

This toolkit includes recognition award overview, outreach, and selection materials to assist state officials in implementing U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Awards Program.

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED- GRS)

State Program Administrator
Toolkit

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U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) State Toolkit Overview

[U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](#) (ED-GRS) is a public engagement initiative structured as a federal recognition award for school sustainability. ED-GRS was founded in 2011, as a result of a public request by a collaborative of national and state school sustainability advocates. The Department, through ED-GRS, brings attention to and celebrates early learning centers, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions' cost-saving, health promoting, and performance-enhancing sustainability practices. Participation in ED-GRS facilitates state and local collaboration in school facilities, health, and environmental education. ED-GRS honorees are invited to a ceremony in Washington, D.C. where they receive a sustainable plaque, are the subject of media attention, and have their efforts celebrated by national school leaders.

States report many benefits of ED-GRS that reinforce school sustainable practices including:

- Coordination of school sustainability leaders across the state and nationally;
- Alignment of sustainable school criteria and messaging;
- Tracking and monitoring school progress in sustainable facilities, health, and environmental education;
- Annual recognition of high performing schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions; and
- Incentivizing the adoption of school sustainability practices.

Early learning centers, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions do not apply to ED directly for this award, but to their state education authorities, whether PK-12 or postsecondary. State participation in the award is voluntary.

ED-GRS nominees must show progress in ALL of the following areas, known as the award pillars:

- Pillar I: Reduce environmental impact and costs;
- Pillar II: Improve the health and wellness of schools, students, and staff; and
- Pillar III: Provide effective environmental and sustainability education

Participating states have autonomy on how they select their nominees to ED. Many states use an application to select nominees, but a distinct application for this award is not a requirement. State nominators may work directly with schools they consider to be good candidates to document their achievements. ED offers an example application format to states, which can be found in this toolkit, and on the application web platform [Green Strides](#).

States set their own state-specific application deadlines, typically December or January, to allow schools time to apply and for them to review and select nominees. States submit their nominees to ED in February, with the precise date varying from year to year. ED announces national honorees in the spring, normally on or around Earth Day, April 22. The ED-GRS ceremony is held in Washington D.C. in July, with the precise date varying from year to year. States are encouraged to offer additional state recognition titles and events, and to partner with the private sector to offer cash prizes to amplify the impact of their award implementation.

Thank you for your interest and participation in ED-GRS, and for promoting school sustainability practices!



Award Criteria

Purpose

The aim of ED-GRS is to inspire early learning centers, schools, districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to strive for 21st-century excellence by highlighting leading sustainability practices and resources that all can employ. To that end, the award recognizes early learning centers, schools, districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) that:

1. reduce environmental impact and costs;
2. improve the health and wellness of schools, students, and staff; and
3. provide effective environmental and sustainability education

Combined progress in ALL three of these areas, known as the award Pillars, serves as the basis for recognition.

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 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 early learning centers, schools, districts, and IHEs that they have determined as meeting the criteria to be an ED-GRS awardee. For postsecondary nominees, state selection committees may include input from the governor's office, postsecondary offices, and/or associations of higher education, as appropriate.

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools and District Sustainability Awardees. Each authority is permitted as many as five pre-K–12 early learning, school, or district nominations. If a state or comparable authority wishes to nominate more than two early learning centers, schools, or districts, at least one must serve at least 40 percent of students from a disadvantaged background.^{1,2} 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. School nominees from previous district awardees must document achievements that differentiate the school's work from that already honored districtwide. Authorities are encouraged to consider a school or district's academic achievement, success in closing achievement gaps, and diversity when selecting school nominees. Early learning institutions are eligible in this category.

Postsecondary Sustainability Award. In addition to a total of five early learning, school, and district nominees, each state may nominate one Institution of Higher Education (IHE) for progress in all three Pillars.³ For this award, state selection committees are encouraged to consider diverse types of institutions. IHE may be selected as an honoree only once.

