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U.S. Department of Education Announces Green Ribbon Schools Honorees

Published on **22 Apr 2013**
Written by **Nathaniel Allen**
Posted in **Center for Green Schools**

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On Monday, April 22, 2013, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Acting EPA Administrator Bob Perciasepe and White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley celebrated the 43rd Earth Day at Mundo Verde Charter School in Washington, D.C., to announce the second year of honorees of the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) award program. A total of 78 honorees, including 64 schools and 14 districts across 29 states and the District of Columbia, received a prestigious Green Ribbon Schools award for their excellence across the initiative's three pillars: 1) improved occupant health and wellness; 2) minimized utility costs and environmental impact and 3) effective teaching of environmental education. Each participating state in this voluntary recognition award is allowed to nominate up to four schools to ED-GRS, and new as of this year, one school district that is also demonstrating a comprehensive approach to sustainability.

The 64 schools and 14 districts that make up this year's class are each amazing in their own right and provide models for schools of all types to follow. When ED-GRS and its criteria was being developed several years ago, we advocated to ensure that the criteria provided an accessible pathway for all schools to strive towards the three pillars, so that this award could be attained by large urban schools, small rural schools and every population in-between. As a testament to the breadth of the green schools movement, 51 percent of this year's ED-GRS awardees serve under-resourced communities, where 40 percent of the student populations are eligible for free and reduced lunch. We commend all of the winning schools for their noteworthy success, as well as the U.S. Department of Education for its innovative program that, without spending any new money, has continued to grow and provide a focal point in the important movement for healthy, high-performing schools.

During his remarks on Monday morning, Secretary Duncan highlighted how the green schools movement and ED-GRS is helping school districts save millions of dollars and said that "this is one of those things with no downside whatsoever." The Secretary reiterated a point we've personally discussed with him, that generally most actions receive some push-back, but not Green Ribbon Schools, and that this initiative is proving to be a "win-win-win at every single level."

We've been proud to work with our friends in the NGO community to collectively support ED-GRS, as well as with individual schools across the country through the resources we've created to help advance sustainability efforts and specifically collect information for the ED-GRS application. Many of the individual schools are LEED certified, with dozens more across the 14 district honorees. Moreover, several schools and districts cited the work of their 2012 Green Apple Day of Service projects in their ED-GRS applications. In her remarks, White House CEQ Chair Sutley noted that Green Ribbon Schools have proven to be "role models for schools and districts across the country--other schools are turning to them for ideas, inspiration and advice." We encourage you to check out the 2013 winners, and read the comprehensive narratives that outline the keys to their success.

Our team was pleased to see three schools that we have a personal connection with be recognized today. I'd like to give a personal shout out to one of the school honorees, Wilson Senior High School in Washington, D.C., my alma mater. I also wanted to recognize one of the district awardees, Montgomery County, Maryland, where Center for Green Schools Director Rachel Gutter was a K12 student. In addition, the mother of Mallory Shelter, who handles marketing & communications for the Center, is a teacher at the Westtown School, a day and boarding school in Westtown, PA. Wilson High School recently underwent a comprehensive renovation and is now LEED Gold. Montgomery County was one of the first school systems in the country to adopt a district-wide LEED policy, and has since instituted a range of successful sustainability initiatives. Westtown recently achieved LEED certification for its facilities building, and boasts strong sustainability policies on campus. We are all so proud to see these schools become nationally recognized leaders in the green schools movement.

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