Department of Education Announces Landmark Green Schools Program

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Today, the federal government launched an initiative that may be the biggest thing to ever happen to the green schools movement.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, and White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley announced the creation of a Green Ribbon Schools program. (Read the Green Ribbon Schools press release from the Department of Education.)

Modeled after the Blue Ribbon Schools program, which recognizes academic distinction, the Green Ribbon Schools program will be a voluntary award, recognizing schools that are demonstrating excellence – or making notable improvement – toward sustainability. Though still in development, the program will evaluate schools across four categories: environmental education; energy efficiency and resource conservation; healthy operations and maintenance; and community engagement and service learning.

The program is a milestone in collaboration among the Department of Education, EPA and White House CEQ, and it will undoubtedly raise the profile of green schools. But more significantly, if one looks closely within the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Education and the Department of Energy, there are dozens of programs, grants and initiatives that can relate to healthy, high-performing schools. The Green Ribbon Schools program has the opportunity to help connect these dots and advance change at a level we've not yet seen.

Kudos to our friend Jim Elder, Director of the Campaign for Environmental Literacy, for originally conceiving this idea. We've been proud to work closely with Jim, as well as our colleagues at the National Wildlife Federation and Earth Day Network, to help advance this concept to reality. (Read our shared press release.) In total, 75 state and national organizations signed on in support of this program prior to today's announcement. This is a landmark day for green schools, and we give the federal government tremendous credit for advancing an initiative that will help ensure the vision of green schools for everyone within this generation.

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