



# **EcoSchools Canada Certification Guide**

---

2021-2022

# Table of Contents

Click on any heading below to go to the corresponding page. Once on the page, click on the heading to come back to this table of contents.

Welcome to the EcoSchools Program! .....	1
How to use this guide .....	2
Steps to certification .....	3
Levels of certification and assessment .....	4
Getting Started on the EcoSchools Certification Application (ECA) .....	5
Program deadlines, assessment, and appeals .....	6
Annual Calendar .....	7
More about EcoSchools actions .....	8



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## Welcome to the EcoSchools Program!



EcoSchools certification represents environmental excellence for kindergarten through grade 12 schools in Canada. Participation in the program allows students, teachers, school administrators, custodians, and parents to get a clear picture of their current environmental practices and take action to reduce their environmental footprint.

Each year, schools apply for certification by undertaking environmental actions, campaigns, and projects, and then recording them in the online EcoSchools Certification Application (ECA) to earn points. At the end of the year, school applications are assessed based on a standard established over 10 years of benchmarking and are awarded a final certification level.



### Our Mission



To nurture student leaders, reduce the environmental impact of schools, and build sustainable school communities.

### Our Vision



Every School an EcoSchool. From individual behaviours to collective impact, all members of a school community are empowered with the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and desire to act as environmentally responsible citizens.

## Publicly funded schools in Canada



All **publicly funded schools in Canada** can participate and certify with the EcoSchools program free of charge.

## Independent / private schools



**Independent / private schools** pay an annual fee to participate and certify with the EcoSchools program. For inquiries about annual fees and certification for independent/private schools, contact [programs@ecoschools.ca](mailto:programs@ecoschools.ca).

## Outdoor Environmental Education Centre (OEEC)



If you are with an **Outdoor Environmental Education Centre (OEEC)** and interested in certifying with the EcoSchools program, please refer to the Outdoor Environmental Education Centre Certification Process or contact [oeec@ecoschools.ca](mailto:oeec@ecoschools.ca).



# Certification Guide 2021-22

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to support your school throughout the certification process. It outlines the EcoSchools program, provides details on the assessment process and levels of certification, and will give you a sense of how to prepare for the year ahead.



## Quick Links



### EcoSchools Certification Application (ECA)

Where schools can register and participate in the EcoSchools program. Check it out [here!](#)



### FAQ

Find answers to frequently asked questions about the EcoSchools certification program and online application, [here](#).



### Webinars

View and register for free webinars (live and recorded) offered throughout the year, as well as how-to videos to help on your EcoSchools journey, [here](#).



### EcoSchools during COVID-19

EcoSchools certification is possible through remote learning, hybrid learning, and with in-school safety measures in place. For more information on certifying during COVID-19, see [here](#).



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## Steps to certification

EcoSchools is an annual certification program that supports and recognizes environmental action in schools. Certification runs between September 1st until June 30th of each year. School activities that happen in July or August can be claimed in the following year's application.



### Connect

Form an EcoTeam and [register](#) or [log in](#) to your school's account on the EcoSchools Certification Application ([app.ecoschools.ca](http://app.ecoschools.ca)).



### Review

Conduct a [School Sustainability Review](#) to review your school's current environmental practices before getting started for the year.



### Plan

Based on your School Sustainability Review, [create your school's action plan](#) in the [EcoSchools Certification Application](#).



### Engage

Get your school excited about and involved in environmental projects, campaigns, and events throughout the year. Use the many resources available in the [EcoSchools Certification Application](#) to support your journey.



### Reflect

As your school engages in actions throughout the year, remember to reflect on and document your actions by filling out Certification Questions in the EcoSchools Certification Application for each action that your school takes part in.

- **Early Bird Deadline:** Last Friday in April (April 29, 2022)
- **Final Submission Deadline:** Second Friday in May (May 13, 2022)



### Celebrate

Celebrate your school's amazing achievements at the end of the school year! Certification results are released by mid-June.



