53 schools win the Green Ribbon for 2019

Great things are happening for the environment at schools across the U.S. Thirty-five schools, 14 school districts, and four postsecondary institutions have been honored as U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (GRS) for 2019. This Green Ribbon program was developed by the U.S. Department of Education to recognize schools for innovative sustainability efforts and inspire other schools to follow their lead. Awards are based on three pillars:

1. Fostering environmental impact and utility costs
2. Improving health and wellness
3. Ensuring effective sustainability education

The evaluation criteria include improved student engagement, academic achievement, graduation rates, and workforce preparedness. This year, five of the schools and one of the school districts selected are Project Learning Tree program participants. PLT is an award-winning environmental education program and an initiative of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. PLT is made freely available to teachers working with youth from preschool through grade 12.

Take a look at the stories of accomplishments—and in progress—of two very different Green Ribbon schools using PLT:

Boston Green Academy, Massachusetts

Boston Green Academy serves a diverse student body, with 89% of students considered high need. Its sustainability initiatives encourage student empowerment through outdoor learning experiences, real-world interdisciplinary projects, and a range of leadership opportunities.

- Students started a composting program in the kitchen and a share table in the cafeteria that helps reduce unneeded food waste.
- Students designed, built, and maintain an outdoor classroom and garden, and collect and reuse rainwater for the garden and barns.
- Ninety-five percent of students are working with city government on a solar feasibility study.
- All teachers and staff members have a four-hour per month shadowing experience in sustainability fields.
- All seniors complete a six-week, 120-hour sustainability internship.

Dutch Fork Elementary School Academy of Environmental Sciences, South Carolina

Dutch Fork Elementary School Academy of Environmental Sciences is a small rural school focused on environmental science. Forty-eight percent of its student body identifies as African American. The school uses the natural environment as a catalyst for inquiry-based, hands-on student learning and critical thinking. Discovery, exploration, collaboration, and scientific research are emphasized.

- Students collect food scraps from the cafeteria to compost their garden, as well as maintain worm bins. According to the teacher data, about 3,000 pounds of food waste is diverted each month from landfills, saving $5,700 in its climate change efforts per year.
- They cook fresh meals using their garden produce.
- They started a pollinator garden, research highway, and herbicide.
- They audit vehicles and help create anti-idling policies.
- Student recycling captains help run a school-wide program for recycling paper products, plastic containers.

To learn more about sustainability trends, environmental education, and Project Learning Tree, visit sflearn.org.