Eco-Schools USA

Handbook

(Version 1 – October, 2016)
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Welcome and Introduction

The National Wildlife Federation’s Role in Environmental Education

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is a leader in conservation and environmental education among America’s major conservation groups. We began educational programs for children in the 1950s and now have school greening programs in over 9,000 Pre-K-12 schools. Moreover, we work directly with 1,000 higher education campuses through our Campus Ecology program; we are a leader, via our Ranger Rick brand, in wholesome children’s education publishing; and we are on a campaign to provide 10 million kids with regular time outdoors learning and playing in nature through partnerships with schools, public agencies and local and regional park departments.

NWF’s Pre-K–12 educational programming provides hands-on, experiential and authentic learning experiences for young children and youth. We believe that learning happens most powerfully when people are deeply involved with the natural world, their communities, and one another. We provide students and educators with hands-on, minds-on, practical and authentic learning experiences and academically challenging programs that employ experiential learning strategies. We are metrics driven and measure results in terms of environmental outcomes, environmental education advancement, and overall academic performance and behavior of students engaged in our programs.

What is the NWF Eco-Schools USA Program?

NWF’s Eco-Schools USA program is a nationwide program that engages Pre K-12 school students, faculty, administrators and community volunteers in a comprehensive, environment-based program to improve student environmental literacy and skills. The schools themselves become greener and cleaner and students learn more science and technology. The Eco-Schools USA program now serves over 4,300 U.S. schools, 2.5 million students, over 116,000 educators, and is growing.

The Eco-Schools USA program focuses on greening existing school buildings, school grounds, curricula, and the student experience. In addition to direct environmental benefits, the program helps to dramatically improve student skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). It is also a proven framework for promoting youth leadership and community service. Roughly two-thirds of the participating schools are in low income urban areas and approximately 45% of participating students are from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. As of early 2016, virtually every major urban area in the U.S. has active Eco-Schools. The Eco-Schools USA website has an interactive map that shows locations and distribution of participating schools.

Eco-Schools USA is part of a larger global network of nearly 50,000 green schools in 62 nations. The Eco-Schools effort was originally launched in 1994 as an outgrowth of the 1992 Rio Environmental Declaration. Its global coordinator, the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), is based in Denmark and each participating nation has its own non-governmental organization operator. During its first decade of existence, the Eco-Schools program prospered in Europe and, in the past five years, has expanded to other major nations including Australia,
Brazil, China, India, Japan, and Russia. The United States joined the program in 2008 and NWF is the sole designated host and operator in this country.

Twenty years of testing and growth have helped the Eco-Schools program to hit on all cylinders. The program produces results that can be measured in energy and water saved, reduced solid waste and food waste, improved indoor air quality, new school gardens and new outdoor classrooms, and more. In 2015, for example, participating U.S. schools saved $65 million on their utility bills through a variety of low-cost and no-cost means. The Eco-Schools platform also lets educators use these improvements as learning opportunities for youth. Student/faculty teams conduct audits of water and energy use, indoor air quality, solid waste, and landscaping and develop action plans to make improvements. These become part of the school’s educational programming.

In addition to environmental education benefits, teachers find profound linkages between STEM education and student learning of environmental subjects. Both offer hands-on learning opportunities and support inquiry-based education, critical thinking, use of technology and problem solving. This will become more important as states, such as California, New York, New Jersey and many more implement the newly-released Next Generation Science Standards.

The Eco-Schools program also helps orient students to a more sustainable future and careers. The program is based on a simplified version of the ISO 14001 environmental management process framework. Schools form school-wide teams, conduct audits, and develop action plans. This exposes them to “green” career paths, and facilitates their transition to higher education, the workplace, and adult life. As schools implement their plans, progress is measured and this helps them reach specific school-wide award levels – Bronze, Silver and Green Flag. In sum, Eco-Schools USA supplies a seven-step framework that provides a core structure for learning opportunities at schools. The seven steps, covered in more detail later in this handbook, are to:

1. Establish a student-driven Eco-Action Team.
2. Perform an environmental review assessment.
5. Link to educational curriculum.
6. Involve the entire school and larger community.
7. Create an “Eco-Code.”

The NWF Eco-Schools USA website is designed to be self-guiding and to make participation in the program easy for educators. The site offers a rich array of environment-based curricula, educational content, and best practices from decades of working with schools and educators. Most of these resources are available at no cost to schools and the Eco-Schools USA program, itself, is a free program.
How Does Eco-Schools USA Benefit Your School?

Eco-Schools USA is a holistic program. It strives to make environmental awareness and action an intrinsic part of the life and culture of a school, including students, teachers, administrative staff, non-teaching staff, parents, and the local community. Eco-Schools USA works to extend learning beyond the classroom and develop responsible environmental attitudes and commitments, both at home and in the wider community.

NWF’s Eco-Schools USA Gets Results!

Whether public, private, charter, magnet, or home school, the NWF Eco-Schools USA program gets results. Our schools are engaged, active, and motivated, and the students are becoming more environmentally literate through hands-on, experiential, and project-based learning that turns the school buildings and grounds into true learning laboratories.

Beyond the actual cost savings to the school and district, Eco-Schools USA has a critical impact on student learning and health as well. Schools report the following improvements from our most recent survey:

- Increased student engagement
- Improved reading abilities
- Improved math skills
- Better understanding of science concepts
- Improved technology and engineering skills
- Increased participation in science and nature activities
- Improved school attendance
- Increased student/staff physical activity

NWF launched the Eco-Schools USA program in 2009. Since then, our growth has been impressive and there are over 4,350 schools nationwide today. We also have state partners in Maryland, Kansas, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin who help us to deliver the program to schools in those states. The program is free to any participating school.
Financial Benefits to the School

There are many ways that schools and districts benefit financially from participating in the NWF Eco-Schools USA program. Each year, NWF surveys its participants to determine if schools are realizing financial savings due to the program. Schools report savings in the areas of energy, water, waste, and carbon footprint. Metrics are gathered through the NWF Eco-Schools USA school “dashboard” -- an online metric gathering portal that allows schools to measure their progress. Some typical savings and school stories are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Using the Eco-Schools Energy Pathway, students at <strong>William Annin School in Bernards Township, NJ</strong> investigated ways to conserve energy at their school. In addition to making small changes, like swapping out old light bulbs for new, energy efficient bulbs, the school also installed solar panels. A large monitor in the school hallway now displays their energy saving results for all to see.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td><strong>Savannah Country Day School, GA</strong>, the first Eco-Schools USA Green Flag school, has a 2,000-gallon cistern that collects 50% of the rainwater from the roof of the school’s main building. Water from the underground cistern is put to use in a number of ways, such as filling the stack pond which is home to fish and turtles. Students learn about water conservation as they calculate how many gallons of water are in the cistern at different times throughout the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption &amp; Waste</td>
<td>With 100% school participation and using the School Improvement Plan, <strong>Churchill Road Elementary, VA</strong> was able to reduce their lunch waste by 90%. Thanks to their innovative approach, all non-used food from the cafeteria now gets redistributed to local food banks. The school went from 300 pounds of cafeteria waste per day to just 30 pounds each day!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>Collectively, participating <strong>NYC Eco-Schools</strong> prevented the release of more than 300,000 pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. These schools participated in the Eco-Schools USA “Cool School Challenge” and tracked their carbon emission savings through energy, water, HVAC, waste, and transportation improvements and behavior changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Academic Achievement
Research has shown that students of all economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds that are engaged in hands-on, applied and real-world aspects of environmental education have an increased desire to learn and perform better on most measurements of student success. Educators today are also finding it harder to attract, retain, and interest students in STEM disciplines. Using the environment as an integrating context, we call this our Green STEM programmatic approach. Green STEM supports inquiry-based learning; places scientific and technical learning in a real world context; and encourages hands-on, project based learning and application of knowledge. Green STEM improves academic performance, especially in science and math, and encourages student environmental awareness, stewardship and leadership.

