



**U.S. Secretary of Education Names Washburn School District a 2017 U.S. Department of Education
Green Ribbon School District Sustainability Awardee
May 4, 2017**

The U.S. Department of Education announced today that Washburn School District in Washburn, Wisconsin is among the 2017 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools District Sustainability Awardees.

The Washburn School District was nominated by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The district serves 587 students, 43% from economically disadvantaged households, in grades 4K-12, with 94 staff. In addition, we have an Early Learning Center in the elementary school for children 8 weeks old to school age which serves another 40 children with 8 staff.

"...to receive another National Award recognizing the efforts of our entire learning community is both humbling and inspiring. Our dedicated staff connect with children to provide them a welcoming, healthy, safe, and engaging learning environment that celebrates their individual abilities. Washburn is a special place," says Dr. Thomas Wiatr District Administrator

Pillar I: Reduced Environmental Impact

In order to reduce our environmental impact and lower costs, the district has implemented a variety of energy-saving initiatives such as upgrading lighting, switching from electric to natural gas hot water heaters, district-wide recycling, and composting of garden waste. A team of students also created and participate in a community outreach recycling program where they collect shiny paper from the school and businesses and bring it to a recycling center. To reduce transportation emissions, classrooms take walking field trips instead of using buses whenever possible. Students in our Ecology Club choose an environmental topic each year and educate their peers with ongoing projects, culminating with an expert guest speaker during an all school assembly on Earth Day.

Pillar II: Improved Health & Wellness

Health and sustainability go hand-in-hand, and this is very apparent in Washburn. The district has partnered with community organizations, including the Alliance for Sustainability, UW Extension for Nutrition Education services and Agriculture agents, and a variety of local farms who provide local produce and milk, apples, and blueberries in the cafeteria. WSD was one of the first school districts in the state to adopt the AmeriCorps Farm to School program which provides an innovative approach to improving childhood nutrition and decreasing obesity by creating healthy eating habits and increasing access to local foods. Through this





program our students plant, harvest, and cook from the school garden every year, and have planted fruit trees which will provide apples in the near future.

In the elementary/middle school, students and staff alike enjoy the annual *All School Walk Around the Block* as part of Week of the Young Child and Walk-a-thon which is our main PTO fundraiser. Thirty minutes of daily outdoor recess is provided for elementary and middle school students and “Brain Breaks” get the students moving for an additional 20-30 minutes per day. Our district also has a Portrait of a Graduate, which focuses on creating physically, socially, and emotionally healthy students.

Pillar III: Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

WSD removed old asphalt and replaced it with a bioswale, pollinator garden, high tunnel greenhouse, outdoor lunch area, compost area, aquaponics lab, and Monarch Oasis. We also have a forested 40-acre Environmental Learning Site. We have an amazing school playground that includes a 6,400 square foot vegetable garden and orchard, a steep sledding hill, a forested area for interpretive play, a US Fish and Wildlife habitat restoration site, a pond, and an outdoor classroom that overlooks Lake Superior. These spaces are within walking distance for students of all ages.

WSD aims to cultivate environmental stewardship, foster human health, and develop ecological sustainability, through place-based education for the students of WSD and community. In all grades our Green and Healthy standards are imbedded into our core curriculum and listed on our 4K-5 standards-based report cards. The school gardens provide hands-on opportunities for teachers to enhance their curriculum outdoors; especially in environmental and cultural topics, while also building relationships with students. Examples include our Agripreneur Program, aquaponics lab, monarch butterfly study, and the addition of several sustainability-based classes. We are also using innovative invasive species removal techniques in our US Fish and Wildlife Habitat prairie restoration project including using goats to eat invasive vegetation.

Across the country, 45 schools, nine districts, and nine postsecondary institutions are being honored for their innovative efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, improve health and wellness, and ensure effective sustainability education.

The honorees were named from a pool of candidates nominated by 28 states and the Department of Defense Department of Education Activity. The selectees include 39 public schools, including five magnet schools and one charter school, as well as six nonpublic schools. Forty-four percent of the 2017 honorees serve a disadvantaged student body and 14 percent are rural. The postsecondary honorees include three career and technical and community colleges.



GreenRibbonSchools



The list of all selected schools, districts, colleges, and universities, as well as their nomination packages, can be found [here](#). A report with highlights on the 63 honorees can be found [here](#). More information on the federal recognition award can be found [here](#). Resources for all schools to move toward the three Pillars can be found [here](#).

