

Director's Corner: Bringing Green Schools to the Mainstream

Published on **7 Feb 2012**

Written by [Rachel Gutter](#)

Posted in [Center for Green Schools](#)



At the [end of last year](#), I shared with you that I thought the green schools movement had reached a tipping point. Even in these first weeks of 2012, the many players in this movement are redefining this conversation and our strategy for putting every student in a green school within this generation.

The launch of the Department of Education's [Green Ribbon Schools award program](#) set a clear and ambitious vision for the comprehensive green school - one that utilizes far fewer resources, positively impacts student health and educates environmentally literate graduates.

The true impact of Green Ribbon Schools is less about the handful of awards that will be distributed by the Department of Education and more about the fact that it's allowing non-profits, state-based organizations, the federal government and thousands of individual champions to all start moving in the same direction.

When I met with Education Secretary Arne Duncan right before the new year, he noted that he was "blown away" to hear that 34 states and the District of Columbia had signed on to participate in the program in its first year. Secretary Duncan also noted that every time the Department of Education launches a new initiative he receives a certain amount of "push back" so it surprised him that he had received "no push back" around the release of Green Ribbon Schools.

It's because of the vision and the leadership that the Center for Green Schools named the Green Ribbon Schools program as one of 10 recipients for our 2011 "Best Of" list. The Department of Education, among others, were recognized for a variety of sustainable, cost-cutting measures, including energy conservation, record numbers of LEED-certified buildings and collaborative platforms and policies to green U.S. school infrastructure.

While it's nice to pat ourselves on the back for all the good work we've done so far, we need to keep in mind that we've got a long way to go.

Recently, we commissioned a series of consumer-focus groups comprised of parents, ranging from the environmentally apathetic to the true greenies. What shocked me the most was that unprompted, not a single parent mentioned the school environment as part of a quality education. Every parent noted the importance of "the who" and "the what" (teachers and curriculum), but not one parent mentioned "the where."

Every day, I see firsthand how much "the where" matters. Teachers who suffer from the "2:30 headache," students who miss weeks of school due to asthma and decrepit school buildings that send a clear message to our students about what we think the future holds for them.

But in this case, the grass truly is greener on the other side. 800 teachers who signed up for the pilot of our [Green Classroom Professional Certificate](#), [teenagers](#) who are taking it upon themselves to educate youth in disadvantaged communities and a [school in rural Kentucky](#) that generates as much electricity as it uses and still serves healthy lunches to its students in the cafeteria.

Nationally, the [Green Schools National Conference](#) will provide one of the best opportunities to come together to discuss these green schools issues. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will be keynoting, and we can't wait to see you there.

And this movement has even begun to grow internationally. Recently, I just returned home from being in Los Angeles to speak at [G'day USA](#) - a U.S.-Australian Dialogue of Green Schools. The efforts of the Australia Green Building Council and many of the other 90 World Green Building Councils got us thinking about how this work translates internationally.

That's why this year we will host the first annual [International Green Schools Day of Service](#), where thousands of events will take place on a single day to take us one collective leap forward in transforming our world's schools.

2012 is the year for us to come together and introduce our cause to the mainstream. Through the new initiatives I've mentioned, along with many more, I think these next 12 months will allow us to make headway into making green schools an international conversation.

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