In addition, today’s students need to develop 21st Century Skills to prepare for success in their chosen career paths as they age. These skills are broken down into three categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21ST CENTURY SKILLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
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The NWF Eco-Schools USA program utilizes the Project-Based Learning (PBL) teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge that is local in nature. Following the Eco-Schools’ Seven Step Framework, students lead the Eco-Action Team, they perform the school’s Environmental Audit, they develop the Action Plan, and Monitor and Evaluate their progress towards goals over time. All of the actions they take are linked to the curriculum, and they use their student voice and choice to engage the greater school Community. Finally, they make their work public by developing an Eco-Action Code and presenting it to the school and broader community. Each step helps to build student confidence, communication, and collaboration skills, while at the same time allowing them to think creatively and critically about environmental or sustainability challenges at their school and develop place-based solutions. In this way, students develop the necessary 21st Century Skills as well as develop an affinity for the STEM disciplines.
Don’t just take our word for it – here’s what members of the school community are saying about various aspects of our program!

“As a 2nd grade teacher, part of our science curriculum is the life cycle of a butterfly. Having a butterfly garden right here on campus has allowed me to connect my curriculum with my students' real life experience and provide a greater depth of understanding for my students.”  
- Melissa Eads, Patton Elementary School, Austin ISD

"Eco Schools’ Green STEM workshop was by far one of the best professional learning sessions of my career! Although I do not have a math or science background, I walked away with practical ways to integrate STEM into my units of study in Reading, Writing, Science and Social Studies. I can’t wait to turn my 5th graders into lead oil spill containment and extraction researchers."- Wendy Poveda, PS 132 (Manhattan)

“Children are learning by doing. This has been an invaluable experience for them.”  
- Oliver Barron, Patton Elementary School, Austin ISD

“Environment-based education offers a platform to provide breadth and depth to all aspects of the curriculum. All students are involved with inquiry learning as they investigate various aspects of each discipline to study. Students grow crops based on their curriculum, making learning come alive. We use the outdoor classroom to “do science,” not just read about it. Our students are passionately learning, utilize all five senses to achieve education goals. These goals will take these students into the future."  
- Don Hutzel, Principal, Churchill Road Elementary
The Meaning of the Eco-Schools Logo

In 1994, FEE France, one of the first Eco-Schools programs, organized a competition in a school of graphic arts to create a logo for an environmental program related to school and based on the active participation of students. The winning design became the logo for the Eco-Schools program worldwide. A lot of meaning is packed into this image. Here is what it symbolizes:

- People are the basis and center of the program. In our hands lies the greening of our future, which is symbolized by the flower flourishing above the head of the central person.
- The flowers symbolize both the flourishing of the environment that we can promote, and the flourishing of human beings who will be enriched by developing values and attitudes that protect our environment and ourselves.
- Once this bouquet of green flowers is open over our heads, it turns into a kind of umbrella, a shelter that protects us.
- The book is associated with school and knowledge, but the two separate pages (with the person in the middle) mean that this knowledge is not purely academic. Books only contribute to the change in behaviors, while teaching/learning and people are central.
- The blue page on the left represents the book of human history, loaded and heavy with the problems of society we are facing and inheriting. This part of the book is already written.
- The white page on the right is not yet written. It represents everything that can be done - and we alone decide what our future will be.

Eco-Schools National Operators Meeting in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Nov. 2015

(photo credit Anna Tramarin)
Sustainable Development[^1]—“Development that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding Earth’s life support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations depends.”

Griggs et al. (2013)

Because of the urgent need for citizens to understand the concepts of sustainability, Education for Sustainable Development or Sustainability Education has become a strong focus worldwide. Sustainability education is a framework that can be used to engage students in all subjects by using the real-world as the vehicle to understanding and actively participating in the complex interconnections between the creation of vibrant communities, strong economies, and healthy ecosystems, both locally and globally. Education forms the foundation for building sustainable communities, and without education we cannot achieve sustainability.

**Equity, Environment and Economics**

Registered Eco-Schools are working toward becoming more sustainable, and are investigating and implementing sustainable development goals. Eco-Schools USA work to link the three interconnected elements of sustainability (social equity, environmental health and economic prosperity) on a local, national and international level. Systems thinking underlies the 7 Step Framework and Pathways to

[^1]: After a long series of intergovernmental negotiations on various themes, which saw a broad participation from major groups and civil society stakeholders under the guidance of the United Nations State Members, the Goals were adopted on September 25, 2015 at the New York United Nations Summit by 193 Member States. UN Member States, the civil society and private sector contributors will use this new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators to guide development global efforts over the next 15 years in a concerted international action with the broadest, most ambitious development agenda ever agreed upon at the global level.
Sustainability that make up the Eco-Schools USA program. As schools take steps to improve their environmental performance, such as through reducing energy consumption or creating wildlife habitat on the school grounds, these steps become a focus of the curriculum, a focus throughout the school and a focus within the community. Students experience the integration of learning and meaning and power behind their action. Each Eco-Schools USA Pathway to Sustainability provides an opportunity for students to work together to solve authentic issues.

**Partners in Sustainability Education**
Several key partners of Eco-Schools USA have comprehensive programs, resources and professional development opportunities that you can utilize to develop strong sustainability education curriculum and programming.

- Green Living Project
- The Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education
- Sustainable Schools Project
- Children’s Environmental Literacy Foundation
- U.S. Partnership for Sustainable Development
- Center for Ecoliteracy
- Global Environmental Education Partnership (GEEP)
- Shelburne Farms

The 17 Goals and 169 targets are meant to be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account the different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.
In the United States our standards for learning drive our students’ classroom experiences. Successful learning looks different in every classroom and for every student and the strategies we use to engage students and move them forward are just as diverse.

As educators we are constantly retooling our practice, looking for ways to reach each and every child, and environment-based education is one such learning experience that can be a transformative experience for both the teacher and his or her students.

In an effort to support your classroom instruction using environment-based education, Eco-Schools USA has aligned their program to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and to the National Science Education Standards (NSES).
Green STEM Initiative

*Environment-Based | Science | Project-Based Learning | Technology | Rigorous | Engineering | Integrated | Mathematics | Student-Centered | Design Process*

STEM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education. We focus on these areas together not only because the skills and knowledge in each discipline are essential for student success, but also because these fields are deeply intertwined in the real world and in how students learn most effectively. STEM is an interdisciplinary and applied approach that is coupled with hands-on, problem-based learning.²

Research shows that students are more motivated to learn and do better in school when they feel their learning is connected to a larger purpose.³ The environment can be a compelling context for teaching STEM. Students who may not otherwise be enthusiastic about STEM disciplines become inspired and often passionate about exploring the many real-world issues that environment-based education offers, from designing local recycling solutions to addressing global fresh water shortages. Green STEM provides them with a realistic context and connection to STEM subjects that they can embrace and take action on to make a difference in their own neighborhood or in the larger world. For students already enthusiastic about STEM subjects, Green STEM offers an opportunity to take their skills to the next level by engaging in a variety of service learning projects in their communities such as, creating a green roof to mitigate storm water runoff, or a pollinator garden to help imperiled wildlife. Such projects can have a range of real-world benefits, connect students with a range of interesting community partners from horticulturalists and wildlife ecologists to urban planners and architectural engineers, and introduce them to innovative green career opportunities.

