



# Ready, Set, Certified!

September 24, 2025



# Presenter

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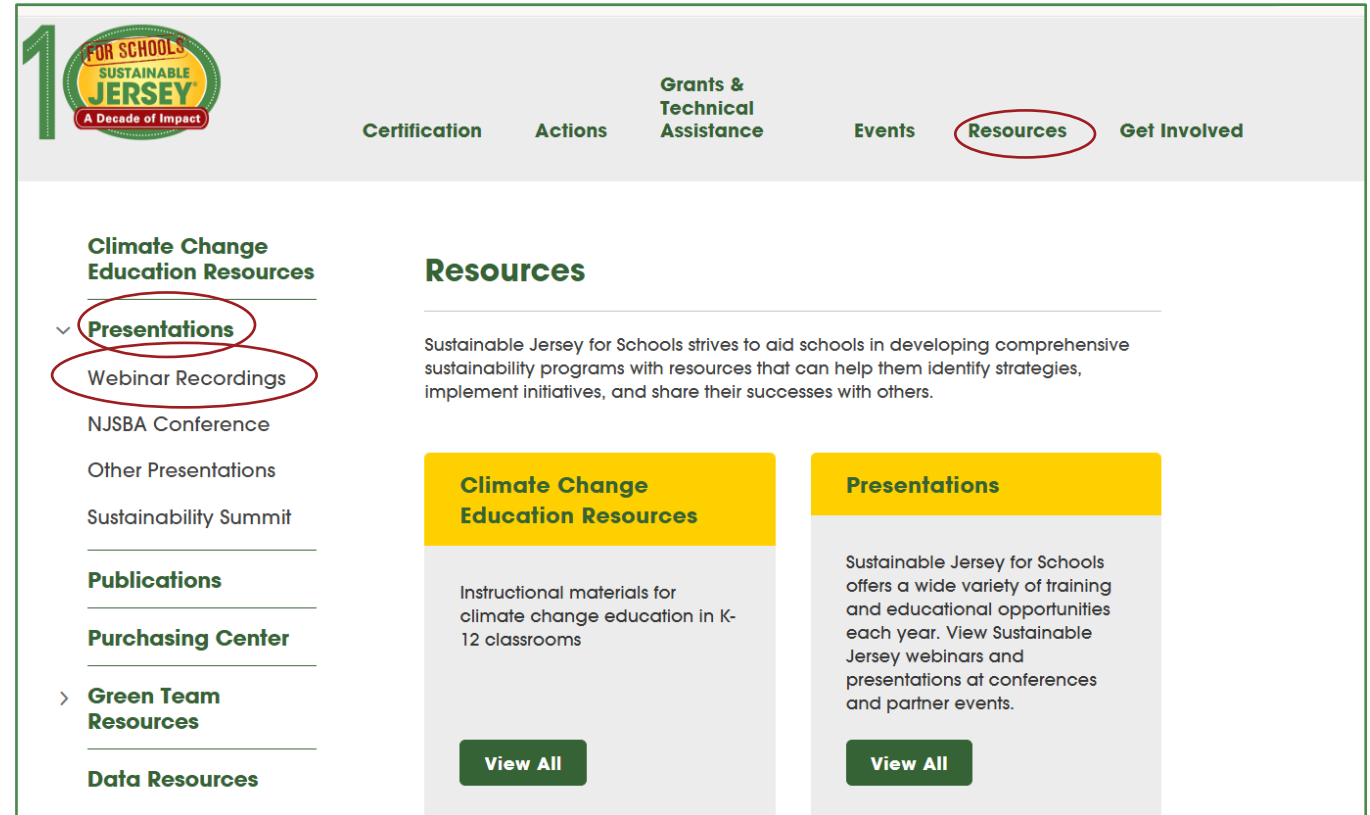
**[contarij@tcnj.edu](mailto:contarij@tcnj.edu)**

**609-771-3427**



# Webinar Housekeeping

- All attendees are muted.
- Questions? Enter them into the Questions box or “raise your hand” and we will answer them at the end of the presentation.
- The recording and slides will be posted on the [Webinar Recordings page](https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/resources/presentations/webinar-recordings/) within a few days.



