Eco-Schools U.S.

National Impact Report 2025-2026

EVERY STUDENT A LEADER, EVERY SCHOOL A FORCE FOR CHANGE

77% of states, including Washington D.C. and the U.S.V.I, participated in Eco-Schools. **589** schools from coast to coast developed action plans with the following states submitting and certifying the most.

#1 Virginia

#2 Colorado

#3 Texas

#4 New Jersey

#5 Ohio

Large: Lalla Odom Elementary School, TX
Medium: Bailey's Upper Elementary School, VA
Small: Place Bridge Academy, CO

We participate in the Eco-Schools program because we believe that building a culture of sustainability starts with small, everyday actions that create long-lasting change. As a school community, we want our students, staff, and families to understand that even the tiniest choices, like picking up trash, turning off lights when you leave a room, or conserving water, can make a huge impact on our environment. By taking part in this program, we're teaching responsibility, encouraging environmental awareness, and empowering everyone at Forest Park to work together to create a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable community.

Forest Park High School, VA

ABOUT PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

As a small, rural Title I school, environmnetal stewardship is not limited to any one demographic or socioeconomic group; it is a shared responsiblity and a shared opportunity for learning.

St. James Santee Elementary Middle School, SC

1% Early Childhood Centers
7% K-12
12% Middle Schools
16% Mixed Grade Bands
20% High Schools
44% Elementary Schools

Cedar River Academy, IA

Cory Elementary School, CO

84% Public Schools
9% Private Schools

The remaining 7% identified as magnet, charter, parochial, homeschool, juvenile justice, or Department of Defense.

No Tribal or First Nations schools participated.

Data collected from all schools participating in the Eco-Schools program 2025-2026 as of June 30, 2026.
To learn more about how Eco-Schools gathers and interprets school data, see Viewing Your Schools Environmental Impact in our FAQ.

SCHOOL ADMINSTRATORS

How does your administration prioritize or lift up Eco-Schools and the school's commitment to sustainability?

20 % Include Eco-Schools goals in the school's improvement/success plans

39 % Share impact of Eco-Schools efforts with those outside the school community, i.e., principal's meeting

53 % Approve release time for sustainability-related professional development/learning

53 % Model environmental stewardship and responsibility

60 % Encourage time to address environmental stewardship and responsibility

85 % Celebrate and recognize environmental efforts and achievements

George Washington Carver Elementary School, GA

SCHOOL DISTRICT COLLABORATIONS

Working toward shared goals for student success and sustainable school communities we look forward to continuing and nurturing our relationships with our school district collaborators.

- **Austin Independent School District, TX**
- **Bosie Public Schools, ID**
- **Denver Public Schools, CO**
- **Fairfax County Public Schools, VA**
- **Jeffco Public Schools, CO**
- **Kathonah-Lewisboro School Distrt, NY**
- **Lincoln Public Schools, NE**
- **Portland Public Schools, OR**
- **Prince William County Public Schools, VA**
- **Red-Clay Consolidated School District, DE**
- **The School District of Philadelphia, PA**

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Students, schools, and districts are building habits that outlast the classroom. We are proud of this year's collective impact supporting wildlife and biodiversity, climate change, and healthy and resilient communities. Here's to a job well done by all our Eco-Schools!

2,261
student-led actions taken

76k
students engaged

6,932
leadership opportunities taken by youth across the nation

63.2k
native trees, flowers, shrubs, and grasses planted

1.1m
square feet of habitat created

3.6m
pounds of waste collected and properly disposed

1,743
hours of service

18.4k
hours of outdoor learning

3,358
water and energy conservation actions taken

CERTIFICATION BREAKDOWN

A special shoutout to our certified Eco-Schools! **40% of this year's participants certified their action plans.** We applaud the students-led action teams, school communities, and community partners for their passion, perseverance, collaboration, and resilience.

19
schools

22
schools

33
schools

154
schools

TOP ACTIONS BY THEME

The Eco-Schools U.S. action library offers a comprehensive selection of 60+ actions, spanning three themes, *Wildlife and Biodiversity, Climate Change*, and *Healthy and Resilient Schools*. Here are the top five most popular actions taken by Eco-Schools across the country.