Download our [Green STEM Guidebook](http://www.cslnet.org/our-agenda/what-is-stem/) to learn more about this topic. Teachers can also learn to design their own Green STEM learning experience through our on-line, self-paced [professional development course](http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2014/08/18/how-a-bigger-purpose-can-motivate-students-to-learn/) that accompanies the Green STEM Guidebook

How to Become an NWF Eco-School

Congratulations! You’ve taken the first step in becoming an Eco-School. Watch this short video for an overview of the NWF Eco-Schools USA Program.

Through school-based action teams of students, administrators, educators and community volunteers, Eco-Schools USA combines effective "green" management of the school grounds, facilities and the curriculum.

Schools that are certified in the program undergo a thorough application process and succeed in organizing and implementing a comprehensive assessment of their school. The Eco-Schools USA program is made up of seven steps, incorporating 10 environmental pathways that students can address in an effort to create a more sustainable learning environment.

Once a school has registered and implemented these seven steps, they can apply for an Eco-Schools award. There are three levels of the award system. The first two levels are the Bronze and Silver awards which are self-assessed. The most prestigious Eco-Schools award is the Green Flag. The Green Flag must be assessed by our staff or an Eco-Schools USA on-the-ground partner and renewed every other year.

On the next four pages, we’ve laid out an easy path for you to follow. You’ll find more details for each step later in this handbook. Along the way, we have a number of resources that can help you make the most of your NWF Eco-Schools USA experience.

The NWF Eco-Schools USA Handbook. We recommend you start your Eco-Schools USA journey by looking more closely at the handbook and brainstorming how the Eco-Schools USA program will be established at your school, with your students and in the community.

NWF Eco-Schools USA Website. Visit our website. There you will be able to log in and update your dashboard, apply for awards, find links to helpful resources and much more.

Online Newsletter. We publish a newsletter 10 months of the year, so be sure to visit our website monthly to catch up on the latest news and find helpful resources. Consider signing up for our emails on our website, and receive timely news and information delivered directly to your inbox.

Social Media. Follow us on both Facebook, Twitter (@EcoSchoolsUSA), and Pinterest, where we share inspirational stories, resources and the latest news in environmental education.

Toolkit: At the end of this handbook, we’ve included links to many of the documents you’ll need as you journey through the Eco-Schools pathways.
Register Your School

Now that you are ready to join the Eco-Schools community, registration is easy – and free! Just enter your school’s zip code or school name on our Join for Free page to find your school.

If your school is already registered, you can select your school and provide updated contact information and you will be added as a user to that school. If you don’t find your school listed, simply click, “My school is not listed here”, and you will be sent to a page where you can add your school’s information.

We understand that sometimes there are several point people at a particular school. If you would like to grant access to your school’s information and profile pages to additional colleagues, you can add them later from the “Manage team” page. You will need to provide their name, email and telephone number. Once added, they should receive an email from Eco-Schools USA confirming their registration.

Don’t have your school’s login information? Email our team for help.
FOLLOW THE 7-STEP FRAMEWORK

1. Establish an Eco-Action Team
2. Conduct an Environmental Audit
3. Develop an Eco-Action Plan
4. Monitor and Evaluate Progress
5. Make Connections to the Curriculum
6. Engage the Whole School and Community
7. Create an Eco-Code
CHOOSE A PATHWAY

sustainable development

- Schoolyard habitats
- Water
- Healthy living
- Consumption & waste
- Healthy schools
- Energy
- Transportation
- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Sustainable food
APPLY FOR AN AWARD

TIERED

THREE

AWARD SYSTEM
Dashboard

Once your school has registered, you can begin to add information to your dashboard. The dashboard will help you track your Eco-Schools progress. First, login to get to your own profile page. You can then edit your profile by selecting “Edit your Profile” from the right side navigation. Examples have been provided from a few of our Eco-Schools to help visualize what a school dashboard might look like.

Benefits of Using Your Dashboard.

• Facilitate collaboration with other schools
• Demonstrate progress toward goals
• Show potential grant funders the school’s achievements
• Share goals and progress with the families of the school community and community at large

This sample shows basic information, including goals and awards specific to your school. Information, pictures and videos you have uploaded will also appear here.
This sample shows the results of the data you will collect and input behind the scenes. This part of your dashboard takes data that is abstract to most students and even adults and puts it in a concrete format that’s more easily understood.

### Our Progress on the Eco-Schools Pathways

#### Energy
Our school has reduced our electricity use by kWh since we started.
That’s enough energy to power 42” plasma TVs for a year!

Learn more about the Energy Pathway

#### Water
Our school has reduced our water usage by gallons since we started.
That’s enough to fill number of 40-gallon rain barrels!

Learn more about the Water Pathway

#### Climate Change
Our school has reduced our CO₂ emissions by lbs per year.
That’s equal to taking cars off the road!

Learn more about the Climate Change Pathway

#### Transportation
We increased the number of students who walk, bike and carpool by .
That’s equal to lbs of CO₂ emissions saved per day!

Learn more about the Transportation Pathway

#### Waste & Consumption
Our school has reduced our trash by lbs since we started.
If the majority of the waste is paper, that’s equal to trees saved!

Learn more about the Consumption & Waste Pathway

#### Schoolyard Habitats®
On average, each student spends minutes learning outside each week.
Students at your school spend % of their school time outdoors each week!

Learn more about the School Grounds Pathway
Here’s a look behind the scenes.

This screen shot shows how metrics are input into your dashboard:

Dashboard Tips and Helpful Hints

• Save often

• Use the Eco-Action Team to develop a dashboard update schedule and, if appropriate, let students make the updates.

• Ensure all students pictured in photos and videos have media releases on file.

• If adding video, use the iframe code to embed content.

• Please email us at eco-schoolsusa@nwf.org with any dashboard issues and we will work with you to address the problem. Helpful information to include in your email: school name, web browser used (Google Chrome, Firefox, etc.), and a screen shot of what’s happening along with your explanation of the problem.
The Seven Step Framework

The Eco-Schools USA Seven Step framework is designed to be a flexible process and one that any school should be able to implement. You are encouraged within this framework to implement each of the Seven Steps in the way that suits your school and situation best. The steps involve a wide diversity of individuals from the school community - with students playing a primary role in the process. To help you get started, we’ve put together some essential framing questions on the next page for each of the Seven Steps.
Step 1
Does your team have a shared vision? How will your team communicate with each other?

Step 2
Will the students make their own audit or will you adapt the Eco-Schools USA audit? Who will take the audit? How and when will you disseminate the results?

Step 3
What are the root causes of the audit results? What strategies would effect change that is aligned with your vision? How will you know?

Step 4
How often and when will you evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of your action plan? Where will the data be collected and displayed?

Step 5
How will the students have the opportunity to discover information about the pathway topics?

Step 6
How will you spread project results out to the larger community? What media outlets will you access/invite? What steps do you have to take for an event to happen and by when?