Directors Award. The Director's Award recognizes state education authorities' efforts to administer U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS). Annually, the ED-GRS Director's Award goes to the state education official who does the most to advance sustainable education in his or her state.



Program Requirements

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 documentation of early learning, school, district, and postsecondary nominees' progress under the Pillars and Elements, listed below. They are encouraged to reference a variety of widely accepted sustainability standards, certifications, ratings, and programs. Nominating authorities, district officials, and principals (where applicable) must certify compliance with all applicable civil rights, student aid, health, environment, and safety statutory and regulatory requirements. See [ED-GRS Awards Website](#) to see past examples of awardee documentation of achievements.

Nominating authorities are encouraged to engage state health, environmental, and safety authorities; nonprofit experts in these areas; and federal agency field offices with appropriate technical expertise. In addition to providing valuable subject matter expertise, these partners can support the selection of nominees to the Department. See [Appendix](#) for a list of state program potential partner agencies

Review Criteria Used by the Authorities to Select Nominees

Each authority is invited to nominate up to five early learning centers, schools, or school districts and a single IHE that it assesses to be the highest performing in their jurisdiction, based on the authorities' evaluation of applicants' progress in all Pillars and every Element. If a state or comparable authority wishes to nominate more than two early learning centers, schools, or districts, at least one must serve at least 40 percent of students from a disadvantaged background. Authorities may use their own criteria to measure disadvantaged such as free and reduced price lunch, minority, etc. The most successful nominees will demonstrate that their sustainability practices have longevity, impact the entire school community, and are well documented.

Authorities should take into account demographic and geographic diversity, and success in closing achievement gaps, in their selections. ED will do the same in the federal review, aiming for a diverse cohort, representative of the full spectrum of early learning centers, schools, school districts, and IHEs across the nation.

ED-Green Ribbon Schools Pillars and Elements

I. Pillar 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 and composting, 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. Pillar II: Improved Health and Wellness



- High standards of [Whole School Whole Community, Whole Child health](#), including health, nutrition, and outdoor physical activity; and
- An [integrated school environmental health program](#) that considers occupant health and safety in all design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of facilities and grounds, including cleaning and maintenance; mold and moisture; chemical and environmental contaminants; air quality and ventilation; and pests and pesticide.

III. **Pillar 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 issues in their community.

*Note that this is not a menu of options. **To be eligible for the federal award, nominees must show progress in ALL of the above Pillars and Elements.*** How they do this is up to each state. The most powerful nominees will demonstrate that their sustainability practices have longevity, impact the entire school community, and are well documented. There are many examples of past submissions on the ED-GRS [awards](#) pages.

Nominee Submission Process

Schools and districts apply to state education authorities for a nomination to ED. Authorities determine their own process for receiving applications for nominations.

State education authorities submit their nominations to ED in February, with the precise date varying annually. Submissions are received via the nomination portal on the [Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub](#). State representatives will be issued an account to access the nomination portal.

Submissions include school contact and demographic information, the Nomination Package, and 5 – 10 images. The Nomination Package is an accessible PDF including the Nomination Presentation Form, Highlights Report-ready Summary, and documentation. Packages must not exceed 20 pages, and will be posted on the ED website once they are approved. It is important that all information provided in the nomination portal be accurate, as this information will be used for formal recognition, printing plaques, and other communications.

After states submit their nominations, ED conducts a review and will contact the state representatives with questions, if needed. ED announces honorees in April, normally on or around Earth Day.

Technical Assistance

ED-GRS provides program administration support to states, including samples and regular communications. Schools looking to improve in these areas can find resources on [Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub](#). For new state representatives, ED-GRS staff can meet with you to discuss your participation, and help navigate the available resources.



