Green Schools
Establish Common Ground

Transcending politics to put our children first

Why Green Schools Matter
"Healthy, high-performance schools mean healthy, high-performance kids," assert many of the leading state legislators that are committed to advancing green schools in their communities. Green schools offer healthy and productive learning environments while operating more efficiently and with a lower impact on school budgets and on human and environmental health concerns.

Green schools are helping to lower utility costs and operating expenses, to conserve precious resources, and to reduce waste — all of which results in an average savings of $100,000 per year, enough to hire at least one new teacher, buy 200 new computers, or purchase 5,000 textbooks. For all of these reasons and many more, green schools matter a great deal.

Defining and Building a Movement
The U.S. Green Building Council and its nationwide community of decision makers, advocates and inspired visionaries are committed to a common vision: green schools for all within this generation. The Center for Green Schools at USGBC was launched in 2010 to work with a diverse set of stakeholders in bold, impactful and unparalleled ways to turn this vision into reality.

And it’s working. There are currently nearly 7,000 LEED registered and certified schools across the country, with a steady increase of one-to-two schools per day. Governments are beginning to lead by example, and 13 states and the District of Columbia have enacted policies for new school construction based on LEED. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education introduced the voluntary Green Ribbon Schools Awards during the 2011-2012 school year. Green Ribbon is a comprehensive program to recognize schools across the country striving for excellence in building energy efficiency, human health and environmental literacy.

Transcending Politics with Green Schools
At its core, the green schools movement promotes universal values — fiscal responsibility, healthy learning environments for our children, and a commitment to appropriately prepare them for the 21st century economy. These common, universal values can unite even the most unlikely parties — and we are making progress.

Elected officials and other key decision makers across the country are uniting around the many benefits of green schools. At the federal level, the bipartisan Congressional Green Schools Caucus is sharing the success stories of communities, schools, teachers and children transformed through cost-effective, healthy and resource-efficient school buildings. The Caucus is united in the belief that healthy, environmentally friendly schools promote learning, save taxpayer money and benefit the communities they serve.

At the state level, legislators are tapping the momentum of the green schools movement to fuel bipartisan discussions and action across America. A bipartisan group of these lawmakers worked with USGBC to publish a handbook for state legislators on green schools, and the green building community is actively supporting the efforts of these leaders in state government under the umbrella of the Green Schools Caucus Initiative.

At the local level, through coalitions like the Mayors’ Alliance for Green Schools and events such as the Sundance Greening of America's Schools Summit [note the resulting National Action Plan], America's mayors are actively working for healthier, higher performing schools.

And even with all this success, there are still so many barriers to break down. The green schools movement has the opportunity for a new platform for engagement — one that transcends politics and advances an agenda that everyone can support. In this campaign we intend to help our community leaders and elected decision makers find ways to work collaboratively to provide our children and our communities with the best opportunities to thrive.
Establish Common Ground
A) Develop a messaging strategy that highlights value aspects to different lawmakers. Spotlight those values in meetings and when developing events, tours, and roundtables. Focus on the element that always works: cost savings.

B) Identify key decision makers to bridge the gap. Who are the lawmakers that can lead a common ground coalition? Indentify someone with the USGBC Green Schools or Advocacy community that has existing relationships with decision makers who can act as the point person. Establish the message around green schools that resonates with this champion, and encourage them to work with their colleagues from both sides of the aisle to garner additional support.

C) Organize an event that provides a rallying point for lawmakers across the spectrum to be educated on the benefits of green schools. Highlight local success stories, using local green schools as a backdrop in telling the story.

D) Establish actionable next steps. What is the local goal of a common ground event? Plan to follow up with strategies such as resolutions or invitations to future events that can continue to advance the bipartisan green schools conversation in your community.

Green Schools Regional Roundtables: Common Ground Series
In 2012, the Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council will launch a series of regional roundtable discussions with local elected officials from across the political spectrum to explore the common ground that exists around the important topic of green schools. These dialogues will be supported by USGBC’s extensive national network of chapters and will include key Center for Green Schools partners.

Green Schools Regional Roundtables: Common Ground in Kentucky
In November 2011, state legislators and key decision makers from six states across the South and Midwest convened in Bowling Green, Kentucky, to discuss the political common ground around the topic of green schools. Led by the bipartisan co-chairs of the Kentucky Green Schools Caucus, Representatives Jim DeCesare (R) and Mary Lou Marzian (D), the event took place at Richardsville Elementary School, the nation’s first net-zero energy school.

The event highlighted the success of the green schools movement in Kentucky that lawmakers could apply to their own communities. With active support from the USGBC Kentucky Chapter, the Kentucky legislature has unanimously adopted a resolution to form a Green Schools Caucus and passed legislation that encourages green construction standards for schools in the Bluegrass State.

At the end of the day at Richardsville, South Carolina Rep. Doug Brannon (R) succinctly summed up what he had learned about green schools: "All day I’ve been looking for a why-not, and it’s clear to me there isn’t one."

Resources
- Green Schools Menu of Options for State Legislators
- Greening Our Schools: A State Legislator’s Guide to Best Policy Practices
- Local Leaders in Sustainability: A National Action Plan for Greening America’s Schools
- Draft Legislative Text: Resolution for Common Ground around Green Schools
- www.centerforgreenschools.org

For more information on USGBC’s Establish Common Ground around Green Schools Campaign, contact Matt Pearce, Campaign Specialist, at mpearce@usgbc.org. For more information on USGBC’s advocacy campaigns, visit www.usgbc.org/campaigns.