Step 7
What thought do your students want to share with the larger school-community about what they value, believe and how they are acting in alignment with those values?
Step 1: Form an Eco-Action Team

The heartbeat of Eco-Schools action and learning

Leadership | Listening | Respect | Facilitation | Empathy | Cooperation | Negotiation

What is it?
The Eco-Action Team is the driving force behind Eco-Schools USA. Ideally, your Eco-Action Team should represent the whole school community - including people beyond your school walls, such as facilities staff, board members and community members. Keep in mind students should play a leading role on the team and represent the views of the entire student body.

How Does it Work?
The Eco-Action Team should meet formally a minimum of four times a year and informally as needed when conducting investigations and completing projects. Try to make sure at least one student from each grade level is on the committee. An Eco-Action team is supported and facilitated by an adult Eco-Coordinator, but led by students. Eco-Coordinator roles can be shared and it is actually a good idea to get several teaching staff involved if possible.

Award Criteria

- The Eco-Action Team consists of students and adults | The team meets at least 4 times a year | Minutes are kept at each meeting | Decisions and actions are shared with the school community

- The Eco-Action Team consists of students, staff and community members | The team meets at least 6 times a year | Students are integral in the decision making process and share responsibility for keeping minutes | Students are responsible for communicating team information to the school community

- The Eco-Action Team consists of 50% students, and also includes, teachers, staff, and community members | The team meets at least 8 times a year | Students take significant responsibility for conducting the Eco-Action Team meetings and the team’s decision-making process | Students share responsibility for keeping minutes for each meeting and communicating information to the whole school | Student representatives actively engage other students and collect suggestions from the greater student body

How can you help?
Use the Eco-Action Team planning worksheet to help you organize your group. You can attend meetings to help students develop their teamwork and collaboration skills. Provide inspiration. But remember, Eco-Schools is a student-led process, please try not to impose your project ideas and activities onto them, help them to find the project they want to do.
Step 2: Conduct an Environmental Audit

Investigating the school's environmental and sustainability performance

Inquiry | Independent Learning | Number Sense | Creativity | Reflection | Scientific Investigation

What is it?
The Environmental Audit is an essential tool for understanding the current environmental situation in your school. It will provide the basis for your Eco-Action Plan.

How Does it Work?
Completing the Environmental Review Checklist is a recommended first step before completing one of the more in-depth pathway audits. The results from this checklist can help your Eco-Action Team focus on a specific pathway. The Environmental Review is optional, but highly recommended if you are just beginning your sustainability journey. The Environmental Audits should be led by students. All pathway audits are available for free on our website. Carry out surveys, monitor behaviors, use questionnaires, create graphs, take photographs and video and present the results to the school via announcements, information boards, social media and/or electronic communications.

Award Criteria

A formal or informal audit is conducted | Schools can develop their own criteria or use an Eco-Schools USA audit checklist.

Two formal audits are conducted using an Eco-Schools USA audit | Audit findings are documented | Students play an active role in conducting the audit | Results are shared with the whole school

A minimum of three formal and comprehensive audits are conducted using an Eco-Schools USA audit | Audit findings are documented | Students are actively involved in conducting the audit and engage resource specialists from the community | Results are shared with the whole school along with the wider community | Environmental audits are conducted yearly to evaluate overall progress

How can you help?
If you or another adult have detailed knowledge of one of the Eco-Schools USA pathways, you could offer to help the Eco-Action Team to do an in-depth review in your area of expertise. Remember, it is the Eco-Action Team who will complete the Environmental Audit, but your expertise could offer additional insight and evidence.
Step 3: Create an Eco-Action Plan

Come up with ideas for what to do based on the results of the audit(s)

Critical Thinking | Planning | Creativity | Time Management | Teamwork | Reflection | Goal Setting

What is it?
The Eco-Action Plan follows from the results of your Environmental Audit and sets forth a series of goals and a structured timetable for achieving environmental improvements.

How Does it Work?
The Environmental Audit will have sparked a lot of ideas for potential projects. The Eco-Action Team now needs to draw up a workable plan with details of the projects they want to take action on. It will include lists of tasks, supplies/equipment needed, people to involve for each project and who is responsible for each action. The Eco-Action Team will also outline a time table and a budget if there are costs associated with implementation. Copies of the Eco-Action plan should be made available for the whole school to see; the more people are aware of what the Eco-Action Team is trying to do, the more likely they are to get involved and take action. Click here for an example of a sample Biodiversity Eco-Action Plan. You’ll find samples and a blank Eco-Action Plan worksheet on the Resource page for each pathway.

Award Criteria

Create a basic action plan based on the results of the Environmental Audit focused on one Eco-Schools USA Pathway | Share the Action Plan with the whole school community | Schoolwide action is taken to mitigate environmental problems, focusing on the selected pathway

Create a detailed action plan that addresses at least two Eco-Schools USA Pathways | Include specific quantifiable targets along with a timeframe for completion | Plan a range of actions covering more than one aspect of environmental management | Results are shared with whole school along with the wider community

Create a detailed action plan based on the results of a formal comprehensive Environmental Audit | Include specific quantifiable targets along with a timeframe for completion | Plan a range of actions which addresses at least three Eco-Schools USA Pathways | Action plan prioritizes targets | Action plan provides cost-benefit information for each action

How can you help?
Give advice on how to break down a big goal into smaller, more manageable goals. Share examples of Action Plans that you have worked on in the past. Help students think systematically about the broader impacts their projects might have at a local, national, and global level.
Step 4: Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Measuring change, analyzing what’s working and making changes where needed

Number Sense | Design | Inquiry | Reflection | Teamwork | Photography & Video | Accuracy
| Revision

What is it?
The process of actively engaging in the monitoring and evaluation of the Eco-Action Plan are important tools to help you check your progress, adjust your plan for greater success and provide validation for your project or initiative.

How Does it Work?
In making any project successful it is important to monitor whether things are changing or have changed. Ideally you want to identify how you will monitor and evaluate your progress as a part of the Eco-Action Plan. There are lots of different ways to monitor and evaluate change:

- Before and after photos
- Analysis of electricity and water bills
- Biodiversity surveys
- Knowledge and attitude questionnaires
- Transportation surveys
- Post-audits
- Meter readings
- Litter counts

Award Criteria

The Eco-Action Team identifies and monitors progress of Eco-Action plan | Successes and challenges are noted in the formal record and archived for use when applying for the Green Flag award

The Eco-Action Team identifies and monitors progress of the Eco-Action plan against initial timeframe and targets | School shows significant progress on one large scale project focused on two Eco-Schools USA pathways | Progress and challenges are communicated to whole school

The Eco-Action Team identifies and monitors progress of Eco-Action plan against initial timeframe and targets | Students are engaged in monitoring and evaluation | Data is used in some curriculum work | School shows significant progress on several large scale projects addressing at least three Eco-Schools USA pathways | Progress and challenges are communicated to whole school and wider community

How can you help?
Help students design questionnaires, surveys and data analysis techniques. Offer help on how to use a camera to collect accurate before and after images. Explain how post audits can be used and how to analyze utility bills effectively. Help students focus on what it is that’s most important to measure.
Step 5: Link to Existing Curriculum

Educating for sustainability in the classroom and as citizens of the community

STEM | Literacy | Inquiry | Systems Thinking | Reflection |
Critical Thinking | Design | Collaboration

What is it?
It is important that your Eco-Schools USA program become an integrated part of your overall curriculum and not another “add on” to an already busy academic schedule. The principle behind Eco-Schools USA is that the topics you are teaching in the classroom should have an influence on how your school environment operates. Use the school building and grounds as a learning laboratory capable of transporting students through a sustainability journey that is rigorous, experiential and fun.

