



2014-2015 Criteria

Purpose

The aim of U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) is to inspire schools, districts and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to strive for 21st century excellence, by highlighting exemplary practices and resources that all can employ. To that end, the award recognizes schools, districts, and IHEs that:

- 1) Reduce environmental impact and costs;
- 2) Improve the health and wellness of schools, students, and staff; and
- 3) Provide environmental education, which teaches many disciplines, and is especially good at effectively incorporating STEM, civic skills, and green career pathways.

Combined achievement in ALL three of these areas, collectively known as Pillars, serves as the basis for recognition. Each Pillar is divided into Elements, which provide further guidance on each of the three main areas. ED-GRS aligns with the Department's cross-cutting goals for education, including improving student, staff, and facility performance and increasing efficiency at the federal, state, and local levels. At the postsecondary level, these Pillars help to support the goals of reduced college costs, increased completion rates, higher rates of employment, and robust civic skills among graduates. The recognition award is part of a U.S. Department of Education (ED) effort to identify and communicate practices that result in improved student engagement, academic achievement, graduation rates, and workforce preparedness, and reinforce federal efforts to increase energy independence and economic security.

Encouraging resource efficient schools, districts, and IHEs allows administrators to dedicate more resources to instruction rather than operational costs. Healthy schools and wellness practices ensure that all students learn in an environment conducive to achieving their full potential, free of the health disparities that can aggravate achievement gaps. Sustainability education helps all students engage in hands-on learning, hone critical thinking skills, learn many disciplines and develop a solid foundation in STEM subjects. It motivates postsecondary students in many disciplines, and especially those underserved in STEM subjects, to persist and graduate with sought after degrees and robust civic skills.

Scope

ED-GRS began in the 2011-2012 school year, recognizing 78 Pre-K-12 schools at the inaugural ED-GRS ceremony in June 2012. In the 2012-2013 school year, ED recognized 68 Pre-K-12 schools and 14 high-performing districts under the pilot District Sustainability Award. In the 2013-2014 school year, ED recognized 48 Pre-K-12 schools and 9 districts. In the 2014-2015 school year, in addition to schools and districts, ED may honor up to 25 IHEs nationwide.¹

Eligibility

The Secretary of Education invites [Chief State School Officers](#) (CSSOs) and [State Higher Education Executive Officers](#) (SHEEOs) from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto

¹ The Department is not bound by the approximation of schools to be recognized in these criteria.



Rico, and the Virgin Islands, as well as the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) (“Nominating Authorities”) to nominate schools, districts, and IHEs that they have determined as meeting the criteria. For all award categories, authorities are strongly encouraged to work with other state agencies, non-profit partners, and associations to ensure appropriate expertise and outreach to eligible candidates. For postsecondary nominees, State Selection Committees should include input from the governor’s office, postsecondary offices, and/or associations of higher education, as appropriate.

The authorities must confirm that the nominees meet the minimum requirements established by ED under the Program Requirements section of this document. They must also describe any other criteria used to select the schools, districts, and IHEs as nominees. The authorities may wish to use, develop, or refine existing green, healthy, and sustainability recognition programs, certifications or ratings, and/or run a competition within their jurisdictions in order to identify nominees to the Department, but they are not required to do so.

ED-Green Ribbon Schools and District Sustainability Awardees. Each authority is permitted as many as five Pre-K-12 school or district nominations. If a state or comparable authority wishes to nominate more than two schools or districts, at least one must serve at least 40 percent of students from a disadvantaged background.² If an authority wishes to make a fifth Pre-K-12 nomination, it must be a private school. For a private school to be nominated, at least one public school or district must be nominated. No more than one of the five nominees in this Pre-K-12 category may be a private school. A school or district may be selected as an honoree only once. Authorities are encouraged to consider a school or district’s academic achievement, success in closing achievement gaps, and diversity when selecting school nominees. Free standing early learning institutions are eligible in this category.