Notification, Recognition Ceremony, and Benefits

Honored early learning centers, schools, school districts, and IHEs are announced each spring, usually on or around Earth Day, April 22. The selectees are invited to a summer ceremony, typically in July, in Washington, D.C. where they receive a sustainable plaque; are the subject of media attention; and have their efforts celebrated by national school leaders. Other schools, in turn, learn about and adopt their practices. States are encouraged to offer additional state recognition titles and events, and to partner with the private sector to offer cash prizes to amplify the impact of their award implementation. The federal recognition award conveys no ED funding to states, early learning centers, districts, schools, or IHEs.

State Resources and Important Links

ED-GRS Website: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/index.html>

Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub: <https://greenstrides.org/>

State Program Administrator Resources (user log-in required): <https://greenstrides.org/state-leader-files/>

Statutory Authorities

ED is responsible for administering U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. ED-GRS is authorized the Department of Education Organization Act, 20 U.S.C. 3402 (2) and (3).



Outreach Materials

Sample Correspondence Inviting Schools, Districts, and/or Postsecondary Institutions to Apply

Dear early learning centers/schools/districts/postsecondary institutions,

For years, your institution has implemented practices, procedures, and programs that promote healthier, more sustainable buildings and grounds, foster health and wellness, and offer effective environmental and sustainability learning. Your work has made positive environmental and health impacts in your school community, along with improving students' environmental literacy.

Because of your efforts, we invite you to apply to [your state x] for our nomination to [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](#) (ED-GRS) federal recognition award. ED-GRS awardees are recognized at both the state and national scale, are the subject of media attention, and are invited to an in-person ceremony in Washington D.C.

To do this, we ask that you detail your achievements in what are known as the three Pillars of ED-GRS: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education. **In order to be eligible for the federal award, you must show progress in all of these areas, not merely some:**

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 and composting, 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**

- High standards of [Whole School Whole Community, Whole Child health](#), including health, nutrition, and outdoor physical activity; and
- An [integrated school environmental health program](#) that considers occupant health and safety in all design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of facilities and grounds, including cleaning and maintenance; mold and moisture; chemical and environmental contaminants; air quality and ventilation; and pests and pesticide.

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 issues in their community.

Attached to this message is the [your state name] application for nomination to ED-GRS. When your application is complete, please submit it [link/location] to [contact]. If you would prefer to submit in another format, we are happy to consider that, so long as you detail progress in of the above Pillars and every Element within them. Please see examples on the ED-GRS [website](#) for past honorees' submissions and feel free to use the format that puts your institution's best foot forward.

It is very important that you document progress in every Pillar of the award, as it is not sufficient to be high achieving in one area. You can find resources to advance in all three Pillars on the [Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub](#).

Note that, if selected for nomination, your school will also be asked to complete the attached certification statements in the Nominee Presentation Form and provide 5-10 recent, active, candid photos of your school sustainability work in high resolution. I will work with you on that after we have selected [your state name] nominees.

Application Timeline for [Year]

[Ideally, states' applications go out in the summer or fall, but it has been done on a much shorter timeframe]

Date	Process
December or date you select	Deadline for schools/districts/IHEs to submit applications to the [your state name] education authority <i>This deadline is flexible, so long as states have enough time to review, select, and submit. You pick your state deadline.</i>
February (date varies annually)	Nominees from the [state name] selection committee forwarded to the U.S. Department of Education by this date
Date you specify Earth Day, April 22 Summer date TBD annually	[State name] selectee announcement event ED will announce national honorees Honorees invited to send representatives to a national recognition ceremony in Washington, DC

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding the application process. We look forward to learning more about your school sustainability work and to sharing your successes around our state and nation.



Sincerely,

[State education agency program administrator name]

Sample Media Posts

Newsletter Item – Call for Applications

Applications are now open for our state’s nomination to [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](#) (ED-GRS) federal recognition award. ED-GRS awardees are recognized at both the state and national scale, are the subject of media attention, and are invited to an in-person ceremony in Washington D.C. Applications should detail your achievements in what are known as the three Pillars of ED-GRS: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education. Join the X [number] schools that have already been awarded in our state, and receive recognition for your school sustainability practices. Learn more and access the application by visiting [website] before [deadline].