WILDLIFE & BIODIVERSITY

Build a Pollinator Garden

Create Wildlife Homes

Bird-Friendly Schools

Fish Stewards

Species Diversity

CLIMATE CHANGE

Paper & Cardboard School Recycling Program

Divert Textile Waste

Active & Sustainable Transportation

Create Your Own Climate Change Action Card

Using Art to Represent Climate Change

HEALTHY & RESILIENT COMMUNTITIES

Build an Edible Garden

Indoor Gardening & Greenhouses

Vermicomposting & School-Based Composting

Days of Service

Repurposing & Innovative Recycling

CONNECTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM

As a key element of the Eco-Schools Framework, here are the top five content areas teachers used in connecting learning experiences to experiential and authentic sustainability action.

1. **Life and Earth Science**
2. **Social Science and SEL**
3. **Arts**
4. **Language Arts**
5. **Math**

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING

SEL skill development through sustainability action was documented across 81 school districts and 78% of schools engaged with all 5 competencies. Skills cited through plan implementation:

- **85% Responsible Decision-Making**
- **69% Relationship Skills**
- **68% Social Awareness**
- **66% Self-Management**
- **64% Self-Awareness**

CONNECTING TO THE SDGS

With each action taken as part of the Eco-Schools program, schools are making meaningful contributions to our global effort to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). School actions aligned most to the following SDGs.

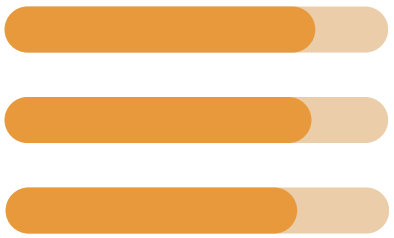
Jensen Beach Elementary School, FL

OBSERVED STUDENT IMPACTS

KEY FINDINGS

Educators across participating schools observed student growth in nearly every dimension the program tracks, and the depth of that growth is as notable as its breadth. Environmental awareness was the standout outcome, but what the data reveals beyond that is a consistent pattern of students developing skills and dispositions that extend far beyond sustainability content: critical thinking, resilience, leadership, and a growing sense of personal responsibility for their learning.

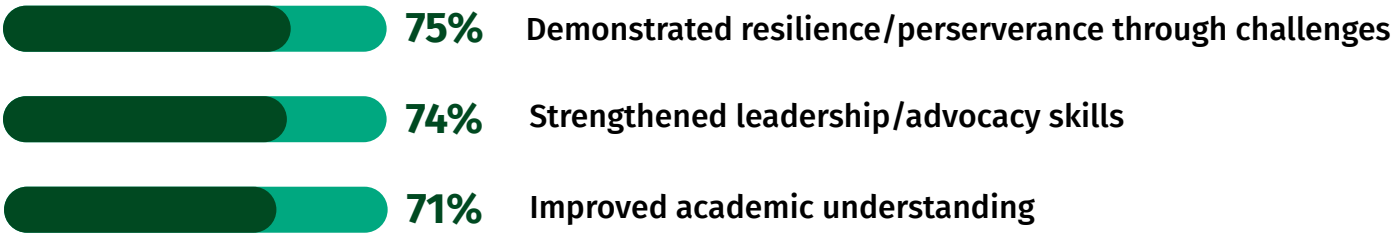
Perhaps most striking is the social-emotional dimension of these results. Program participation appears to cultiv ate confidence, perseverance, and civic-mindedness in ways that traditional classroom structures rarely achieve on their own. The near-total absence of schools reporting no observable impacts is itself a finding worth highlighting. Across school types, grade levels, and geographies, educators are seeing real, recognizable change in students who are both new and returning to the Eco-Schools program.



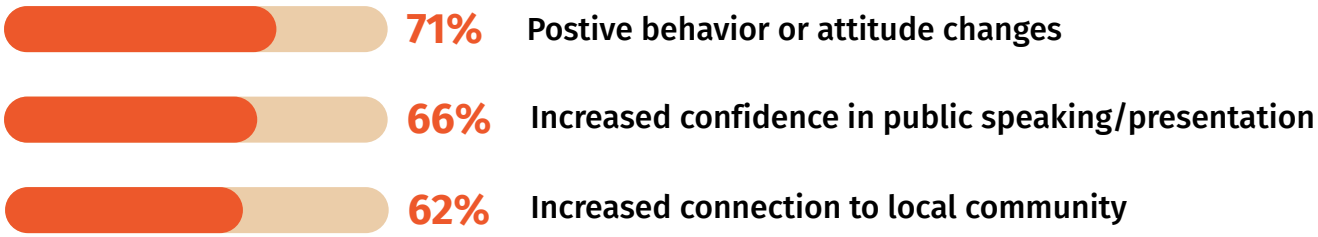
EDUCATIONAL VALUE AND PROGRAM EFFICACY

What makes these findings particularly compelling is not any single outcome, but the pattern across all of them. Schools are not checking one or two boxes, they are observing students grow simultaneously as thinkers, communicators, leaders, and community members. This kind of multi-dimensional development is the hallmark of high-quality, project-based learning, and it is precisely what the Eco-Schools model is designed to produce.