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## Levels of certification and assessment



Throughout the school year, schools complete actions in the online application and earn points towards their certification. The depth and extent of these completed environmental actions will determine the school's final certification level.

There are **four levels of certification** a school can achieve:



### **Bronze: 50-65 points**

If you're new to EcoSchools or want to focus on a few key actions this year, we suggest aiming for Bronze certification. It is important to start slow and lay a foundation for environmental learning and action at your school.



### **Silver: 66-74 points**

Silver certification is suited to schools that have started to develop a solid foundation of environmental learning and action throughout their school community.



### **Gold: 75-100 points**

Aiming for Gold certification is a challenge that will provide a comprehensive framework for environmental learning and action at your school.



### **Platinum/Green Flag: >101 points**

Platinum is the highest level of certification and a challenge that we recommend for schools that are ready to take on diverse environmental actions and engage their community. Schools that certify at Platinum are recognized as Green Flag schools through the [international Eco-Schools program](#).



### **Participant Schools**

Schools that are not able to claim the required points for certification at the Bronze level but have attempted a minimum of three environmental actions, can submit their applications as [Participants](#). Participant schools are valuable members of the EcoSchools network, but are not considered certified EcoSchools.

**When a school becomes a certified EcoSchool, they receive a digital certification seal that reflects their certification level. This seal can be displayed on a school's website and social media accounts, in newsletters, in email signatures, and more.**



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## Getting Started on the EcoSchools Certification Application (ECA)



Once you have registered for the EcoSchools program, it's time to start exploring the ECA!

### Your Dashboard

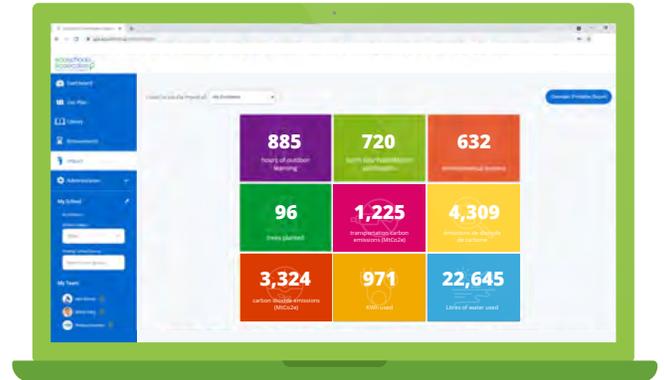
Track your school's certification progress over the year. Use the blue navigation bar on the left side of your screen to navigate to different pages including:

**Our Plan:** Where you can view and manage the actions you want to take this year.

**Library:** Where you can view all the actions not currently in your plan.

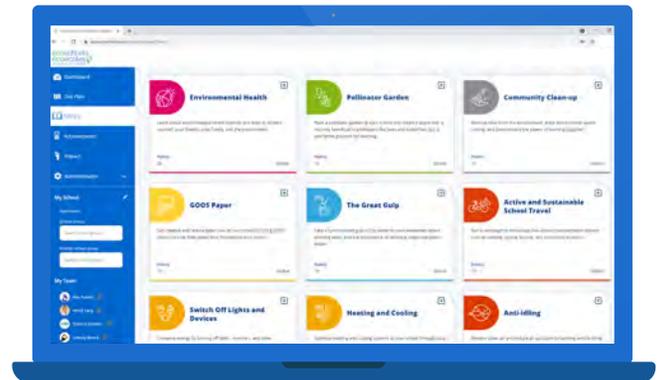
**Achievements:** Where you can view your schools certification history and download past certification seals.

**Impact:** Where you can view the impact of your school and the collective impact of all schools in Canada as we work towards a cleaner, greener, and better future!