Postsecondary Sustainability Award. In addition to a total of five school and district nominees, each state may nominate one IHE³ for exemplary achievement in all three Pillars. For this award, State Selection Committees are particularly encouraged to document how the nominees’ sustainability work has reduced college costs, increased completion rates, led to higher rates of employment, and ensured robust civic skills among graduates and to make an appropriate effort to consider diverse types of institutions. Like a school or district, an IHE may be selected as an honoree only once. While ED is not bound to selecting particular numbers of honorees, the final national cohort will be reflective of the full range of types of IHEs, including two- and four-year institutions and public and private institutions.

Program Requirements

² 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. Nominating Authorities must indicate the definition used and the percent disadvantaged for each school nominated.

³ An IHE is defined in Section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act as public and private non-profit institutions.



State education authorities, including both [CSSOs](#) and [SHEEOs](#), working with governor's offices, higher education officials, and other partners, as appropriate in each state, must submit an evaluation of school, district and postsecondary nominees under the Pillars and Elements, listed below. They are encouraged to use a variety of widely accepted sustainability standards, certifications, ratings, and programs, some listed in the [Framework](#) for Evaluation of Schools. Nominating authorities, district officials, and principals (where applicable) must certify compliance with all applicable civil rights, health, environment, and safety statutory and regulatory requirements.

Nominating Authorities are encouraged to engage the collaboration of state health, environmental, and safety authorities; non-profit experts in these areas; and federal agency field offices with appropriate technical expertise. In addition to providing valuable subject matter expertise, these partners can make the task of recruiting applicants and selecting nominees to the Department less cumbersome. For their postsecondary nominees, state selection consortia may include input from governor's offices, higher education offices, and/or associations of higher education, as appropriate in each state.

Once schools, districts, and IHEs are selected by Nominating Authorities and presented, ED, assisted by other federal agencies, will conduct final review to ensure that schools, districts, and IHEs: 1) are performing in all three Pillars and every Element; 2) comply with all applicable federal civil rights, student aid and federal, state, local, and tribal health, , safety and environmental statutory and regulatory requirements; 3) meet high college- and career-ready academic standards; and 4) in the case of IHEs, pay particular attention to documenting reduced college costs, increased completion rates, higher rates of employment, and robust civic skills among graduates.⁴

This federal review will determine the national honorees, which will be announced annually on Earth Day. Authorities must, at a minimum, include documentation of high performance in all Pillars and Elements, as well as the health, safety, and environmental statutory and regulatory compliance of nominated schools, districts, and IHEs, as applicable in each case. They are encouraged, but not required, to conduct on-site verification of compliance matters where these are applicable.

Review Criteria Used by the Authorities to Select Nominees:

Each authority is invited to nominate up to five schools or school districts and a single IHE that they assess to be the highest performing in their jurisdiction, based on the authorities' evaluation of applicants' achievement in all Pillars and every Element. Authorities should take into account demographic and geographic diversity and success in closing achievement gaps in their selections, as ED will do the same in the federal review, aiming for a diverse cohort, representative of the full spectrum of schools, school districts and IHEs across the nation.

⁴ For more on college and career-ready standards, see:
http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/publication_pg4.html



ED-Green Ribbon Schools Pillars and Elements

I. Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs

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

II. Improved Health and Wellness

- 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 coordinated school health, including social and psychological services, nutrition, fitness, and quantity of quality outdoor time for both students and staff.

III. Effective 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 such knowledge and skills to address sustainability and environmental issues in their community.

Technical Assistance

ED-GRS provides technical assistance to schools, districts, IHEs, associations, and states, including: 1) a portal of [resources](#) and [webinars](#) for green schools; 2) a [Framework](#) and [sample application](#) for evaluation of nominees; and 3) ongoing communications among State Selection Committees, non-profits, and federal agencies to facilitate the dissemination of best practices.



Notification, Recognition Ceremony, and Benefits

Honored schools, school districts, and IHEs are announced each year on Earth Day and are recognized at an annual ceremony held in Washington, D.C. in July. The recognition award conveys no ED funding to states, districts, schools, or IHEs.

Statutory Authorities

ED is responsible for administering U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. ED-GRS is authorized by Section 5411(b)(5) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (20 U.S.C. § 7243(b)(5)) and Department of Education Organization Act, 20 U.S.C. 3402 (2) and (3).