



## U.S. Secretary of Education Names Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary a 2020 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School

The U.S. Department of Education announced today that Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary in Spring House, PA is among the 2020 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools award honorees. Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary is the only school in Pennsylvania to receive this 2020 award.

Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary was nominated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and is greatly deserving of this honor, demonstrating in its application the many innovative and creative steps that have been taken to embrace the three pillars: 1) reducing environmental impact and costs, including waste, water, energy use and alternative transportation; 2) improving the health and wellness of students and staff, including environmental health, nutrition and fitness; and 3) providing effective sustainability education, including robust environmental education that engages STEM, civic skills and green career pathways.

Across the country, 39 schools, 11 districts, and five postsecondary institutions are being honored for their innovative efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, improve health and wellness, and ensure effective sustainability education.

The honorees were named from a pool of candidates nominated by 27 states. The selectees include 28 public schools, including three magnet schools and four charter schools, as well as 11 nonpublic schools. Forty-five percent of the 2020 honorees serve a disadvantaged student body.

The list of all selected schools, districts, colleges, and universities, as well as their nomination packages, can be found [here](#). A report with highlights on the 55 honorees can be found [here](#). More information on the federal recognition award can be found [here](#).

### Highlights of the Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary Application

#### Pillar 1: Efforts to Reduce Environmental Impact and Costs

- Reduce, reuse, and recycle are commonly-used school-wide terms as students, faculty, and parents do their part to make a difference in our environment.
- Students are strongly encouraged to use reusable water bottles and are reminded of the impact they are making each time they refill their water bottle at the refillable water stations located throughout the school.
- Plastic gutters have been installed on the side of the greenhouse and rain barrels will be installed to collect water and redistribute to the plants inside the greenhouse.
- Faucets are equipped with water-saving aerators and toilets are set at 1.6 gallons per flush.
- The installation of a commercial dishwasher, utilization of reusable dishes and utensils, and cafeteria composting initiatives have drastically reduced the amount of waste that comes from the cafeteria.



- To reduce paper consumption, technology has become the cornerstone between curriculum and the development of 21st century competencies as students are prepared for the digital age.
- All T8 florescent lamps have been replaced with LED 4ft linear tube lamps on recommendation of an assessment by PECO (Philadelphia Electric Company).
- Each classroom is equipped with motion-sensor, energy-saving lighting and valves have been installed on steam radiators to control the temperature more efficiently in each room.

## Pillar 2: Efforts to Improve the Health and Wellness of Students and Staff

- The faculty and staff at Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary are challenged to establish a nurturing environment centered around the whole child, preparing them to become leaders in a global society.
- The development of a new school counseling center includes weekly character education lessons and mindfulness practices offered by a full-time school guidance counselor.
- Safe Students Online allows parents to be alerted of inappropriate or concerning content across social media platforms to be proactive against harmful online material and potential bullying issues.
- Yearly themes like “Make Mercy Real” and “Mercy is our Compass” serve as guides in the school community implementing service opportunities benefitting a wide array of Sisters of Mercy-sponsored ministries, as well as other community organizations.
- After school extra-curricular programming also plays a part in promoting health, wellness, and STEM practices.
- Varsity and Junior Varsity sports including basketball, soccer, swimming, lacrosse, field hockey, flag football, swimming, and track and field keep students active and engaged in their school community.
- Physical education classes emphasize physical health and fitness, skill development, and movement. Health classes are offered weekly to all students focusing on nutrition, systems of the body, physical and mental health, drug and alcohol awareness, and personal health concepts.
- Educators are committed to staying current with best practices in education and realize the importance of being lifelong learners.
- The facilities and operations teams are conscientious in their decision-making when it comes to the health and wellness of our school. All supplies are eco-friendly and every effort is made to eliminate as much waste as possible.
- The entire school is cleaned and sanitized every night using green, eco-friendly products. The pest management plan uses only eco-friendly, student-safe products.
- Safety initiatives include interior and exterior security cameras around the school, a double entry door for the two main entrances into the building, a license scanning system for all visitors, required clearances for all volunteers, a daily police supervision walk-throughs, and classroom presentations with the fire department, police department, and Montgomery County Department of Public Safety.
- The school nurse provides universal precautions trainings and facilitates the trainings to be trained in First Aid/CPR, Diabetes, and EpiPen. Routine fire drills and lock down drills ensure safety practices are in place.



## Pillar 3: Efforts to Ensure Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

- Middle school students are encouraged to explore and showcase their interests through elective classes that range from STEM, coding, and broadcasting, to school leadership, history, current events, woodworking, and the Arts.
- Through non-traditional lessons and projects, students are encouraged to not just think “outside the box,” but to get rid of “the box” entirely as they explore ways to develop more environmentally sound decisions focused on sustainability across the curriculum.
- The Exploratorium, Imaginarium, two science labs, and STEM Center are all innovative learning spaces used to create these unique academic experiences across all grades and subject areas.
- A Director of STEM develops an annual STEM Night, solely dedicated to students working with their families to complete experiments, better understand the global impact they have on the environment, and foster a sense of community around STEM. The STEM Director also creates STEM backpacks filled with experiments for students to “check out” throughout the year and complete at home with their family. These activities are centered around the use of reusable materials most families have in their homes, like toilet paper rolls, tissue boxes, plastic bottles, and cardboard.
- A Director of the Greenhouse is responsible for overseeing, managing, and supervising the environmental education and sustainability initiatives related to our newly-built greenhouse. The Director of the Greenhouse works with the Director of Curriculum to assist teachers with the newly purchased Life Lab curriculum to provide students with hands-on experiences in the greenhouse. Students have had “salad parties” after growing a variety of vegetables, and samples are always shared with the faculty and staff.
- The Parents’ Organization plays a vital role in upholding the commitment to the critical concern of caring for the Earth. They aligned with the mission to create a year-long plan dedicated to environmental education and sustainability through the sponsorship of author visits, and assemblies.
- Teachers in all grade levels support project-based learning tied to STEM, the environment, and sustainable practices to impact our world.

### A Note on the Award Name for Communications

ED's award is called "U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools" and has "District Sustainability Award" and "Postsecondary Sustainability Award" categories, in addition to the original school award. It is abbreviated ED-GRS. "Green Ribbon Schools" without the "U.S. Department of Education" is not ED's award, but instead is a separate program overseen by another organization. A selected school is a "2020 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School."

