

# **Eco-Schools U.S.**

**2026-2027**

## **Program and Certification Guide**



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# Certification Guide 2026-27

## Welcome to the Eco-Schools U.S. Program!

Eco-Schools U.S. certification represents environmental excellence for PK-12 schools in the United States. Participation in the program allows students, teachers, school administrators, custodians, and parents to get a clear picture of their current environmental practices and take action to reduce their environmental footprint.

Each year, schools apply for certification by undertaking environmental actions, campaigns, and projects, and then recording them in the online Eco-Schools U.S. Certification Application (ECA) to earn points. At the end of the year, school applications are assessed based on their alignment to the Eco-Schools Framework and are awarded a final certification level.



### All U.S. Schools

All schools in the United States can participate and certify with the Eco-Schools U.S. program free of charge.



#### Our Statement of Purpose

Our programming works in collaboration with communities to provide K12 education that is responsive to and supports student leadership and equitable solutions to collectively build a more ecologically and socially just world.



#### Our Vision

NWF Education strives to support communities in creating resilient, just spaces for people and wildlife to thrive.

### We Value...

- Accountability
- Authenticity
- Collaboration
- Equity & Justice
- Growth & Learning
- Kindness & Compassion
- Well-Being and Belonging
- Vision & Purpose Focused



# Certification Guide 2026-27

## How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to support your school throughout the certification process. It outlines the Eco-Schools U.S. program, provides details on the assessment process and levels of certification, and will give you a sense of how to prepare for the year ahead.



### Quick Links

#### Eco-Schools U.S. Certification Application (ECA)



Where schools can register and participate in the Eco-Schools U.S. program. Check it out [here](#)!

#### ECA Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)



Find answers to frequently asked questions about the Eco-Schools U.S. certification program and online application, [here](#).

#### Webinars | Training



View and register for free webinars (live and recorded) offered throughout the year, as well as how-to videos to help on your Eco-Schools journey, [here](#).

#### Sign up for Eco-Schools Updates



Stay connected to Eco-Schools U.S. by [signing up for our monthly communication](#). These communications keep you up-to-date on new program resources and so much more.

# Certification Guide 2026-27

## Eco-Schools Framework to Certification

Eco-Schools U.S. is an annual certification program that supports and recognizes environmental action in schools. Schools can register starting August 10th and must submit for certification by the first Friday in June. School activities that happen in July or August can be claimed in the following year's application.



### Form An Action Team

Create a student-led committee with diverse abilities and perspectives to drive environment-based education and actions for the school community.



### Authentically Engage the Community

Foster genuine, reciprocal connections and share intergenerational and transcultural stories from working together at the nexus of environment, community, and economy.



### Develop an Action Plan

Annually create an action plan that aligns with the committee's values, focusing on nature-based solutions for the community resilience, health, and wellbeing.



### Take Action, Collect Data, Measure Impact, and Share Stories

Identify community and nature-based solutions for the team's action plan, measure the school's impact, and share accessible, fact-based stories to raise awareness, and promote collaboration moving toward whole-school engagement.



### Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Collect data before and after taking action to evaluate how well the plan is working. Revise plans as needed and keep the school community informed about action progress.

**Submissions Open: First Friday in April (April 2, 2027)**

**Final Submission Deadline: First Friday in June (June 4, 2027)**



### Identify Curriculum Connections

The team's environment and community-based actions will connect to what students are learning in classrooms.



### Celebrate, Reflect, and Create an EcoCode

Celebrate successes big and small, reflect on lessons learned, and creatively display the school's commitment to the community and sustainability in an EcoCode.

# Certification Guide 2026-27

## Levels of Certification

Throughout the school year, schools complete actions in the online application and earn points towards their certification. The depth and extent of this completed environment and nature-based actions will determine the school's final certification level.

The four levels of certification a school can achieve are described below. Please see the Certification Rubric [on page 11](#) for more details on how we assess applications.



### Bronze: 50-64 points

If you're new to Eco-Schools or want to focus on a few key actions this year, we suggest aiming for Bronze certification. It is important to start slow and lay a foundation for environmental learning and action at your school.



### Silver: 65-79 points

Silver certification is suited to schools that have started to develop a solid foundation of environmental learning and action throughout their school community.



### Gold: 80-99 points

Aiming for Gold certification is a challenge that will provide a comprehensive framework for environmental learning and action at your school.



### Green Flag: 100+ points

Green Flag is the highest level of certification and a challenge that we recommend for schools that are ready to take on diverse environmental actions and engage their community. Please ensure you have reviewed the Green Flag Certification FAQ if your school is interested in pursuing the Green Flag level this year.



### Participant Schools

Any school that submits a plan on the Eco-Schools U.S. Certification Application with a minimum of 35 points but is unable to submit for certification (a minimum of 50 points) will be recognized as a Participant school. Participant recognition celebrates a school's effort in taking environmental action and acknowledges a school's attempt in becoming Eco-Schools certified. Schools that are recognized as Participants will be awarded a digital Participant seal and are valuable members of the Eco-Schools network, but are not considered certified Eco-Schools.

When a school becomes a certified Eco-School, they receive a digital certification seal on their Impact page, that reflects their certification level and links to downloadable seals and certificates. This seal can be displayed on a school's website and social media accounts, in newsletters, in email signatures, and more.

