



U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools

The *U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) recognition award* honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions that are demonstrating progress in three Pillars: 1) reducing environmental impact and costs, including waste, water, energy use and alternative transportation; 2) improving the health and wellness of students and staff; and 3) providing effective sustainability education.

The award is a tool to encourage state education agencies, stakeholders and higher education officials to consider matters of facilities, health, and environment comprehensively and in coordination with state health, environment, and energy agency counterparts. Unique about the award is that, in order to be selected for federal recognition, schools, districts and postsecondary institutions must be demonstrating progress in all three of the Pillars, not just one area.

Schools, districts, colleges, and universities do not apply for the award to ED, but to their state education authorities. Candidates must contact their state departments of education (or equivalent DoDEA or BIE jurisdictions) or state higher education authorities for information on selection in each state. State participation in the award is voluntary and not all state education authorities choose to nominate schools, districts, or colleges and universities, but hearing from interested schools may be helpful to a state in determining whether it wishes to nominate.

States submit their nominees to ED by February 1st of each year, with various fall and winter deadlines for their state-wide competitions for up to five PK-12 schools and districts and a single postsecondary institution. ED announces honorees annually on Earth Day, April 22nd. The honorees are invited to attend a national ceremony in the summer where they receive a sustainable plaque and flag. Refreshed criteria and guidelines for states and their partners are published in the spring for the subsequent award cycle.

Through the award, ED encourages the critical collaborations that ensure all of our nation's schools are healthier, safer, and more sustainable. ED's complementary *Green Strides* initiative uses an annual report, blog, newsletter, social media, and tour to facilitate the sharing of promising practices and resources. The *Green Strides Webinar Series* and resources page provide all schools, districts, and institutions of higher education free information on the tools that help them move toward the Pillars of the recognition award to follow the footsteps of the ED-GRS honorees. The award is not tied to any one program or standard, but instead encourages all schools, districts, and institutions of higher education to use all of the many helpful resources available to them.

