

Earth Charter School Seal Case Study

Designing the world of tomorrow: Warburg Secondary School Leads the Way by **Building the First Earth Charter School in Germany**

by Mareva Dijoux and Alicia Jimenez

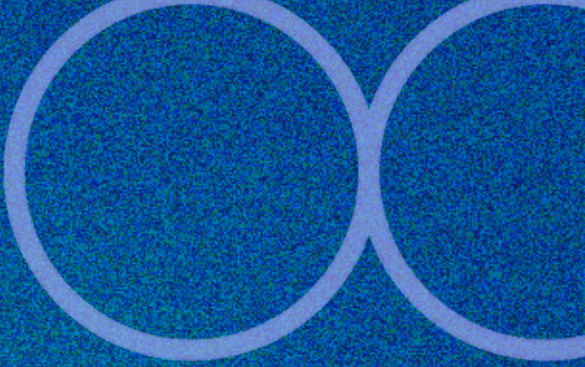


UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter



University
for Peace

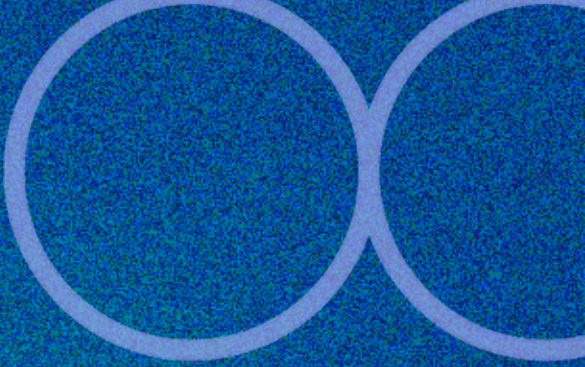




“Sustainable development is the peace
policy of the future.”

Dr. Klaus Töpfer





The ECSS for Sustainable Development Education

In response to our rapidly changing climate and the urgent need to address and change humans' current unsustainable relationship to the Earth, the United Nations created Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Under SDG 4.7, this goal specifies that by 2030, all students should acquire knowledge about sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, climate change, human rights, equality, peace, and global citizenship.

To help promote education for sustainable development, and to reach this goal, Earth Charter International developed the Earth & ESD School Seal [ECSS]. This pioneering quality seal school assessment integrates an ethical perspective of sustainability with the pedagogical elements and practices associated with education for sustainable development.

The ECSS can be used for assessment to recognize outstanding schools in sustainable development education, or as a framework for improvement to encourage schools to bolster these aspects of their curriculums.



School Profile

Name: Erd-Charta-Schule Städt. Sekundarschule- Warburg mit Teilstandort Borgentreich

Location: Warburg, Germany

School type: Public

School level: Secondary

Number of Students: 798

Number of Teachers: 100

Prior engagement in sustainable initiatives: Certificate “Schule ohne Rassismus – Schule mit Courage” obtained in 2023. This certificate is awarded to schools that focus on projects supporting democracy and the fight against racism.

Prior Engagement with the Earth Charter: Yes

THE LAUNCH OF THE WARBURG SCHOOL INNOVATIVE PROJECT

The Warburg Secondary School, with campus locations in both Warburg and Borgentreich, established its relatively new institution by posing the question “How can we design schools differently?” Guided by this inquiry and the principles of the Earth Charter, the school has developed frameworks to enhance the integration of the Earth Charter and social competencies, including democratic education. By aiming to broaden and deepen the understanding of education and learning, the school distinctly differentiates itself through the structures it has implemented and its initiatives to transform Warburg into an Earth Charter city. Consequently, it serves as a model for other educational institutions by illustrating the potential for action and development within the German educational system.



