

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# GreenRibbonSchools



## Highlights from the 2016 Honorees

Schuylerville's excerpt



U.S. Department of Education - 400 Maryland Ave, SW  
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New York

## **Schuylerville Elementary School, Schuylerville, N.Y.**

### *Green and Healthy Evolution on the Hudson River*

Schuylerville Elementary School, with over 720 students, is located in the rolling hills and fields of beautiful upstate New York, close to the shores of the Hudson River. With a wealth of scenic and agricultural resources surrounding the grounds, striving to be a sustainable is a great fit for the school's mission, as sustainability is a critical way to ensure that future generations care for and benefit from the natural resources of the area.

Schuylerville's green school efforts began in 2011, initiated by elementary parent volunteers with support from nonprofit partner and neighbor Hudson Crossing Park, and inspired by the Children and Nature Movement and an organization based in Texas called GreenRibbonSchools.org (not affiliated with ED-GRS). The school focuses on embedding the cornerstones of the GreenRibbonSchools.org program, getting young people outdoors, learning from the environment, making sustainable choices, and prioritizing healthy lifestyles.

To date, more than 50 projects have been implemented as part of Schuylerville's sustainability efforts, spanning school years, and sending ripples across the district and community. What began with ideas from parent volunteers has grown as students, teachers, and administrators seek out the green school volunteers for support with projects and programs, and the resulting projects exemplify the creativity, sustainability, and lasting effect of this transformation of the school's vision, operations, and educational goals.

Annually, more than 500 Schuylerville students, teachers, and families participate in the Turtle Count Challenge on World Turtle Day in May. Teachers bring students to the pond on the campus, using observation to build STEM and literacy skills. Having been inspired, students often return with their families to observe the turtles and other wildlife. What once was an overlooked retention pond has become a treasured natural space. This annual program has garnered the attention of the Schuylerville Public Library, leading to collaboration with the school volunteers to plan a story walk. Using the book *In the Small Pond*, pages from the story are posted on a trail around the school grounds and on waterside trails at Hudson Crossing Park, promoting outdoor experiences and literacy. The Turtle Count also has prompted second-grade students to host an awareness event and fundraiser for Blanding's turtle, a local species on the endangered list. Educators from Wilton Wildlife Park and Preserve have assisted the students with educational presentation, and students collected donations for the facility.





Schuylerville has a well-established curriculum at multiple grade levels that includes hatching insects, including butterflies. One of the first projects of the new sustainability volunteer group was to work with teachers and a local Girl Scout troop to plant a butterfly garden, creating an accessible supply of milkweed for the voracious caterpillars, and an appropriate release space for the newly-hatched butterflies. With guidance and donations from five local farm and nursery businesses, the butterfly garden is now an established outdoor learning area. It also serves as a site for more than 200 students participating in Journey North's tulip test gardens citizen science program, and currently is being certified as a Monarch Watch Waystation as part of a local Girl Scout's Gold Award project. Interest in gardening has grown throughout the school, leading to the cultivation of indoor classroom gardens and the construction of four outdoor raised beds.

Since their inception, the school's greening efforts have been supported by Hudson Crossing Park, a public educational and recreational destination within walking distance of the school. The annual Hudson Crossing Triathlon inspired a summer student and family jogging program called Towpath Tuesdays, as well as an annual Hi-5k Challenge, which invites participants to complete a five-kilometer race in some form, whether walking, jogging, racing, biking, swimming, hiking, or kayaking. In the inaugural Hi-5k, more than 250 students, teachers, and community members reported success in finishing the five-kilometers, including kindergarten students who decided to replace the usual classroom Thanksgiving feast with a five-kilometer Turkey Trot of accumulated laps on the school track. Each year, the five-kilometer race challenges have evolved, including serving as the organized event for the school's contributions to the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. The Saratoga County Public Health Department chose to replicate the Hi-5k program, challenging all of the youth in the summer recreation programs of the 20 towns and villages in the county.

In an example of teacher leadership in the school's sustainability efforts, some 120 fourth grade students planted a White Pine peace tree in the outdoor classroom. After studying Native American history and anti-bullying, students brainstormed words and phrases that represented weapons of war and buried them under a new five-foot pine tree. By locating this tree in the outdoor classroom, the students made it an accessible symbol of peace for the entire student body, as it is a place that all can visit for inspiration in growing, learning, and leading.

Finally, the school's sustainability efforts have included systemwide improvements to the school's recycling program and energy reduction technology. In 2011, much of the school's waste went to the landfill, including waste from some 50 classrooms, offices, and large gathering spaces, as well as unclaimed items in the lost and found. The school features zero-sort receptacles in every classroom; specialized programs for recycling electronics, ink cartridges, and markers; unclaimed clothing





donations that go to a secondhand store serving the community; and a rapidly evolving cafeteria program that diverts 40,000 pounds of food waste to a local pig farm and compost pile, and more than 90,000 milk cartons per year to a recycling facility.

Significant capital improvements since the launch of the school's sustainability efforts include energy conservation measures such as LED, T-8, and motion sensor lighting; hot water heater system upgrades; roof systems and insulation upgrades; replacement windows; and energy management upgrades to direct digital controls; valve and motor replacements on the gym and cafeteria air handlers; re-insulation of heating lines; replacement of unit ventilators; and upgrading to ENERGY STAR kitchen appliances. To further reduce Schuylerville's carbon footprint, staff have orchestrated prudent scheduling with an energy management system based on building use, including night setbacks and occupancy sensors.

The Schuylerville sustainable schools efforts are growing stronger every year, and are nurtured through investment, ownership, and leadership from a wide variety of stakeholders, ranging from kindergarten students to Hudson Crossing Park board members. Together, Schuylerville Elementary and Hudson Crossing Park are growing tomorrow's leaders with their feet in the grass and their eyes looking forward to a healthy and vibrant community and planet.