OBSERVED STUDENT IMPACTS



When students are trusted to identify real problems, build action plans, and engage their school communities, they practice skills that no worksheet can replicate. The data suggests that this approach works, and works consistently. Eco-Schools reach into civic identity and community connection is especially significant, as these outcomes reflect a depth of engagement that goes beyond academic achievement and into the kind of student formation that educators and school communities most hope for.



> At Carver, Eco-Schools is not an add-on program, but the foundation for how our students engage with the natural world.
>
> G. W. Carver Elementary Middle School, GA

> We participate in Eco-Schools because it teaches students to be responsible citizens, strengthens academics, builds leadership, and helps protect our environment. All while improving our school community.
>
> Roosevelt Elementary School, NJ,

> Eco-Schools has helped us grow a culture where children lead with curiosity, kindness, and courage.
>
> Grow CoOp, FL

ECO-SCHOOLS ROLE AS A PART OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

One suggestion from our assessment last year was to get our younger students more involved. The Eco-Action team has visited each K-5 classroom to talk with them about how they can help and to gather their ideas. It's allowing them to spread the environment-based actions to the larger student body more consistently, which in turn embeds environment-based learning within the school culture. One of the planned actions is to give every student a nature journal, each family a tree to plant at home, and a bird feeder for that tree. This way, the learning extends beyond the school walls and fosters lifelong environmental advocates.

Glandorf Elementary School, OH

Last year our principal and superintendent were so impressed with the program they asked me to introduce a similar class to 7th graders. This overlap between grades has allowed us to collaborate with more students, teachers, community members, and businesses. Students are now teaching lessons to other grades to spread awareness and increase involvement. Eco-Schools has become a cornerstone of our middle school, and we are working to extend it to our elementary and high schools. Our ultimate goal is to integrate Eco-Schools throughout the entire district!

Eureka Middle School, MT

HEALTHY AND RESILIENT SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

With over 2000 actions taken by schools this year, many identified their work directly supported or improved their community's health, wellness, and/or resilience.

- **12 %** inequitable impacts from climate-fueled extreme weather
- **15 %** indoor air quality
- **20 %** safe and accessible routes to school
- **24 %** soil contamination
- **28 %** air pollution
- **30 %** outdoor water quality
- **35 %** food deserts
- **63 %** increase in green space or tree canopy

Top: Prairie Creek Community School, MN
Left: College View Elementary School, CO
Right: Lankenau High School, PA

WHERE STUDENTS LEAD, CHANGE FOLLOWS

Walter Maginnis High School, MN
Green Infrastructure

Building on their 3-year outdoor learning plan, students completing a rigorous pond project proposal. Through advocacy, persistence, and hope for positive change their pond solved for drainage issues and allowed students to protect their natural resources and collect stormwater.

Maumee Middle School, OH
The Science of Prairie Ecosystems

Students hosted a community Prairie Fair focused on pollinators, native plants, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship, where they designed activities, created advertisements and connected with local businesses and organizations.

Winterhaven K-8, OR
Habitat Restoration

Students led a schoolwide biodiversity initiative, partnering with Backyard Habitats and conservation experts to restore native gardens, design an outdoor learning space, and conduct habitat surveys, positioning students as genuine contributors to professional-level conservation.

The School at Marygrove, MI
Social Justice

In partnership with Detroit Area Youth Uniting Michigan and the Chip Bag Project, students collected Mylar waste, and transformed it into insulated sleeping mats for unhoused individuals, teaching that environmental stewardship and social justice are deeply interconnected.

Laurel Hill Elementary School, VA
Food Share Program

This student-led food share program reduced cafeteria waste, expanding from grades 4-6 to K-3, adding refrigeration for perishables, and evolving into a self-sustained operation, now advancing toward mindful consumption education to further curb food waste.

Cedar River Academy, IA
Monarch Conservation

2nd graders studied the monarch butterfly, then hosted an Earth Day assembly for 220 students and Cedar Rapids' Mayor Pro Tempore. Discovering the city had already signed the Mayors' Monarch Pledge students were proud of their civic action, learning, and environmental stewardship.