The screenshot shows the website for Sustainable Jersey for Schools. The header includes the logo and navigation links: Certification, Actions, Grants & Technical Assistance, Events, Resources (circled in red), and Get Involved. The main content area is titled "Resources" and features a sidebar with categories: Climate Change Education Resources (with a dropdown arrow), Presentations (circled in red), Webinar Recordings (circled in red), NJSBA Conference, Other Presentations, Sustainability Summit, Publications, Purchasing Center, Green Team Resources (with a right-pointing arrow), and Data Resources. The main content area includes a description of the organization's mission and two featured resource cards: "Climate Change Education Resources" and "Presentations", each with a "View All" button.

<https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/resources/presentations/webinar-recordings/>



# Sustainable Jersey for Schools



- Identifies **actions** to become more sustainable
- Provides **tools, resources, and guidance** to make progress
- Provides access to **grants** for schools and school districts
- Recognizes **accomplishments**
- Awards certification to individual schools but requires School Board and district level support

# Sustainable Jersey for Schools



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# Agenda

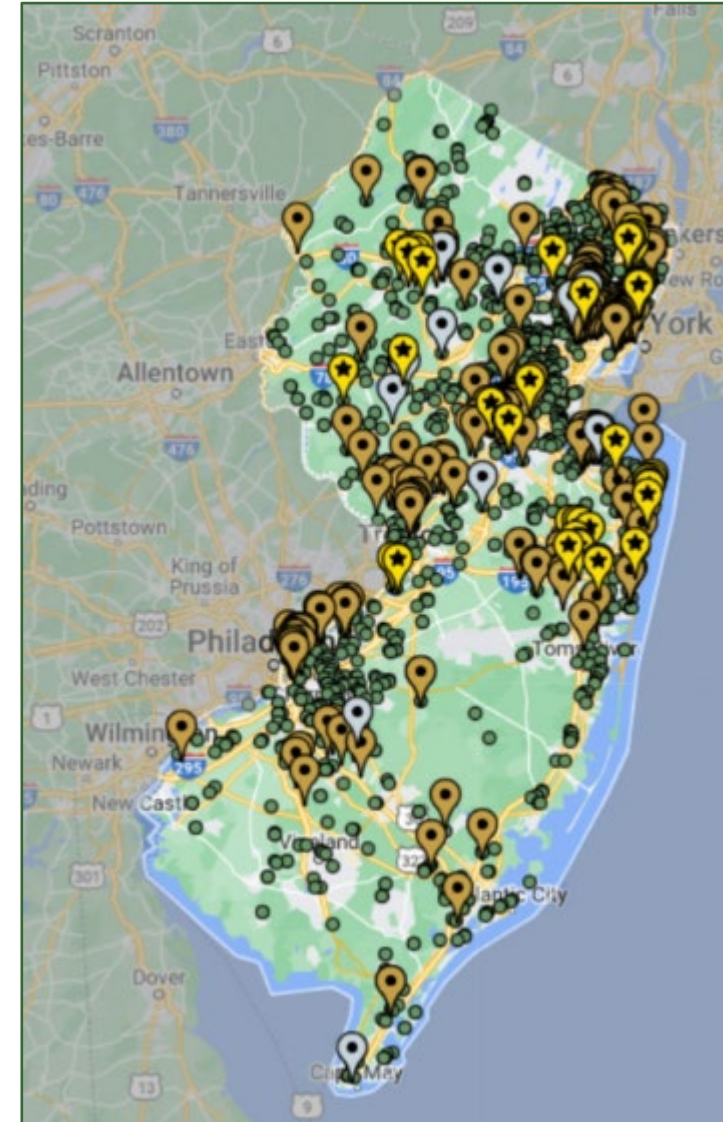
- Why Get Certified?
- Certification Overview
- Organizing your Green Team & Getting Started
- Parts of an Action
- Common pitfalls
- Resources & Tips for Completing Actions and Applications
- Technical Assistance/Questions





# Why Get Certified?

- SJS program provides roadmap to sustainability in your district and schools
- Tap into extensive support and training
  - Sustainable Jersey training and events
  - Connections to partner organizations willing to help
- Priority access and notification on incentives & grants (Sustainable Jersey Grants Program)
- Gain recognition
- Fuel the statewide movement – 375 schools certified





# Five Steps to Certification

1

- School district adopts resolution of participation and registers. Superintendent invites district's school principals to participate

2

- School principals register their school with letter of participation signed by principal and superintendent

3

- Green Team created at district or school level

4

- District/School completes certification actions totaling at least 150 points.

