



EcoSchools Canada Certification Guide

2023-2024

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Welcome to the EcoSchools Program!



EcoSchools certification represents environmental excellence for elementary through secondary 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.

Outdoor Environmental Education Centre (OEEC)



If you are with an **Outdoor Environmental Education Centre (OEEC)** and interested in certifying with the EcoSchools program, please contact oeec@ecoschools.ca.



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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 and COVID-19

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



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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). For ideas and inspiration on forming an EcoTeam, see [Get Inspired: Build a Strong EcoTeam](#).



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](#).

- **Platinum Eligibility Questionnaire Deadline:** Last Friday in February (February 23, 2024)



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 26, 2024)
- **Final Submission Deadline:** Second Friday in May (May 10, 2024)



Celebrate

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



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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.

The **four levels of certification** a school can achieve are described below. Please see the Certification Rubric on [page 13](#) for more details on how we assess applications.



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: 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 equivalent to Green Flag schools in the [international Eco-Schools program](#). Please ensure you have reviewed the [Platinum Certification FAQ](#) if your school is interested in pursuing the Platinum level this year.



Participant Schools

Any school that creates a plan on the EcoSchools Certification Application but does not reach a certification level (a minimum of 50 points) will be recognized as a [Participant school](#). Participant recognition celebrates a school's effort in taking environmental action and acknowledges a school's attempt in becoming EcoSchools certified. Schools that are recognized as Participants will be awarded with a digital Participant seal and 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.



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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

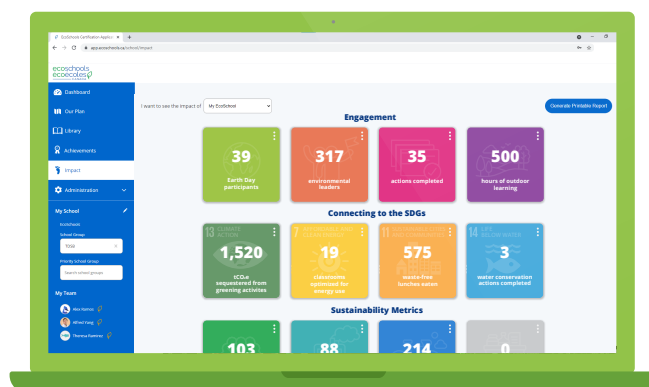
Track your school's certification progress over the year. Use the blue navigation bar on the left side of your screen to navigate to different pages including:

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.

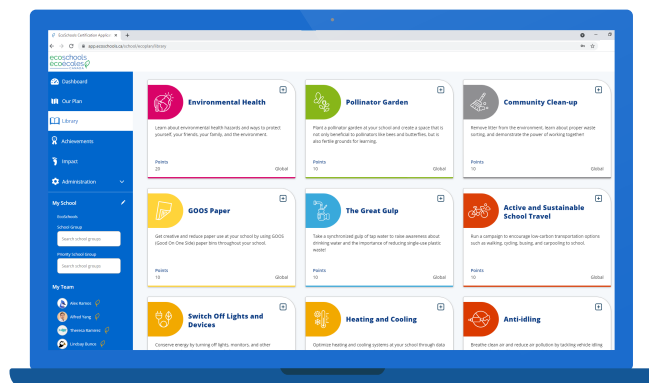
Achievements: Where you can view your school's certification history and download past certification seals.

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

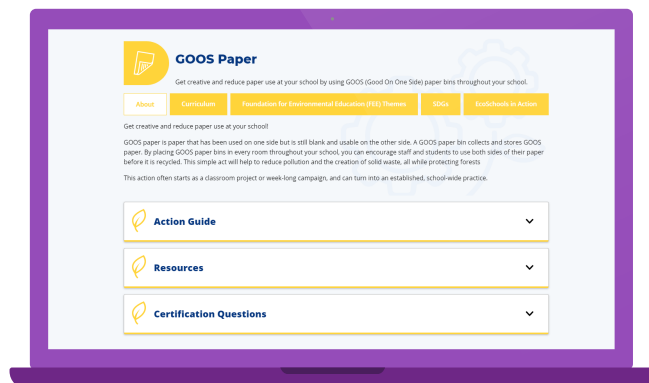
Gather your EcoTeam, go through the library, and choose actions to [add to your school's environmental action plan](#) this year. Actions can be searched by keyword or theme. Actions can be added and removed throughout the year as your program becomes defined.