Newsletter Item – Award Announcements

Join us in celebrating this year’s U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) awardees! These schools and districts have demonstrated their achievements in three essential areas of school sustainability, known as the three Pillars of ED-GRS: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education. This Earth Day we hope that other schools will be inspired to take actions of their own, learning from the best practices demonstrated by our state’s ED-GRS awardees. Learn more about [state name] [year] honorees [press release link].

Social Media

Use the ED Infrastructure and Sustainability [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts for example social media posts, and follow these accounts for opportunities to retweet/reshare updates.

Presentation for Outreach Events

A sample presentation is located in the [state leader resource page](#) on the Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub. Feel free to adapt this to your needs or to reach out to ED to request other powerpoint examples.



ED-GRS Logo and Award Language Guidelines

ED's award is called "U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools" and has "District Sustainability Award" and "Postsecondary Sustainability Award" categories. The official acronym is ED-GRS.

"Green Ribbon Schools" without the "U.S. Department of Education" is not ED's award, but instead is a separate program overseen by another organization. There is no "National," "Program," or "Award" in the award title.

State authority awards, may be called "STATE NAME Green Ribbon Schools" or another name of your choosing.

Early learning centers, schools, districts, and IHE's that have been awarded by ED-GRS are called "YEAR Honorees" or "YEAR Awardees". Each title must be displayed with the year of the award every time it is noted. ED-GRS is a one-time award given per year, not a lifetime award.

Honorees may display the ED-GRS logo from the year that they were received their award. Below are samples of the logo, and additional image file formats are available via the state resource portal on Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub. For previous years please contact ED. The logo was changed in 2022.

2021 ED-GRS Logo	New Generic ED-GRS Logo (published in 2022)

Honorees are provided with one plaque when they receive the year they receive their award, typically at the summer ceremony. States must submit the formal name of the honorees when they submit their nominations. The names submitted by the states will be printed on the plaque. States are permitted to create mementos for their honorees. ED-GRS honorees are permitted to create additional mementos of their choosing, using the appropriate year and award title guidelines, such as banners or web graphics.



Sample Application

Note to state officials: Many states use an application to select nominees, but that is not a requirement for this award. States may already know of good candidates and work with them to document their achievements in all three pillars. In other cases, states repurpose existing programs that recognize schools' sustainability work. This sample is provided to assist state officials but is not required. You can see examples of different state application formats [here](#). Some states distinguish between application and nomination to ED. That is, the states submit a summary to ED, rather than the actual application completed by institutions.

Background

Thank you for your interest in completing the [state name] application for nomination to U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS), District Sustainability Award, or Postsecondary Sustainability Award. ED-GRS recognizes early learning centers, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions taking a comprehensive approach to sustainability, incorporating environmental learning with improving environmental and health impacts. You must show progress in each of the following Pillars and all of their corresponding elements found [here](#):

Pillar I: Reducing environmental impact and costs;

Pillar II: Improving the health and wellness of students and staff; and

Pillar III: Offering effective environmental and sustainability education.

Early learning centers, schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions demonstrating progress in every area will receive highest scores. It will help to assemble a team with expertise across these areas to complete the application. You may also wish to consult the [Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub](#) for resources to progress in each Pillar.

Applications are due by to [state contact] by [date]. [State name] will send nominations to the U.S. Department of Education by [date]. Please contact [state program administrator name] if you have questions.

