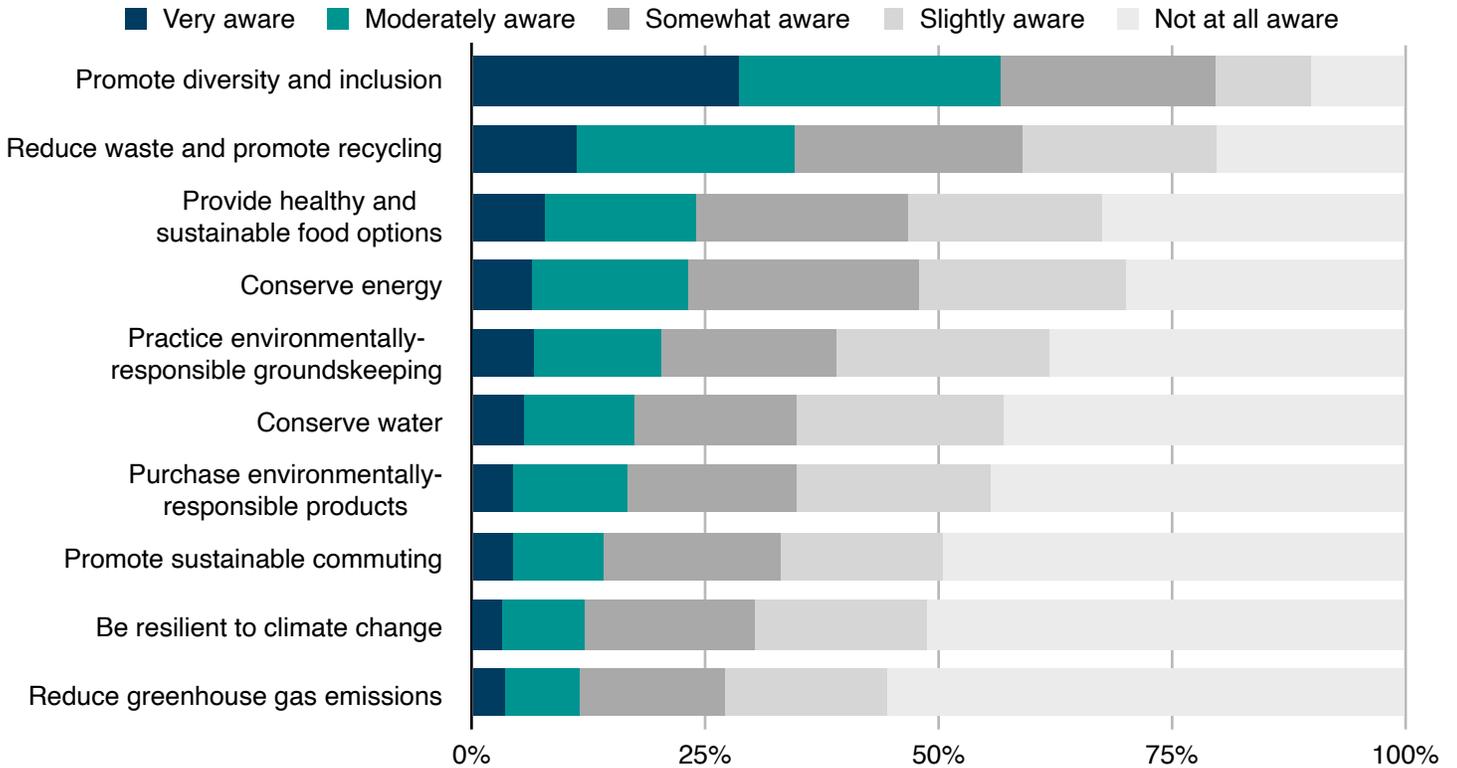
Awareness of Environmental Stewardship (46)

How familiar are you with the following concepts?



