

# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY NOTES



## Framework for a Sustainable School

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) worked with experts and leaders in the green schools movement to reach a critical milestone: publishing and adopting a holistic framework for green schools that encompasses environmental impacts, health, and learning. With the advent of [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](#) (ED-GRS), ED enumerated that green, or sustainable, schools strive toward the following three pillars: 1) Reduced environmental impacts and costs; 2) Improved health and wellness; and 3) Effective environmental and sustainability education.<sup>1</sup>

## Examples of School Sustainability Actions

The following ED-GRS award pillars can be used to organize school sustainability actions and can include many different efforts, such as:

Pillar I: Reduced Environmental Impacts and Costs	Pillar II: Improved Health and Wellness	Pillar III: Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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;</li> <li>Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation;</li> <li>Reduced solid and hazardous waste production through increased recycling, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste; and</li> <li>Expanded use of alternative transportation, through active promotion of locally available, energy-efficient, and renewable energy options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High standards of <u>Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Health</u>, including health, nutrition, and outdoor physical education; health, counseling, and psychological services for both students and staff; family community involvement; and</li> <li>An <u>integrated school environmental health program</u> that considers occupant health and safety in all design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of facilities and grounds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy, and human systems;</li> <li>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</li> <li>Development and application of students' civic engagement knowledge and skills to address sustainability and environmental issues in their community.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> "Eligibility - U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools." 2022. [www2.Ed.gov](https://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/eligibility.html). July 18, 2022. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/eligibility.html>.

This framework has been adopted across the nation by many states and stakeholders, encouraging state and local agencies and their nonprofit partners to work collectively to create and maintain sustainable schools. Using this framework for sustainable schools ensures not only consideration of the physical environment but also learning outcomes and health impacts. Since the implementation of ED-GRS, many organizations have used this framework of green schools to unify their programs and goals, focus their initiatives on specific activities or areas, and implement plans that address the full range of sustainability goals in school settings.



STUDENTS FROM HUNTLEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 158 (IL) BOARD A SCHOOL BUS.

## Gaining Recognition for Your Work

[ED-GRS](#) recognizes school programs for their sustainability achievements in all three pillars. If your school, district, early learning center, or postsecondary institution is making progress in these areas, you can [apply](#) to be nominated by your state education authority for the federal award.

## Finding More Resources

All schools can find resources to advance in these three areas on the [Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub](#) and [sign up](#) to receive monthly ED Infrastructure and Sustainability News. The [Whole-School Sustainability Framework](#), another helpful resource for school sustainability, identifies the key components of a green school as organizational culture, physical place, and educational program.

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