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.
- Tools and 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](#).

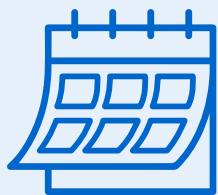


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Program deadlines, assessment,
and appeals



Important Dates & Deadlines



Program Launch: The EcoSchools program launches each year in mid-late September.

Platinum Eligibility Questionnaire: Schools aiming for Platinum certification must complete a short questionnaire by the **last Friday in February**. Please see [this FAQ](#) for more information.

Early Bird Deadline: Schools that submit by the **last Friday in April** are eligible for a prize draw!

FINAL 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



School applications are assessed based on the information provided through the [ECA](#). To be assessed and certify, schools must submit a completed application by the final EcoSchools deadline.

When a school submits their application, they submit at a particular level (based on the total number of points accumulated). The application is then verified by EcoSchools Assessors based on the data, documentation, and descriptions provided in the application. Numerical data inputs in the application are verified, based on 15+ years of benchmark data. EcoSchools Assessors may contact applicants directly to verify values. Assessment may also include School Visits ([see the FAQ for details](#)). Should a school application exceed or not meet the criteria of their submitted certification level, their final certification level may be changed during the assessment process.

See the Certification Rubric on [page 13](#) for more details on the assessment criteria.

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](#).



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Annual Calendar



Welcome to a new year in your EcoSchools adventure!

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 used to plan your actions and campaigns throughout the year. For more environmental, social, and sustainability events happening throughout the year, please refer to our [EcoCalendar](#).

Month	Events & Important Dates	Activities
September - October	<p>Registration Opens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waste Reduction Week (3rd week of October)• Walk to School Month (October)• Take Me Outside Day (October 18)• EcoSchools #CertTips newsletter scheduled for the weeks of September 14 and October 12.	<p>Get started! Register your school, establish an EcoTeam, create a plan for the year, and let people at your school know how to get involved with the EcoSchools program.</p> <p>Our school's plans and goals:</p>
November - December	<p>Don't forget to update your online application as you complete actions. This will help you avoid the end-of-school-year rush.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Radon Action Month (November): Learn about environmental health hazards and ways to protect yourself, friends, family, and the environment.• Happy Holidays! Make the most of the holiday season while continuing to take action at home: reduce waste, use energy responsibly, and enjoy time outdoors.• EcoSchools #CertTips newsletter scheduled for the weeks of November 9 and December 14.	<p>Keep up your amazing work and provide opportunities for all students at your school to learn IN, ABOUT, FOR and FROM the environment.</p> <p>Our school's plans and goals:</p>
January - February	<p>Platinum Eligibility Questionnaire (Last Friday in February)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Sweater Day (first Thursday in February)• Winter Walk Day (first Wednesday in February)• The winter is a great time to focus on energy. Reduce your carbon footprint by running actions such as Heating and Cooling, Switch Off Lights and Devices, and School Energy Footprint.• EcoSchools #CertTips newsletters scheduled for the weeks of January 11 and February 8.	<p>Resume your actions as you return from holidays and monitor your progress. Start planning for outdoor gardening and planting projects.</p> <p>Our school's plans and goals:</p>



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Annual Calendar

Month	Events & Important Dates	Activities
March - April	<p>Early Bird Deadline (Last Friday in April)</p> <p>Enjoy your March Break!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• World Water Day (March 22): Celebrate by taking The Great Gulp with your school.• National GOOS Paper Day (first Thursday in April): Express your creativity while reducing paper use!• Earth Month (April)• EcoSchools #CertTips newsletters scheduled for the weeks of March 14 and April 11.	<p>For Earth Day, engage your school in learning, action, and celebration around environmental issues that are important to your local community.</p> <p>Our school's plans and goals:</p>
May - June	<p>Application Deadline (Second Friday in May)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bike to School Week (May): Embrace the spring season by biking or rolling to school.• National Indigenous History Month (June)• It's time to start gardening! Get outdoors to create food gardens and create pollinator habitat.• EcoSchools #CertTips newsletter scheduled for the week of May 9 and June 13.• Certification results will be released in June. Celebrate your achievements with your school community!	<p>Make sure to complete your actions and submit your school's plan before the second Friday of May! We are so excited to learn about your actions this school year!</p> <p>Our school's plans and goals:</p>
July - August	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take environmental learning and action with you while you enjoy your summer break.• Keep taking care of your gardens during this fruitful season!	<p>We wish you a beautiful summer, looking forward to seeing you again in September!</p> <p>Summer notes and reminders:</p>



