

## FAQS

### ABOUT ECO-SCHOOLS USA

#### **What is Eco-Schools?**

[Eco-Schools](#) is an international program that provides a framework to help educators integrate sustainable principles throughout their schools and curriculum. It strives to model environmentally sound practices, provide support for greening the curriculum, enhance academic achievement, and foster environmental stewardship. Three award levels – Bronze, Silver, and Green Flag – provide schools with recognition for their achievements, and students are active participants in the process.

#### **Who runs the international Eco-Schools program?**

Eco-Schools was started in 1994 by the [Foundation for Environmental Education \(FEE\)](#) with support from the European Commission. FEE is a non-governmental, nonprofit organization that promotes sustainable development through environmental education. It operates four other programs in addition to Eco-Schools –Young Reporters for the Environment, Blue Flag, Green Key, and Learning about Forests (LEAF).

#### **How is Eco-Schools USA related to the international Eco-Schools program?**

Eco-Schools is currently being implemented in 62 nations around the world. Eco-Schools USA is part of this successful global Eco-Schools network. Each country interprets the program according to its circumstances – for example, the large size of the United States means certain approaches that work well in smaller countries don't work here – but all programs are based on the same framework and principles.

#### **Who runs Eco-Schools USA?**

In December 2008, the [National Wildlife Federation](#) was granted host status for the Pre-K-12 Eco-Schools USA program in the United States. This responsibility fits seamlessly with NWF's commitment to promote environmental education, connect people with nature, and raise awareness about the threat to people and wildlife from global warming.

#### **What is the role of Eco-Schools USA in the larger green schools movement?**

Eco-Schools USA supports the growing movement to green schools throughout the United States and across the globe. To assist schools in achieving recognition through the federal Green Ribbon Schools program, we have developed an [alignment primer between the pathways of Eco-Schools USA and the three pillars of Green Ribbon Schools](#). Eco-Schools USA also collaborates with a growing number of state-based green schools programs to offer co-certification and/or share resources, and has [partnered](#) with a variety of other organizations to advance the cause of greener schools.

## REGISTRATION

How much does it cost to participate in Eco-Schools USA?

Nothing! It's free to register for the program and utilize the Eco-Schools framework to green your school.

### How do I register my school?

Ready to join the Eco-Schools community? Registration is easy – and free! Just [enter your school information in the registration form](#).

### How do I know if my school is already registered?

Before completing the registration form, please be sure your school is not already enrolled. [Search the interactive map of registered schools to check](#). Our database will not allow schools to register twice.

### How do I log back in after I have registered?

Click on the "[LOGIN](#)" button on the right side of the page. You will need the email address you entered when you registered.

### What if I don't have the email address used to register my school?

If you don't have access to the email address associated with your school's registration, contact Eco-Schools USA at [eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org](mailto:eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org) requesting this information. We will send you the email address you used to register so that you will be able to log in.

### How can I find more Eco-Schools in my region?

Check out our [interactive map](#) to see all registered Eco-Schools and their award levels. You can see how many Eco-Schools are registered in your state and find other schools near you.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE

### What are the Seven Steps?

Eco-Schools USA is built on a framework of [Seven Steps](#). The framework offers a step-by-step method to implement your program, but it is a flexible process that allows you to complete each step in the way that best suits your school and situation. The Seven Steps are:

1. Establish an Eco-Action Team
2. Perform an Environmental Review / Audit
3. Develop an Eco-Action Plan
4. Monitor and Evaluate Progress
5. Link to the Educational Curriculum
6. Involve the Entire School and Larger Community
7. Create an "Eco-Code" or Mission Statement

### Is it necessary to complete the Seven Steps in order?

You'll find that steps 1-4 are best done in order, as each one builds upon the previous one. Steps 5-7 can be done at any point; in fact, it is best if you start working on them as soon as you begin your program.

### What are the Pathways?

Eco-Schools USA has identified a variety of focus areas or [pathways](#) for schools to follow in their journey through the program. You will choose which pathway(s) you wish to take on. Most schools tackle just

one or two at a time. Many of the pathways overlap or are closely related, so you will likely find that by making progress in one area, you are taking steps toward improving your performance in another as well. The pathways from which you can choose are:



### How do we earn Eco-Schools awards?

Once your school has [registered](#) and implemented the [Seven Steps](#), you can apply for an Eco-Schools award. There are three levels of the award system: [Bronze](#), [Silver](#), and the highest honor, [Green Flag](#). The Bronze and Silver levels are self-assessed. The Green Flag must be assessed by an Eco-Schools USA assessor and renewed every two years. A school is considered to be a permanent Eco-School once it has gained its fourth Green Flag. Visit our [Awards page](#) to find criteria for each award level, checklists to help you keep track of your progress, and detailed instructions for applying for an award.