### Library

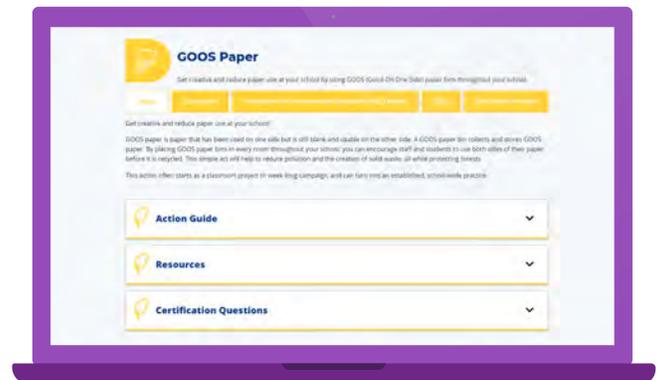
Gather your EcoTeam, go through the library, and choose actions to [add to your school's environmental action plan](#) this year. Actions can be searched by keyword or theme.



### This is what an Action looks like!

An action includes:

- Information about the action, connections to curriculum, and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- An action guide, which provides simple steps to completing the action.
- National and regional resources to support learning and action on the environmental topic.
- Certification questions, which schools complete for points towards their certification level.



For more information on how to complete an action check out his short [how-to video](#).



# Certification Guide 2021-22

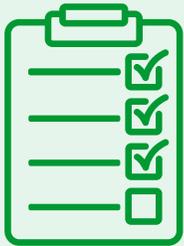
Deadlines, assessment, and appeals

## Certification Deadline



Certification applications must be [submitted through the ECA](#) by the **second Friday in May**. Schools may claim actions or campaigns that are planned for after the certification deadline by completing the appropriate actions to the best of their ability.

## Certification Assessment



Our end-of-year assessment begins after the second Friday in May. All applications are assessed by EcoSchools staff based on the information provided in the school application, using predetermined assessment criteria.

As a part of the assessment process, 20 minute virtual school visits will be scheduled for all schools that have submitted at Platinum, in addition to a statistically relevant selection of all other schools that have submitted applications. Virtual school visits will be a combination of school support and application verification.

## Final Standings



Final certification standings will be released to all schools in mid-June. Schools will be informed by email when their application has been assessed and will then be able to log into their school application to review assessment feedback and download their certification seals.

## Appeal Process



EcoSchools Canada makes every effort to ensure certification applications are assessed accurately and equitably. Should a school wish to appeal your final standing, they may complete this [form](#).



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## Annual Calendar



This calendar provides an overview of the EcoSchools program and highlights key dates, events, activities, and school communications throughout the year. With the exception of program deadlines, the calendar is meant to act as a guide and can be adapted to include regional events and priorities.

Month	Events & Important Dates	Activities
September - October	<b>Registration Opens</b> <i>Waste Reduction Week</i> <i>Walk to School Month</i>	Register or log-in to the <a href="#">ECA</a> , establish an EcoTeam, create a plan for the year, and let people at your schools know how to get involved with the EcoSchools program.  Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.
	<b>TIP!</b> Initiate a Waste-Free Lunch program at your school for Waste Reduction Week.	
November - December	<b>Winter Break</b>	Provide opportunities for all students at your school to learn <b>IN, ABOUT, FOR, and FROM</b> the environment.  Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.
	<b>TIP!</b> Hosting an event for the holidays? Make it waste-free!	
January - February	<i>Sweater Day</i> <i>Winter Walk Day</i>	<b>Start planning</b> for outdoor gardening and planting projects.  Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.
	<b>TIP!</b> Winter is a great time to focus on energy conservation. Start exploring energy at your school and run a campaign to reduce your carbon footprint.	
March - April	<b>Early Bird Deadline (Last Friday in April)</b> <b>March Break</b> <i>World Water Day</i> <i>National GOOS Paper Day</i> <i>Earth Day</i>	For Earth Day, engage your school in learning, action, and celebration around environmental issues that are important to your local community.  Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions.
	<b>TIP!</b> Take a <b>Great Gulp</b> in celebration of World Water Day! Make a <b>GOOS paper</b> bin and start reducing paper use!	
May - June	<b>Application Deadline (second Friday in May)</b> <i>Bike to School Week</i> <i>Local Food Week</i>	Complete your online application and submit by the second Friday in May.  Celebrate your school's achievements!  Receive certification results in mid-June.
	<b>TIP!</b> Help to reduce daily greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality in your community—get walking and rolling to school!	
July - August	<b>Summer Break</b>	School Ground Greening <b>summer maintenance</b> begins.  <b>Have a wonderful summer!</b>

