

CA-GRS- Key Information for Applicants

California Green Ribbon Schools Award: Key Information for Applicants

What is the California Green Ribbon Schools Award Program?

The California Green Ribbon Schools Award recognizes achievement in three pillars:

PILLAR 1: Conservation of resources – including water, waste, energy, and alternative transportation options.

PILLAR 2: Health and wellness of students and staff – covering indoor air quality, pest management, nutrition, garden programs, physical education, outdoor learning environments, and mental health supports.

PILLAR 3: Environmental literacy and stewardship – defining what environmental literacy looks like at your school or district, how it is integrated into classrooms and enrichment activities, STEM and CTE programs, and how students and staff carry environmental stewardship into their communities and beyond.

The Application Process

The application begins with completing the Green Ribbon Schools form to the best of your ability, starting with achievements you are already engaged in or have completed. Think of the application as an **iterative process**:

- Apply early, assess what you do well, and identify what you can quickly improve.
- Use the application as a roadmap for future planning, updating it from year to year.
- Connect with technical advisors to review your application, receive suggested next steps, and access resources.
- Participate in meetings like this statewide network gathering to learn from others engaged in similar work.

The Green Ribbon Schools application is intentionally broad. It is not meant to be completed with strict fidelity but rather to give you multiple opportunities to showcase your achievements in whole-school, district, or county office sustainability.

Best Practices

- **Use the [Applicant Toolkit](#)** (which we'll review later) to guide both your timeline and delegation of work.
- **Don't do it alone**—this is a lot of work. Assemble a team from your district, including staff who track utility bills and conservation data.
- **Have a strong lead applicant** who can compile data and present your story in one clear, consistent voice that represents your school or district.

Pro Tips

Each question should be addressed with three key elements:

- **Saturation** – How many students are being impacted by the achievement?
- **Longevity** – Tell the full story of the achievement: when it started, how it evolved, and where it's headed.
- **Evidence** – Paint a picture with words using data, measurements, and descriptive detail so reviewers can clearly see the achievement.

Cross-pollinate achievements across different questions. Reviewers only see one pillar, so don't hesitate to repeat information. For example, garden programs can appear in:

- Pillar I (irrigation and conservation)
- Pillar II (garden design and health /wellness)
- Pillar III (environmental education)

If you copy and paste, double-check that the information is relevant to the specific question.

Don't leave questions blank. Even a small amount of information helps. Future work is not always eligible for credit unless supported by a board resolution, contract, or memorandum of understanding. For example, if solar panels are not yet installed, you can include the board resolution approving their installation as evidence.

Final Notes

There are many additional tips and tricks for completing the application. Some you'll learn organically, others through conversations with Green Ribbon Schools network members. By applying, you join a large network of incredible people doing inspiring work. **Connect, learn, and grow together.**

Additional Questions from Registration

1. Program Basics & Application Process

Questions: What is the program? How does it work? How do schools apply or qualify? Do we need to start new efforts, or can we enhance existing ones? What are the requirements, approval process, and demands?

Answer: The **California Green Ribbon Schools (CA-GRS) Award Program** recognizes schools, districts, and county offices of education for their efforts in whole-school sustainability. Applicants demonstrate progress in three pillars—**resource conservation, health and wellness, and sustainability/environmental education**. Schools do not have to start from scratch—applying existing efforts and enhancing them is encouraged. Applications are reviewed based on achievement across these pillars.

Question: Who is eligible to apply?

Answer: Eligibility includes PK-12 public and private schools, early education centers, school districts, and county offices of education across California.

Question: How do I apply?

Answer: Applications are requested via the [CA-GRS website](#) and submitted electronically via email. Schools should collect data and examples from across the institution and complete all three pillars. Districts or county offices should highlight achievements from multiple sites.

Question: How can schools get started?

- Review CA-GRS application materials and [pillar slide decks](#).
- Form a school/district committee to gather data.
- Highlight best achievements.
- Use [recorded webinars](#) and resources as guidance before submitting the official application.

2. Focus Areas of the Program

Question: What does “wellness” include? Does socio-emotional wellness count?

Answer: “Wellness” in CA-GRS is broadly defined and includes **physical, mental, and socio-emotional health**. Yes, socio-emotional wellness counts.

Question: Can the program support early education, game-based learning, or physical activities?

Answer: Innovative approaches—like game-based learning, curriculum integration, and physical activities—are encouraged.

3. Program Impact & Participation

Question: How does the program support schools in becoming greener? What is the impact on students?

Answer: The program helps schools identify strengths, set goals, and connect to resources, creating a culture of sustainability. It fosters **student leadership, environmental literacy, and healthier learning environments**.

Question: Can young advocates and elementary-level students be involved? How do Early Education Centers participate?

Answer: Schools of all levels—from Early Education Centers to high schools—can participate. Early Education Centers and elementary schools are welcome to participate, as the program is adaptable for all grade levels.

Question: Which schools in LA County are participating?

Answer: County-level participation varies; information on current honorees can be provided for those interested in local examples by contacting greenribbonschools@cde.ca.gov. To see a list of schools that have been recognized in the CA-GRS program, visit: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/cagrs.asp>.

4. Review Process, Maintenance & Funding

Question: What are the review and award processes?

Answer: Applications are reviewed by CDE staff and a panel of experts. **Applications are reviewed by CDE staff and a panel of experts. Applicants will be recognized in the following manner:**

- **Bronze Level:** Achievement of 55.0 – 64.9%
- **Silver Level:** Achievement of 65.0 – 74.9%
- **Gold Level:** Achievement of 75% or better
- **Green Achievers:** The top five performers each year receive the highest recognition as Green Achievers and are recognized in the California School Recognition Program.

Question: How do schools maintain a Green Achiever Award?

Answer: The CA-GRS is not a certification. However, Green Achievers can continue their work by expanding their sustainability initiatives and supporting current applicants.

Question: Are funds provided? Is there funding for specific activities?

Answer: While the CA-GRS program itself does not provide direct funding, participation often helps schools connect with **grants, partnerships, and community resources** that support sustainability activities.

For more information:

- Visit the CA-GRS website: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/greenribbonprog.asp>
- Program FAQs: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/greenribbonschoolsfaq.asp>
- Or contact the CA-GRS team at greenribbonschools@cde.ca.gov