Nominee Information

School, District, or Postsecondary Institution Name:

Category of Nomination (Early Learning Center, School, District, or Postsecondary):

Address: City: State: Zip: Twitter: Facebook:

Top official (School=Principal; District=Superintendent; IHE= President): Title (Mr./Ms./Mrs./ Dr.): First

Name: Last Name: Position/Role (Principal/ Superintendent/ President): Email:

Phone:

Lead Applicant (if different) Title (Mr./Ms./Mrs./ Dr.): First Name: Last Name:

Position/Role (Teacher/ Sustainability Director/ Facilities Director): Email: Phone:

Check all that apply:



Early Learning
Elementary
Middle
High
Public

Charter
Magnet
Non-Public
Two-Year
Four-Year

Community College
Career and Technical
Urban
Rural
Suburban

Provide percentages, if any are relevant to your school, district, or institution:

Pell Recipients:

Special Education:

Free and Reduced Price Lunch:

Graduation Rate:

Minority:

Attendance Rate:

Limited English Proficient:

Provide the following, if relevant:

Total Enrolled:

Number of Schools:

Buildings:

Campuses:



Documentation of Sustainability Achievement

Narrative for Pillar 1: Your Efforts to Reduce Environmental Impact and Costs

Use 2-4 pages to describe how your early learning center, school, district, or postsecondary institution is reducing environmental impact and costs by reducing or eliminating greenhouse gas emissions; improving water quality, efficiency, and conservation; reducing waste production; and using alternative transportation. Identify your energy-efficient facilities and practices, your efforts to decarbonize and electrify your premises, ecologically and educationally beneficial uses of grounds, and methods of disposal for solid and hazardous wastes. Use supporting data and reference participation in pertinent benchmarking programs to demonstrate progress where possible.

Narrative for Pillar 2: Your Efforts to Improve the Health and Wellness of Students and Staff

Use 2-4 pages to describe how your early learning center, school, district, or postsecondary institution improves the health and wellness of students and staff by integrating a school environmental health program and promoting sound health and wellness practices. You should discuss indoor and outdoor environmental quality; cleaning and maintenance; mold and moisture; thermal and acoustical comfort; chemical and environmental contaminants; air quality and ventilation; pests and pesticide, as well as nutrition and outdoors physical activity. Other components you may include are health education, health services, counseling, psychological and social services, sun safety, staff health promotion, and family and community involvement. Incorporate metrics and include program participation where possible.

Narrative for Pillar 3: Your Efforts to Ensure Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

Use 2-4 pages to describe how your early learning center, school, district, or postsecondary institution ensures effective environmental and sustainability education throughout the curriculum. Provide examples of interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy, and human systems. Demonstrate how your institution uses the environment and sustainability to develop STEM content, knowledge, and thinking skills, and teach all subjects in context. You should discuss how your early learning center, school, district, or postsecondary institution develops and applies civic knowledge and skills to environmental and sustainability education. All STEM and civics work should be described as it relates to environmental and sustainability learning. Detail any environmental or sustainability literacy standards, show how these concepts are integrated into assessments, and describe environmental and sustainability literacy professional development. Include co-curricular opportunities such as field trips, study abroad, clubs, and service learning. This section should describe hands-on, place-, project-, and problem-based, authentic learning across the curriculum, not limited to one subject.

Summary Narrative: An Overview of Your Work Encompassing All Three Pillars

Use one substantive paragraph to provide an overview narrative describing your early learning center, school, district, or postsecondary institution's efforts to reduce environmental impact and costs; improve student and staff health and wellness; and provide effective environmental and sustainability education. This overarching summary should highlight the best of your work in every ED-GRS Pillar and Element. You can view examples of summary narratives in last year's [Highlights Report](#). The summary that you submit should be what you would like to see appear in a future Highlights Report, if your



institution is selected. It may be helpful to pull from your previous three narratives to write the summary.

Photos: Please submit 5-10 high resolution photographs with brief descriptions including who, what, when, and where. Photos should candid action shots, and not posed or collaged. They should be recent – from within the last three years. By sending these photos, you are giving [state name] and the U.S. Department of Education permission to use them in our newsletter and social media.



