

**Joshua Nodiff**  
**Brown Leadership Institute**

### Action Plan Progress Report

My action plan is to implement a series of environmentally conscious initiatives to make my school, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School, more sustainable. Initially, my action plan had solely been to make LaGuardia's Technical Theater department more sustainable, since we dispose of an inconceivable amount of perfectly potent lumber and discard that plywood into a dumpster filled with food scraps and landfill waste. However, I was recently elected to be the president of LaGuardia's student body and lead the Student Government Organization. Therefore, I intend to use that position to expand my action plan, as to address several other environmental concerns: recycling, composting, analyzing the wellness of cafeteria food and fresh alternatives, implementing a green roof, monitoring and reducing energy usage, and creating an environmentally conscious community within the school (students, teachers, administrators, and custodial staff).

For the 2014-2015 school year, I plan to implement a series of environmental initiatives as SGO president to make LaGuardia more sustainable. Last year, I successfully started an after-school club with a handful of committed students and four committed teachers to discuss our solidarity in catalyzing sustainable reforms. I've been investigating the policies that the NYC Department of Education has legislated regarding sustainability, and I've discovered the existence of policies that LaGuardia does not enthusiastically adhere to (namely, Local Law 41). It had never occurred to me that the Department of Education had mandated sustainable action, since it was obvious that my high school — and I'm sure many others — lacked in this area. For this reason, I am trying to have an environmentally passionate teacher become LaGuardia's Sustainability Coordinator, as required by Local Law 41. Therefore, I have been working with several individuals to catalyze a change, both inside and outside the school. For example, I've

been working with an organization called Cafeteria Culture, which aims to reduce waste in public school cafeterias while boosting the effectiveness of recycling and composting. The obstacle here is ensuring proper communication between the student body, the administrative faculty, the teachers, and the custodial staff. A common misconception is that the custodians mix recycling with trash and composting in one big bag. Therefore, students say, "Why bother placing things in the appropriate bins?" Students don't do it because they think janitors don't do it. Janitors can't do it unless students do it. The issue here is communication. Another issue in my action plan is making sustainability a priority for the high school administration, because quite frankly the majority of the administration could care less. I'm also in contact with an organic chef who specializes in food management services, sustainability, and wellness, on supplementing the disgusting cafeteria lunches provided by the SchoolFood organization (which is supplied by Tyson Foods, notorious for antibiotic use, animal abuse, and opposition to the organic movement) with healthier, nutritious options. To do so, I have proposed a hydroponics program for which students would grow fresh, organic produce to supplement cafeteria food. The students themselves will be involved with growing this food as an extracurricular activity, allowing them to become more "in touch" with their food. This opportunity will allow students to engage hands-on with the growing process, and become educated on the principles of hydroponics, urban agriculture, community organizing, and food science. Hydroponics is the system of growing organic produce without the need for sunlight or soil. Water enriched with nutrients will cycle through a pneumatic system of tubes and hydrate the crops, and special lights will illuminate the garden and allow for photosynthesis. The process will be sustainable, communal, and educational. Ideally, if my school's administration allows it, we could construct a Green Roof, which would essentially utilize LaGuardia's spacious rooftop for agricultural purposes while lowering carbon emissions and subsequently reducing heat within the building. Supplementary to the hydroponics, we would host a Community-Supported Agriculture garden on top to provide fresh, student-grown food for the cafeteria. Unfortunately, it is all an issue of budgeting and custodial

permission. It's also an issue to see if the Dept. of Education would allow food to be supplied by means other than the SchoolFood Corporation. The long-term goal of these initiatives would be to embody a practical change that other high schools, and eventually perhaps the entire Dept. of Education, would strive to emulate. This way, not only would the LaGuardia community become more environmentally conscious and lead by example, but also the entire city of New York would strive to mimic these standards. I plan to present my action plan at a PTA meeting this fall. You can find the rough draft of my action plan here:

[https://www.icloud.com/iw/#keynote/BAI5hHXMc1bUUHmUnkWBGKI8F2IFC5bimH-F/School\\_Sustainability](https://www.icloud.com/iw/#keynote/BAI5hHXMc1bUUHmUnkWBGKI8F2IFC5bimH-F/School_Sustainability)

I had previously written an article about my fantastic experience at the Brown Environmental Leadership Lab, which can be found here: <https://www.teenlife.com/blogs/articles/summer-program-promoting-sustainability>. There, I wrote about the skills that I have learned from BELL and have applied to my action plan: simply put, I left the program as a true environmental activist. It's apparent that the community we created at BELL became a family that would stay in touch by sharing ideas and working together to better our planet. I have no doubt that this program helped us all become leaders for our generation, and agents of social change to promote what's most beneficial for everyone—protecting our environment. The two most important ideas that I took away from this program are (1) our environment is beautiful, yet exhaustible and thus it is our responsibility to actively sustain it NOW, and (2) every being on this planet is a natural leader in his or her own right, and the most incredible skill is to be able to see the leader in each individual. I've surely grown as a leader from the skills I've learned at BELL, and I've become better aware of my strengths and weaknesses as a leader by working on my action plan. I would encourage others to remain optimistic with their action plans and inspire others while subsequently becoming inspired themselves.