PREVIOUS INVOLVEMENT AND DEEP INSPIRATION FROM THE EARTH CHARTER



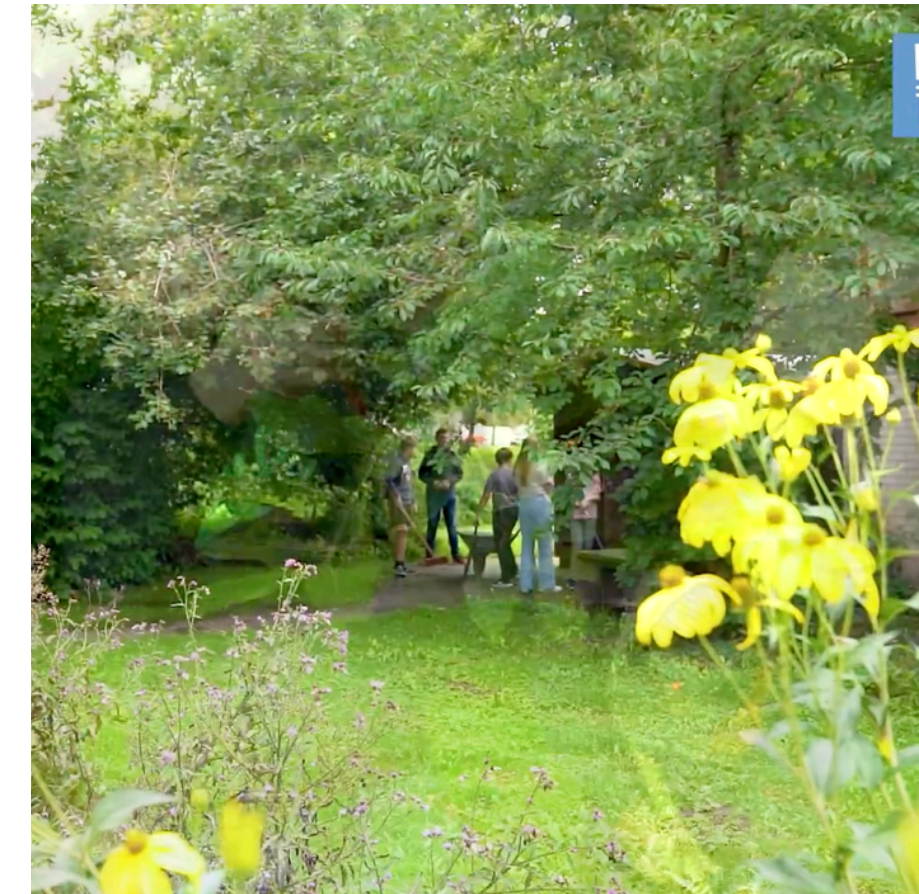
Warburg's first involvement with the Earth Charter began twelve years ago, at the suggestion of one of the school's members, when the Earth Charter became the subject of a week-long school-wide project. With the founding of the Secondary school in 2013, the Earth Charter principles were established as binding guidelines for the entire school. Following this important milestone, structures were then created to make the Earth Charter a moral compass at various levels of school life. For example, the curriculum specifies how references to the Earth Charter should be made consistently and in a wide range of subjects. In addition, a two-period Earth Charter elective subject was introduced for students in Year 8, which they can choose to take for one school year. Every three years, project days based on the guiding principles of the Earth Charter are held with the whole school community. Some age groups also have project days focused on the Earth Charter both at the beginning and the end of the school year.

STANDOUT PROGRAMS AT SEKUNDARSCHULE WARBURG

The Warburg School integrates numerous policies and practices that work to promote Earth Charter values within its educational framework. For example, each class holds a class council meeting once a week. All matters concerning the class are discussed during the meeting, be it conflicts that need to be resolved or projects that require planning. This initiative led by the pupils fosters strong connections within the community, democratic education, as well as self-organization skills. This is an important factor in the effort provided to educate on democracy, non-violence and peace.

In the Earth Charter subject, designed to be action-oriented, tree planting campaigns are carried out, ornithology is practiced, and campaigns on topics such as “School without Racism and with Courage” are integrated into learning processes. Career Orientation Days in Year 8 are also implemented, each of them corresponding to one guiding principle of the Earth Charter.

