



## **Purpose**

The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools will recognize schools that save energy, reduce costs, feature environmentally sustainable learning spaces, protect health, foster wellness, and offer environmental education to boost academic achievement and community engagement. The recognition award is part of a larger U.S. Department of Education (Department) effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about practices proven to result in improved student engagement, academic achievement, graduation rates, and workforce preparedness, as well as a government-wide aim to increase energy independence and economic security.<sup>1</sup>

As part of its effort, the Department aims to:

- Facilitate the dissemination of best practices and established metrics regarding energy efficient and cost effective, healthy and environmentally sustainable learning spaces and educational programs, among federal agencies, states, tribes and localities; and
- Achieve these objectives by encouraging the coordination of efforts by the public (at federal, state and local levels), for-profit, and non-profit sectors and among schools themselves.

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, the Department will recognize schools where staff, students, officials and communities have worked together to produce energy efficient, sustainable and healthy school environments and to ensure the sustainability and environmental literacy of graduates.

## **Vision**

Inspiring schools to strive for 21<sup>st</sup> century excellence, the Green Ribbon Schools recognition award will recognize schools that have achieved or are making demonstrable progress toward 1) having a net zero environmental impact; 2) improving the health and performance of students and staff; and 3) ensuring the environmental and sustainability literacy of all graduates.<sup>2</sup> These three "Pillars" of the Green Ribbon Schools award will serve as guideposts to motivate states, tribes, districts, administrators, faculty, parents and students to create the most productive, enriching, and efficient schools possible. The demonstrated combined achievement in these three areas serves as the basis for the Green Ribbon Schools award.

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<sup>1</sup> More details can be found in the White House Blueprint for a Secure Energy Future: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/blueprint\\_secure\\_energy\\_future.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/blueprint_secure_energy_future.pdf). Examples of such efforts include programs implementing the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-140, 42 U.S.C. chap. 152, and other sections of the U.S. Code).

<sup>2</sup> The authorities making nominations to ED will be provided a Framework on Green Ribbon Schools webpages describing methods by which to gauge the performance of schools in these three Pillars.



This recognition initiative aligns with the Department’s cross-cutting goals for education, including improving student, staff and facility performance and federal, state and local level efficiency and results. Environmental and sustainability education can help all students learn to think critically, innovate and develop a solid foundation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

### **Initial Scope**

ED-GRS will launch a pilot program in fall 2011 with as many as 50 awards to be made in 2012, with the goal of expanding within five years to approximately 200 awards per year.<sup>3</sup>

### **Eligibility**

The Secretary of Education invites Chief State School Officers (CSSOs), the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) (“the authorities”) to nominate schools that meet the criteria for recognition. In submitting nominated schools, the authorities must confirm that the schools meet the minimum requirements established by the Department under “Program Requirements” and describe any other criteria used by the authorities to nominate the schools.<sup>4</sup> The authorities may wish to develop or refine existing state or comparable level green school recognition infrastructures and/or run a concurrent award program within their jurisdictions in order to present nominees to ED.

In the first year of the program, each authority is permitted as many as four nominations. If a state or comparable authority wishes to nominate more than one public school, at least one must be a school with at least 40 percent of their students from a disadvantaged background.<sup>5</sup> If an authority wishes to nominate a fourth school, one of the four must be a private school. Authorities are strongly encouraged to take a school’s academic achievement and any achievement gaps into account when selecting schools, as the Department will consider these factors in selecting winners.

### **Program Requirements**

With the support of state health, environmental and safety authorities, state education authorities must certify evaluation of nominees in the Pillars and Elements, according to the minimum practices specified in the Framework for Evaluation of Schools by Authorities Making

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<sup>3</sup> The Department is not bound by the approximation of schools to be recognized in these criteria. It may award more or fewer Green Ribbon Schools in the pilot year.

