Dear Nebraska Schools,

For years, your institution has implemented practices, procedures, and programs that promote healthier, more sustainable buildings and grounds, foster health and wellness, and offer effective environmental and sustainability learning. Your work has made positive environmental and health impacts in your school community, along with improving students’ environmental literacy.

Because of your efforts, we invite you to apply to the Nebraska Department of Education for our nomination to [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](https://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/index.html) (ED-GRS) federal recognition award. ED-GRS awardees are recognized at both the state and national scale, are the subject of media attention, and are invited to an in-person ceremony in Washington D.C.

To do this, we ask that you detail your achievements in what are known as the three Pillars of ED-GRS: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education. **In order to be eligible for the federal award, you must show progress in all of these areas, not merely some:**

1. **Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs**
	* Reduced or eliminated greenhouse gas emissions, using an energy audit or emissions inventory and reduction plan, cost-effective energy efficiency improvements, conservation measures, and/or on-site renewable energy and/or purchase of green power;
	* Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation;
	* Reduced solid and hazardous waste production through increased recycling and composting, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste; and
	* Expanded use of alternative transportation, through active promotion of locally available, energy-efficient options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies.
2. **Improved Health and Wellness**
	* High standards of [Whole School Whole Community, Whole Child health](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscc/index.htm), including health, nutrition, and outdoor physical activity; and
	* An [integrated school environmental health program](https://www.epa.gov/schools) that considers occupant health and safety in all design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of facilities and grounds, including cleaning and maintenance; mold and moisture; chemical and environmental contaminants; air quality and ventilation; and pests and pesticide.
3. **Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education**
	* Interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy, and human systems;
	* Use of the environment and sustainability to develop STEM content knowledge and thinking skills to prepare graduates for the 21st century technology-driven economy; and
	* Development of civic engagement knowledge and skills and students' application of such knowledge and skills to address sustainability issues in their community.

Attached to this message is the Nebraska application for nomination to ED-GRS. When your application is complete, please submit it to Sheyanne Smith at Sheyanne.smith@nebraska.gov .If you would prefer to submit in another format, we are happy to consider that, so long as you detail progress in of the above Pillars and every Element within them. Please see examples on the ED-GRS [website](https://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/awards.html) for past honorees’ submissions and feel free to use the format that puts your institution’s best foot forward.

It is very important that you document progress in every Pillar of the award, as it is not sufficient to be high achieving in one area. You can find resources to advance in all three Pillars on the [Green Strides School Sustainability Resource Hub](http://www.greenstrides.org).

Note that, if selected for nomination, your school will also be asked to complete the attached certification statements in the Nominee Presentation Form and provide 5-10 recent, active, candid photos of your school sustainability work in high resolution. I will work with you on that after we have selected Nebraska nominees.

Application Timeline for 2024

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| Date | Process |
| January 29, 2024 | Application due to the NDE Email to Sheyanne.smith@nebraska.gov  |
| February 1, 2024 | Nominees from the Nebraska selection committee forwarded to the U.S. Department of Education by this date |
|  | Nebraska selectee announcement event |
| Earth Day, April 22 | ED will announce national honorees |
| Summer date TBD annually | Honorees invited to send representatives to a national recognition ceremony in Washington, DC |
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Please contact me if you have any questions regarding the application process. We look forward to learning more about your school sustainability work and to sharing your successes around our state and nation.

Sincerely,

Sheyanne S. Smith

Sheyanne.smith@nebraska.gov