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Committee on Environmental Policy

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

Seventh meeting

Geneva, 1 and 2 March 2012

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Panel discussion on education for sustainable development school plans

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

At the sixth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, the member States adopted the priorities for implementation of phase III of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. One of the priorities adopted was to better connect policy to school activities. To this end, member States committed to install education for sustainable development (ESD) plans in every school by 2015, in order to focus on practical implementation and to foster coherence between policy and practice.¹

As a follow-up to this decision, a two-hour panel discussion will be held at the seventh Steering Committee meeting. This document provides a framework for the panel discussion, outlining the main questions for discussion, as well as providing brief background information on school plans for ESD, defining the relevant terms and presenting good practice examples.

¹ See Learning from each other: Achievements, challenges and ways forward (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2012/3; para. 14). Available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28258>.

I. Promoting a whole-institution approach to education for sustainable development

1. Education for sustainable development (ESD) school plans are a tool to implement a whole-institution approach. A whole-institution approach generally refers to the simultaneous infusion of sustainability in an education institution's curriculum, the reduction of its institutional ecological footprint, the strengthening of learners' participation and the improvement of relationships between the educational institution and the community. This ultimately means that all aspects of an institution's internal operations and external relationships are reviewed and revised in the light of sustainable development/ education for sustainable development principles.

2. Within such an approach, each institution decides on its own actions, addressing the three overlapping spheres of Campus (management operations), Curriculum (teaching/ learning and research) and Community (external relationships). A whole-institution approach thus means that the strategy of the institution, and ultimately its culture, is oriented towards sustainable development.

3. A whole-institution approach is not limited to formal education but also can be applied in institutions providing non-formal education (e.g., museums, art galleries, national parks) and informal education (e.g., local authorities, businesses, non-governmental organization). However, the panel discussion focuses on the implementation in schools — on the “whole-school approach” to ESD.

4. Schools following this approach address ESD through multiple perspectives, which includes curriculum development, but also school governance, consumption and pedagogy. Moreover, outreach efforts of the school to the community and activities related to landscaping can also play an important role in the whole-school approach to ESD.²

5. Ultimately, by following this approach, schools practice what they preach, by addressing sustainability concerns in their day-to-day practices. What is taught in the classroom should be consistent with the non-formal, as well as hidden curricula, and with school actions and practices.³

6. The national implementation reporting carried out under the framework of the Strategy for ESD in 2010 has shown that the whole school approach is being developed and implemented in the majority of ECE member States. In fact, a majority of the countries that participated in the reporting exercise said they had adopted a whole-school approach in 2010, compared to less than 30 per cent in 2007, representing striking progress.⁴

7. The number of countries providing incentives to support a whole-institution approach also increased significantly. The Green Flag Scheme, an international award scheme for eco-schools, is being used by many countries to provide incentives, along with other awards and certificates (Greece, Armenia, Hungary, Austria). In many cases these are (partly) funded by public authorities. Incentives are also given in the form of knowledge support.⁵

² See Ferreira, Jo-Anne, Lisa Ryan and Daniella Tilbury, *Whole-school approaches to sustainability: A review of models for professional development in pre-service teacher education*. (Sydney, Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability, 2006). Available from <http://aries.mq.edu.au/projects/preservice/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See ECE/CEP/AC.13/2012/3.

⁵ Ibid.

II. Education for sustainable development school plans — a tool for implementing the whole-school approach

8. On a practical level, the implementation of the whole-school approach often is realized by means of a school strategy or plan, which sets out the road map for adopting a whole-school approach to ESD and details its components.

9. The Steering Committee highlighted the importance it allocates to the installation of such school plans by adopting the decision to install ESD school plans in every school by 2015. Naturally, school plans for ESD developed and implemented in the ECE region are and need to be of diverse nature, in order to be locally relevant and culturally appropriate.

10. The panel discussion provides a platform to share good practices with regard to implementing a whole-school approach and developing ESD school plans and to discuss how the promotion of such plans can be supported on the regional level.

A. Good practice in Cyprus: sustainable environmental education agendas for each school

11. In Cyprus, the newly introduced National Curriculum of Environmental Education/ESD aims at the creation of the sustainable school — a school which is a model of an organization promoting sustainability. The national curriculum of Cyprus with regard to environmental education (EE) and ESD is directed towards the whole adjustment of the school, i.e., it follows a whole-school approach so as to promote substantial changes which concern:

(a) The pedagogical level (National Curriculum, pedagogical strategies and educational techniques, learning and teaching process);

(b) The social/organizational level (school culture, relations between the school and the society, organization of the school, educational policy);

(c) The technical/economic level (infrastructure and equipment of the school, administrative practices).

12. The programme of study is developed in 12 thematic units addressing the international, regional and national scale: forest; water; pollution; poverty; urban development; desertification; production and consumption; energy; tourism; means of transport; culture and environment; and biodiversity.

