

DMPS Earns U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Award

Monday, April 22nd, 2013

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, along with White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley and Environmental Protection Agency Acting Administrator Bob Persiaclepe, announced today that Des Moines Public Schools is among 78 schools and districts recognized with the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Award. Iowa is among 29 states and D.C. with schools or districts earning the award.

The Green Ribbon Schools Award is part of a larger U.S. Department of Education effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about practices that are proven to result in improved student engagement, higher academic achievement and graduation rates, and workforce preparedness, as well as a government-wide goal of increasing energy independence and economic security.

This is the second year of the national recognition for schools and the first year entire school districts were recognized. Des Moines Public Schools is one of only 14 districts in the nation to be honored. Last year, Central Campus in Des Moines was one of the first schools to earn a Green Ribbon Schools Award. Last month, for the second year in a row, Des Moines Public Schools was recognized as the Energy Star Partner of the Year by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Today's honorees are modeling a comprehensive approach to being green," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "They are demonstrating ways schools can simultaneously cut costs; improve health, performance and equity; and provide an education geared toward the jobs of the future. In fact, the selected districts are saving millions of dollars as a result of their greening efforts. And the great thing is that the resources these honorees are using are available for free to all schools."

"Preparing students for success in the 21st century economy begins in our schools. The schools and districts being honored today are modeling the best practices in reducing environmental impact and cutting costs, creating a healthier learning environment, and providing students with an education geared toward the jobs of the future," said Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality Nancy Sutley

"Schools are the center of a community and, as such, school districts have a unique opportunity to positively impact the environmental practices and understanding of tens of thousands of students, staff members, and community members", said Superintendent Tom Ahart. "Des Moines Public Schools is committed to the implementation of practices that span the Green Ribbon Pillars and model energy efficiency and environmental sustainability while simultaneously providing safe and healthy learning environments and quality educational experiences for students."

"By placing a priority on environmental issues and improvements, DMPS is demonstrating the importance of conservation, energy efficiency, and environmental stewardship to students, families, and the communities it serves, thus ensuring that the same care and concern for the environment is carried on in future generations," added Bill Good, chief operations officer for Des Moines Public Schools.

The school district was nominated by the Iowa Department of Education. Highlights of why the school district was honored today include:

Efficient School Buildings: The district works with multiple partners to develop and implement efficiencies district-wide. For example, DMPS partners with Johnson Controls to design and implement building automation and HVAC controls; The Energy Group reviews energy practices and provides options for retro-commissioning, new technology, and operational changes; The Weidt Group audits systems and energy use and makes recommendations with a cost/benefit analysis; and MidAmerican Energy helps the district identify and take advantage of energy rebate programs. Renovation projects have focused on replacing obsolete, inefficient, or worn-out equipment and systems, which has had a tremendous impact on energy consumption. Large-scale energy improvements have included HVAC, building envelope, and electrical upgrades. Thirty-three buildings have replaced the traditional boiler system with geothermal. When geothermal is not possible, other conservation steps, such as replacing outdated boilers with high-efficient units, are taken. Additionally, by modifying building controls, particularly replacing pneumatic controls with Direct-Digital Control technology, the district can create temperature set points, set back temperatures for unoccupied periods, and the stagger the startup of equipment to avoid peak demand charges. Building envelope upgrades have included the installation of double-pane glazed windows and doors with internal insulation and weather stripping. Lighting upgrades have included the installation of high-efficient T8 and T5, LED, and motion-sensor lighting and renovation designs that maximize the use of day lighting. The district is also committed to small habit changes that can have a big impact. For example, teachers are encouraged to close and position classrooms blinds to reduce heat loss or keep the room cooler during breaks. Daily, the entire staff does their part by turning off lights, shutting down computers, and unplugging electronics. DMPS has saved \$2.4 million in avoided energy costs since 2007-08, equivalent to 66 first year teachers. DMPS also leads by example on issues such as waste and preventative health measures. Water retention is built into every renovation plan and rain gardens have been installed at many schools. Two years ago, DMPS



implemented single stream recycling and purchased additional classroom and large recycling containers, increasing the amount of solid waste that is recycled by 63% from 2009-10 to 2011-12. The district has been recognized by various groups in 2012 for its efforts, including: ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year, Governor's Iowa Environmental Excellence Award, Green Ribbon School for Central Campus, and an ASHRAE Iowa Chapter Technology Award.

Healthy Learning Environments: DMPS has implemented stringent plans relating to improving the health, comfort, and learning environment of students and staff. The district has a management plan to control asbestos exposure. Though not required until 2015, DMPS has also begun testing for lead. Current regulations require radon testing of buildings with preschool classrooms; DMPS has gone further and conducts radon tests in all district buildings. By 2013, the last wood playground will be removed, and DMPS does not allow any CCA material on new installations. The district has also implemented multiple practices to promote nutrition, physical activity, and overall school health. Nine schools participate in the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge. The district has a Farm to School chapter, as do four individual schools. Eleven schools have school gardens, and the Central Campus Horticulture program has a massive greenhouse garden. Schools work with AmeriCorps FoodCorps Members who lead weekly afterschool cooking and nutrition lessons and activities. DMPS partners with the Dairy Council and the NFL for "Fuel Up to Play 60," which provides equipment and nutrition education for all elementary schools. Twenty-eight elementary schools participate in IDPH's "Pick a Better Snack" program, and DMPS hosts AmeriCorps HealthCorps Members who lead monthly lessons and tastings for all students grades PreK-3 and for nine afterschool girls groups. Students spend at least 120 minutes in physical activity weekly, and numerous outdoor education, exercise, and recreation opportunities are available.

Innovative Environmental Education: Through innovative partnerships, DMPS is implementing ground-breaking new initiatives in environmental and sustainability education, and these concepts are incorporated into the curriculum at all grade levels. For the last three years, DMPS and the Center for Bio-renewable Chemicals at Iowa State University have collaborated to pair DMPS teachers with ISU bio-renewable scientists, providing teachers with the tools, experiences, and ongoing relationships with career scientists that enable them to share with students the latest STEM developments. DMPS also participates in Symbi, a joint effort between ISU, DMPS, and the National Science Foundation, to educate and inspire young people about renewable energy, sustainable technology, and green products. With Symbi, ISU graduate students work collaboratively with teachers to develop innovative, engaging science activities for students. In partnership with the George Lucas Education Foundation, DMPS introduced a Project Based Learning AP Environmental Science course at all of the five comprehensive high schools. DMPS also offers the Iowa Energy and Sustainability Academy, a cutting edge program focused on energy sustainability at Central Campus. The district is also committed to providing students with meaningful outdoor learning experiences. Multiple schools have built outdoor classrooms for on-site outdoor learning experiences. Students also take off-site field trips to places like Gray's Lake, Neil Smith National Wildlife Refuge, Living History Farms, Des Moines Water Works, and Metro Waste Authority. These field trips help students connect with the environment. At Hillis Elementary, students learn how they can make good, healthy choices in an urban setting every Wednesday during ECO (Every Child Outside) Hour. Hundreds of DMPS students participate in environmentally-focused service-learning projects annually. For more information about the Green Ribbon Schools program, visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools/>.