



The Director's Award

The Director's Award recognizes state education authorities' efforts to administer U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS). Annually, the ED-GRS Director's Award goes to the state education official who does the most to advance sustainable education in his or her state, by such means as:

- Running a robust nomination process, including extensive outreach to early learning centers, schools, districts, and/or postsecondary institutions, support to nominees, and detailed consideration to all three Pillars in concise and well-documented nomination packages;
- Connecting more early learning centers, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions to sustainability resources in all three Pillars;
- Amplifying the stories of their honorees through online, social media, and in-person fora;
- Helping schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions connect to and learn from one another;
- Partnering with a variety of state and private sector entities, both non- and for-profit, to bring more resources and expertise into early learning centers, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions; and
- Exhibiting a dedication to exceptional school facilities, health, and sustainability education through activities outside of the administration of the ED-GRS award, such as participation in professional development, conferences, and/or organizational work.

The ED-Green Ribbon Schools Director will annually present the ED-GRS Director's Award at the ceremony, considering input from states and non-profit organizations. Any state education official who is involved in implementing the ED-GRS award and has not yet received the Director's Award is eligible for nomination. *If you wish to nominate a state education official, please send your nomination and justification to ed.green.ribbon.schools@ed.gov.*

Honorees and some of their achievements include:

2024: George Garcia, Education Program Consultant, California Department of Education

- Effectively manages a three-tiered state award with bronze, silver, and gold levels to recognize California Green Ribbon Schools (CA-GRS) at multiple levels of achievement.
- Sustains a vigorous nomination process, including a multi-agency and sector review and thoughtful personal attention to each applicant.
- Created the Achievers and Applicants Network for CA-GRS to unite past, present, and potential participants in a cooperative learning environment.
- Oversaw a three-day, 400-mile Green Strides Tour across Northern and Central California in September 2023 that involved hundreds of participants, ten schools, and five counties.
- Works to build partnerships among state government, non-profit organizations, and schools to develop and improve resources and funding opportunities.





2023: Alexandria Roe, Vice President for Capital Planning and Budget, University of Wisconsin System

- Established a statewide postsecondary nominating committee and hired a systemwide sustainability coordinator.
- Runs a robust competition with a clear application process and extensive outreach to all institutions in the state, regardless of affiliation.
- Effectively communicates the opportunity to campus leadership and encourages them to engage in the higher education sustainability conversation with experts across their own campuses.
- Through her enthusiasm for the award, she generated friendly sustainability competition – and collaboration – amongst University of Wisconsin campuses and led to the most postsecondary honorees of any state.

2022: Jon Long, Architect, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

- Supports and coaches applicants on how to put their best foot forward.
- Offers applicants flexibility and feedback on their efforts.
- Hosted the successful 2021 Green Strides Tour, despite pandemic circumstances.
- Looks for opportunities to promote the award at conferences, meetings, and presentations.
- Engages his whole agency in sustainable school efforts.

2021: Joseph DaSilva, School Construction Coordinator, Manuel Cordero, Assistant School Construction Coordinator, and Mario Carreno, School Construction Finance Specialist, Rhode Island Department of Education

- Established a home for ED-GRS shortly after the inception of the program.
- Hosted an ambitious “Education Built to Last” facilities-themed Green Strides Tour in 2013.
- Engaged stakeholders from various agencies and sectors to share sustainable best practices, select ED-GRS nominees, and celebrate honored institutions.
- Worked to cultivate applicants by linking a facilities grant program to green schools work, encouraging not only exemplary facilities practices, but also efforts to improve environmental literacy and wellness.

2020: Elizabeth Schmitz, Environmental and Sustainability Education Program Supervisor, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (WA and previously KY)

- Hosted the Green Strides Tour in KY and WA, in 2014 and 2019, respectively.
- Spearheaded outreach to underserved school populations.
- Worked to streamline applications for ED-GRS.
- Engaged stakeholders from peer state agencies and non- and for- profit private sectors in order to share sustainable best practices, select ED-GRS nominees, and celebrate honored institutions.





- Participated in and presented at numerous conferences promoting the award and environmental education, including the North American Association for Environmental Education and the Green Schools Conference and Expo.

