

Have You Heard?

Warner Elementary School is Delaware's 2018 Green Ribbon award winner, becoming the state's nominee for the national award.

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The Green Ribbon program recognizes schools for exemplary achievement and considerable progress in three areas: 1) reducing environmental impact and costs; 2) improving the health and wellness of students and staff; and 3) providing effective environmental and sustainability education by incorporating STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), civic skills and green career pathways.

Red Clay Superintendent Merv Daugherty thanked the school's partners for assisting in the program and said that the entire school should be congratulated. "Warner has proven that a school in an urban setting can become a leader in environmental stewardship," he said. "The students and staff are to be congratulated for their outstanding efforts."

Warner went from a school that did not recycle at all three years ago to a school that has placed recycling as a top priority amongst its students and staff:

- Every classroom now has two "Green Team Ambassadors" and a recycling bin for paper, plastics, and aluminum. On a weekly basis, the school recycles about 130 pounds of classroom "trash."
- The school upgraded its Styrofoam lunch trays to recycled paper trays and now recycles all the milk jugs in the lunchroom.
- All third-graders visit the Delaware Solid Waste Authority to learn about recycling and conservation.
- Students planted a garden outside and harvest vegetables in the fall.

The program was organized by Assistant Principal Joe Rappa. "This is all student led," he said. "The students do everything, I just monitor it."

Principal Chrishaun Fitzgerald said students have a good working knowledge of what can be composted, what can be recycled, and what can be thrown away in the cafeteria after they eat lunch. "I am very proud of Mr. Rappa, and of our students," she said. "This is a leadership opportunity. They are not just taking care of the environment and the school, but they are taking care of their community as well."

Warner also made facility changes to be more efficient in its water usage:

- Automatic toilets and sinks help reduce water usage.
- Refillable water bottle stations replaced water fountains.
- The school went from using 318k gallons in May 2011 to 146k gallons in May 2016.

The school has sought and won multiple grants and awards to support its efforts to become an eco-friendly building, including:

- The Energy Star award for 2008-2013.
- A grant from the Delaware Valley Green Building Council in 2015.
- A vermiculture (worm composting) kit that is used in the science curriculum.
- Funding in 2013 from the Triangle Neighborhood Association to start a school garden, which now produces hundreds of pounds of vegetables a year. The vegetables are used in the school's kitchen and served to students. Neighbors also are invited to harvest from the garden.

Secretary of Education Susan Bunting lauded the entire Warner community for its efforts, particularly the students who have taken ownership of this work.

"The students lead the recycling efforts in the building," Bunting said, noting Warner's Green Team of students are chosen through grade-level writing prompts to educate their peers and staff on the importance of recycling.

"These students are leading by example," Bunting said. "They and the rest of the Warner student body, their families, the faculty and staff and their neighborhood partners deserve this recognition for their achievements."

State officials will honor Warner at a ceremony later this spring. The U.S. Department of Education will name national winners next month.