



EcoSchools U.S.
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

EcoSchools United States Certification Guide

2024-2025

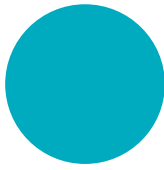
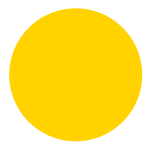


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EcoSchools U.S.
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Welcome to the EcoSchools U.S. Program!

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

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



All U.S. Schools

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



Our Statement of Purpose

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



Our Vision

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

We Value...

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





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How to Use This Guide

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



Quick Links

EcoSchools U.S. Certification Application (ECA)



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

ECA Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)



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

Webinars | Training



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

Sign up for EcoSchools Updates



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



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EcoSchools Framework to Certification

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



Form An Action Team

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



Authentically Engage the Community

Foster genuine connections and share transformative stories from working at the nexus of environment, community, and economy.



Develop an Action Plan

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

For those working towards Green Flag Certification, the mandatory Green Flag Eligibility Questionnaire Deadline is February 28, 2025.



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

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



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EcoSchools Framework to Certification



Monitor and Evaluate Progress

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

Submissions Open: First Friday in April (April 4, 2025)

Final Submission Deadline: First Friday in June (June 6, 2025)



Identify Curriculum Connections

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



Celebrate, Reflect, and Create an EcoCode

Celebrate successes big and small, reflect on how to improve for the future, and creatively display the school's commitment to nature-based solutions in an EcoCode.



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Levels of Certification

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

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



Bronze: 50-64 points

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



Silver: 65-79 points

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



Gold: 80-99 points

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



Green Flag: 100+ points

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



Participant Schools

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

When a school becomes a certified EcoSchool, they receive a digital certification seal that reflects their certification level. This seal can be displayed on a school's website and social media accounts, in newsletters, in email signatures, and more.

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Getting Started on the EcoSchools Certification Application (ECA)

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

Your Dashboard

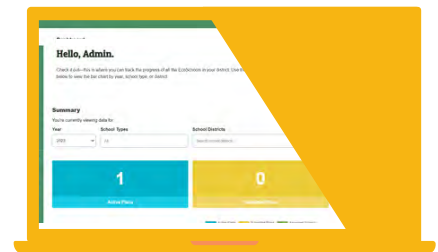
Track your school's certification progress over the year. Use the blue navigation bar on the left side of your screen to navigate to different pages including:

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

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

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

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



My Library

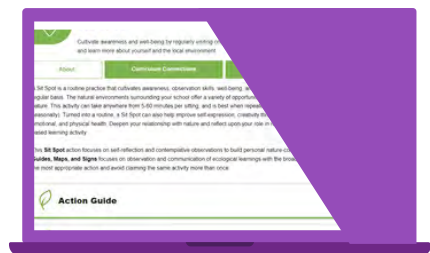
Gather your Action Team, go through the library, and choose actions to add to your school's environmental action plan this year. Actions can be searched by keyword or theme. Actions can be added and removed throughout the year as your program becomes defined.



This is What an Action Looks Like!

An action includes:

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



Check out short how-to videos on the [Professional Learning page](#) of the EcoSchools website.



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Program deadlines, assessment, and appeals

Important Dates & Deadlines

The EcoSchools Certification Application (ECA) opens August 10, 2024.

Green Flag Eligibility Questionnaire: Schools aiming for Green Flag certification must complete the mandatory Green Flag questionnaire by the last Friday in February. Please see [this FAQ](#) for more information.

Submissions open the first Friday in April!

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

Certification Assessment

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

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

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

Final Standings

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

Appeal Process

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

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Annual Calendar

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

Month	Important Dates	Activities
September – October	<p>Registration Opens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean Earth Challenge Farm to School Month Walk & Roll to School Day Earth Science Week 	<p>Register your school, establish an Action Team, set goals, create a plan for the year, and let people at your school know how to get involved with the EcoSchools program.</p> <p>Answer the first 5 questions on the About the Action Team card.</p> <p>TIP! Initiate a waste-free lunch program at your school and consider ways to reduce waste throughout the year.</p>
November – December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor Classroom Day America Recycles Day World Soil Day Audubon Christmas Bird Count Holiday Power Down Days Winter Break 	<p>Provide opportunities for all students at your school to learn IN, ABOUT, and FOR the environment.</p> <p>Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.</p> <p>TIP! Hosting an event for the holidays? Make it waste-free!</p>
January – February	<p>Green Flag Eligibility Questionnaire (Due Last Friday in February)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MLK Day of Service World Wetlands Day Great Backyard Bird Count 	<p>Start planning for outdoor gardening and planting projects.</p> <p>Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.</p> <p>TIP! The winter is a great time to focus on energy. Start exploring energy at your school using the Cool School Challenge action card.</p>
March – April	<p>Submission Window Open (first Friday in April)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Water Day Earth Month Clean Earth Challenge Global Action Days Spring Break 	<p>For Earth Day, engage your school in learning and action around environmental justice issues that are important to your local community.</p> <p>Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.</p> <p>TIP! Conduct water quality tests or a macroinvertebrate survey to celebrate World Water Day.</p>
May – June	<p>Application Deadline (First Friday in June)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Garden for Wildlife™ Month Bike & Roll to School Day Endangered Species Day World Oceans Day National Pollinator Week 	<p>Complete your online application and submit by the first Friday in June. Celebrate your school's achievements!</p> <p>You will be notified by email of certification results.</p> <p>TIP! Help to reduce daily greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality in your community—get walking and rolling to school!</p>
July – August	<p>Summer Break</p>	<p>Don't forget about summer maintenance for your school garden and trees. Have a wonderful summer!</p>