How Does it Work?
Student-led projects to improve the school’s sustainability performance are a great example of action learning, but learning for sustainability can happen in a variety of ways at a school. Eco-Schools are able to demonstrate how the learning going on in class is helping students develop sustainability knowledge and skills. Teachers review the school’s current curriculum and see where sustainability topics are being taught and suggest ways to further integrate environment-based instruction. Teachers should also be able to identify where skills like critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communication are being developed; these all contribute to education for sustainability. Encourage colleagues to take advantage of their Eco-Schools work too; real-life projects can bring just about any subject to life.

Award Criteria

Students have the opportunity at most grade levels and across disciplines to integrate environmental issues into the classroom, on school site or in local community

Students have the opportunity at most grade levels and across disciplines to integrate environmental issues into the classroom, on school site or in local community | Students’ experiences are integrated into curriculum and are inquiry based

Students at all grade levels have the opportunity to integrate environmental issues into the classroom, on school site or in local community | Students’ experiences are integrated into curriculum and are inquiry based | School staff are provided with professional development and training on best practices, knowledge and skills for environmental education

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Help colleagues see how they are already contributing to education for sustainability and simple ways they can incorporate environment-based topics as a part of their pedagogy rather than separate from it. Remember to stress a student’s Pre-K-12 experience is about educating the whole child, mind, body, and spirit and sustainability is one way to develop youth’s skills, values, and knowledge.
Step 6: Involve the Community
Let the whole school and wider community know what the Eco-Action Team is doing and how they can help make a difference

Information, Media & Technology Skills | Public Speaking | Design | Leadership | Teamwork | Facilitation | Information, Communications and Technology Literacy

What is it?
Involving the community is about two things – one, the diversity of members who take part in the Eco-Action Team and two, the diversity of school, family and community members the Eco-Action Team works to engage as a part of their sustainability work. Work together to find out the interests and needs of your community and then work together to make where you live, work and play a happier, healthier place to be.

How Does it Work?
To spread the impact of the Eco-Schools USA work, the Eco-Action Team will need to get as many people involved as possible. They might also want to get involved with sustainability projects that are happening nearby. The Eco-Action Team can let people know about their Eco-Schools USA work by having a prominent and eye-catching display, giving assemblies and class presentations, school announcements, social media and by organizing some fun events. They could exercise their fellow students’ artistic side by designing posters too. By involving the wider community in diverse sustainability initiatives the Eco-Action Team will be engaging even more people in the learning and practices of sustainability.
Step 6: Involve the Community (continued)

Award Criteria

**Bronze Award**

The school uses a prominent, designated way such as a newsletter, bulletin board or website, to communicate Eco-Schools USA activities with staff and students along with the greater community.

**Silver Award**

The school uses a prominent, designated ways such as, a newsletter, bulletin board and website, to communicate Eco-Schools USA activities with staff and students along with the greater community. The whole school, along with community volunteers, engage in a number of Eco-Schools USA activities.

**Green Flag Award**

The school uses a prominent, designated way such as a newsletter, bulletin board or website, to communicate Eco-Schools USA activities with staff and students along with the greater community. The whole school, along with community volunteers, engage in a number of Eco-Schools USA activities. The school develops a day of action or other event that engages the greater community in learning about and helping with Eco-Schools projects. Students write about Eco-Schools USA projects for local papers and magazines. The school uses the Eco-Schools USA website and other communication tools to share its projects with other schools in US and with the global community.

How can you help?

Help students to develop their public speaking skills as well as their professional media and communication skills. Practice negotiation scenarios, through role play, acting as the “critical friend.” Give advice on writing press releases and contacting the media. Show you support by promoting events and activities through your own channels, online, in print and in person.
Step 7: Create Your Eco-Code
Creating a call to action that the whole school can get behind

Communication | Design | Information, Communications & Technology Literacy | Empathy | Teamwork | Creativity | Persuasion | Critical Thinking

What is it?
The Eco-Code is the Eco-Action Team’s mission statement. It should demonstrate – in a positive, clear and imaginative way - the whole school’s commitment to improving their environmental performance. The Eco-Code should be reflective of your Eco-Action Plan, curriculum and student experiences.

How Does it Work?
The Eco-Code is a great way to get people thinking about the work members of the Eco-Action Team are trying to do and why they are trying to do it. The Eco-Action Team could create a song, statement, poem, rap, acronym, acrostic, limerick, or something even more creative! The creation of the Eco-Code is student-driven and should be reviewed and updated every two years. The Eco-Code should be prominently displayed in a variety of locations around the school.
Step 7: Create Your Eco-Code (continued)

**Award Criteria**

**Bronze**

The Eco-Action Team gathers input on a school-wide basis and develops an Eco-Code which is then agreed upon and adopted.

**Silver**

The Eco-Action Team gathers input on a school-wide basis and develops an Eco-Code which is then agreed upon, adopted and displayed.

**Green Flag Award**

The whole school and greater community is given the opportunity to make suggestions on developing (or refining and enhancing) the Eco-Code | The Eco-Action Team takes suggestions, refines the Eco-Code and takes to full school for adoption | The Eco-Code is prominently displayed for all to see as they enter the school | The Eco-Code is reviewed every year to ensure relevancy.

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**How can you help?**

When an Eco-Action Team is trying to come up with an Eco-Code it is a good chance for them to think about the wider environmental and sustainability issues impacting their city, state, nation and globe. Help students to develop their critical and systems thinking skills. If you are artistic, this is a great opportunity to help students develop their poetic, lyrical and artistic skills. This is also a great opportunity to get the school community involved, through Eco-Code development contests.
The Pathways to Sustainability

Use the results of your Environmental Audit to set realistic targets and concentrate on areas that are most relevant to your school. Most schools tackle one or two pathway audits at a time, but it will be a decision made by those who best understand the school, the Eco-Action Team.

If the Eco-Action Team isn't quite sure which pathway to take on first or next, checkout our Environmental Review Checklist. This checklist includes questions for each of the ten pathways and will provide teams needing added support with some initial data. This initial data can inform a team's decision when choosing a pathway to address.

Many of the pathways overlap or are closely related to each other. Energy, for example, is connected to Climate Change, and Healthy Living is connected to Sustainable Food. You may find that by making progress in one area, you are taking steps toward improving your performance in another.

Based on our recent survey of our registered Eco-Schools, you can see that each school chooses the environmental focus that is best for their students, faculty and situation.

Read on to find out more about the importance of each pathway and to understand why your school should address each pathway.

Please note: the Energy Pathway must be addressed by every school applying for a Green Flag award. This pathway has the greatest return on investment in terms of savings to the school as well as the biggest impact on the carbon footprint of the school.
**Biodiversity:** If you go outside for a walk around your school grounds, you are sure to observe both living and nonliving things—natural and human-influenced. What is the relationship between the living and nonliving things you find? Based on your discoveries, what can you do to create favorable conditions for a diversity of life?

**Climate Change:** How do our behaviors and attitudes in our school and homes contribute to carbon dioxide emissions? What is the effect of those behaviors and attitudes on the health of our ecosystem?

**Consumption and Waste:** How does nature cycle materials? What is the effect of our material-cycling process on the health of our ecosystem? Is there something we can change to better mimic the way nature cycles materials?

**Energy:** Where does energy come from? How does energy flow through nature? How do our behavior and attitudes around energy usage impact our economic and environmental health?