<sup>4</sup> The first cohort of ED-GRS will be measured based on pre-existing achievement. In future years, their example and the additional time will allow for a measurement of improvement. This is in keeping with the development of Blue Ribbon Schools Program, which has also grown since its first cohort selection. Experience shows that an initial example is required to spur change more broadly.

<sup>5</sup> A student from a “disadvantaged background” is defined for this program by the CSSO of each state. The definition must include students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals and may include students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient, migrant, or receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.



Nominations to the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (Framework) and the applicable Civil Rights, Health, Environment and Safety Statutory and Regulatory Requirements, both also located on the Green Ribbon Schools webpage.

Of the nominees determined by the Nominating Authorities to be eligible and presented to ED based on their performance as described below, the Department, assisted by the Environmental Protection Agency, will conduct final review to ensure schools meet all of the eligibility requirements; comply with all applicable federal civil rights and federal, state and local health, environment and safety statutory and regulatory requirements; and meet high college- and career-ready academic standards<sup>6</sup>, and then rate the finalists to select the awardees. Authorities must, at a minimum, include documentary verification of health, safety and environmental statutory and regulatory compliance of nominated schools. They are encouraged, but not required in the pilot year, to include on-site verification of compliance.

### **Review Criteria Used by the Authorities to Select Nominees:**

In the pilot year, each authority is invited to nominate those four schools they assess to be the highest performing in their jurisdiction, based on the authorities' evaluation of schools' *quantified achievement*<sup>7</sup> toward reaching the goals of the three Green Ribbon School Pillars and Elements, according to the Framework provided by ED.<sup>8</sup> The authorities will be provided the Framework in order to facilitate their evaluation of schools. Authorities must evaluate nominees to ED that exemplify high achievement in all three Pillars. Nominees demonstrating exemplary achievement in all three Pillars and every Element, according to the Framework will be ranked highest.

### **Green Ribbon Schools Pillars and Elements**

#### **I. Environmental Impact and Energy Efficiency**

- 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;
- Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation;

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<sup>6</sup> For more on college and career-ready standards, see: [http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/publication\\_pg4.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/publication_pg4.html)

<sup>7</sup> The quantified assessment should be based on the common metrics provided in Framework for Evaluation of Schools by Authorities Making Nominations to the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (Framework).

<sup>8</sup> In future years, evaluators may be required to assess quantified achievement through review of the school community's comprehensive *green school plan* that incorporates, at a minimum, the plan elements listed under "The Three Pillars and Elements," and a *baseline assessment* for each of the elements of the plan; however, this is not a requirement in the pilot year.



- Reduced solid and hazardous waste production, through increased recycling, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste streams; and
- Expanded use of alternative transportation to, during and from school, through active promotion of locally-available, energy-efficient options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies.

## **II. Healthy School Environments**

- An integrated school environmental health program based on an operations and facility-wide environmental management system that considers student, visitor and staff health and safety in all practices related to design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of schools and grounds; and
- High standards of nutrition, fitness, and quantity of quality outdoor time<sup>9</sup> for both students and staff.

## **III. Environmental and Sustainability Education**

- Interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy and human systems;
- 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
- Development of civic engagement knowledge and skills, and students' application of these to address sustainability and environmental issues in their community.

## **Technical Assistance**

ED-GRS will provide technical assistance to schools and states, including: 1) resources and examples and 2) a comprehensive Framework for Evaluation of Schools by Authorities Making Nominations to the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (Framework).

## **Notification, Recognition Ceremony and Benefits**

Winning schools will be recognized at an annual ceremony. This recognition program conveys no ED funding to states, schools, or districts; however, Green Ribbon Schools and those working

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<sup>9</sup> Local prevailing weather conditions over the course of the school year will be considered in assessing this element to account for regional variability.



to achieve the recognition award's aims may find raising financial and technical support to their green schools efforts a little easier.

**Statutory Authority**

The Department is responsible for administering U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. Green Ribbon Schools is authorized by Section 5411(b)(5), of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 7243(b)(5)).