### How many Pathways must we take on?

To earn a Bronze Award, you need to complete the Seven Steps using at least one pathway. For a Silver Award, you must take on at least two pathways, and for a Green Flag, three pathways. Please note: The Energy Pathway must be addressed by every school applying for a Green Flag award.

### Are we required to use the audits you provide?

A thorough [audit of your school's current environmental performance](#) is key to creating a plan for making improvements and monitoring your progress. For the Bronze Award level, you may use any audit you choose. For the Silver and Green Flag levels, you must use the Eco-Schools audit templates, but you can adjust them if necessary to better accommodate your students' age level and abilities and the particular circumstances at your school.

### Do we need to do an audit of our school's total environmental performance, or just complete the audits for the pathways we are working on?

To achieve an Eco-Schools USA award, you need only complete the audit(s) for the pathway(s) you are addressing. We have also created an Environmental Review Checklist. We encourage you to use this checklist to get a "big picture view" of your school's current impact. You can use it to help you decide which pathway(s) to address and to monitor your progress from year to year.

### Does work that we've already done to green our school count towards Eco-Schools' criteria?

Yes, it certainly can! Many of our schools start their greening process before joining Eco-Schools. There's a good chance you will find that work you've already completed aligns with one or more of the steps in the Eco-Schools framework. You'll find that Eco-Schools provides you with a method to organize your efforts and recognition to celebrate your successes.

### How long does it generally take to achieve an award?

The time it takes to implement the program varies greatly from school to school, but generally if you are starting from scratch, you should be able to achieve an award within around 18 months. If you have already undertaken some greening projects before joining Eco-Schools, you may well be able to apply for your first award sooner than that.

### **Is Eco-Schools USA aligned with national education standards?**

Yes, it is. To assist educators in weaving the Eco-Schools USA program into their existing curriculum, each of the Eco-Schools USA pathways has been aligned to the National Science Education Standards from which all states base their standards as well as the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and the Common Core Standards. Access the [standards alignment here](#).

### **TIPS AND SUPPORT**

#### **Why should we participate in Eco-Schools USA?**

Whether you are a teacher, student, administrator or facilities manager, the Eco-Schools USA program can benefit your school and local community. The Eco-Schools program is designed in a way that:

- Improves academic performance, especially in science and math
- Leads to financial savings for schools
- Decreases a school's carbon footprint through practical solutions that reduce energy and water consumption
- Reduces school waste and conserves natural resources
- Encourages environmental awareness and stewardship
- Increases parental involvement
- Helps students and teachers develop stronger relationships with their communities
- Fosters global understanding and national and international connections

To find out more about the benefits of being an Eco-School, visit our [benefits page](#).

#### **Is my school ready to join Eco-Schools USA?**

To successfully implement the Eco-Schools program, here's what you need:

- 1) The support of your administration.
- 2) A group of students, teachers and other school staff who are eager to implement the program.

If just one person is ready to champion the program, that's a starting place, but you'll want to get other people on board as soon as possible. That's all that's really necessary to begin! The rest will come as you work through the Seven Steps. See below for more tips on gathering support for your program.

#### **How can I persuade my administration and colleagues that we should participate?**

In addition to environmental stewardship, Eco-Schools USA can help your school achieve a variety of goals, from financial savings to improved academic performance and student engagement. Visit our [benefits page](#) to gather the facts, and then consider which goals will be most motivating to your administrators and colleagues. Emphasize these points as you explain the program to help you make a case for becoming an Eco-School. You may also want to look at our [case studies](#) for examples of what other Eco-Schools have achieved as they have implemented the program.

#### **How do we involve the whole school?**

While the Eco-Action Team provides a great opportunity for some students to get deeply involved in the Eco-Schools process, your goal should be to involve the entire student body in meaningful ways. You'll find a variety of ideas under [Step 6: Involve the Community](#). Here are just a few tips to get you started:

- Ensure that all interested students have an opportunity to serve on the Eco-Action Team or subcommittees working on specific projects.
- Communicate your Eco-Schools activities and achievements regularly, perhaps at school assemblies, on a bulletin board or display in a central location, or on the school's website.

