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SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

At Burlington's Sustainability Academy, Upgrades Are More Than Skin Deep

 POSTED BY [KATHRYN FLAGG](#) ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2012 AT 03:11 PM IN [BURLINGTON](#), [EDUCATION](#), [VERMONT](#) | [PERMALINK](#)

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At a dedication ceremony at the Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes today, the Burlington magnet school celebrated the construction of its new outdoor classroom.

Students, teachers and parents — as well as a few representatives from Seventh Generation, which funded the project — crammed into and around the open-air veranda. It's a space that teachers and students dreamed up for outdoor classes and community gatherings.

We have a longer story about the Sustainability Academy in tomorrow's issue of *Seven Days*, focusing less on cosmetic updates to the once-neglected schoolyard and more on the growing momentum to transform a high-poverty elementary school into a leader in experimental education.

The school reopened as a magnet school in 2009, in large part because Burlington desperately needed a way to economically integrate its school. Ninety-five percent of Barnes students at that time lived in poverty, compared to roughly 48 percent district wide.

Today, that percentage at Barnes has dropped to 70 percent. Test scores are starting to improve. And under the leadership of interim principal Brian Williams — who labored on the outdoor classroom for six weeks alongside Burlington High School art teacher Chris Sharp — parents report that changes are coming rapidly to the Old North End elementary school. That's perhaps most obvious in the school yard, where school leaders envision constructing accessible tree houses and natural playgrounds in addition to the new outdoor classroom.

Williams this afternoon dedicated the classroom to the community, students and future of the school. The brief ceremony included remarks from Seventh Generation CEO John Replogle, who called it an "honor and privilege" to work with the school, and committed Seventh Generation as an ongoing partner to the Sustainability Academy. The company, a pioneer in green cleaning products, donated \$7000 to fund the construction of the outdoor classroom.

In what was undeniably the most adorable part of this afternoon's dedication, student representatives stepped up to the microphone to share their own pledges and wishes for the future. Those ranged from a future in which "I hope we can grow almost all the food we eat" to a pledge to build flying bicycles. Bicycles were a recurring theme in the pledges — it is, after all, "Bike Week" at the elementary school — as were hopes for less pollution, more recycling and composting, and "more trees in the woods."

But students' wishes also touched on themes of social and economic sustainability. One student pledged to "make clothes for people who don't have money or parents,"



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and another pupil expressed the wish to live in a future "where clean water is not a privilege, but available to all people."

Photos by Kathryn Flagg

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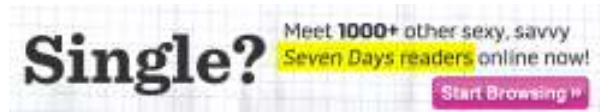
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