**Healthy Living:** What are healthy actions? How does physical activity impact learning?

**Healthy Schools:** What happens when hazardous waste is not disposed of properly? How is air quality inside different from the air quality outside my school?
**Schoolyard Habitats:** What aspects of our school grounds support life for a diversity of species? What kinds of natural phenomenon does your school grounds provide for students to investigate?

**Sustainable Foods:** From where does our food come? What is the relationship between how food is grown, ecological health, and our physical health?

**Transportation:** What trends and patterns characterize the way we transport ourselves to school and home? Is there a way to change those patterns to reduce the impact of transportation on the health of our ecosystem and improve the health of our school-community?

**Water:** What factors influence the health of our watershed? What can we do to both improve and conserve water quality and quantity?
Biodiversity is the variety of life on our planet. It can be studied on many levels. At the highest level, one can look at all the species on the entire planet. On a much smaller scale, one can study biodiversity within a single ecosystem (for example, a pond) or a neighborhood park. Identifying and understanding the relationships between all living things on Earth is one of the greatest challenges in science. Researchers have estimated that there are between 3 and 30 million species on Earth, with a few studies predicting that there may be over 100 million species. Currently, we have identified only 1.7 million species, so the vast majority of species on the planet are not yet known!

- Biodiversity provides us with a wide array of foods, fibers and other materials, which support our economy
- A diversity of pollinators, plants and soils provide a variety of foods for our diet.
- Most medical discoveries to cure diseases and lengthen life spans were made because of research into plant and animal biology and genetics.

Driving Questions

✓ How can we, as conservation botanists, increase the numbers of native plant species on our school grounds?
✓ How can we, as members of the community, work with our local government to bring awareness to the biodiversity needs of our community?
✓ How can we, as wildlife biologists, engage the community in the habitat needs of our local wildlife?
✓ How can we, as landscape architects, design a habitat on our school grounds that will provide a place for pollinators to flourish and serve as a demonstration pollinator habitat for the community?
Climate change is any significant change in climate lasting for an extended period of time. Climate change includes major changes in temperature, precipitation, or wind patterns, among other effects, that occur over several decades or longer.

Our natural world is a complex system. Climate has changed throughout history and is one of the things that make our planet so unique and beautiful. Man-made climate change threatens the delicate balance that keeps the Earth systems intact.

Global average temperatures are rising and the warming trend is the result of human activities. Burning fossil fuels for transportation, manufacturing, heating and cooling and electricity generation, releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Levels of these heat-trapping gases, particularly carbon dioxide (CO$_2$), are increasing at a faster rate than at any other time on record. The consequences of this unprecedented change in the atmosphere are both uncertain and likely to be extreme as is evident by the increase in extreme weather events, such as winter storms, wildfires, droughts and floods.

Whole school communities can play a key role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by actions that can shrink their “carbon footprints.”

Driving Questions

✓ How can we, as engineers, design, develop, and test a carbon saving instrument, machine, space, plan, etc. that has the potential to reduce carbon output in an industry?

✓ How can we, as landscape architects, design and construct an outdoor green space with a net zero carbon impact (reduce greenhouse gas emissions), which will provide opportunities for students to learn and study?

✓ How can we, as atmospheric scientists, better understand how our city’s climate is changing and raise awareness of local issues and offer actions community members can take toward mitigation?

✓ How can we, as environmental protection technicians, monitor our air, water, and soil for pollutants and work with our local city government to increase awareness and effectively work together to make the community a healthier place to live?
The United States is home to just 5 percent of the world's population; however it generates 30 percent of its trash. The average American creates a staggering 4.5 pounds of garbage daily. Almost everything we do creates waste, and as a society we are currently producing more waste than ever before.

Both consumption and waste have major environmental impacts. Producing goods and transporting them to consumers uses large quantities of fossil fuels and produces pollution, particularly carbon dioxide (the major greenhouse gas leading to climate change). When these products become waste, they are transported again, usually to landfills, where they produce methane (another potent greenhouse gas) as they break down, or to incinerators, which generate more pollution as they burn.

**Driving Questions**

- How can we, as waste managers, raise awareness of the life cycle of products at our school and how they impact our local economy?
- How can we, as members of the community, work with the city to create recycling and compost pick up or if our community has these programs how can we make them more efficient or accessible?
- How can we, as materials scientists, design products that address waste reduction and consumption habits for school and home?
- How can we, as mechanical engineers, design a machine that recycles community materials that can be sold to companies that use post-consumer products to create new products?
The nation's school districts spend more than $7.5 billion a year on energy. Schools are the largest energy consumer in many municipalities. But up to 30 percent of that energy is used inefficiently or unnecessarily.\(^4\)

By implementing energy-conservation measures and using energy-efficient technologies, schools can significantly cut their energy use. The result is financial savings as well as a reduced environmental impact.

Through simple changes in people’s behavior, schools have found that a 10% reduction in energy usage can be achieved quickly and easily. In fact, a school that engages in good energy practices can end up using over one-third less energy than the average school. Efforts usually focus on heating and lighting systems, but excessive use of technology can be addressed too.

This is vitally important because using 1 kWh of electricity in the U.S. results in between 1.22 and 2.17 pounds of carbon dioxide being emitted (pounds of carbon is dependent on school’s fuel source).\(^5\) To visualize a pound of carbon imagine a large exercise ball. Each full exercise ball is equivalent to a pound of carbon.

**Driving Questions**

- How can we, as geoscientists, better understand the benefits of renewable resources for use in our community and work with the city council on plans to include affordable access to those sources of energy, via residential and commercial mechanisms to collect, store, and use solar, wind, hydro, and/or geothermal energy?
- How can we, as members of the community, conserve energy and educate others about energy conservation and its environmental and economic benefits?
- How can we, as landscape architects, use land cover, rooftop gardens and living walls to reduce heating and cooling needs at our school and provide other schools in our district with the results of our research?
- How can we, as power (electrical) engineers, design heating and cooling systems for the vulnerable members of our community that are safe and rely only on renewable energy?

\(^4\) [http://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy02osti/31607.pdf](http://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy02osti/31607.pdf)

\(^5\) [http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=74&t=11](http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=74&t=11)
What are characteristics of healthy living? Some people have said, friendship, physical activity, mental exercises, helping others, stewardship, and healthy nutrition. But did you know that after the family, formal education is one of the most important factors in encouraging healthy attitudes and habits in children and young people. It is estimated that the average student will spend some 15,000 hours of his or her life at school. Schools, therefore, play a vital role in promoting not only regular exercise and healthy diets but in developing students' emotional well-being.6

The state of our health is directly related not only to long-term physical well-being but also to emotional and social factors: our general happiness, confidence and outlook on life. There is also a clear relationship between health and educational attainment.

Studies show that time spent outdoors and active helps children grow lean and strong, enhances imaginations and attention spans, decreases aggression, and boosts classroom performance. In addition, children who spend time in nature regularly are shown to become better stewards of the environment.

Driving Questions

- How can we, as health educators or community health workers, educate our community about the behaviors that promote overall wellness?
- How can we, as members of the community, collaborate with our Parks and Recreation department to promote family healthy eating and activity habits?
- How can we, as epidemiologists, research the patterns and causes of diseases in our community and design a plan to lower health risks through awareness, education and activity campaigns?
- How can we, as local farmers, work with our food services department to promote healthy local, organic and fresh foods?


TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Top 10 Tips | Fast Facts | Standards Alignment | Sample Action Plan | Healthy Living Audit | Lesson Links
Healthy Schools
IAQ | Healthy Learning Environments | Integrated Pest Management | Green Cleaning | Absenteeism | Natural Lighting | Respiratory Illnesses and Headaches

Providing students and school staff with a healthy learning and working environment is an important component of a sustainable school. Every day, 55 million children in the United States attend school. Too often, their school buildings have poor indoor and outdoor air quality, hazardous chemicals and other unhealthy conditions that make students, staff and faculty sick and impair their ability to learn and work.

On average, one out of ten children is affected by asthma, and asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism, accounting for close to 13 million missed days per school year. Often times, asthma and respiratory related illnesses can be exacerbated by pollutants such as chemicals, cleaning supplies, pesticides and exhaust from idling buses and automobiles.

A Healthy School is the responsibility of everyone, including school staff and administrators, students and community members. While student involvement is key to the Eco-Schools USA program, some issues addressed by this pathway require the expertise and training of facility managers and administrators to amend. We provide as many tools and resources as possible to assist students in working on these complex issues.

Driving Questions

✓ How can we, as pest management technicians, work with the school district’s director of facilities to convert to an organic pest management system?
✓ How can we, as members of the community, provide the school board with the evidence needed to improve health conditions at our school?
✓ How can we, as school nurses, work with the students, staff and faculty to decrease the numbers of days the school community is absent?
✓ How can we, as environmental science and protection technicians, raise awareness about toxins in and around the learning environment that contribute to ill health?
As today’s schools are challenged to increase both student test scores and campus safety and efficiency, redesigning the school grounds and reclaiming the landscape as an outdoor classroom and laboratory can assist schools in achieving both objectives.

Schoolyard Habitats are quite literally nature’s playground for ideas. Students have fantastic imaginations! The school grounds are the perfect environment in which to let those minds run wild and free.

What sort of space could be created? Might there be Monarch recovery gardens? Farm to School beds for each grade level? Can we install a wind turbine? The learning opportunities are endless; think about the knowledge to be gained studying properties of matter, change over time, living and non-living systems, structure and function. Practical skills can be nurtured: measuring, building, communicating and problem solving.

Schoolyard Habitats at their best are great spaces to learn; they are litter-free, support biodiversity and will hopefully have a flagpole flying the Eco-Schools Green Flag! As a bonus, a school that addresses this pathway can easily certify their school for free as an NWF Schoolyard Habitat, and can display a Schoolyard Habitat badge on their dashboard.

**Driving Questions**

- How can we, as entomologists, inform the community about the benefits of our local pollinators and open people’s hearts to declining bee populations?
- How can we, as master gardeners, raise awareness about the human health benefits of gardening?
- How can we, as soil scientists, provide the community with the knowledge, tools and resources to improve the quality of soil where they live?
- How can we, as landscape architects, design an outdoor learning laboratory that is open to the public, can be used for learning at each grade level and is accessible to students and community members with disabilities?
More than 30 million children in the United States eat a school lunch five days a week, 180 days a year. Regrettably, many of these school lunches are filled with poor quality, highly processed foods that contribute to childhood obesity, diabetes, reduced attention spans and poor grades.

Most students have little to no idea where their food comes from, how it is grown and harvested, how it is processed and the impacts of its production, processing and transport to the environment.

Schools across the country are exploring and implementing innovative programs focused on food. Sustainable food programs work to bring fresh, local food to school. They provide healthy meals in school cafeterias, improve student nutrition, offer curricular connections on topics related to healthy nutrition and food and connect schools to their local communities and farms.

There are tremendous opportunities for schools to feed their students and staff better, reduce their environmental footprints, support their local economies and at the same time enhance the curriculum with engaging food-related content.

Driving Questions

- How can we, as cafeteria staff, bring healthier food options that taste good, to students?
- How can we, as local chefs, work with students, staff and parents to create quick, healthy meals that can be enjoyed at home and school?
- How can we, as county food policy council members, ensure that our students have equitable access to healthy, affordable food, including fresh fruits and vegetables?
- How can we, as farmers, work with our local school and community to raise awareness around food systems and increase participation or start a farmer’s market?
**Transportation**

Traffic. Travel. All unavoidable in any young person’s life as they go to and from school. Options on how to travel vary according to where we live and where we need to go.

While there are noisy, polluting, uncomfortable, expensive and slow ways to move, there are also fast, clean, comfortable, cheap, and healthy routes from point A to B. All modes have an impact on an individual’s health, on a community and on the environment. The goal is to make those impacts positive or, at the very least, less negative.

According to **Safe Routes to School**, half of students attending school in the U.S. are dropped off in the family car, while 25 million students ride a bus to school. Approximately 9.9 million students (25 percent) live within one mile of school, and only half of these students walk or bike to school. Another 6.3 million children (16 percent) live between one and two miles from school, and just 12 percent of those students walk or bike to school.

Schools can do a lot to improve the way their staff and students travel. There may be new modes of transportation to test and promote or new routes to explore that take children through greener places. There may be big questions to pose about why we travel and whether it is better to go by train, car, bike, plane, bus or on our own two feet.

**Driving Questions**

- How can we, as urban/city planners, work with the school community to develop land use plans and programs that will promote safer routes for students to walk and bike to school?
- How can we, as members of the community, design a tool for the school and community to safely bike or walk to school?
- How can we, as civil engineers, provide growing cities or aging cities with designs that create safe routes for students and community members to access local schools?
- How can we, as health professionals (i.e., doctors, technicians, nurses, etc.), increase knowledge about the importance of heart health through activities such as walking and biking?

**TOOLS AND RESOURCES**

- Top 10 Tips
- Fast Facts
- Standards Alignment
- Sample Action Plan
- Transportation Audit
- Lesson Links
Water covers about 70 percent of the Earth’s surface. But the vast majority of Earth’s water is found in the oceans, too salty to drink and unfit for many other applications. Of the freshwater on Earth, about two-thirds is frozen in the ice caps and glaciers, which leaves less than one percent accessible for human use.

Fresh clean water is one of the basic necessities of life. But in the United States and throughout the world, it is becoming a scarce resource. As weather patterns shift and temperatures rise due to climate change, water security, including health and conservation will only become more crucial.

Most people take water for granted, that it has always been in abundance and available, much in the same way that electricity or heating are perceived.

By studying water, where it comes from, how it cycles through the environment and why we are so dependent on it, students will develop their systems thinking skills. Most importantly they will also come to understand how water connects us intimately with millions of species and with the landscapes and wildlife we love.

Driving Questions

✓ How can we, as hydrologists, better educate our community on how water moves through our watershed and promote the importance of a healthy watershed?
✓ How can we, as water utility managers, educate the community about storm water curb and gutter inlets in an effort to reduce harmful pollutants from entering our local waterways?
✓ How can we, as a school district facilities manager, reduce water consumption and waste within the schools?
✓ How can we, as conservation biologists, understand the needs of the plant and animal life in our local watershed and engage the community in action-oriented activities that will make a positive impact on our watershed ecosystems?
Eco-Schools USA Awards

Now that you’ve implemented the Seven Steps, you may be ready to apply for an Eco-Schools USA award. There are three levels to the award system. The Bronze and Silver awards are self-assessed, and can be achieved by meeting the specific criteria for each award and then submitting the on-line award form. The on-line award form can be found on your dashboard page in the right-hand navigation, “Apply for New Awards, Manage Awards and Download Certificates.