- Hold a contest to create the school's [Eco-Code](#).
- Develop an outdoor classroom and gardens on the school grounds and encourage all teachers to make use of them for hands-on lessons.
- Find ways to divide up at least some of your [Action Plan](#) items so all classrooms can participate. For example, if your goal is to reduce electricity use, have each classroom implement a plan to check that lights are off and electronics shut down when the room is unoccupied.

### **What are the best ways to involve parents and the rest of the community?**

There are many ways to expand your Eco-Schools work to engage a wider network, and many benefits to doing so. See [Step 6: Involve the Community](#) for suggestions. For example:

- Communicate your Eco-Schools activities and achievements to parents and the community through a variety of media, such as school newsletters, stories in local news sources, and community calendars.
- Look for ways to tap into the interests and skills that parents and community members can bring to your projects. Ask for volunteers to serve on your Eco-Action Team and to help with specific projects. For example, an energy engineer could help assess opportunities for energy conservation, a carpenter might be able to assist with constructing raised garden beds or compost bins, and an avid gardener could help choose plants and create a maintenance plan.
- Hold work bees, information fairs, or celebrations and invite the whole community to participate.

### **Where can we find funding and other support for our projects?**

When it comes to greening your school, you can take many actions that will make a big impact but cost little or no money. When you do need funding, creativity is the key to finding the support you need. Applying for grants is one excellent way to fund projects. Also, don't overlook local businesses or organizations that might be willing to donate money or materials to support your efforts. Consider asking school alumni to contribute to the cause. You might also be able to team up with other groups in your area to get expertise and volunteers to help you carry out projects. For instance, perhaps a local conservation group would assist with invasive species removal and habitat restoration, a local nursery would donate native plants, and a scout troop would build nesting boxes to install in the new habitat.

### **How can we get recognition for our accomplishments?**

Eco-Schools USA gives [awards](#) to recognize your achievements in the program, and you can display your Bronze or Silver Award certificate or Green Flag proudly. You can also print [participation certificates](#) to honor the contributions of students and volunteers. But there are many other ways to get the recognition your hard work deserves. Contact local media – your newspaper, television station, or radio station – and invite them to cover your activities and the awards you achieve. Be sure to include information about your Eco-Schools activities in school newsletters and on your website. Share your work via social media. Reach out to other Eco-Schools in your area to share and celebrate successes.

### **Is there a way to get ideas from other schools' experiences?**

Yes! [Check out our case studies](#) for lots of information and inspiration. You can learn a lot – and save time and trouble – by reading about other schools' challenges and successes and making good use of the hard-earned knowledge they've shared.

## FURTHER INQUIRIES

### **Do you have a newsletter?**

Yes, we post an e-newsletter 10 times a year that lists program updates, resources, grants and contests, and lots of other useful information. You can [sign up to receive an email with the newsletter link here](#).

### **Can we communicate with other Eco-Schools to share advice?**

If you'd like to share ideas or get tips from another school in your area (or anywhere else), use our [interactive map](#) to search for schools. Click on the school name for the coordinator's contact information.

### **Can we get matched with a "sister" Eco-School in another country?**

A system for making international connections is in the works. Until it is up and running, we may be able to help you. On the international Eco-Schools website, take a look at the [list of participating countries](#). Then email the Eco-Schools USA team to let us know which country or countries you are most interested in connecting with, and we will contact the countries' coordinators to see if we can arrange a match for you.

### **If we have another question, how can we contact you?**

Email the Eco-Schools USA team at [eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org](mailto:eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org).

## Keep in Touch

It's easy to keep in touch, find resources, and share your successes as you journey along the Eco-Schools USA path.

### National Wildlife Federation Eco-Schools USA Website

Visit the [NWF Eco-Schools USA website](#) to get additional information and tools to successfully implement the program.

### Eco-Schools International Website

This is the [global Eco-School website](#) with links to Eco-Schools all around the world.

### Social Media

Join in the discussion as we share inspiration and stories on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest.

Twitter: Follow us [@EcoSchoolsUSA](#)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EcoSchoolsUSA/>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/nwfpins/eco-schools-usa/>

### Monthly Newsletter & Emails

Every month, see [what's trending for Eco-Schools](#). Sign up to receive our monthly emails. It's an easy way to keep up with what's happening.

### Email

Feel free to contact us via email [Eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org](mailto:Eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org), with any questions, comments, and concerns or if you just want to share your success.

## Who We Are

### National Team

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