



U.S. Green Ribbon Schools Award

On September 23, 2011, the U.S. Secretary of Education, EPA Administrator, and Council on Environmental Quality Chair opened the pilot year for the new Green Ribbon Schools award to recognize the highest performing green schools in the nation. Modeled on the prestigious Blue Ribbon Schools award, Green Ribbon will recognize k-12 public and private elementary, middle and high schools across the nation who demonstrate the greatest combined achievement in the following three "Pillars": 1) 100% of the school's graduates are environmentally and sustainability literate, 2) the school has a "net zero" environmental impact; and 3) the school has a "net positive" impact on student and staff health.

K-12 green schools are key to our nation's competitiveness in the 21st century. They prepare students to participate in the new green economy, while strengthening the nation's ability to increase our energy security, conserve precious natural resources, and reduce chances of losing American jobs to other countries who charge ahead and take the lead. National studies indicate that the many benefits of green schools include: decreased energy costs and reduced environmental impact, improved student and staff health and productivity, enhanced critical thinking skills, higher student performance, and increased student engagement, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

The Green Ribbon School recognition program is the first comprehensive green school initiative to come from the federal government. It lays out a thoughtful vision for green schools, sets a high benchmark for success, and will significantly raise the profile of individual green schools and the green school movement. And it provides an opportunity for states to showcase the exemplary work being undertaken by their leading green schools.

While the award confers no immediate federal funds, winners of the Green Ribbon, like Blue Ribbon Schools, are likely to experience extensive national and local press coverage, re-energized staff and parents, enhanced community support, increased application rates (private and choice schools), and gain business partners and other private financial assistance. Award winners will be invited to participate in a national recognition ceremony, possibly in Washington, DC.

Schools must be nominated by their state chief education officer and cannot apply directly to the Department of Education (ED). Each state may nominate up to four schools to ED. If a state wishes to nominate more than one public school, at least one must be a school with 40 percent or more of their students from a disadvantaged background. If a state wishes to nominate a fourth school, one of the four nominations must be a private school. ED will select up to 50 award winners in this first pilot year. 25 states are expected to participate. The final deadline for submission of nominees to ED by states has not yet been set, but it is likely to be in March so that the winners can be announced in April, 2012.

Tom Torlakson, California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, recently announced: "We look forward to participating in the national Green Ribbon Awards, and we're looking at creating our own state green schools award program that goes even deeper and broader." Additional details on Green Ribbon can be found at: www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/