



U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) is a public engagement initiative structured as a federal recognition award for school sustainability. It helps to facilitate state and local collaboration around school facilities, health, and environmental education. By highlighting schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions' cost-saving, health promoting, and performance-enhancing sustainability practices, ED-GRS celebrates these schools and brings more attention to their work. The schools are invited to a summer ceremony in Washington, D.C. where they receive a sustainable plaque; are the subject of media attention; and feel their efforts celebrated. Other schools, in turn, learn about and adopt their practices.

Schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions do not apply to ED for this award, but to their state education authorities, whether K-12 or postsecondary. State participation in the award is voluntary and not all state education authorities choose to nominate.

ED-GRS nominees must show progress in each of the following areas: 1) reducing environmental impacts, such as waste, water, energy, greenhouse gases, and transportation in the areas of facilities, grounds, and operations; 2) improving health and wellness through coordinated school health, with consideration to air quality, contaminant control, acoustics, daylighting, thermal comfort, school nutrition, and outdoors physical activity; and 3) offering effective environmental and sustainability education that emphasizes hands-on, real-world learning, civic engagement, STEM connections, and green career preparation.

Participating states have considerable autonomy on how they select their nominees to ED. For instance, they may designate a lead who forms a committee. These committees might include representatives from state education agencies, including facilities, health, and curriculum personnel; natural resources, energy, or agriculture agencies; and non-profits working with school sustainability in the state, such as state affiliates of North American Association for Environmental Education, U.S. Green Building Council, Project Learning Tree, and National Wildlife Federation Eco-Schools USA. These partners can help to identify candidates to nominate.

Many states use an application to select nominees, but do not have to offer a distinct application for this award. They may already know of good candidates and work with them to document their achievements. In other cases, states already have programs that ask that schools document their sustainability work and re-purpose those program applications for this nomination. In addition, ED offers an example application format to states.

States submit their nominees to ED by February 1. They set their own state-specific application deadlines to allow them time to review and select nominees. ED announces national honorees in spring. States are encouraged to offer additional state recognition titles and events, and to partner with private sector to offer cash prizes, amplifying the impact of their award implementation.