For more environmental days, occasions, and events, visit the [Eco Calendar](#).



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## More about EcoSchools actions

Actions make up the backbone of EcoSchools certification, and consist of a variety of fun and educational projects, campaigns, lessons, and challenges that help schools assess and improve their environmental practices. Actions are designed to be flexible and adaptable to all curricula and school types to ensure that everyone across Canada can pursue certification. EcoSchools actions also connect schools to the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [global FEE network](#).

Please find a full list of EcoSchools actions below.

	Action	Description
 SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being	 <b>Environmental Health</b>	Learn about environmental health hazards and ways to protect yourself, your friends, your family, and the environment.
	 <b>Sit Spot</b>	Cultivate awareness and well-being by regularly visiting one specific spot where you can sit, slow down, awaken your senses, and learn more about yourself and the local environment.
	 <b>Take Me Outside Day</b>	Commit to spending at least one hour outside with your class for Take Me Outside Day!
 SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation	 <b>School Water Audit</b>	Explore how your school uses water through an audit, and implement School Water Audit water-saving strategies to protect this precious resource!
	 <b>School Water Footprint</b>	Collect consumption data to investigate your school's water use and provide a baseline for success!
	 <b>The Great Gulp</b>	Take a synchronized gulp of tap water to raise awareness about drinking water and the importance of reducing single-use plastic waste!
 SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy	 <b>Heating and Cooling</b>	Optimize heating and cooling systems at your school through data collection, communication, and monitoring.
	 <b>Phantom Power</b>	Reduce your school's energy footprint by monitoring and unplugging your appliances!
	 <b>School Energy Footprint</b>	Investigate your school's energy consumption to help understand your building's carbon footprint.
	 <b>Switch Off Lights and Devices</b>	Conserve energy by turning off lights, monitors, and other electronics when they are not needed!
	 <b>WWF Earth Hour</b>	Switch off your lights and make noise for the Earth Hour movement.
	 <b>WWF National Sweater Day</b>	Our planet is getting hotter. Your school can help by turning down the heat on National Sweater Day.



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## More about EcoSchools actions