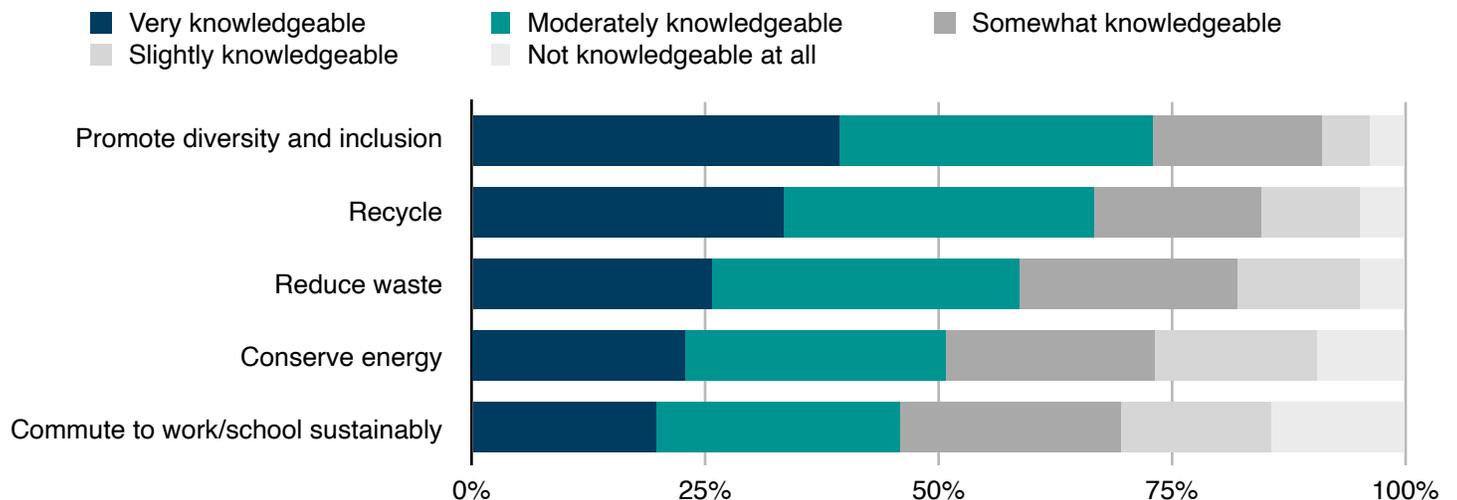
Awareness of OPS Efforts (23)

How aware are you of OPS efforts to...?



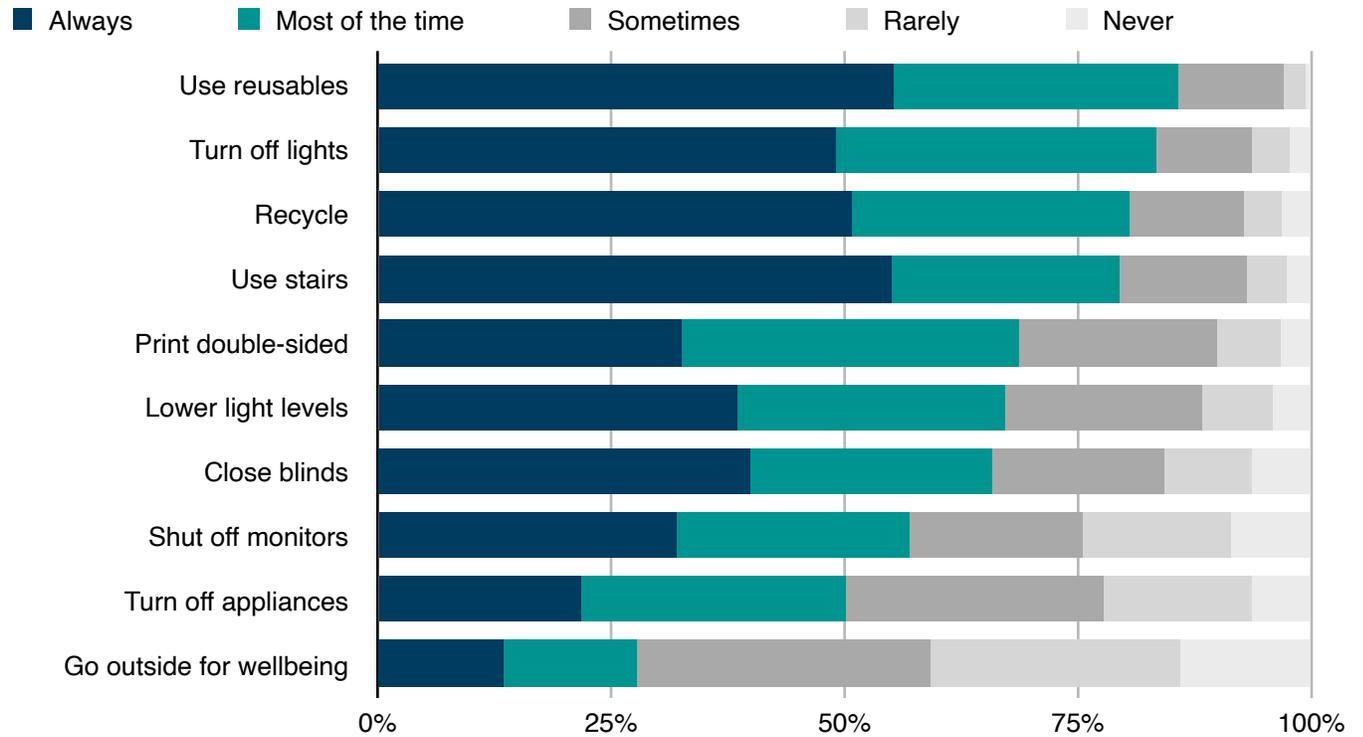
Knowledge of Practices (59)