Sample Checklist for State Evaluation of Nominee

Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs	Score 1-5 <i>or indicate whether demonstrating progress (Y/N)</i>
Reduced or eliminated greenhouse gas emissions, using an energy audit or emissions inventory and reduction plan, cost-effective energy efficiency improvements, conservation measures, on-site renewable energy and/or purchase of green power, or other efforts to decarbonize/ electrify	
Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation	
Reduced solid and hazardous waste production through increased recycling and composting, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste	
Expanded use of alternative transportation, through active promotion of locally available, energy-efficient options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies	
Improving Health and Wellness	Score 1-5 <i>or indicate whether demonstrating progress (Y/N)</i>
High standards of Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Health , including nutrition and outdoor physical activity; health, counseling, and psychological services for both students and staff; and family and community involvement	
Integrated school environmental health program that considers occupant health and safety in all design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of facilities and grounds, including indoor and outdoor environmental quality; cleaning and maintenance; mold and moisture; chemical and environmental contaminants; air quality and ventilation; and pests and pesticide	
Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education	Score 1-5



	or indicate whether demonstrating progress (Y/N)
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 21 st -century technology-driven economy	
Development of civic engagement knowledge and skills and students' application of such knowledge and skills to address sustainability issues in their community	



Submitting Your Nominees for ED-GRS

Preparing to Submit

1. State education authorities submit nominees to the U.S. Department of Education in February by the specified deadline, which varies annually.
2. All nominees must be submitted online as an uploaded Section 508 compliant PDF through www.greenstrides.org. See the section Nomination Package Accessibility below for an overview to accessibility and instructions.
3. Indicate to ED (ed.green.ribbon.schools@ed.gov) that your state will be submitting a nominee this year and who will be doing that, if you have not done so already, so that we may create an account for the individual submitting the nominations.
4. Log in to the Nomination portal on www.greenstrides.org ; you will then be prompted to create nominations.

Submitting your Nominations

1. You will be prompted to submit up to five early learning to high school or district nominees and up to one postsecondary nominee.
 - a. You do not have to complete all nominations in one session, but it is best to have the nomination packages that you intend to upload in a session finalized, so that you do not need to replace a given submission with revised versions within the system.
2. For each nominee, you will be prompted to specify the type of nominee and to enter each nominee's contact information (both a lead applicant and a top official, if they differ), social media handles, and basic demographic information for each institution, where applicable.
 - a. Ensure that the formal name of the honoree is typed exactly as it should appear on a plaque, and that all addresses, name spellings, and emails are accurate. This step is important. Plaques have been printed incorrectly because names and cities were provided to ED incorrectly.
3. You will be prompted to upload your nomination packages. Please make sure that your nomination package is accessible to people with disabilities (i.e., Section 508 compliant) in its entirety. We will have to ask you to resubmit any inaccessible nominations. Some states have found it helpful to connect with colleagues in IT and special education programs, who tend to have experience with document accessibility. Nomination packages must:
 - a. Not exceed 20 pages PDF. This may require synthesizing information from your state's application intake. You are welcome to intake as much information at the state level as you need to evaluate your applicants.
 - b. Be titled with a simple name that does not include special characters or spaces.
 - c. Use standard fonts and margins.
4. Each nomination package must contain three components, *in the order listed below*:
 - a. Nominee Presentation Form – the new and improved versions, available on the state resources page of <https://greenstrides.org/state-leader-files/> should assist in providing accessible submissions. This is the Nomination Package Cover Letter. There is a different Nominee Presentation Form for each type of nominee: early learning center, school, district, or postsecondary.