# Certification Guide 2026-27

## Getting Started on the Eco-Schools Certification Application (ECA)

Once you have registered for the Eco-Schools program, it's time to start exploring the ECA!

### Your Dashboard

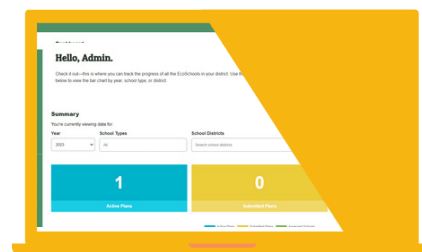
Track your school's certification progress over the year. Use the blue navigation bar on the left side of your screen to navigate to different pages including:

**Our Action Plan:** Where you can view and manage the actions you want to take this year.

**Action Library:** Where you can view all the actions not currently in your plan.

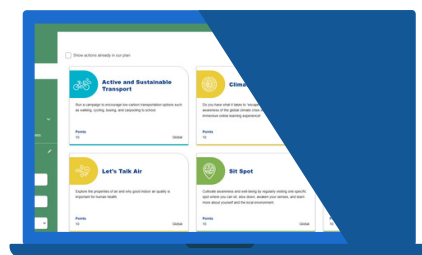
**Achievements:** Where you can view your school's certification history and download past certification seals.

**Impact:** Where you can view the impact of your school and the collective impact of all schools in the U.S. as we work towards a cleaner, healthier, sustainable future!



### My Library

Gather your Action Team, go through the library, and choose actions to add to your school's environmental action plan this year. Actions can be searched by keyword or theme. Actions can be added and removed throughout the year as your program becomes defined.



### This is What an Action Looks Like!

An action includes:

- Information about the action, connections to the curriculum, and Sustainable Development Goals.
- An action guide, which provides simple steps to completing the action.
- Tools and resources to support learning and action on the environmental topics
- Certification questions, which schools complete for points towards their certification level.

Check out short how-to videos on our YouTube page.





# Certification Guide 2026-27

## Program deadlines, assessment, and appeals

### Important Dates & Deadlines

The Eco-Schools Certification Application (ECA) opens August 10, 2026.

**Certification Readiness Eligibility Questionnaire: Schools aiming for certification must complete the questionnaire by the last Friday in February.**

Submissions open the first Friday in April!

**FINAL Certification Deadline:** Certification applications must be submitted through the ECA by the first Friday in June. Schools may claim actions or campaigns that are planned for after the certification deadline by completing the appropriate actions to the best of their ability.

### Certification Assessment

School applications are assessed based on the information provided through the ECA. To be assessed and certify, schools must submit a completed application by the final Eco-Schools deadline.

When a school submits their application, they submit at a particular level (based on the total number of points accumulated). The application is then verified by Eco-Schools Assessors based on the data, documentation, and descriptions provided in the application. Eco-Schools Assessors may contact applicants directly to verify values. Assessment may also include virtual visits (see the FAQ for details). Should a school application exceed or not meet the criteria of their submitted certification level, their final certification level may be changed during the assessment process.

See the Certification Rubric on page 12 for more details on the assessment criteria. The [Action Card Point Guide](#) provides additional guidance about how schools accrue points.

### Final Standings

During the assessment period, submitted action plans will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Once assessed, schools will be notified by email to view their certification results and any available feedback by logging into the ECA. If schools disagree with their certification results, they may engage in an Appeals process.

### Appeal Process

Eco-Schools U.S. makes every effort to ensure certification applications are assessed accurately and equitably. Should a school wish to appeal their final standing, they may [complete this form](#).

# Certification Guide 2026-27

## Annual Calendar

This calendar provides an overview of the Eco-Schools program and highlights key dates, events, and activities throughout the year. With the exception of program deadlines, the calendar is meant to act as a guide and can be adapted to include regional events and priorities.

### Month

### Important Dates

### Activities

September –  
October

#### Registration Opens

- Farm to School Month
- Walk & Roll to School Day
- Earth Science Week

Register your school, establish an Action Team, set goals, create a plan for the year, and let people at your school know how to get involved with the Eco-Schools program.

**THINGS TO DO NOW! Answer the first 5 questions on the About the Eco-Schools Program card.**

November –  
December

- Outdoor Classroom Day
- America Recycles Day
- World Soil Day
- Audubon Christmas Bird Count
- Holiday Power Down Days
- Winter Break

Provide opportunities for all students at your school to learn **IN, ABOUT, and FOR** the environment.

**Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.**

January –  
February

#### Certification Eligibility Questionnaire (Due Last Friday in February)

- MLK Day of Service
- World Wetlands Day
- Great Backyard Bird Count

Start planning for outdoor gardening and planting projects.

**Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.**

March –  
April

#### Submission Window Opens (first Friday in April)

- World Water Day
- Earth Month
- Intn Day of Forests
- Global Action Days
- Spring Break

For Earth Day, engage your school in learning and action around environmental justice issues that are important to your local community.

**Don't forget to update your certification questions in the ECA as you complete actions.**

May –  
June

#### Application Deadline (First Friday in June)

- Garden for Wildlife® Month
- Bike & Roll to School Day
- Endangered Species Day
- World Oceans Day
- National Pollinator Month

Complete your online application and submit **by the first Friday in June**. Celebrate your school's achievements!

You will be notified by email of certification results.

July –  
August

#### Summer Break

Don't forget about summer maintenance for your school garden and trees. **Have a wonderful summer!**