13. The thematic units listed above provide a starting point for each school from which to plan and implement its own Sustainable Environmental Educational Policy (SEEP), which is based on the study and examination of an issue of sustainable development selected from all the participants in the learning process (students, teachers, principals, local populations etc) related to:

(a) The needs and the interests of students and teachers;

(b) The environmental problems faced by the school;

(c) The particular characteristics, problems and needs of the community in which the school is situated;

(d) The environmental issues which influence, in the short or in the long term, the quality of life of people at the local and international level.

14. At the end of the school year it is expected that the school unit identify — according to the objectives achieved during the implementation of the SEEP — possible issues for

further study related to EE/ESD for the next school year. The aim is not the control, the comparison or the comparative evaluation of schools, but the self-improvement of each school unit against the background of sustainable development, respect, protection and conservation of the environment.

15. The programme of study is supported by the teacher's handbook for the implementation of the programme of study for EE/ESD. For all the thematic units of the National Curriculum of EE/ESD, supporting educational material has been produced. Moreover, the criteria for self-evaluation have been determined in order to identify the degree of achievement of the SEEP schools and school classes.

B. Good practice in Canada: Guide for Sustainable Schools

16. The Guide for Sustainable Schools in Manitoba is the result of a partnership between Manitoba Education and school divisions in Manitoba that seek to support Manitoba schools and their communities in their goals to become sustainable. The Guide invites schools to take a whole-school approach to sustainability, exploring sustainability through the curriculum, in addition to real-life learning experiences, improvements in school management of resources and facilities (e.g., energy, waste, water, biodiversity, schoolyard design, and purchasing of products and materials) and associated social and financial issues.

17. The vision of the Guide is for all schools in Manitoba and their communities to be sustainable, so that students will become informed and responsible decision makers, playing active roles as citizens of Canada and the world, and will contribute to social, environmental and economic well-being and an equitable quality of life for all, now and in the future.

18. The Guide seeks to assist Manitoba schools in:

(a) Moving beyond sustainability awareness-raising by undertaking concrete, action-oriented learning activities, integrated with school curricula, leading to teaching for sustainability as an integral component of school planning;

(b) Actively engaging in a continuous cycle of planning, implementing and reviewing approaches to sustainability as part of everyday school operations;

(c) Using natural resources in more sustainable ways, achieving measurable social, ecological, educational and financial outcomes;

(d) Monitoring and reporting on progress toward becoming sustainable; and

(e) Developing values that support a sustainability ethos, working toward sustainability in partnership with their local communities and school authorities and ensuring students share ownership of sustainability initiatives and decision-making.

19. The Guide is accessible in the form of an online, expandable platform. This idea developed through dialogue with representatives from the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI), which presently reaches 2,000 schools, representing approximately one quarter of all schools in Australia through online mediums (for examples, see AuSSI, Queensland Sustainable Schools, and New South Wales (NSW) Sustainable Schools websites).

20. The initial content of the Guide was modelled after exemplars from other countries and programmes, including AuSSI, NSW Sustainable Schools, the United Kingdom Sustainable School programme and the Eco-Schools programme.

21. The Guide includes:
- (a) The rationale for school sustainability;
 - (b) A template for a School Sustainability Plan (SSP), which uses terminology consistent with the Department's existing annual school report and addresses key issues facing schools; and
 - (c) Essential tools and resources to assist schools in developing, implementing and monitoring their SSPs, while integrating sustainability considerations into whole-school planning.
22. The Guide is designed to help schools through the process of developing, implementing and monitoring sustainability plans. It includes the following sections:
- (a) Becoming a sustainable school: key background information about sustainability and the need for school sustainability plans;
 - (b) School Sustainability Plans (SSPs): a step-by-step guide to help schools through the stages of sustainability planning;
 - (c) Toolbox: essential materials to assist schools throughout the stages of sustainability planning.
23. The Guide, including the template for a School Sustainability Plan, can be downloaded online.⁶

III. Panel discussion on education for sustainable development school plans

A. Format

24. At the seventh Steering Committee meeting, a two-hour panel discussion will be held on ESD school plans. The panel will be composed of three panellists — the national focal point for ESD of Cyprus; the national focal point for ESD of Canada; and the President of the Executive Committee of Environment and School Initiatives — who will give introductory presentations. Following the presentations, the floor will be open for questions and discussion. The panel aims to provide a platform for sharing good practices with regard to implementing a whole-school approach and developing ESD school plans.

B. Questions for discussion

- (1) How can the goal to implement ESD school plans in every school by 2015 be effectively implemented?
- (2) How should the implementation of this goal be supported on the regional level (e.g., collection of examples of ESD school plans/materials and sharing of them)?

⁶ International Institute for Sustainable Development and Manitoba Education, *Guide for Sustainable Schools in Manitoba*. Available from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/pdfs/sustainable_guide.pdf.

C. Outcomes

25. Based on the panel discussion and its conclusions, the Steering Committee may wish to decide on activities to support the promotion of ESD school plans on the regional level, for instance, the collection of good practice examples of ESD school plans.
