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A Year of Chapter Advocacy Efforts: Green Schools

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As we at USGBC wind down 2011 – and gear up for a promising 2012 I am pleased to have the opportunity to reflect on what an incredible year it's been for green schools. With the help of our seemingly tireless volunteer and chapter network, the Center for Green Schools at USGBC has had a first year that has exceeded many expectations. Even heading into a time of year when things typically seem to slow down, USGBC's volunteers continue to be hard at work on behalf of green schools. To learn more about the recent goings-on of Green Schools Committees from coast-to-coast, read on, and be sure to check out this video from the 2011 Green Schools Committee Symposium held this past summer. To get in on the action, find a committee near you.

I had a few opportunities to see these volunteers in action throughout the year, and started things off in San Francisco back in April. USGBC Colorado and Northern California Green Schools Committee leaders Peggy Kinsey and Pauline Souza joined me at the National School Boards Association's 71st Annual Conference, where we met with school board members from around the country to work toward our country-wide green schools goals, and they shared their stories of building grassroots green schools movements in their own backyard.

In May, the Detroit Regional Chapter participated in the local Green Living Festival. On the eve of the festival, the chapter's green schools committee was joined by dignitaries, community leaders and media for an evening of celebration, featuring a fashion show, live music, networking and organic treats. The evening was capped off with an awards ceremony to recognize the dedication and achievement of several Michigan green leaders. Proceeds from the event went to the Chapter's Green Schools Committee's Green School in a Lunch Box project -- their 2010 USGBC Green Schools Innovation grant winning initiative!

Montana Chapter Green Schools Committee members Wendy Weaver and Dawn Smith co-authored a piece for Montana Parent Magazine, introducing their state to Center for Green Schools initiatives and how they're being implemented in the Treasure State.

Just in time for the new school year, Mississippi Chapter Green Schools Committee Chair Sally Zahner and her committee were involved in the groundbreaking for what could be Mississippi's first LEED certified school, Hancock North Central Elementary. The school in coastal Mississippi is being built with a combination of funds from the district and FEMA, and in addition to being green, a portion of the new structure will be able to withstand 200 mile per hour winds.

In October, USGBC Orange County (California) kicked off their Adopt-a-School project, which will connect volunteers with nearby Davis Magnet School in Costa Mesa. GSC members will work to promote the school as a teaching tool, while actively providing a school with a classroom makeover. Congrats to Green Schools Committee Chair Wendy Rogers for securing some major local partners.

The USGBC Arkansas Chapter launched the Arkansas Green Schools Challenge just before Thanksgiving. Green Schools Committee Chair Dustin Davis reports that 41 schools across Arkansas have already signed on to participate in the competition that will "empower students and communities to be good stewards of their own environments." Dustin partnered with Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA) to kick this off. Just up north, the USGBC South West Virginia Chapter's GSC Chair Steve Sunderman is busy preparing for his chapter's second year of the VA Green Schools Challenge, coming in 2012.

To close out the year and open up a newer side of the green schools conversation, Chris Tyler and the Kentucky Chapter helped bring together a bipartisan team of state legislators at Richardsville Elementary in Bowling Green, Ky., to discuss political common ground around the topic of green schools. Richardsville is the nation's first net-zero energy school, and serves a 78 percent free and reduced lunch population. The school was constructed without spending any additional money than the conventionally built schools in the Warren County School District. Lawmakers from six states around the region discussed ways to work together to advance the green schools movement in their communities. You can read more about the day's events and the incredible story in Warren County.

It's been another incredible year for the green schools movement, and with this many advocates and champions out there, I know that we have all the more to look forward to in 2012.

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