- b. Highlights Report Ready Summary Narrative - Provide a narrative that summarizes a nominee's work in all three Pillars. Direct your applicants to [last year's Highlights Report](#) for examples of this summary. It should not be a bulleted list, but rather a coherent paragraph. The summary that you submit should be what you would like to see appear in the final Highlights Report.
 - c. Documentation - Use a nomination format that presents a clear, succinct picture of a nominee's successful practices in each Pillar. Ensure that the nomination materials cover all three Pillars. Consider orthographical and grammatical correctness. Work with your nominees to put their best foot forward.
 5. Use a nomination format that presents a clear, succinct picture of a nominee's successful practices in each Pillar. Consider orthographical and grammatical correctness. Work with your nominees to put their best foot forward.
 6. Ensure that the nomination materials cover all three Pillars. Common reasons for not confirming a nominee:
 - a. Nominees are weak in one or more Pillars.
 - b. Nominees do not connect STEM and civics education to environmental and sustainability learning.
 - c. School nominees have already been recognized as part of a district award and do not differentiate their work from the districtwide effort.
 7. You will be asked to submit between five and ten photographs for each nominee and to enter descriptions.
 - a. You must enter at least five in order to finalize a nomination.
 - b. Photos should be action shots, not posed, and of high resolution.
 - c. They should be recent – from the last three years.
 - d. They should be individual photos, not collages or screenshots from social media.
 - e. Accepted file types: gif, jpg, jpeg, png

After Submitting your Nominations

8. ED will confirm receipt of nominees and contact you with any questions.
9. If you are asked to make changes, you will need to resubmit the entire PDF with the changes included, rather than revised pieces of the submission. The entire package goes on our website when selectees are announced.
10. ED will send information regarding an all-state call prior to the Earth Day, April 22nd announcement and provide you with embargoed materials.



Nomination Package Accessibility Instructions

Accessibility Introduction:

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, amended by the Workforce Investment Act ([29 U.S.C. §794d](#)) requires all federal agencies to use information and communications technology that is accessible to people with disabilities.

ED-GRS Nomination Package Accessibility:

ED-GRS nomination packages must be accessible to people with disabilities (i.e., Section 508 compliant) in its entirety. Nomination packages are posted directly on <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/awards.html>. This means that we will have to ask you to resubmit any inaccessible nominations. Some states have found it helpful to connect with colleagues in IT and special education programs, who tend to have experience with document accessibility.

Nominee Presentation Forms:

ED provided the Nominee Presentation Forms as fill-able PDFs to facilitate accessibility. State officials and honorees are advised to digitally complete the blank fields, use digital signatures, and save completed versions of the Nominee Presentation Forms to ensure accessibility. Forms that have been printed, signed, then scanned are not considered accessible because they cannot be read by screen readers. State officials and honorees are advised to use Adobe Acrobat or similar applications to complete the presentation form while maintaining accessibility.

Combining the Presentation Nomination Forms and Documentation to make the Nomination Package:

The Nominee Presentation Form, Highlights Report-ready summary, and documentation must be submitted as one PDF document (nomination package) that does not exceed 20 pages. State officials are advised to use Adobe Acrobat or similar application combine file tools to accomplish this. Packages that have been printed then scanned are not considered accessible.



State Program Potential Partner Agencies

Many states have found that partnerships increase participation in the recognition award program, as well as increase communication and collaboration on school sustainability more broadly. Partnerships are not a requirement of ED-GRS, but often provide beneficial support for state authorities. Partners may be able to assist state officials with:

1. Identification of, outreach, and promotion to schools
2. Application review
3. Application technical assistance for schools
4. Coordination and elevation of sustainability school programs

At Your Agency: Health, Curriculum, Facilities, and Communications Offices

- Award encompasses facilities and grounds, STEM, outdoors physical activity, and healthy, local nutrition programs

Other State Agencies: natural resources, health, forestry, environmental health, energy, agriculture, conservation, environmental protection, building authorities

- Other state agencies can support with promotion, identifying potential nominees, technical assistance, etc.

Non-Profits/Community Organizations that support Green Schools: Check for local or regional affiliates of the U.S. Green Building Council, North American Association for Environmental Education, Eco-Schools USA, Project Learning Tree, Conservation Corps, education associations

School Institutions/Leaders: Past U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School honorees, superintendents, student sustainability leader organizations

Note: While some states have formal partnerships with partner agencies for the administration of the program, state officials are required to be involved in submission to the Department. A sample Memorandum of Understanding among partners is available on the [state leaders resource page](#).