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Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education

Dear Secretary DeVos,

The Chesapeake Bay Program commends the U.S. Department of Education for its continued support and administration of the Green Ribbon Schools Program. Since its initiation in 2012, this program has recognized 65 K-12 schools and 12 school districts in the Mid-Atlantic region for their outstanding performance in sustainability. The benefits of sustainable and healthy schools to local communities are numerous, and your agency's forward-thinking effort to recognize school's green performance has been critical to raising awareness and promoting positive change in our region's public, charter, and private schools.

The Bay Program is a regional partnership that leads the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. It is led by the Chesapeake Executive Council, which consists of the Governors of the six states within the Bay's watershed, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In June 2014, the Executive Council signed the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, a collaborative plan that guides the restoration and stewardship of the Bay, its tributaries and the lands that surround them. This Agreement includes a Sustainable Schools Outcome that commits our partnership to the following:

“Continually increase the number of schools in the region that reduce the impact of their buildings and grounds on their local watershed, environment and human health through best practices, including student-led protection and restoration projects.”

This Outcome is rooted in the three “Pillars” of the Education Department's Green Ribbon Schools Program which recognize schools that: (1) reduce environmental impact and costs; (2) improve the health and wellness of schools, students, and staff; and (3) provide effective environmental and sustainability education.

The Chesapeake Bay Program monitors progress towards this goal. In 2017, over six hundred public and charter schools in our watershed held sustainable schools certifications from programs including the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools program, the National Wildlife Federation Eco-Schools, and state certification programs. While this number is robust and growing, many schools continue to lack the incentive or resources to engage students in making their buildings, grounds, and operations healthier for students and the natural environment. The Green Ribbon Schools program is a powerful driver for continuing to incentivize both our schools and local partners towards increasingly sustainable practices.

Increasing school performance in these three pillars will have positive impacts on the Chesapeake and our many rivers and streams by reducing polluted runoff and energy use, and affecting other positive environmental impacts. Just as important, progress in these pillars can save schools precious fiscal resources by reducing costs of utilities and waste management. Of paramount importance is the way that participating in sustainable schools programs and practices benefits the students' academic achievement, well-being, and readiness to eventually join the workforce.

To this end, we are committed to bolstering awareness of and participation in the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools program and highlighting schools in our region that achieve this prestigious status. We support the efforts of Pennsylvania Pathways to Green Schools, West Virginia Sustainable Schools, Maryland Green Schools, and other programs that break down barriers to school sustainability and provide technical assistance to schools conducting and developing sustainability initiatives. We are grateful for the U.S. Department of Education's leadership in school sustainability and applaud its continuation. We look forward to the announcement of the 2018 Green Ribbon School award winners.

Respectfully,

Ben Grumbles
Chair, Principals' Staff Committee

CC:

Nathan Bailey, Assistant Secretary, Office of Communications and Outreach
Andrea Falken, Director, U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools