

## Ten Minute T(ea) with Ms. Becca Malloy

*Interview conducted by Natalia Dorogi  
January 31, 2017*

Q) What is the concept of lights out?

A) Lights out means an ending. "Lights out" means that something that provided comfort and continuity has stopped. In a literal sense, it means that you've moved from visual clarity to darkness. That brings some discomfort, risk, fear, unpredictability. And with the Green Cup Challenge starting this month, it means literally turning off electric lights. We talk a lot about "disruptive" technology or innovation these days. I hope that the literal "lights out" of the Green Cup Challenge doesn't make people so uncomfortable that they feel frustrated, but pushes us think creatively and develop some disruptive ideas about how to keep our campuses productive and comfortable without relying on the electricity we get from fossil fuels. It means let's turn off the lights on the old paradigm of consume, consume, consume, and let's turn ON the lights of creativity, sustainability, and renewables.

Q) You are very passionate about sustainability. What experiences influenced you to get involved in it?

A) I grew up by the ocean, and my best childhood memories are of playing in the tidal flats with crabs, algae, and periwinkle snails. That whole system was so complex, but the magic of it was in the complexity. As I grew up, I found inspiration in the complexity of systems and especially how that complexity created balance. In college, as I was looking for summer jobs, one of my dear friends pushed me way outside of my comfort zone as a young introvert and encouraged me to begin canvassing for environmental clubs. I was really resistant because it was so far outside of my comfort zone. But I tried it, and that was the biggest moment of personal growth that I've experienced in my life. By knocking on doors and connecting with people and hearing their stories, really listening to their stories, I learned about the lifeblood of communities in a way that I've never forgotten, and I still feel deeply connected to the communities that I canvassed in twenty years ago. That helped me to understand how social complexity, environmental complexity, economic complexity builds balance, and how we as individuals really thrive the more complex that community is.

Q) How does NMH participate in sustainability in terms of events? What about on a daily basis?

A) When we're talking about sustainability at NMH, we're balancing social, environmental and economic sustainability, and so that gets at the root of everything that we do. But if we're focused on an explicit statement about sustainability, NMH has a bunch of events that happen every year. Sophomores during their orientation learn the definition of sustainability then run around campus taking group selfies with the resources that sustain us, to win a prize of NMH farm ice cream. In

February, we participate in the Green Cup Challenge to reduce our carbon footprint by encouraging sustainable behaviors to cut down on electricity use. In May, we host the NMH Farmers' Market Teach-In, where all of our classes use food systems as the lens for the day's material, and an educational farmers' market in the center of campus is a platform for lots of experiential lessons. Every other Tuesday, we have a "brown bag lunch" session called NMH2050 where everyone is invited to join together in a themed conversation about the sustainable future of our school. We have a Green Events certification process, so that any event held on campus can be certified as "green" if they follow sustainable guidelines. On a daily basis, there is an ongoing, open dialogue about ways we can be better. We converted from fuel oil in our steam power plant to veggie oil about a year and a half ago, and our carbon footprint has dropped dramatically. Our farm and our sustainably-managed forests are important carbon reservoirs. New buildings are all built to super-efficient standards. We're beginning to compost paper towels in school buildings, and all of our dining hall food waste is composted. Our dining hall is Green Restaurant certified, and we're hoping to participate in the Real Food Challenge in the future. And the list goes on!

Q) What is NMH's history with the Green Cup Challenge?

A) In 2016, I was at a conference with folks from Exeter and Lawrenceville. Exeter had had a dorm competition to reduce electricity and mentioned that they wanted to compete with another school. I ran up and threw down the gauntlet, challenging them on the spot. We all came together to build the Green Cup Challenge, and as it grew, it became too much for us to run organically, so the Green Schools Alliance offered to take over, and they've done a wonderful job of growing the event and its impacts over the years. It becomes harder and harder for each school to reduce year after year, and so we've moved the event out of the spotlight over the past few years, but this year, there's a renewed interest, and so we hosted a gathering of students from a few schools last week and are excited about the rallying energy from our students this year. The whole point of the Challenge is to magnify individuals' efforts by compiling data, and so we can see how one light turned off in each room in each dorm on each campus translates into tons of carbon dioxide that we prevented from being emitted.

Q) Why do you think is important to get others engaged?

A) That is a loaded and really important question right now with our new administration. Over the past decade or two, the US economy has shifted away from manufacturing to a more service-based economy. There's a neat animated map of that at the Bureau of Labor Statistics ([https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2014/ted\\_20140728.htm](https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2014/ted_20140728.htm)). There are lots of reasons for that change, one of which was that our patterns of consumption were not sustainable. The new administration is focusing on reinvigorating manufacturing in the US (which was largely replaced by automation), and drop support for the services economy. We are a human system here in the US, and complexity is key to our resilience. Consumption is not going to bring us to a golden future; instead, we need to work together to foster disruptive innovation like biomimicry and cradle-to-

cradle design. If support for that progress is not coming from Washington, we need to find ways at the state, business and community level to maintain forward momentum and social, economic and, importantly, environmental balance in our complex system.

*Ms. Becca Malloy is a biology teacher and the Sustainability Director at NMH. She has helped NMH develop as a role model in the sustainability world, and she helped found the Green Cup Challenge, a nation-wide school competition to conserve energy.*