2019: John Olson, Science Content Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education

- Hosted the 2014 Green Strides Tour.
- Successfully engaged postsecondary counterparts in 2015, becoming the only state to nominate a full six institutions of a possible six in the first year of the postsecondary award.
- Developed a detailed plan to sustain his efforts during a Peace Corps leave of absence in early 2016.
- Engaged stakeholders from peer state agencies, non- and for- profit private sectors, and the higher education community in order to share sustainable best practices, select ED-GRS nominees, and celebrate honored institutions.

2018: Penny Taylor, Director, Office of Healthy Schools, Florida Department of Education

- Hosted the 2014 Green Strides Tour.
- Provided feedback and mentoring to schools and districts so that they might improve for re-application.
- Worked to simplify the Florida application process.
- Participated in professional gatherings related to school health, environment, and sustainability.
- Partnered with numerous inter- and intra- agency entities.
- Devised a Memorandum of Understanding among state agencies and a non-profit that established the Florida Green School Network, helping to create a pipeline of nominees for ED-GRS recognition and to support the green school movement in the state.

2017: Keisha Ford-Jenrette, Program Manager, Georgia Department of Education

- Hosted the 2017 Green Strides Tour.
- Fostered collaboration among many government, non-profits, and for-profit partners, and schools.
- Supported schools and districts in the process of applying, including providing feedback and mentoring so that they could improve for re-application.
- Worked with Captain Planet Foundation to offer a significant cash award to honorees.
- Collaborated with the lieutenant governor's office for state recognition festivities, releases, and citations each year and developed a state-level honorable mention to broaden recognition and reward promising efforts.

2016: Bernard Piaia, Director, Office of School Facilities, New Jersey Department of Education

- Hosted the 2013 Green Strides Tour.
- Developed mechanisms to use honorees to incentivize more schools to apply for ED-GRS.





- Built lasting partnerships with the New Jersey Department of the Environment, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New Jersey Building and Grounds Association, School Boards Association, and the EIRC, among others.
- Encouraged postsecondary counterparts to nominate.
- Sought new ways to improve the process each subsequent year.
- Mentors other states.

2015: Lynn Bamberly, Director of Competitive Grants and Awards, Colorado Department of Education

- Hosted the Green Strides Tour in 2014.
- Continually improved the Colorado application process.
- Ensured comprehensive nomination packages from school, district, and postsecondary nominees.
- Effectively worked with partners and sponsors, creating mechanisms for mentoring applicants with the assistance of both past honorees and private sector.
- Successfully fundraised for both honorees' travel to ceremony and Green Strides Best Practices Tour.
- Worked with postsecondary counterparts to oversee nomination for the postsecondary award.

2014: Lesley Taylor, Consultant, Facilities Planning, California Department of Education

- Hosted the 2013 Green Strides Tour
- Developed an online application, a feedback scorecard to applicants, and a California Green Ribbon Schools program..
- Offered helpful contributions on all-state calls.
- Provided a model submission format to ED to use as a template.
- Participated in Green Schools National and Green California Schools conferences.
- Proactively recruited schools, hosting webinars, revamping the California Department of Education Green Ribbon pages, conducting social media outreach, and coordinating with an array of partners.

2013: Victoria Rydberg, Environmental Education Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

- Revamped Wisconsin Green and Healthy Schools, enrolling hundreds of Wisconsin schools in this pathway to ED-GRS.
- Hosted the 2013 Green Strides Tour.
- Provided a model submission format to ED.
- Served as a member of the Green Schools National Network Advisory Council.
- Developed a website that shares the practices of each Wisconsin Green and Healthy School.





2012: Gilda Wheeler, Program Supervisor, Sustainability and Science, WA Office of Public Instruction

- Pioneered a multi-state, multi-sector committee structure and online application and scoring process in the pilot year of ED-GRS.
- Effectively participated on numerous all-state calls to help define the program and how it would become a tool to encourage collaboration among state education officials and their partners.
- Participated in the 2012 Green Schools National Conference.
- Worked to develop a Washington Green School and District award and recognition events.
- Hosted the 2013 Green Strides Tour.
- Developed an application format that has served as a template for states.