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The EcoSchools Action Library

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		Environmental Health	Learn about environmental health hazards and ways to protect yourself, your friends, your family, and the environment.
		Let's Talk Air	Explore the properties of air and why good indoor air quality is important for human health.
		Sit Spot	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.
		Take Me Outside Day	Celebrate outdoor learning by hosting a one-day Take Me Outside Day event at your school to promote the importance of reconnecting with nature.
 SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation		School Water Audit	Explore how your school uses water through an audit, and implement School Water Audit water-saving strategies to protect this precious resource!
		School Water Footprint	Collect consumption data to investigate your school's water use and provide a baseline for success!
		The Great Gulp	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		Heating and Cooling	Optimize heating and cooling systems at your school through data collection, communication, and monitoring.
		Phantom Power	Reduce your school's energy footprint by monitoring and unplugging your appliances!
		School Energy Footprint	Investigate your school's energy consumption to help understand your building's carbon footprint.
		Switch Off Lights and Devices	Conserve energy by turning off lights, monitors, and other electronics when they are not needed!
		WWF Earth Hour	Switch off your lights and make noise for the Earth Hour movement.
		WWF National Sweater Day	Our planet is getting hotter. Your school can help by turning down the heat on National Sweater Day.



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The EcoSchools Action Library



SDG 11
Sustainable Cities and Communities



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

SDG 12
Responsible Consumption and Production





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The EcoSchools Action Library



Action	Description
 Climate Hero Escape Room	Do you have what it takes to “escape” climate change? Increase your awareness of the global climate crisis while engaging in a fun and immersive online learning experience.
 Create Your Own Action	Do you have a plan for an action that doesn't quite fit? Let us know all about it!
 Earth Day	Earth Day is celebrated annually on April 22nd. Engage in collective action to support climate change resilience, biodiversity, and ecosystems.
 EcoCode	An EcoCode is your school's environmental policy or mission statement that demonstrates your commitment to climate action.
 Eco-Friendly Meals	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase food sustainability by trying eco-friendly meals and food habits.
 Environmental Fair or Conference	Organize a day of environmental learning for your school or broader community.
 Environmental Literacy	Deepen environmental literacy by providing opportunities for all students at your school to learn IN, ABOUT, FOR, and FROM the environment.
 Extend Your Action	Has your school extended an EcoSchools action to a larger school project? Let us know about it!
 Getting Started	Start your year by building a strong EcoTeam, reflecting on student interests and community needs, then making an action plan for success!
 Staff Professional Development	Create opportunities for school staff to enhance their environmental knowledge and skills by participating in webinars, workshops, and conferences.
 Track School Transportation Emissions	Track how staff and students travel to and from school to better understand transportation-related GHG emissions and the transportation options you have.
 Young Reporters for the Environment	Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) Canada is a national environmental journalism competition for writers, photographers, and videographers aged 11-18.
 Zero-Emission Vehicles & Low-Carbon Driving	Explore how zero-emission vehicles and low-carbon driving can contribute to a more sustainable future.

SDG 13
Climate Action



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.



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The EcoSchools Action Library



SDG 15
Life on the Land



SDG 17
Partnerships
for the goals



Action	Description
 Community Science	Become a community scientist (also known as citizen scientist) and contribute to important environmental research projects from across Canada, and beyond!
 Create Nearby Nature Guides, Maps and Signs	Grow deeper connections to nearby-nature and share your learning by developing place-based field guides, maps, or signage!
 Create Homes for Wildlife	Help protect local species and support biodiversity by creating safe homes and spaces for wildlife, where they can nest, feed, and thrive!
 Greenbelt Biodiversity	Learn about Ontario's Greenbelt and take action to track and enhance biodiversity on your school grounds.
 Low-mow Zone	Let a grassy area of your school grounds grow wild and start studying with nature!
 Pollinator Garden	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.
 Supporting Canadian Species at Risk	Take action to raise awareness and support a species at risk in Canada.
 The Bondar Challenge	Take inspiration from the work of Dr. Roberta Bondar and get connected to nature through the lens of a camera!
 Tree Planting and Maintenance at School	Plant and care for trees on your school grounds and experience the benefits for decades to come.
 School to School Mentorship	Collaborate with another EcoSchool to strengthen leadership and environmental impact in school communities across the country.