How knowledgeable are you about ways you can do the following at work?



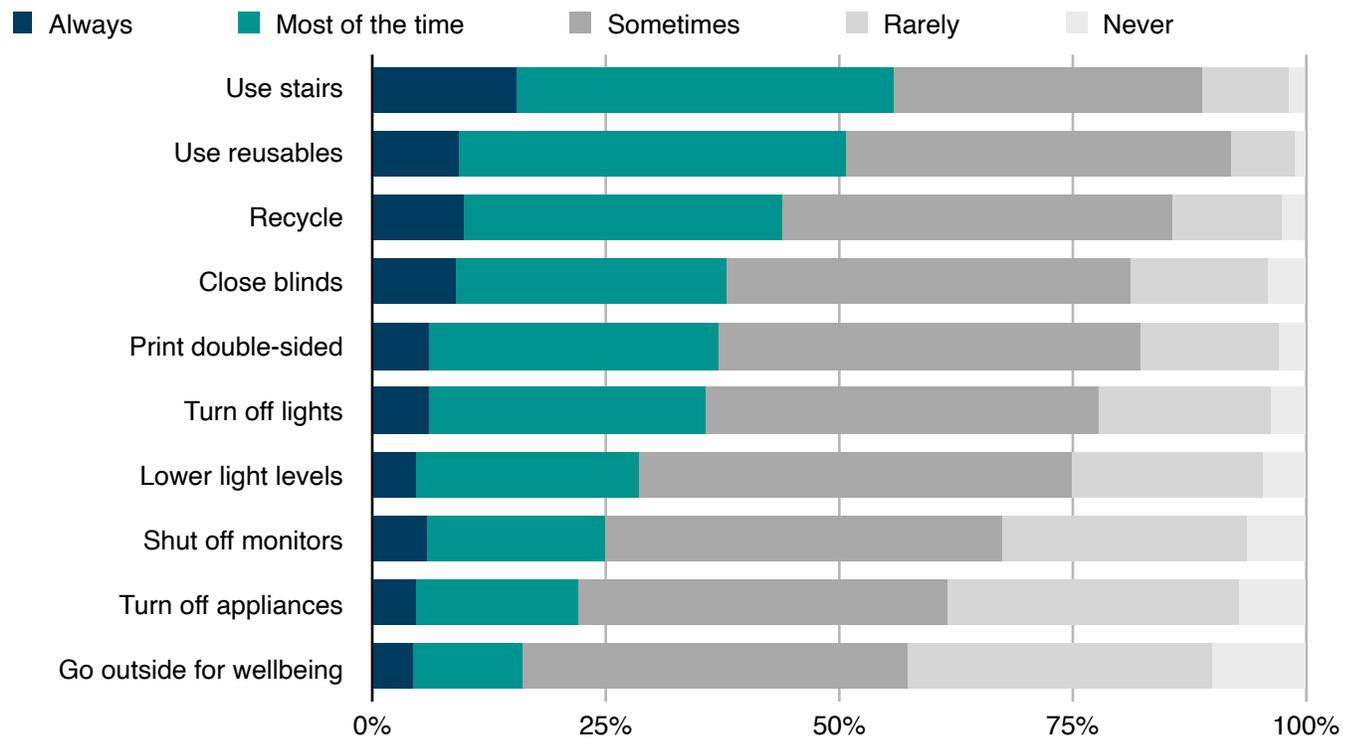
Self-Reported Behavior (67)

How often do you do the following at work?



Peer Behavior (35)

How often do your peers do the following at work?



Mission Alignment and Importance

Mission Alignment: How strongly respondents agree or disagree that environmental stewardship concepts align with OPS’ mission.

Importance: How strongly respondents agree or disagree that it is important for OPS to take active steps toward the various aspects of environmental stewardship.

