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## FRENCH SCHOOLS PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY

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- **New curricula incorporating sustainable development have been initiated.**
- **Training programs for teachers and management have been launched on the topic.**
- **Students across elementary, middle and high schools, as well as technical and vocational schools have put sustainability projects in motion.**
- **Sustainable-development education will irrigate the entire French educational system by 2020.**

From November 30 to December 11, 2015, France is hosting the UN conference on climate change called Paris Climate 2015 or COP21. This occasion offers the French educational community the opportunity to focus on the themes of sustainable development and climate change, on which French schools have been working for several months now.

“Because education for sustainable development is one of the missions of French Schools, we wanted the entire educational community to engage with its partners in an educational approach to sustainable development” said French Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, “especially in the school year 2015-2016, when COP21 will be held in France.”

This policy goes with a strong partnership with the ministry for ecology, sustainable development and energy, with a strong coordination with its minister Segolene Royal.

“With 12.3 million students and 840,000 teachers, French schools have enormous potential to change behavior, meet the challenges posed by climate change and form a citizenship that is respectful of the environment.” she continued.

Sustainability initiatives include generalized programs to initiate and strengthen teaching on issues of sustainable development, as well as those more specifically geared toward the COP21 event. The following are just a selection.

## Generalized Educational Initiatives

The Ministry's ultimate goal is to integrate education on sustainable development into the entire educational system by 2020. Toward this end, new curricula have already begun to be put into place, as well as initial and continuing training programs for teachers and management. New educational resources have been created.

Students at all levels — elementary, middle and high schools, as well as technical and vocational schools — have begun working on sustainability projects. Many projects take advantage of the Ministry's active policy of partnership with international institutions, such as UNESCO, and also with government services, community associations, public institutions, research centers and businesses.

Among the initiatives that started this year is the appointment of eco-delegates in all secondary schools. Given the effectiveness of peer training, these class representatives specialized in sustainable development will have to sensitize their peers and to suggest initiatives to their head of school.

In primary schools, teaching tools have been made available to help them develop “natural corners” (educational gardens, insect hotels, ponds, etc.).

## First-ever Climate Week

The first Climate Week, from October 5 to 10, tackled the scientific and civic issues associated with climate change at the local school level. A number of programs, in cooperation with school partners, were undertaken on the subject of the mitigation and adaptation to climate change. These have included simulations of international negotiations.

## Simulated International Climate Negotiations

To understand the complex interplay of actors involved in climate negotiations, French secondary, technical and vocational-school students participated in simulated international negotiations.

By participating in this exercise, students learned:

- to promote their positions through the formulation of arguments,
- to understand intercultural issues,
- to become a citizen through participation in exchanges between actors with divergent interests,
- to understand the complex environmental, economic and social issues at stake.

## Programs With Partners

The Ministry organized several initiatives in cooperation with partners linked to the COP21 event. These included the “[Climate Train](#)” with the SNCF, the French national train system, and “[Operation #maplanète2050](#)” with the radio station France Info, as well as discussions with Luc Jacquet, director of the film “[La Glace et le ciel](#)” (“Ice and Sky”) and its team.

## During COP21

During COP21, a great number of elementary, middle and high schools will implement numerous initiatives about sustainable development and the mitigation of climate change.

On December 4, a "thematic day," is organized by the French Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. It is the first time in COP history that Education ministers will discuss strengthening sustainable-development education in connection with the fight against climate change. The conference will feature speeches by Rachid Belmokhtar, Morocco's Minister of Education (the country which will organize COP 22), and Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO. Round tables, on "States and best practices regarding sustainable development education" and "Partners of educational systems, actors in the drive toward sustainable development," will feature a varied range of participants.

The closing of the conference will spotlight five young people from different European countries reading a text on climate change.

*Note: Due to the terrorist attacks of November 13, all school outings to COP21 have been canceled.*

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