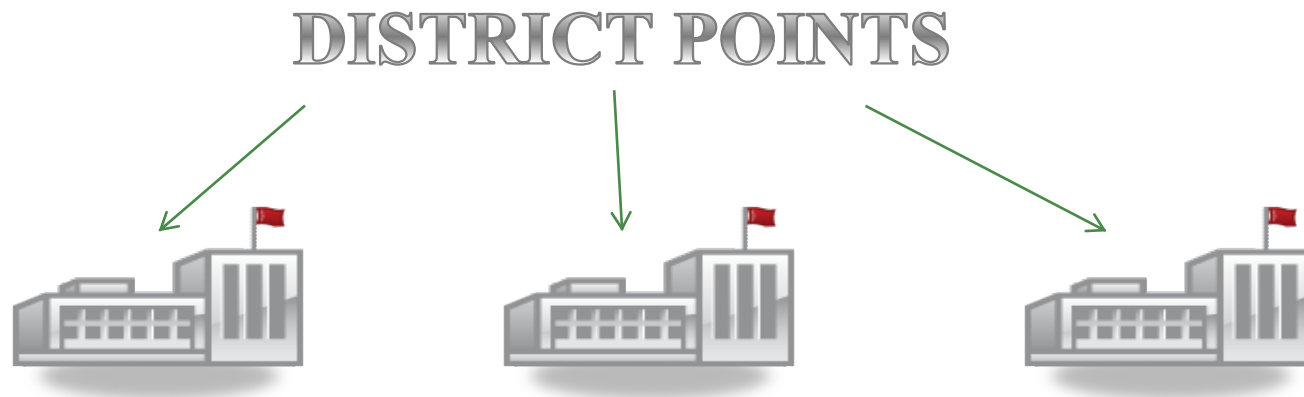
5

- Green Team uploads documentation and submits application.



# Certification Overview

- There is one certification application cycle per year
- Certification lasts 3 years
- The online application is a guided process with 3 rounds of submissions and feedback
- Districts and schools submit applications, but **only schools are certified**
- Points earned in the district application flow to each school in the district.





# 2026 Certification Cycle

- **January 12** – Initial Application Deadline
- Late February – Reviewer Comments
- **March 23** – Second Submission
- Early May – Reviewer Comments
- **June 15** – Final Application Submission
- Late August – Certified Schools Notified
- **October** – Certified Schools Celebration

## 2024 Awards



**Jackson Township School District**  
*All schools Certified, 1 Silver, 9 Bronze,  
Sustainability Makes \$ense Award*



**New Brunswick School District**  
*All schools Silver Certified, 3 Digital Schools Star, 2  
Champion awards*



# Levels of Certification



- At Least 150 points
- Green team
- 2 out of 14 priority actions
- Actions completed in 6 of 22 categories



- At least 350 points
- Green team
- 3 out of 14 priority actions
- Actions completed in 8 of 22 categories



# Going for a Digital Schools Star?

Be sure to complete the following requirements as part of your certification application:

- Complete at least **8 Digital Schools actions** in the **3 Digital Learning categories**. Of the 8, **4 must be Foundational actions**.
- The 8 actions must include **at least one from each category**.
- **At least one action must be the Digital Innovative Classroom at the 15-point level**.