The criteria that make up each of the Seven Steps are assigned point values. As each step is completed, points are accumulated toward an award. The points required to reach each award level are outlined below. Upon successful completion of the application and all criteria met, the school will be awarded either the Bronze or Silver Award, and certificates of achievement can be downloaded and printed. The top award is the Green Flag, which must be evaluated 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. All the necessary awards forms and checklists can be found in our Eco-Schools Toolkit at the end of this handbook.

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**Earn 100 points to apply for a Bronze Award**

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**Earn 200 points to apply for a Silver Award**

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**Earn 300 points to apply for a Green Flag Award**

(Must be renewed every 2 years)

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To keep track of your school’s points, login using the email address you registered with to access your school’s dashboard. As you check off your accomplishments on the award form, the dashboard will display your current point’s total. Please note that the Pathway icon will not appear as being addressed until the award application is submitted and approved. A school can apply for any one of these awards depending on the level of criteria met under each of the Seven Steps. The Bronze Award Criteria, Silver Award Criteria and Green Flag Award Criteria, will help to give schools an idea of what stage they have reached and what level of award they could apply for.
Step by Step Summary:

- **Check** the Eco-Schools [interactive map](#) to find out if your school is already registered as an Eco-School. If not, go to the [registration page](#) and sign-up! Complete the registration form and click 'submit'.
- If you previously registered as an Eco-School, simply [login](#) using the email address used to register the school to access your school's profile.
- On your school's profile page, click on “Apply for New Awards, Manage Awards and Download Certificates.” Choose the award form needed from the drop down menu and click ‘submit’.
- Fill-out the award application and click ‘submit.’ If the application is only partially completed, you can click 'save' and return to the form at a later time.
- If the application is successfully entered and all criteria met, your school will be automatically awarded the Eco-Schools USA Bronze or Silver Award. You will be able to download and print a personalized certificate of achievement and your addressed pathway(s) will no longer be grayed out and will display metrics.

### HOW-TO APPLY FOR A Bronze or Silver Award

1. Update your dashboard with your goals, accomplishments, and metrics. Add a minimum of 3 photographs;
2. Upload your pathway audit and action plan (as a PDF) to your award form;
3. Upload any other documentation and/or evidence you feel will be helpful in evaluating your sustainability work.

### HOW-TO APPLY FOR A Green Flag Award

1. Update the school’s profile on your dashboard;
2. Complete the online Green Flag Application. Access the application directly from your profile page by clicking on “Apply for an Award: Green Flag” in the box in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.
3. Upload the following items:
   a. Offline Green Flag Application or Green Flag Renewal Application
   b. Audits for at least 3 pathways, one of which must be energy
   c. Action Plans for at least 3 pathways
   d. Photographs of Eco-Schools bulletin board or display and/or link to your school’s Eco-Schools web page;
   e. Evidence of progress – this could be a written summary, iMovie or other video platform, or an online photobook
   f. Copy of Eco-Code
Once you have updated your school’s dashboard and successfully uploaded all your Green Flag application materials, you will receive email confirmation from our team. Eco-Schools USA staff will then assess your application and review your school’s progress, and will contact you regarding the status of your Green Flag application and/or Renewal.

**Celebrating Success!**
An important part of achieving one of the three award levels is celebrating your student’s and school’s success! Take this opportunity to spread the word of your sustainability achievements via a school-wide assembly, a tour of your new Schoolyard Habitat or recycling center, or a community event. Have your students showcase the results of their efforts during the assembly program, end of school year or mid-term celebration, or even through a school newsletter that goes out to every student, faculty, and the PTA.

The list below are some of the other suggestions to help spread the good news:

- Invite important members of the community
- Invite the media
- Use our press release template and share it with local TV and news outlets.

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**HOW-TO APPLY FOR RENEWAL:**

**2**nd, **3**nd or **4**th Green Flag Renewal

1. Update school’s profile page on your dashboard.

2. Fill out the online Green Flag Renewal Form found by clicking “Apply for New Awards, Manage Awards, and Download Certificates” on the right-hand navigation. Attach it to the award form.

3. Attach the following pieces of evidence to the Green Flag Renewal:
   a. Audits for 3 pathways;
   b. Action Plans for 3 pathways
   c. Photograph of Eco-Schools bulletin board or display case or link to your school’s Eco-School’s webpage
   d. Evidence of Progress
Resources

Non-Profits | Small Businesses | Green Schools | Corporations | Foundations | Government Agencies


Climate Classroom Kids | Climate Classroom Kids | Cool School Challenge | Energy Star | EPA’s A Student’s guide to Global Climate Change | EPA’s Climate Change Impact | NASA’s Climate Kids | NASA’s Vital Signs for the Planet | NWF/NAAEE Guidelines for K-12 Climate Change Education | NWF’s Climate Classroom | Young Voice for the Planet


Resources (Continued)


Benefits for Students | Educator Resources | Environment-Based Education: Improving Attitudes and Academics for Adolescents | Making your Schoolyard Accessible | Vermont FEED: Farm to School Food Education | Why Create a Site?

Burlington School Food Project | CDC: A look inside food deserts | Center for Ecoliteracy: Rethinking School Lunch | Edible Schoolyard Project | Food Corps | Food Empowerment Project | Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution | Let’s Move Campaign: Eat Healthy | National Farm to School Network | National PTA: Nutrition | Sustainable America Blog: What is a Food Mile? | The Lunch Box | USDA Farm to School
Resources (Continued)


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?
Go to the Register page and 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 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.
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](https://www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools) to get additional information and tools to successfully implement the program.

**Eco-Schools International Website**
This is the [global Eco-School website](https://www.eco-schools.org) 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](https://twitter.com/EcoSchoolsUSA)
- Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/EcoSchoolsUSA/](https://www.facebook.com/EcoSchoolsUSA/)

**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

Kevin Coyle, Vice-President, Education and Training, Reston, VA  
Laura Hickey, Associate Vice-President, Education Programs, Reston, VA  
Kim Martinez, Senior Director, K-12 Education Programs, Reston, VA  
Liz Soper, Director, K-12 Programs, Montpelier, VT  
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Regional Contacts

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Mid-Atlantic Regional Center  
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South Central Regional Center  
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Crystal Jennings, Coordinator, Education and Leadership Development Programs, Atlanta, GA  
Marya Fowler, Senior Manager, Education Outreach, South Central Regional Center, Austin, TX  
Karen Bishop, Coordinator, Education Outreach, South Central Regional Center, Austin, TX
Eco-Schools USA Toolkit

Here you will find links to many of the most commonly used forms and summary documents utilized by Eco-Schools around the nation. The toolkit page can now be found on our website. Form updates and additions will be completed quarterly. Please bookmark this page for future ease of access.

General Eco-Schools USA Information

✓ Sample Eco-Schools USA Timeline
✓ Eco-Schools USA Parent Fact Sheet

Seven Step Framework

✓ Eco-Action Team Planning Worksheet
✓ Environmental Review Checklist
✓ Sample Eco-Action Plan Biodiversity – specific plans are found under each Pathway)
✓ Blank Eco-Action Plan worksheet
✓ Environmental Audit(s) – Pathway specific audits found on this page
✓ Seven Steps and Awards Summary Document

Award Checklists and Criteria

Award Checklists (printable documents to track progress)

✓ Bronze Award
✓ Silver Award
✓ Green Flag

Award Criteria (informational list of criteria along with point value)

✓ Bronze Award
✓ Silver Award
✓ Green Flag

Award Application Forms

✓ Link to Green Flag application and renewal forms on this page

Sample Press Release

✓ Bronze Award
✓ Silver Award
✓ Green Flag