Director's Corner: What's Next in the Green Schools Movement

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It seems like we only just made it through back-to-school season at the Center for Green Schools and now the holidays are right around the corner. With USGBC's annual Greenbuild Conference and Expo under our belt, the Center team is hard at work on many upcoming initiatives to carry us through 2011 and into 2012.

This year's Greenbuild was held in Toronto, and focused on "what's next" in the green building movement. The Center played off the theme by partnering with United Technologies Corp. to release a new independent nationwide survey conducted by GfK Custom Research North America that reveals nearly three out of four Americans support federal investment in school building improvements focused on creating healthier learning environments, saving tax dollars or lowering carbon emissions. One in three of the more than 1,000 Americans surveyed said the majority of U.S. schools are in poor shape and 90 percent of those surveyed felt the condition of U.S. schools were adequate at best.

The release announcing the survey was picked up by close to 300 news outlets within hours, including Reuters– which reaches more than 48 million readers a month— several business journals and 152 TV stations. The results of the poll were announced during a press conference that took center stage drawing members of the media and an array of Greenbuild attendees.

The release of this survey was timed with the official launch of the Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools program. The Green Ribbon Schools program is the first comprehensive and coordinated federal initiative to focus on the intersection of education, health and the environment and will recognize schools where students, teachers and faculty have worked together to advance environmental literacy and reduce operating costs through sustainable measures. For more than a year, the Center, along with the Campaign for Environmental Literacy, Earth Day Network and National Wildlife Federation, worked closely with the Department of Education and other federal entities to make this program a reality. I consider the launch of Green Ribbon Schools to be one of the greatest steps forward in the green schools movement— a landmark collaboration between federal agencies and non-profits that will dramatically accelerate our progress.

I'm extremely excited to announce several new initiatives that the Center will kick off in 2012.

- This spring, we will host the first ever Green Schools International Day of Service. Volunteers from across the world will partake in acts of service like planting schoolyard gardens, building rainwater harvesting sculptures and educating students, parents and communities.
- In January, we will launch a new program to catalyze green campus initiatives at community colleges while equipping a diverse group of graduates for success in the green economy.

This year's Greenbuild and all of our work the past few months has reminded me that there are a lot of folks ready and willing to make sure every child has the opportunity to attend a green school. From our chapter leaders, members and champions who have been supporting sustainability for years, to new voices, policy makers and advocates to the movement, I am perpetually inspired and amazed by how far we have come. Enjoy the rest of your year and get ready for some tremendous successes in 2012.

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