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The EcoSchools Certification Rubric



Levels of Achievement

Please refer to the rubric below for guidance on the criteria EcoSchools Canada uses to assess school applications (also known as your school's Plan on the [ECA](#)).

 Participant	 Bronze	 Silver	 Gold	 Platinum
Program Initiated The EcoSchools program was initiated.	Emerging Program The EcoSchools program is in its early stages and some environmental learning and action has been demonstrated.	Developing Program The EcoSchools program is in development and environmental learning and action has been demonstrated throughout the school.	Accomplished Program The EcoSchools program has a strong foundation with the whole school community, and environmental learning and action is well integrated throughout the school year.	Outstanding Program The EcoSchools program is well-established. Environmental learning and action is a defining element of school culture throughout the school year and extends beyond the school walls.

Assessment Criteria by Level

Each item in this section must be completed to qualify for the associated Level of Achievement. Fulfilment of these items will be combined with an EcoSchools Assessor's evaluation of Program Elements ([page 14](#)) to award a Level of Achievement for the year.

Participant	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
<input type="checkbox"/> Create a Plan (school application) on ECA	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a Plan (school application) on ECA <input type="checkbox"/> Submit application before deadline <input type="checkbox"/> Achieve 50-65 points <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in school visit, if required <input type="checkbox"/> Program Elements have been started	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a Plan (school application) on ECA <input type="checkbox"/> Submit application before deadline <input type="checkbox"/> Achieve 66-74 points <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in school visit, if required <input type="checkbox"/> Program Elements are somewhat fulfilled	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a Plan (school application) on ECA <input type="checkbox"/> Submit application before deadline <input type="checkbox"/> Achieve 75-100 points <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in school visit, if required <input type="checkbox"/> Program Elements are mostly fulfilled	<input type="checkbox"/> Create a Plan (school application) on ECA <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory Platinum Eligibility Questionnaire <input type="checkbox"/> Submit application before deadline <input type="checkbox"/> Achieve 101 or more points <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in school visit, if required <input type="checkbox"/> Program Elements are fulfilled or go above and beyond



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The EcoSchools Certification Rubric

Program Elements

NOTE: Program Elements are not relevant to the Participant level of achievement.

Rigour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Action documentation: suitable documentation is uploaded to actions <input type="checkbox"/> Action description: clear description of how actions were implemented <input type="checkbox"/> Data accuracy: data questions are complete, answered accurately, and allow for impact measurement <input type="checkbox"/> Planning: evidence of self-assessment, action planning, goal setting, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Application completeness 	<p>Relevant Certification Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to quantitative data (i.e., numerical values, unique to each action) • Action Documentation • Action Descriptions • Getting Started #6, 7
Collaboration and Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff and student involvement: participation from a variety of staff and students throughout the school community <input type="checkbox"/> Interdisciplinarity: environmental program is integrated in a diversity of classes and subject areas <input type="checkbox"/> Visibility / communications: regular communication with school community, environmental program is visible throughout school <input type="checkbox"/> Community involvement: environmental program extends beyond the school walls 	<p>Relevant Certification Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to engagement and participation (questions #2-4 in most actions) • Questions related to communication (question #6 in most actions) • Questions related to broader community (question #7 in most actions) • Questions related to instructional time • Getting Started #4, 5, 10 • Environmental Literacy #1, 2, 5, 7, 8
Student Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Student engagement: diverse participation from across the student body <input type="checkbox"/> Student leadership: opportunities for student leadership and skill building <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusiveness: student voice is at the heart of the environmental program, representing a breadth of involvement from planning to celebration 	<p>Relevant Certification Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to student engagement and participation (questions #2-3 in most action cards) • Questions related to student leadership (question #5 in most action cards) • Action Description • Getting Started #1, 2 • Environmental Literacy #6
Extensions and Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reflection and celebration: evidence of reflection on how actions and campaigns went, as well as celebration <input type="checkbox"/> Extended learning: for example, Extend the Learning suggestions in each action's Action Guide; connection with UN Sustainable Development Goals; other learning extensions based in EcoSchools' Action Criteria <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor learning: opportunities for students to learn outdoors and/or foster nature-connections 	<p>Relevant Certification Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions related to reflection and celebration • Questions related to extending the learning • Action Description • Getting Started #8, 9 • Environmental Literacy #3, 7, 8, 9