Shown below are the results for both Mission Alignment and Importance for each of the four concepts, as well as the average of the four that is used as an overall response.

Concept	Mission	Importance
Environmental stewardship	57%	85%
Community leadership in environmental stewardship	56%	78%
Resilience to the effects of climate change	52%	76%
Operating in a way that produces more benefits than harm	58%	83%
Overall Average	56%	81%

Reason

Top four reasons why respondents believe it is important for OPS to actively pursue environmental stewardship efforts:

1. **Environment** - Because it lessens OPS's environmental impact, conserves resources, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions (654 respondents)
2. **Responsibility** - Because it’s the right thing to do (556)
3. **Health & Wellness** - Because it protects public health and promotes wellness (441)
4. **Future Generations** - Because it ensures that future generations can fully meet their needs (412)

Focus

Top four areas respondents believe OPS should focus on:

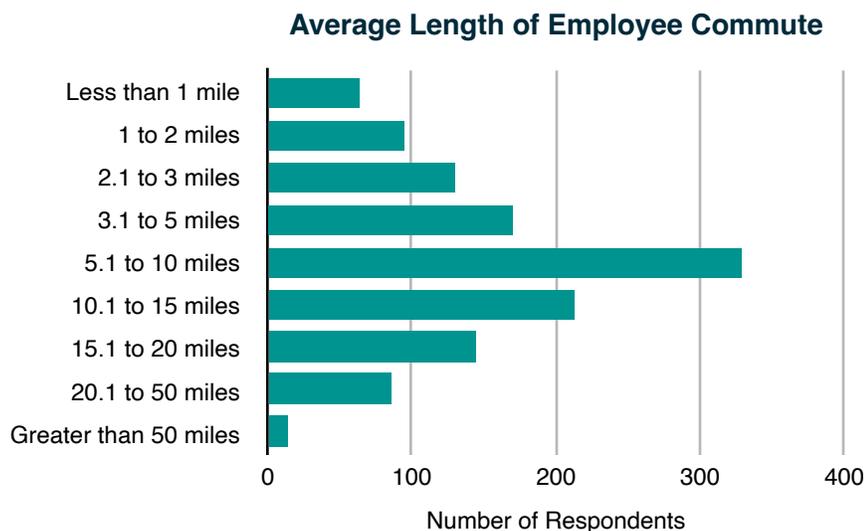
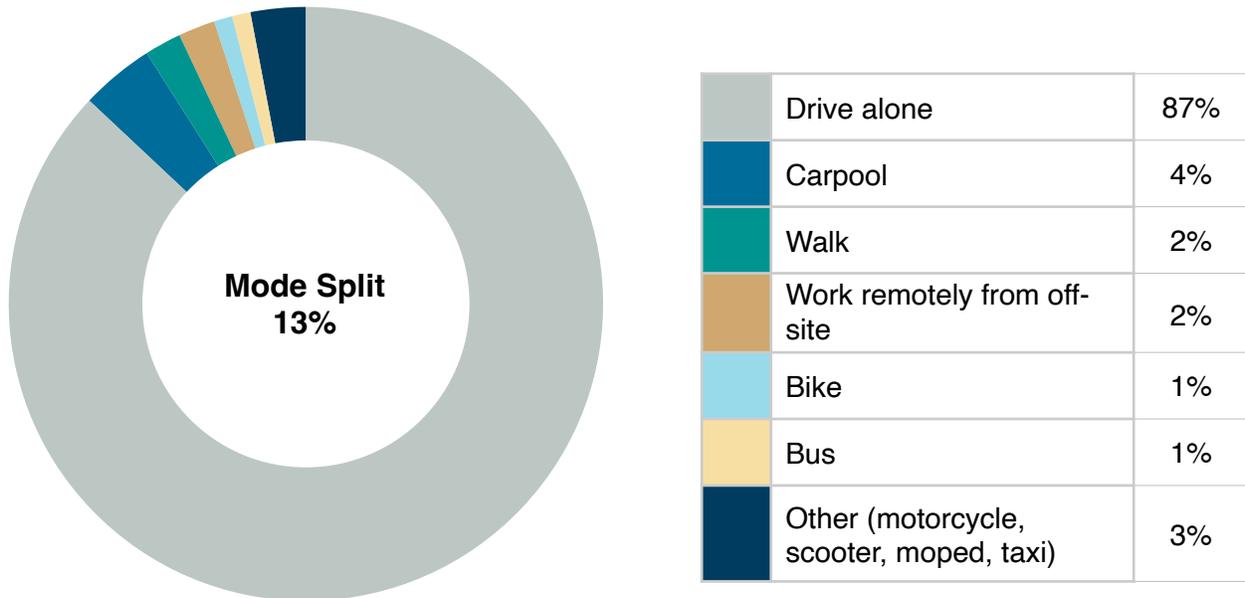
1. **Waste** - reducing waste, increasing recycling, and purchasing environmentally-responsible products (822 respondents)
2. **Energy** - conserving energy, making buildings more energy efficient, and generating energy on site from renewable sources (e.g. wind or solar) (665)
3. **Food** - making healthy and sustainable food options more available (478)

