

An interview with Kirsten Brashares, co-founder of *Wellness in the Schools*- a non-profit organization that promotes children's environmental health, nutrition and fitness within the New York City public schools.

Q: Tell us about *Wellness in the Schools* and your philosophy.

Brashares: Wellness in the Schools is a parent-run 501c3 involved in children's environmental health, nutrition and fitness in the NYC public schools. Our goal is to create healthier schools for all of NYC's 1.1 million public school students through preventive health initiatives.

Q: How would you attempt to implement more sustainable programs in existing Schools?

Brashares: One of our projects is a bio-based green cleaning initiative called *Clean, Green Schools* that we are running in partnership with Grassroots Environmental Education. The use of bio-based green cleaners versus petroleum-based conventional cleaners is one way schools could become more sustainable. By switching to bio-based green cleaners we will create not only healthier indoor air quality for our schoolchildren, but also prevent approximately 500,000 pounds of toxic chemicals from being released into NYC's environment.

We are working with West Harlem Environmental Action (WEACT) to add filters to school buses in order to improve their indoor air. In addition, we are trying to help schools and parents connect with their local farmer's markets and farms in order to take advantage of local and sustainable food.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for those (parents/teachers/students) who might want to start to implement more sustainable practices in their schools?

Brashares: NYC public school parents can visit our website at www.wellnessintheschools.org or call us at 646-536-9497 for practical ways to implement some of these initiatives in their schools. For example, parents can visit our website to download a flyer for their school's custodians which has all the bio-based cleaners now available.

If parents are concerned about the indoor air quality on school buses, they should go to www.weact.org/schoolbus for information on how to get involved. WITS can help facilitate Wellness Councils in public schools where parents connect with their school's administrators and other parents to develop wellness-related sustainable practices.