**Snapshot of 2019 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools**

**Closing Remarks**

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To send us off to the reception, I want to spend a few minutes talking about you – the 2019 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools, District Sustainability Awardees, and Postsecondary Sustainability Awardees. You are working as schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions to reduce your utility costs and improve health and hands-on student learning in innovative ways.

A total of 35 schools, 14 districts, and 4 institutions of higher education have been honored today for their efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, promote better health, and ensure effective environmental education. The list of selectees includes 25 public schools and 10 non-public schools. The public schools include 2 charter and 3 magnet schools.

You are ENERGY and AASHE STARS and LEED facilities. You house sustainability offices; have hired sustainability directors; and implement climate action plans. You employ daylight harvesting, cool roofs, and high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, chillers, windows, and doors. You’ve installed rooftop solar arrays, solar water heating, cool roofs, wind turbines, geothermal, energy dashboards, high-efficiency light bulbs, and digital building controls.

You reduce, reuse, recycle, and are striving for zero waste. Students participate in upcycling contests; pack zero-waste lunches; and print double-sided. You use cloud storage, one-to-one devices, and electronic communications. You’ve gone trayless, and you stock your classrooms, residence halls, dining halls, and cafeterias with reusable dishes and flatware. You divert thousands of pounds of food scraps and organic yard waste from the landfill by instituting share tables, composting, and donation programs.

You carry out stormwater management plans with bioswales, rain barrels, greywater systems, permeable pavement, and rain gardens. You have installed water-bottle filling stations, wells, water filtration systems, low-flow fixtures, and movement sensors. You meticulously monitor water quality.

You have devised landscape management and schoolyard master plans; and been designated Tree Campuses. You’ve ripped up asphalt to put in green schoolyards and replaced turf with drought-resistant native plants.

Your alternative transportation efforts include safe routes, bicycle-friendly campuses, electrical vehicle charging stations, designated parking for carpoolers, free shuttles, bike sharing and vehicle loan programs. Your students are staying active and protecting air quality as they walk and bike to class.

You know that a safe, healthy school building environment is a key to healthier, higher-performing students and staff. You change air filters on a schedule; offer online maintenance work order systems; and test to ensure that your facilities are safe from mold, mercury, radon, and carbon monoxide. You minimize the use of science lab chemicals, storing and disposing of them properly. You select cleaning products that are safe for building occupants and the planet; and implement preventative, holistic pest management. Your schools are no-smoking and no-idling zones.

You look after the overall health of your students, with bullying and violence prevention, restorative justice, positive behavioral intervention, social-emotional learning, yoga and mindfulness, character education, and peer counseling. You offer social workers, school-based health centers, dental clinics, vision checks, asthma support, diabetes awareness, sun safety, bike safety, and weekend food backpacks.

To keep active outdoors, your students participate in climbing, hiking, canoeing, surfing, sledding, skiing, snowshoeing, running, and triathlon events. Students enjoy outdoors physical activity in all but the most inclement of weather.

Students consume local, organic, and school-garden grown food; they eat made-from-scratch lunches and harvest of the month features. They find salad bars, as well as vegetarian, gluten-free, and international dishes in their school cafeterias. They can select from unlimited produce during lunch and free, nutritious snacks after school.

Your students learn by doing. They’re working hard in your outdoor classrooms, which contain courtyards, bird and bat houses, beehives, chicken coops, monarch waystations, nature trails, wildlife habitats, and wetlands. In sites such as these, students engage with not only science, math, nutrition, and agriculture, but also with art, literature, and social studies.

You’re using the school grounds and surrounding community to deepen students’ understanding of the natural world and their connection to it. They collect data; raise trout, ducks, chicks, and frogs; test water quality; count birds; and tag butterflies. Students monitor, chart, and evaluate waste, water, and energy consumption. They construct native habitats, build rain gardens, plant trees, turn compost, and cultivate their crops.

They participate in courses such as agricultural science, alternative energy, animal science, meteorology, fish and wildlife management, ecology, art and ecology, green architecture, green physics, and green engineering.

Your preschools and kindergartens spend several hours outdoors every day, dressed and ready to dig, build, play, and sort, rain or shine.

Not surprisingly, your students delight in their gardens. These include sensory gardens, pollinator gardens, hydroponic and aquaponic gardens, tower gardens, peace gardens, container gardens, greenhouses, and fruit trees. With garden class as part of formal instruction, students measure, plan, write, synthesize, collaborate, and problem-solve as they plant, water, harvest, process, cook, preserve, donate, and compost what they reap. They benefit from 4-H programming, Master Gardeners, and dedicated garden educators.

Your students are not only taking their lessons home to teach their families, but also are building partnerships with local, national, and international organizations -- farms, parks, forest preserves, wildlife and nature centers, zoos, and aquariums. Your students participate in outdoor experiential overnights where they learn orienteering, astronomy, and Leave No Trace.

You’ve formed partnerships with utilities, natural resource and public health agencies, offices of sustainability, waste management companies and water management districts, environmental education centers and associations, health and sustainability non-profits, and energy savings companies.

Your teachers are constantly learning and bringing their experiences back to their classrooms. They use teaching materials from Project WET, Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, and the National Energy Education Development Project.

We’re always thrilled to see your students engage in civic learning. They’re restoring native prairies, removing invasive species, cleaning up beaches, and conducting wetlands maintenance.

You celebrate School Nutrition Month, Farm to School Week, Healthy Schools Day, Living Schoolyard Month, Walk and Bike Days, Green Apple Days of Service, National Environmental Education Week, and, of course, Earth Day and Earth Week.

And then, at your green colleges and universities, students prepare for careers with sustainability in mind, with programs in sustainable agriculture, design, energy, business, forestry, and agriculture. Students tackle real-life problems involving environment and health.

You are Eco-Schools USA, Project GreenSchools!, …and now, 2019 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. Collectively, you’re pretty fantastic!

We ask that you enlist other schools, districts, colleges, and universities, and encourage them to use some of the resources, practices, and programs you have already employed. You can find some of these on our Green Strides sustainability resource hub and get more ideas from your peers, in this year’s Highlights Report, in which each of your institution’s work is featured.

Help other schools learn how to save money and ensure that their students are healthy and learning by the most hands-on, engaging means possible.

Once more, congratulations. We are thrilled to have you as our 2019 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools, District Sustainability Awardees, and Postsecondary Sustainability Awardees.