- Wellness** - supporting OPS staff to meet the challenges they face and supporting their strengths so they feel a part of the community, and are connected to their natural surroundings (438)

Active Commuting

Transportation constitutes approximately 25% of U.S. emissions, in large part due to commuting. When employees commute using an active mode of transportation, it not only helps OPS reduce its emissions, but also contributes to employee wellness. The metric used to measure this is called a mode split - the percent of trips employees make to work using a mode of transportation other than driving alone in a vehicle (in a typical week). Responses on this question will be used to calculate transportation emissions in the greenhouse gas inventory.

OPS' current mode split is 13% - in other words, 13% of employees get to work in a way other than driving alone in a car. See below for a full breakdown of transportation modes used by respondents, followed by a chart showing the average length of employee commute.



Successes/Strengths

The survey asked participants for specific sustainability strengths and recent successes with explanations, if possible. Of the 1586 participants surveyed, 396 left comments.

Commonly Identified Strengths:

1. **Waste Management.** Responses from 160 individuals (40% of responses) mentioned recycling and composting as a success. This was by far the largest and most popular success mentioned in comments.
2. **Energy Conservation.** 16% of respondents noted energy conservation efforts such as motion sensor lighting and faucets, and upgrades to heating and cooling systems.
3. **Purchasing & Source Reduction.** A total of 22 respondents (6%) highlighted other forms of materials management and source reduction, such as reduction in paper use through 1:1 technology and plastic reduction with water bottle filling stations.

Sample Responses:

- “JROTC paper recycling; Benson group is redoing the rain garden.”
- “Switching from Styrofoam lunch trays to paper.”
- “We now have recycling bins at every location that I know of. Most schools encourage using the online textbooks and limit printing of paper.”
- “Motion-detection lights; go off automatically after several minutes; rooftop garden at one of my schools; previous attempts to compost lunch items (prior to the pandemic).”
- “I love that my school's renovation includes lights that have dimmers and motion activation to save energy. “
- “At Dundee we have a water tank that collects rainwater. This is the water used for the plants.”

Opportunities

In addition to asking survey participants about strengths, the survey also provided an opportunity for respondents to suggest ways in which OPS could be more sustainable. Of the 1586 participants surveyed, 483 left comments.

Commonly Identified Opportunities:

1. **Waste Management.** 187 individuals (39% of responses) identified recycling and composting as an area for improvement. Of these comments, 127 respondents pinpointed the need for training and follow through with the existing recycling program.
2. **Purchasing.** A total of 104 respondents (21%) indicated a desire for OPS to reexamine materials purchased. A significant portion (87 individuals) specified the food program as an immediate area of concern.
3. **Energy Conservation.** 93 participants highlighted energy conservation, especially through building improvements and upgrades, as a necessary area of focus. 10% suggested incorporating sustainable green spaces such as rain gardens.

Sample Responses:

- “Actually taking the recycling bins materials to be recycled -- our custodial staff is exhausted and overworked and I know they've been just throwing stuff away.”
- “Recycling should be promoted and should not be limited to paper. Omaha uses a single-stream recycling processor. Each room should have a recycling container that is appropriate for the size and purpose of the room.”
- “Compostable lunch materials/options for composting. Less single-use plastic in breakfast/lunch programs. Expand plant-based options in dining rooms (intentional food sourcing, no factory-farmed meat/less over-processed food).”
“Schools should STOP having grab and go breakfast because so many plastic bags and plastic and paper products are used everyday!”
- “Packaged food unused should be sent to shelters or somewhere not a trash can.”
“Immediately stop the use of quaternary ammonium compounds in schools. These are pesticides that ruin the environment AS STATED ON THE LABEL ON THE BOTTLE.”
- “I believe all new buildings should accommodate both solar and wind energies.”
“Grounds should be sustainable prairie grasses and native plants. Grounds should all include a community garden/orchard to foster community, ownership, and equity within each neighborhood.”