NEXT GENERATION CONSERVATION LEADERS AND STEWARDS

Students at Carver Elementary and Richmond Hill Elementary collaborated to design and lead Earth and Arts Night, a large, community-wide environmental celebration that connected environmental learning, stewardship action, creativity, and community engagement. Developed as a student-led event, Earth and Arts Night provided opportunities for students to share their knowledge of ecosystems, biodiversity, sustainability, and conservation through visual art, music, interactive exhibits, and hands-on activities. Students from both schools worked together across campuses to prepare for this unique event. Families, community members, and local partners attended to celebrate the students' work and engage with environmental themes. The night served as a demonstration of how schools working together can amplify impact beyond what either could achieve alone.

George Washington Carver Elementary Middle School, GA

As a result of our growing role in environmental education, we were invited to participate in local Community Resilience Resource meetings focused on promoting nature and nature-based solutions (NNBS) to address challenges such as flooding, climate change, and extreme weather in our rural area. Our students and educators participated in discussions alongside local government representatives, nonprofits, and community organizations. This participation gave our school a voice in shaping local resilience strategies and brought real-world environmental problem-solving directly into our students' learning experience. Being included in these conversations was a meaningful affirmation of the work our school community has been doing, and a powerful example for students of what civic engagement and environmental leadership can look like at the local level.

St. James Santee Elementary School, SC

After conducting empathy interviews with students, teachers identified a clear and important theme: many students felt there was a lack of culturally relevant food options and a broader lack of access to healthy food. In response, a group of five student leaders stepped forward to better understand the issue and gather input from the entire student body. They collected feedback from all 100 enrolled students to learn more about what students wanted and needed. Through this process, students decided to create a school garden that would grow culturally meaningful foods, a direct response to what their peers told them mattered most.

Respect Academy, CO

Eco-Schools Action in Motion: Student Voice as a Catalyst for Change: The activism letter campaign was explicitly designed to elevate student voice and channel authentic youth leadership into local action. Middle school students identified, researched, and confronted pressing environmental health issues affecting their region, ranging from toxic algae blooms and deforestation to rampant air pollution. Letters were mailed to mayors, state legislators, county officials, school board members, and environmental agencies. Many students received responses.

Tenakill Middle School, NJ

2025-2026

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WHY ECO-SCHOOLS?

Our school's focus is environmental education. We have 73 different community partners who we engage with to work on environmental projects in our building and around our community. The Green Flag is public recognition of our work and partnerships.

Lankenau Environmental Magnet High School, PA

We are participating in Eco-Schools because we believe schools have a powerful role in protecting our environment and shaping responsible citizens. By involving staff, students, and the wider community, we can create lasting, school-wide changes, from reducing waste and conserving energy to promoting biodiversity and sustainable travel.

Roosevelt Elementary School, NJ

The Eco-Schools program provides student-centered framework for turning environmental learning into real-world action, and that is the principle behind all environmental science initiatives here at Maumee Middle School. We are looking forward to using Eco-Schools to empower our students to move beyond learning about sustainability to actively practicing it.

Maumee Middle School, OH

It's about fostering a 'Green Mindset' where students develop vital leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking skills.

Centerville Elementary School, VA

We participate in Eco-Schools to provide students with hands-on, real-world learning opportunities focused on environmental stewardship. The program supports cross-curricular instruction, student leadership, and sustainable practices that reduce waste and conserve resources. Participation also strengthens community partnerships, enhances our school environment, and helps build lifelong habits that prepare students to be responsible, environmentally conscious citizens.

Flint Hill Elementary School, MO

We participate in the Eco-Schools program to instill leadership in students, to bring awareness about climate change, and to spark interest in science to release science advocates into society. We intend to create a school community that understands the importance of being eco-friendly and honors the land that we learn on, and the wildlife that surrounds it.

Hurden Looker School, NJ

We are proud to showcase the impact our projects have on our community and our environment. Hanging the Green Flag in our hallway is a sign to our school community that our school prioritizes environmental education and student action.

Hawthorne Elementary School, ID

To register your school, visit:

app.ecoschools.us

To learn more about the Eco-Schools U.S. program, visit:

nwf/eco-schools-us

Districts and partners looking to work with Eco-Schools or general questions, email us at:

ecoschoolsus@nwf.org

Sustainability isn't a subject, it's a habit for hope and change we're building together.