



## **Purpose**

The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) recognition award honors schools that are exemplary in reducing environmental impact and costs; improving the health and wellness of students and staff; and providing effective environmental and sustainability education, which incorporates STEM, civic skills and green career pathways. The recognition award is part of a larger U.S. Department of Education (ED) effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about practices that are proven to result in improved student engagement, higher academic achievement and graduation rates, and workforce preparedness, as well as a government wide goal of increasing energy independence and economic security.

As part of this effort, ED aims to:

- Facilitate the dissemination of best practices and standards regarding energy efficient, cost effective, healthy, and environmentally sustainable schools and educational programs among states, tribes, districts, and schools; and
- Encourage the coordination of efforts among the public sector (at federal, state and local levels), the for-profit and non-profit sectors, and schools.

Annually, ED recognizes schools and districts creating efficient, sustainable, and healthy school environments, and ensuring the environmental and sustainability literacy of graduates.

## **Vision**

A primary goal of ED-GRS is to inspire schools to strive for 21<sup>st</sup> century excellence. To that end, the award recognizes schools that:

- 1) Reduce environmental impact and costs;
- 2) Improve the health and wellness of schools, students and staff; and
- 3) Provide effective environmental and sustainability literacy, incorporating STEM, civic skills and green career pathways.

Combined achievement in these three areas, collectively known as "Pillars," serves as the basis for recognition. Each Pillar is divided into Elements, which provide further guidance on each of the three main areas. This recognition award aligns with the Department's cross-cutting goals for education, including improving student, staff, and facility performance as well as efficiency at the federal, state, and local levels.

Encouraging efficient schools allows administrators to dedicate more resources to education rather than utility costs. Healthy schools and good wellness practices ensure that all students learn in an environment conducive to achieving their full potential, free of the health disparities that can aggravate achievement gaps. Environmental and sustainability education helps all



students engage in hands on learning, hone critical thinking skills and develop a solid foundation in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

## **Scope**

ED-GRS began in 2011-2012, recognizing 78 schools at the inaugural ED-GRS ceremony in June 2012. In addition to schools, in the 2012-2013 year, ED may also recognize approximately five high performing multi-school serving districts for the pilot District Sustainability Award.<sup>1</sup>

## **Eligibility**

The Secretary of Education invites Chief State School Officers (CSSOs), including chiefs of D.C. and Puerto Rico, as well as the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) (“the Authorities”) to nominate schools that they have evaluated as meeting the criteria for recognition. The authorities must confirm that the schools meet the minimum requirements established by the ED under the Program Requirements section of this document. They must describe any other criteria used to select the schools as nominees. The authorities may wish to develop or refine existing green school recognition programs, and/or run an award within their jurisdictions in order to present nominees to the Department, but are not required to select their nominees by a competition.

Each authority is permitted as many as four nominations. If a state or comparable authority wishes to nominate more than one public school, at least one must be a school with at least 40 percent of their students from a disadvantaged background.<sup>2</sup> If an authority wishes to nominate a fourth school, it must be a private school. No more than one of the four may be a private school. A school may be selected as honoree only once every three years. Authorities are encouraged to take a school’s academic achievement, achievement gaps and diversity into account when selecting school honorees.

**District Sustainability Award:** In addition to their school nominations, each authority may recommend one multi-school serving district for its exemplary comprehensive high achievement in all three Pillars. Nominating authorities should document how the district nominee is comprehensively high performing in all Pillars and Elements. Authorities may adapt the Framework, sample application or committee review used to select individual schools in their evaluation of districts.

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<sup>1</sup> The Department is not bound by the approximation of schools to be recognized in these criteria.

<sup>2</sup> A student from a “disadvantaged background” is defined for this program by the CSSO of each state. The definition *must* include students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals and *may* include students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient, migrant, or receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Nominating Authorities must indicate the definition used and the percent disadvantaged for each school nominated.



## **Program Requirements**

State education authorities must submit evaluation of nominees in the Pillars and Elements, listed below. They are encouraged to use the practices suggested in the Framework for Evaluation of Schools (Framework). Nominating authorities, district officials and principals must certify compliance with all applicable civil rights, health, environment and safety statutory and regulatory requirements.

Nominating Authorities may wish to engage the collaboration of state health, environmental, and safety authorities; non-profit experts in these areas; and federal agency field offices with appropriate technical expertise. In addition to providing valuable subject matter expertise, these partners can make the task of selecting nominees to the Department less cumbersome.

Once schools are selected by Nominating Authorities and presented, ED, assisted by the Environmental Protection Agency, will conduct final review to ensure that schools: 1) meet all of the eligibility requirements; 2) comply with all applicable federal civil rights and federal, state, local and tribal health, environment and safety statutory and regulatory requirements; and 3) meet high college- and career-ready academic standards.<sup>3</sup>

This federal review will select the honorees. Authorities must, at a minimum, include documentation of high performance in all Pillars and Elements, as well as the health, safety, and environmental statutory and regulatory compliance of nominated schools. They are encouraged, but not required, to conduct on-site verification of compliance matters as well.

## **Review Criteria Used by the Authorities to Select Nominees:**

Each authority is invited to nominate the four schools and district that they assess to be the highest performing in their jurisdiction, based on the authorities' evaluation of schools achievement in the Pillars and Elements. Nominees demonstrating comprehensive exemplary achievement in all Pillars and every Element will be ranked highest. Nominating Authorities are encouraged to use the Framework of standards and the sample application template provided by the Department to assist them in evaluating nominees. However, these sample documents are not required and may be adapted by Nominating Authorities.

## **Green Ribbon Schools Pillars and Elements**

### **I. Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs**

- Reduced or eliminated greenhouse gas emissions, using an energy audit or emissions inventory and reduction plan, cost-effective energy efficiency improvements, conservation measures, and/or on-site renewable energy and/or purchase of green power;

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<sup>3</sup> For more on college and career-ready standards, see:  
[http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/publication\\_pg4.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/publication_pg4.html)



- Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation;
- Reduced solid and hazardous waste production through increased recycling, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste; and
- Expanded use of alternative transportation, through active promotion of locally-available, energy-efficient options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies.

## **II. Improved Health and Wellness**

- An integrated school environmental health program based on an operations and facility-wide environmental management system that considers student, visitor and staff health and safety in all practices related to design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of schools and grounds; and
- High standards of nutrition, fitness, and quantity of quality outdoor time<sup>4</sup> for both students and staff.

## **III. Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education**

- Interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy and human systems;
- Use of the environment and sustainability to develop STEM content knowledge and thinking skills to prepare graduates for the 21st century technology-driven economy; and
- Development of civic engagement knowledge and skills, and students' application of these to address sustainability and environmental issues in their community.

## **Technical Assistance**

ED-GRS provides technical assistance to schools and states, including: 1) a clearinghouse of resources on green schools and 2) a Framework and sample application for evaluation of nominees; and 3) ongoing communications with states, non-profits and federal agencies to facilitate the dissemination of best practices.

## **Notification, Recognition Ceremony and Benefits**

Honored schools are announced each year on Earth Day and are recognized at an annual ceremony held in Washington, D.C. during the first week of June. At this time, the recognition award conveys no ED funding to states, schools, or districts; however, ED-Green Ribbon Schools and those working to achieve the recognition award's aims may find raising financial and technical support to their green schools efforts a little easier.

## **Statutory Authority**

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<sup>4</sup> Local prevailing weather conditions over the course of the school year will be considered in assessing this element to account for regional variability.



The Department is responsible for administering U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. ED-GRS is authorized by Section 5411(b)(5) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (20 U.S.C. § 7243(b)(5)).