Numerous green spaces are actively incorporated into lessons, alongside a significant contribution to biodiversity, as well as an on-campus beehive. Safe retreat and recreation areas are available for both students and teachers, and the natural environment is thoughtfully integrated into school grounds. Additionally, every Monday, a group of pupils work on a nearby youth farm that promotes sustainability and environmental care. Through this activity, they gain a valuable hands-on experience by working with the earth and the animals on the farm. Meanwhile, another group of pupils gathers to prepare a healthy meal every Monday for all their peers in the fifth and sixth grades, thus gaining knowledge in cooking and contributing to sustaining a healthy and nourishing diet for all.





Another major initiative planned for this year is the introduction of Earth Charter mottos, each based on one of the Charter's four pillars and implemented on a quarterly basis. The aim is to encourage students to engage with these values and reflect on how they can apply them in their personal lives. This project came about during the school's semi-annual conference, which brought together staff members, students, and parents. The first motto is: "Wir wachsen zusammen" ["We grow together"]. There is great anticipation within the school community to observe how the project develops and what new ideas emerge from it.

THE ECSS PROCESS AT SEKUNDARSCHULE WARBURG



The Warburg School decided to obtain the official school seal because they wanted to be named "Erd Charta Schule" ["Earth Charter School"] in order to make their association with the Earth Charter clear to the outside world. The ECSS was therefore necessary for this name change.

A unique aspect about the ECSS process for this school was the diversity of their committee during the evidence-gathering process. The committee itself included not only teachers, but also students, parents, other school staff such as janitors and administrators, as well as the town's mayor. Witnessing this process was incredibly helpful and eye-opening because the variety of voices and views present to discuss different aspects of school life added to the wealth of information the committee was able to gather. This also helped all participants understand a multitude of perspectives on the strengths of the school, and what efforts were falling through the cracks.

Some challenges the participants said they faced during the process was that they felt they were “blind” to their own systems, which made it hard for them take a step back and evaluate their institution from an outside perspective. For example, students dedicate an hour each week talking about their feelings and reflections on the world, using current events as a way to process their emotions and build connections rooted in care. They didn't know this was a unique initiative and didn't count it as part of the process at first. The EC & ESD process also made them realize that they had never considered asking questions like: “What kind of copy paper is being ordered?”, “Which cleaning agents are being used?”, “What type of energy supplies the school?”, or “Which tablets does the school typically purchase?” Today, these elements are being reevaluated and answered thoroughly.



REFLECTIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND GOALS GOING FORWARD

Looking back on the process, the Warburg School felt a great sense of excitement in receiving the seal and was grateful about how the assessment process helped them better understand their own practices. Moving forward, it is clear the school is planning on improving their institution as a whole and ensure all their new ideas on how to best align with the Earth Charter are being implemented effectively and carefully. One area of improvement suggested in the assessment was the need to make clearer connections between the mission and projects of the school and the Earth Charter within their institution, which will be their next focus while also making every step more transparent and inclusive towards all students. Their aim is to meet each student's needs and work harder to involve more of them in the various Earth Charter projects of the school, meanwhile addressing a theory-practice gap they discovered during the evaluation process. They also are also working on introducing new themes based on a specific Earth Charter principle for each quarter of the school year, thereby setting a specific intention for every quarter to give students the opportunity to reflect deeper on each principle and integrate them into their daily lives.

When asked about their reflections on the process, the committee shared: "At the end, everyone involved is delighted that we have been awarded the school seal with the highest rating. We see this as confirmation of our work and as an incentive for further steps. For example, we are considering offering the Earth Charter profile subject as an optional subject for Year 9 or 10. In October, we will celebrate by planting a tree as a sign of our hope for many more opportunities to live, learn and celebrate together at school practically with head, heart and hand in the spirit of the Earth Charter."



Would you like to elevate sustainability and transform your school into a place where **SUSTAINABILITY** and **ETHICAL VALUES** matter?

Visit our webpage earthcharter.org for more information or contact us directly at info@earthcharter.org

Want to learn more about this inspiring school? [Check out this video.](#)

This video and other associated materials can be found in the [Erd Charta Germany website.](#)