



North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
2025 Green Ribbon Schools and Districts

Program Overview

Purpose

The *U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) recognition award* honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions that are demonstrating progress in three Pillars:

- 1) reducing environmental impact and costs, including waste, water, energy use and alternative transportation;
- 2) improving the health and wellness of students and staff;
- 3) providing effective sustainability education.

The award is a tool to encourage state education agencies, stakeholders and higher education officials to consider matters of facilities, health, and environment comprehensively and in coordination with state health, environment, and energy agency counterparts. Unique about the award is that, in order to be selected for federal recognition, schools, districts and postsecondary institutions must be demonstrating progress in all three of the Pillars, not just one area.

The recognition award is part of a larger U.S. Department of Education (ED) effort to identify and communicate practices that are proven to result in improved student engagement, higher academic achievement and graduation rates, and workforce preparedness, as well as energy independence and economic security. The 2025 awards cycle marks the 14th year of US ED's Green Ribbon Schools program.

Fifteen North Carolina schools, three districts, and two postsecondary institutions have received the US Department of Education Green Ribbon Award nationally.

Vision

A primary goal of ED-GRS is to inspire schools to strive for 21st century excellence. To that end, the award recognizes schools and districts that encourage efficient schools and districts allow administrators to dedicate more resources to education rather than utility costs. Healthy schools and wellness practices ensure that all students learn in an environment conducive to achieving their full potential, free of the health disparities that can aggravate achievement gaps. Environmental and sustainability education helps all students engage in hands on learning, hone critical thinking skills and develop a solid foundation in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.



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Eligibility

The NC Department of Public Instruction invites Public and Private School Authorities to submit to NCDPI schools and districts that excel in the three Pillars. NCDPI will nominate schools and districts that they have evaluated as meeting the criteria for recognition in collaboration. The schools and districts are strongly encouraged to work with other state agencies, non-profit partners and associations to ensure appropriate expertise in preparation of the submittal. Schools may be existing or new schools.

ED-Green Ribbon Schools and District Sustainability Awardees. NCDPI is permitted as many as five Pre-K-12 school or district nominations. If NCDPI wishes to nominate more than two schools or districts, at least one must serve at least 40 percent of students from a disadvantaged background.^{1,2} No more than one of the five nominees in this Pre-K-12 category may be a private school. A school or district may be selected as an honoree only once. NCDPI considers a school or district's academic achievement, success in closing achievement gaps, and diversity when selecting school nominees. Free standing early learning institutions are eligible in this category.

Program Requirements

Public and Private School Authorities must submit evaluation of school and district nominees in the Pillars and Elements, listed below. NCDPI will use the practices suggested in the Framework for Evaluation of Schools and Districts, which include a variety of widely accepted sustainability standards, certifications, ratings and programs. NCDPI, district officials and principals (where applicable) must certify compliance with all applicable civil rights, health, environment and safety statutory and regulatory requirements.

Public and Private School Authorities may wish to engage the collaboration of state health, environment, energy and safety Public and Private School Authorities; non-profit experts in these areas; and federal agency field offices with appropriate technical expertise. In addition to providing valuable subject matter expertise, these partners can make the task of selecting nominees to NCDPI less cumbersome.

Once schools and districts are selected by NCDPI and presented to ED. ED with assistance by several federal agencies will conduct final review to ensure that schools and districts: 1) meet all of the eligibility requirements; 2) comply with all applicable federal civil rights and federal, state, local

¹ A student from a "disadvantaged background" is defined for this program by the CSSO of each state. The definition *must* include students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals and *may* include students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient, migrant, or receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Nominating Authorities must indicate the definition used and the percent disadvantaged for each school nominated.

² If a state receives four or fewer applicants and none can be classified as disadvantaged, this provision will not be used to limit the state's nominations to two.



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and tribal health, environment and safety statutory and regulatory requirements; and 3) meet high college- and career-ready academic standards.

This federal review will determine the national honorees. In preparation of the application, Public and Private School Authorities must, at a minimum, include documentation of high performance in all Pillars and Elements, as well as the health, safety, and environmental statutory and regulatory compliance of nominated schools and districts, as applicable in each case.

Review Criteria Used by the NCDPI to Select Nominees

NCDPI may nominate up to four schools and a single district that they assess to be the highest performing in their jurisdiction, based on the Public and Private School Authorities' evaluation of applicants' achievement in all Pillars and every Element. The Public and Private School Authorities are encouraged to use the Framework of standards and the sample application template provided by the NCDPI to assist in the preparation of school or district. Application and Framework documents can be found on the NCDPI School Planning website at [External Resources | NC DPI](#) under 2025 Green Ribbon Schools.

The 2025 Green Ribbon Schools Application and the 2025 Green Ribbon District Application are templates or guides as to the content of the application to be sent to NCDPI. When using the provided template(s), following the application order is mandatory. Alternatively, Public and Private School Authorities may consider other formats by reviewing previous Honoree submissions on the U.S. Department of Education website. The total written application shall not exceed 17 pages. This should allow room to include pertinent data in support of the response to the "Pillars."

Where to Send Your School and / or District Submittal, or a Post Secondary Institution Submittal. *(Note: The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) will continue to facilitate applications for Post Secondary Institutions during the 2025 awards cycle.)*

Submittals are made in MS WORD format. When complete, email to the following address by the published due date and time. Include "2025 Green Ribbon Schools" in the subject line.

submit via email to: jon.long@dpi.nc.gov

Questions should be addressed to:

email (preferred): jon.long@dpi.nc.gov
telephone: (984) 236-2923



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Green Ribbon Pillars and Elements for Schools, Districts, and Post Secondary Institutions.

I. Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs

- Reduced or eliminated greenhouse gas emissions, using an energy audit or emissions inventory and reduction plan, cost-effective energy efficiency improvements, conservation measures, and/or on-site renewable energy and/or purchase of green power;
- Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation;
- Reduced solid and hazardous waste production through increased recycling, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste; and
- Expanded use of alternative transportation, through active promotion of locally-available, energy-efficient options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies.

II. Improved Health and Wellness

- An integrated school environmental health program based on an operations and facility-wide environmental management system that considers student, visitor and staff health and safety in all practices related to design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of schools and grounds; and
- High standards of coordinated school health, including social and psychological services, nutrition, fitness, and quantity of quality outdoor time³ for both students and staff.

III. Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

- Interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy and human systems;
- Use of the environment and sustainability to develop STEM content knowledge and thinking skills to prepare graduates for the 21st century technology-driven economy; and
- Development of civic engagement knowledge and skills, and students' application of these to address sustainability and environmental issues in their community.

³ Local prevailing weather conditions over the course of the school year will be considered in assessing this element to account for regional variability.



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Technical Assistance

ED-GRS provides technical assistance to schools, districts and states, including: 1) a portal of resources and webinars for green schools and 2) a Framework and sample application for evaluation of nominees; and 3) ongoing communications among state agency selection committees, non-profits and federal agencies to facilitate the dissemination of best practices.

Notification, Recognition Ceremony and Benefits

Honored schools and districts are announced each year and are recognized at an annual ceremony. The recognition award conveys no ED funding to states, schools, or districts.

Statutory Authority

The US Department of Education is responsible for administering U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. ED-GRS is authorized by Section 5411(b)(5) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (20 U.S.C. § 7243(b)(5)).