

What You Need to Know About the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools Program

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In his [2012 Earth Day Proclamation](#), President Obama outlines the case for green schools and recognizes the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools program as a driver for improving school sustainability, health and education for 21st century jobs. I had the privilege to attend the announcement of the inaugural class of Green Ribbon Schools, made by Education Secretary Arne Duncan, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, and White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley. The event was held at Stoddert Elementary, a beautiful LEED Gold facility and one of Washington, D.C.'s winning Green Ribbon Schools (it was also the location we chose to launch the Center for Green Schools in September of 2010).

I have a special place in my heart for Stoddert. While I went to the public school in the next neighborhood over (where my sister currently teaches first grade), I spent a good amount of my youth playing baseball and soccer on Stoddert's field. Since those days, I've seen incredible progress at DCPS. The school system that was once full of facilities in utter disrepair has become, in many ways, a model green district. I was glad that one of the key champions of this effort, D.C. Councilmember Mary Cheh, author of the D.C. Healthy Schools Act, was also standing proud Stoddert this morning. It was incredibly powerful to see the Secretary of Education announcing a monumental moment in the green schools movement – frankly, the biggest thing to happen to date – at Stoddert.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Stoddert Principal Marjorie Cuthbert and myself

Great things have been said about Green Ribbon Schools, particularly how quickly the Department of Education, the Environmental Protection Agency and the White House Council on Environmental Quality collaborated to create such a well-designed program from scratch. Their quick work is certainly noteworthy, and the hardworking folks across those agencies deserve tremendous credit.

But what really matters now is the impact this program is having on local schools and students. At the Center, we've heard stories from teachers and school leaders across the country about the activities and student-led projects that are taking place in their classes because of Green Ribbon Schools. This morning, Stoddert Principal Marjorie Cuthbert and Secretary Duncan together spoke about the Stoddert Green Team's student-led energy monitoring, recycling initiatives and community gardening efforts.

Ask Oregon State Representative Jules Bailey, a national expert on energy efficiency financing and green schools, why this movement matters, and he can tell you an [inspiring story](#) about meeting a member of the Stoddert Green Team while touring the school during the [2010 Green Schools State Legislative Summit](#). Rep. Bailey likes to sum it by saying that "Healthy-high performance schools mean healthy high performance kids." That statement, which cuts straight to the core of this movement, has since become a primary talking point for green schools advocates across the country.

Students in all types of schools and communities across America are benefiting from the Green Ribbon Schools program, and it's significant to note that of the [78 winning schools](#), about half have a majority of their student populations from disadvantaged backgrounds. As the Secretary said during his remarks, "Green Ribbon Schools can be urban, rural, big, small, new or old." Indeed, this program provides a pathway that any school can strive for, and this year's winners are evidence of the green schools movement reaching the mainstream. Congratulations to all of the winning 2012 Green Ribbon Schools, and most importantly, kudos to a new generation of healthy, high performing kids.

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