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U.S. Department of Education and 33 States, D.C. and Bureau of Indian Education Officially Launch New Green Ribbon School Program

Washington, D.C. (Dec. 19, 2011) – Earlier this month, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that 33 states, including the District of Columbia and the Bureau of Indian Education, enrolled in the new U.S. Green Ribbon School awards program, gaining huge momentum for the pilot year from school communities and organizations nationwide. Of those enrolled, 17 have a Republican governor, 16 have a Democrat governor and 1 has an Independent governor. In the coming months, state departments of education will nominate K-12 schools that have made outstanding strides in advancing sustainability initiatives, promoting student health and instituting environmental education.

Green Ribbon Schools is a voluntary awards program for K-12 schools that conserve natural and energy resources, reduce costs, maximize learning opportunities, foster wellness and integrate environmental themes across curriculum. In launching the Green Ribbon program, the Department of Education and participating states will celebrate schools that have adopted best practices in recycling; transportation; dining services; energy, water and indoor air quality management; and facilities and grounds maintenance in addition to incorporating outdoor and nature education into their academic programming.

“Earth Day Network is committed to greening all of America’s schools within a generation, and we and our partners are pleased that so many have joined together to make the Green Ribbon Schools program and the greening of our schools a reality,” said Kathleen Rogers, president of Earth Day Network. “We look forward to supporting schools that apply for this prestigious award and to announcing the first Green Ribbon winners around Earth Day 2012,” added Rogers.

According to Kevin Coyle, vice president of education and training for the National Wildlife Federation, “A green education in today’s world is becoming a stark necessity. This is well understood in places like China and European nations who see green technology and business systems as defining in the early 21st Century in the same way that the Internet was so transformative over the past 20 years.”

The Green Ribbon School program is modeled on the Department of Education’s popular Blue Ribbon School awards program, launched in 1982 to recognize academic achievement. To date, more than 5,000 schools across the country have received a Blue Ribbon distinction and the award is a source of tremendous pride in their communities. While a Blue Ribbon stands for

the pursuit of educational excellence, a Green Ribbon will represent the pursuit of educational excellence through the advancement of sustainable practices, healthful environments and environmental literacy.

Rachel Gutter, director of the Center for Green Schools at USGBC, describes the Green Ribbon Schools program as being the "biggest thing to happen to the green schools movement." Gutter stresses that America's K-12 schools, no matter their condition or location, "can function as living laboratories to prepare today's students for the careers of tomorrow."

"Environmental studies and education are perfect ways to stimulate student curiosity and to help reverse America's longstanding national decline in science and math education," said James Elder, head of the Campaign for Environmental Literacy. "Green schools also make sense when looking for ways to keep kids healthy, interested in school and graduating. And, public officials, school boards and principals should know that green schools help save hundreds of millions of precious public dollars in utility bills so these funds can go directly into educating students."

The U.S. Green Building Council, the National Wildlife Federation, the Campaign for Environmental Literacy, Earth Day Network and other organizations applaud this effort by the U.S. Department of Education and the participating states and see it as an important step toward keeping American K-12 education relevant, vibrant and focused on leadership in a changing world.

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About Campaign for Environmental Literacy

The Campaign for Environmental Literacy (CEL) is a network of national education and environmental organizations that work to engage the federal government in helping to close the nation's growing environmental literacy gap. CEL has led successful efforts with its lead partners (National Wildlife Federation, Second Nature, Earth Day Network, and U.S. Green Building Council) to restore and grow environmental education funding; authorize the University Sustainability Program at the Department of Education; and introduce the Ocean, Coastal, and Watershed Education Act and the No Child Left Inside Act (www.fundee.org).

About Earth Day Network

Growing out of the first Earth Day in 1970, Earth Day Network mobilizes over one billion people worldwide year-round with over 25,000 partners in 192 countries to broaden, diversify and mobilize the environmental movement, through advocacy, education, public policy and consumer campaigns. More than one billion people now participate in Earth Day activities each year, making it the largest civic observance in the world (www.earthday.org).

About National Wildlife Federation

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is America's largest conservation organization, inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future (www.nwf.org). Over the past 15 years, NWF education programs have helped over 4,000 schools to become greener through NWF's Certified Schoolyard Habitats program and Eco-Schools USA. NWF is the sole U.S. host for the international Eco-Schools program, the largest green school program globally, that is now in 51 nations, reaching 38,000 K-12 schools and over 11 million students. NWF's Eco-Schools USA program launched in November 2009 and is one of America's largest green school programs, currently reaching over 480 schools in 42 states, in an effort to green school buildings, grounds, curricula, and student experiences (www.ecoschoolsusa.org).

About the U.S. Green Building Council

The U.S. Green Building Council is committed to a prosperous and sustainable future for our nation through cost-efficient and energy-saving green buildings. With a community comprising 79 local affiliates, nearly 16,000 member organizations, and more than 167,000 LEED Professional Credential holders, USGBC is the driving force of an industry that is projected to contribute $554 billion to the U.S. GDP from 2009-2013. USGBC leads an unlikely diverse constituency of builders and environmentalists, corporations and nonprofit organizations, elected officials and concerned citizens, and teachers and students. For more information, visit www.usgbc.org, on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.