President Clinton and Our Green Apple Partners Set the Bar High for this Year's Green Apple Day of Service

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For former President Bill Clinton, the “right kind of future” for today’s K-12 students includes careers in energy efficiency and green schools. Citing the Center’s recent State of Our Schools Report while closing out the annual Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U) this Sunday, Clinton described our nation’s existing school buildings as “an enormous employment opportunity for the American workforce,” pointing out that through programs like Gateway STEM High School in St. Louis, “Everybody can be trained to retrofit these buildings.”

More than 500 CGI U attendees came to Gateway on Sunday to finish off a big weekend of big ideas, giving back to the event’s host city. The former President and his cadre of volunteers worked on projects all over the school, on a day that set a high standard for this year’s Green Apple Day of Service events. Volunteers planted flowers and mulched, cleared walking trails, painted classrooms, assessed the building’s energy use and much more. The President opened the morning by thanking the U.S. Green Building Council, the Center for Green Schools and Washington University “for their involvement in this project, and their support of this school,” a school he described as an “outpost of opportunity” for its students. President Clinton called the day at Gateway a way for attendees to prove they are “serious about integrating service into every aspect of our lives,” and reminded the students that if they want “a future of shared prosperity, everybody’s got to have a chance to be a part of it."

President Clinton also thanked several of the service event’s in-kind supporters, including three Green Apple partners. Interface was on site to deliver pallets of donated carpet tiles, re-carpeting the school’s auditorium and band room. My knees are sore today from installing new Interface carpet in the band room, but the look on the face of the teacher when we were done was worth every minute. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt provided a new set of environmental titles to the school’s library and Excel Dryer donated and installed two new XLERATOR hand dryers, with plans to introduce their savings calculator tools to Gateway’s teachers and students.

I had the pleasure of working with CGI U staff in the weeks leading up to the service event, brainstorming sustainability projects that could happen at Gateway, drawing largely from project ideas for Green Apple Day of Service – something I heard many CGI U students are excited to participate in for the second time this coming September. The local USGBC Missouri Gateway Chapter also came out in force over the last few weeks, rallying local partners to support the event with an energy audit team, and securing the donation of a 25 kilowatt solar-energy system by Brightergy Solar Solutions.

Before visiting with volunteers around the 500,000 square foot facility, the President challenged those gathered to think of what could be done with a financing mechanism that saves schools like Gateway from having to dip into their already strained budgets for energy efficiency and other facilities improvements, instead paying for retrofits with the savings on utility bills. Explaining this paid-from-savings approach to school financing, Clinton called these strategies “the nearest thing America has to a win-win for the economy."

It was a great weekend at CGI U. This collection of the brightest and boldest thinkers on college campuses, in all 50 states and more than 70 countries, spent two days sharing their commitments to impact today’s most pressing social issues, including human rights, public health, climate change and education. These students are taking on the world’s most urgent issues, and I am confident that President Clinton’s support of equal access to better school facilities, and to

STEM education for all communities and students, will have left a lasting impression on these young leaders for years to come.

In 2010 USGBC Students was formed out of the Center for Green Schools' commitment to help students green their campus, community and careers.

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