

Green Apples For Everyone

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Written by [Rick Fedrizzi](#)

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This week, I had the extraordinary opportunity to attend the Annual Meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative, a gathering that brings together leaders from around the world and encourages them to make a commitment to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing the global community.

USGBC's mission is nothing short of building a better world, so we spend a lot of time thinking up game-changing ideas. And we had one ready to share with CGI this week, a new initiative that I'm so proud of: Green Apple.

Green Apple is a new, global movement from the Center for Green Schools at USGBC that aims to give all children a school environment where they have clean and healthy air to breathe, where energy and resources are conserved and where they can be inspired to dream of a brighter future. We all know what an apple a day is supposed to do. Well, the goal of Green Apple is the same: to make sure kids are spending more time in the classroom and less time in the doctor's office.

USGBC has long championed the green schools movement. In 2010, we established the Center for Green Schools to drive the transformation of all schools in America into sustainable and healthy places to learn, work and play. We took on this work because the importance of green schools simply can't be overstated.

In the United States, more than 25 percent of Americans walk into classrooms as students, teachers, staff or administrators. But instead of walking into places of opportunity, millions of these people are stuck in buildings where the air is filled with toxins and mold, where classrooms are poorly lit and overcrowded and where resources are limited and outdated.

More than 20 percent of public schools report having unsatisfactory indoor air quality -- which can make kids sick and aggravate asthma. But when toxic chemicals -- often found in paint, flooring, furniture and various products used for maintenance -- are eliminated, students and staff report less eye, nose and throat irritation, and asthma-related incidents decline.

Of course, the benefits of better schools extend far beyond the health and wellbeing of students and staff. They ripple out to the entire community, and even the entire world. Schools are arguably the most important buildings in any community, in any city, in any country. And by making our schools more sustainable, we're creating something that's not only better for learning and teaching, but also better for budgets and for the planet.

On average, healthy, efficient schools save \$100,000 per year on operating costs -- enough to hire at least one new teacher, buy 200 new computers, or purchase 5,000 textbooks. Just think: if all new U.S. school construction and renovation went green today, the total energy savings alone would be \$20 billion over the next 10 years.

These schools also lessen environmental impacts, conserve scarce resources and give the next generation a firsthand lesson about the importance of being responsible environmental stewards. They have an important long-term impact on local communities by creating opportunities for people to develop needed skills for the new green economy.

You can probably tell that I'm passionate about sustainable schools... and there's a good reason. My wife, Cathy, is a public school teacher and lifelong educator. I have a front row seat to all that schools do for our kids, our communities and our future. That's why I'm so committed to taking the green schools movement global through our Green Apple initiative.

It all starts this Saturday, September 29, with the first ever Green Apple Day of Service. We're bringing together thousands of advocates from around the world, including students, teachers, parents, elected officials, organizations, companies and more, to take action through local service projects at community schools. More than 1,100 projects have signed on in all 50 states and on every continent. It's going to be a great day. And it's just the beginning.

The future is being shaped each and every day in classrooms around the world. Businesses get that this is something they can do about improving education, and companies such as United Technologies Corporation and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and others, are partnered with us to help schools and students implement positive change.

So let's make our schools safe and sustainable places for the next generation to learn and inspire them to do the same for the planet they'll inherit. Because where we learn matters.

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