Follow us on social media for more EcoSchools activities and celebrations.



EcoSchools U.S.
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EcoSchools US Certification Rubric

Levels of Achievement

Please refer to the EcoSchools Framework and the rubric below for guidance on the criteria EcoSchools US uses to assess school applications (also known as your school's Plan on the ECA).

Participant

PROGRAM INITIATED

The EcoSchools program was initiated, an action team is in place, and plans are being developed.



Bronze

EMERGING PROGRAM

The EcoSchools program is in its early stages and some environmental learning and action has been demonstrated.



Silver

DEVELOPING PROGRAM

The EcoSchools program is in development and environmental learning and action has been demonstrated throughout the school.



Gold

ACCOMPLISHED PROGRAM

The EcoSchools program has a strong foundation with the whole school community, and environmental learning and action is well integrated throughout the school year.



Green Flag

OUTSTANDING PROGRAM

The EcoSchools program is well-established. Environmental learning and action is a defining element of school culture and extends beyond the school walls.



Assessment Criteria by Level

In addition to aligning your plan to the EcoSchools Framework, each item in this section must be completed to qualify for certification. Fulfillment of these items, in combined with an assessor's evaluation of Program Elements (page 2), is required to earn certification.

Participant

- Create an Action Plan (school application) on ECA
- Submit application before deadline
- Achieve at least 35 points

Bronze

- Create an Action Plan (school application) on ECA
- Submit application before deadline
- Achieve 50–64 points
- Program Elements have been started

Silver

- Create an Action Plan (school application) on ECA
- Submit application before deadline
- Achieve 65–79 points
- Program Elements are somewhat fulfilled

Gold

- Create an Action Plan (school application) on ECA
- Submit application before deadline
- Achieve 80–99 points
- Participate in school visit, if required
- Program Elements are mostly fulfilled

Green Flag

- Create an Action Plan (school application) on ECA
- Satisfactory Green Flag Eligibility Questionnaire
- Submit application before deadline
- Achieve 100 or more points
- Participate in school visit, if required
- Program Elements are fulfilled or go above and beyond the school walls

Program Elements

Following the EcoSchools Framework and implementing the Program Elements are required for certification. NOTE: Program Elements are not relevant to the Participant level of achievement.

Rigor	
<p>Collaboration & Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Action documentation: suitable documentation is uploaded to actions <input type="checkbox"/> Action description: clear description of how actions were implemented <input type="checkbox"/> Data accuracy: data questions are complete, answered accurately, and allow for impact measurement <input type="checkbox"/> Planning: evidence of self-assessment, action planning, goal setting, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Application completeness 	<p>RELEVANT CERTIFICATION QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to quantitative data (i.e., numerical values, unique to each action) • Action Description • Action Documentation • Questions in About the Action Team
<p>Student Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff and student involvement: participation from a variety of staff and students throughout the school community <input type="checkbox"/> Interdisciplinary: environmental program is integrated into a diversity of classes and subject areas <input type="checkbox"/> Visibility/communications: regular communication with school community, environmental program is visible throughout the school <input type="checkbox"/> Community involvement: environmental program extends beyond the school walls 	<p>RELEVANT CERTIFICATION QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to engagement and participation found in the About the Action Team card • Questions related to communication • Questions related to the broader community and partnerships • Questions related to curriculum connections
<p>Extensions & Reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Student engagement: diverse participation from across the student body <input type="checkbox"/> Student leadership: opportunities for student leadership and skill building <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusiveness: student voice is at the heart of the environmental program, representing a breadth of involvement from planning to celebration 	<p>RELEVANT CERTIFICATION QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to student engagement and participation (found in About the Action Team) • Questions related to student leadership • Action Description
<p>Curriculum Connections: for example, curriculum connections suggestions in each action's Action Guide; connection with UN Sustainable Development Goals; other learning extensions based in EcoSchools' Action Criteria</p> <p>Outdoor Learning: opportunities for students to learn outdoors and foster nature-connections</p> <p>Reflection and Celebration: evidence of reflection on how actions and campaigns went, as well as celebration</p>	<p>RELEVANT CERTIFICATION QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to reflection and celebration • Questions related to curriculum connections • Action Description • Questions in About the Action Team