SDG 11  
Sustainable Cities and Communities



SDG 12  
Responsible Consumption and Production



Action	Description
 <b>Active and Sustainable School Travel</b>	Run a campaign to encourage low-carbon transportation options such as walking, cycling, busing, and carpooling to school.
 <b>Anti-Idling</b>	Breathe clean air and reduce air pollution by tackling vehicle idling at your school and in your community!
 <b>Community Clean-Up</b>	Remove litter from the environment, learn about proper waste sorting, and demonstrate the power of working together!
 <b>Get Cooking!</b>	Learn how to cook from scratch, preserve food, support local food systems, and feed your school community.
 <b>Grow a Food Garden</b>	Get your hands dirty, grow food for your community, and learn about plants and nutrition in an outdoor food garden.
 <b>Indoor Gardening and Greenhouses</b>	Bring gardening inside for hands-on, year-round learning about plants, food, and nutrition.
 <b>Conduct a Waste Audit</b>	Discover how much waste your school is producing so you can start reducing!
 <b>Divert Textile Waste</b>	Reduce, reuse, repurpose, repair, and recycle old textiles such as clothes, shoes, and bedding, and help to divert waste from the landfill.
 <b>GOOS Paper</b>	Get creative and reduce paper use at your school by using GOOS (Good On One Side) paper bins throughout your school.
 <b>Recycle Your Personal Electronic Waste</b>	Collect electronic waste (e-waste) from your school community and ensure items get properly reused and recycled.
 <b>Reduce Harmful Single-Use Plastics</b>	Raise awareness and take a pledge to reduce harmful single-use plastic waste at your school.
 <b>Repurposing and Innovative Recycling</b>	Recycle, repurpose, or repair items that are not recyclable through the regular recycling stream and help to divert waste from the landfill.
 <b>Reduce Your Food Waste</b>	Get your school ready to reduce avoidable food waste through an awareness campaign and school-wide pledge.
 <b>Sort Your Waste</b>	Track and reduce contamination in your garbage and recycling bins, raise awareness, and establish an effective waste sorting program.
 <b>Vermicomposting and School-based Composting</b>	Get your hands dirty and turn your food scraps into nutrient-rich soil.
 <b>Waste-Free Lunch</b>	Reduce your school's waste by encouraging students and staff to bring waste-free lunches!
 <b>Waste-Free Meetings and Events</b>	Make your next school event or meeting waste-free!



# Certification Guide 2021-22

## More about EcoSchools actions



SDG 13  
Climate Action



Action	Description
 <b>Create Your Own Action</b>	Do you have a plan for an action that doesn't quite fit? Let us know all about it!
 <b>Earth Day</b>	Earth Day is celebrated annually on April 22nd and is a great opportunity to take action for the environment!
 <b>EcoCode</b>	An EcoCode is your school's environmental policy or mission statement that demonstrates your commitment to climate action.
 <b>Environmental Fair or Conference</b>	Organize a day of environmental learning for your school or broader community.
 <b>Environmental Literacy</b>	Deepen environmental literacy by providing opportunities for all students at your school to learn IN, ABOUT, FOR, and FROM the environment.
 <b>Getting Started</b>	Help us get to know your EcoSchool this year and build a strong foundation for success!
 <b>Meatless Mondays</b>	Reduce greenhouse gas emission by participating in Meatless Monday!
 <b>Staff Professional Development</b>	Create opportunities for school staff to enhance their environmental knowledge and skills by participating in webinars, workshops, and conferences.
 <b>Track School Transportation Emissions</b>	Track how staff and students travel to and from school to better understand transportation-related GHG emissions and the transportation options you have.
 <b>Young Reporters for the Environment</b>	Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) Canada is a national environmental journalism competition for writers, photographers, and videographers aged 11-18.
 <b>Community Science</b>	Become a community scientist (also known as citizen scientist) and contribute to important environmental research projects from across Canada, and beyond!
 <b>Connect With Nearby Nature</b>	Grow deeper connections to nearby-nature and share your learning by developing place-based field guides, maps, or signage!
 <b>Create Homes for Wildlife</b>	Support wildlife populations by creating safe spaces they can nest, feed, and play.
 <b>Low-mow Zone</b>	Let a grassy area of your school grounds grow wild and start studying with nature!
 <b>Pollinator Garden</b>	Plant a pollinator garden at your school and create a space that is not only beneficial to pollinators like bees and butterflies, but is also fertile grounds for learning.
 <b>Supporting Species at Risk</b>	Take action to raise awareness and support a species at risk in Canada.
 <b>The Bondar Challenge</b>	Take inspiration from the work of Dr. Roberta Bondar and get connected to nature through the lens of a camera!
 <b>Tree Planting and Maintenance at School</b>	Plant and care for trees on your school grounds and experience the benefits for decades to come.

SDG 15  
Life on the Land



There are two locked  actions that will help to form the foundation of a strong EcoSchool. They cannot be removed from a school plan. While it is recommended that schools try to implement these actions, they may choose to complete as much, or little, of each of these actions.