

We've been speaking with leaders in and out of the Network about this journey toward health, equity, and sustainability, and a big consensus is the work is of course so critical to our collective future, but is HARD work, mentally and emotionally as well. At Green Schools National Network (GSNN), we explore strategy and big-picture concepts to get schools and districts closer to green, but we don't often speak about the challenges we're all facing on the ground trying to get there. And the importance of a whole-person approach (a concept we regularly discuss in relation to whole-school and whole-child) intersects here as well. How can we attend to the social and emotional needs of everyone in the school system – including educators, leaders, staff, and families?

In this never-ending fight for health, equity, and sustainability, through the confines of district power dynamics, local laws, and systemic inequities, it makes perfect sense to feel fatigued and overwhelmed. There are hills and valleys in this work, but the emotional, physical, and mental stressors can be felt every day. A GSNN Leader talked candidly with us about the in-between stage she feels like she's in. With 20 years in this movement, she's feeling overwhelmed. With climate events escalating more now than ever before, she's wary of how much higher the stakes feel. We've been coming back to that conversation again and again trying to map out possible solutions, ones that address the most immediate human concerns while we continue chipping at the mammoth that is climate change and resilience. Where do we build in the space for breaks, for breath, for balance? How do we achieve long-standing change that doesn't require a hand to stay at the wheel? How do we step back to take care of ourselves when we're in charge of ensuring our young people have something left for them in this world?

The truth is, we don't know the answer. We do know, however, that community (both personal and professional) make this work a little bit easier. So we reached out to our community to learn more about what keeps them resilient and coming back to this work. We want to share a few things we've heard and want you to join the Network and share with us as well.

“Students. Students who are demanding this. Students who are looking at their future and demanding that the adults in the room hear them. Community partners, teachers who are demanding that change happen. And that breathes life into me every day.”

“It is those young people that are part of my life and have been part of my life in my thirty years as an educator, thinking about the life that they live now and the quality of that life, how they see themselves as an interconnected part of a community, as being able to make a difference and make an impact in the world, and to know that they can live into the future full of hope and inspiration. Because we can in fact regenerate life on this planet. This is not a static machine that's broken down, this is an endlessly regenerative system that we're a part of that's full of possibilities in life. And I would like every young person whose life I touch to have that sense of hope and wonder and inspiration in the life they're living now as they work toward a more sustainable future.”

“The collaboration of all partners to pitch in and make change. No matter what vantage point, there is something to do to transform K-12 education to create a sustainable and just future.”

“The world I believe we should have is run exclusively on compassion, equity, and love; and I've spent so much of my life only able to build that world out in theory. I don't believe I will see it in my lifetime, but I want to ensure I do all I can to allow kids who look like me the opportunity to live it in practice.”

“All of the amazing and diverse ways in which people across the country are advancing sustainability in their schools and districts keep me coming back day after day. That and the potential for us to do it in concert together.”

GSNN aspires to be a place of community for the leaders, staff, educators, and other professionals within the green schools movement. We want to help you practically, not just strategically, and be more intentional in talking about the day-to-day struggles and successes that lead to the bigger accomplishments of schools and districts. We want you to see us and all of our partners as part of your team so you don't feel like you are solving this existential crisis by yourself. As this work always shows us, we are stronger and better together.

What do you think? Let us know how you're working against burnout. We want to continue this conversation within our community.