**Wait until the final round to submit your digital schools star application.**





# What is a Green Team?

- First step in establishing a school sustainability program
- Such entities can go by any name, but the role is the same: lead and coordinate the sustainability activities of the school
- ***Hold at least four meetings annually***
- ***Letter signed by the principal or superintendent that formally establishes the green team***
- ***Green team annual report that highlights the accomplishments for the school year***
- ***Invite union leadership to appoint two members***



***\*Green Team action requirements***



# Organize Your Green Team for Success

Recruit members from diverse sectors of the district – administration, educators, facilities, food services, school nurse, parents, students, community partners

Use existing committees (e.g. wellness council) to also serve as green team

Make sustainability part of district goals

Include sustainability-related professional learning in staff goals

Provide stipends to staff to coordinate green team initiatives and the application process

Release staff from hall/lunch/recess duty for green team meetings and to work on application

Use a shared drive (e.g. Google) to compile documents for application

Publicly recognize green team efforts and the contributions of volunteers



# Getting Started

Take inventory of what you're already doing that could earn points.



**Food Waste Recycling or Composting**



**Recycling Non-Mandated Materials**



**Onsite Renewable Generation System - Solar**



# Getting Started

Take inventory of what you're already doing that could earn points.



**Materials Reuse**



**Civic & Stewardship  
Volunteer Initiatives**



**Programs to Promote  
Physical Activity**



# Getting Started

Take inventory of what you're already doing that could earn points.



**Breakfast After the Bell**



**Community Education & Outreach**



**Waste Audit**



# Anatomy of an Action

Even if you don't read the entire action, read the summary at the top for an overview and be sure to read carefully, the "What the submit...." section.

A screenshot of a web page for a "Community Education & Outreach" action. The page is titled "Community Education & Outreach" and includes a "10 Points" badge, a "Priority" icon, and a "School" icon. There are "Print" and "Get PDF" buttons. A left sidebar contains a table of contents with links: "Why is it important?", "Timeframe", "Project costs and resource needs", "What to do, and how to do it ('How to')", "What to submit to earn points for this action", and "Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing". The main content area shows "Updated January 2020", a "PRIORITY ACTION" heading, and a detailed paragraph describing the action's requirements. A "Why is it important?" section is partially visible at the bottom.

**Community Education & Outreach**

**10 Points** Priority School

Print Get PDF

<a href="#">Why is it important?</a>	Updated January 2020
<a href="#">Timeframe</a>	<b>PRIORITY ACTION</b>
<a href="#">Project costs and resource needs</a>	This action awards points to schools that take action to educate the community about sustainability issues and about specific programs that encourage sustainable practices. Educational programs and activities may be hosted at the school or held at another location, so long as the events are open to the public. This action presents the opportunity for schools to collaborate with municipalities, and both may earn points towards their respective certification – Sustainable Jersey for Schools or Sustainable Jersey (for municipalities). To get 10 points for community education and outreach, schools will need to present at least two sustainability-focused education activities to the public in the current school year, and students must have been an integral part of at least one of the activities.
<a href="#">What to do, and how to do it ("How to")</a>	<b>Why is it important?</b>
<a href="#">What to submit to earn points for this action</a>	
<a href="#">Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing</a>	
<a href="#">Resources</a>	



# Understanding Action Requirements

## Community Education and Outreach

### What to submit to earn points for this action

In order to earn points for this action, the following documentation must be submitted to verify that the action requirements have been met. Activities must have taken place during the current school year.

**1. Description of Implementation.** In the text box provided on the submission page for this action provide a short narrative (about 300 words) describing the two activities presented by the school to educate the community about sustainability topics and the impact of the outreach on the school community. Include a description of student involvement in presenting at least one of the topics to the community,

**2. Upload documentation** for at least two sustainability-focused education events or activities open to the public. Include the program outreach or educational materials, flyers, press releases, newspaper articles, screen shots of event web pages, and/or photographs. The events must have taken place during the current school year.

**3. Upload documentation** that describes student involvement in at least one of the activities. Copies of articles or reports that reference student participation and photographs are acceptable.

### Resubmission Requirements

To earn points again after an approval has expired, the complete submission requirements need to be met for the application year.

- Activities from **current school year.**
- **Two** activities required, with students involved in presenting at least one.
- Set aside promotional materials as they are shared.
- Consider reaching out to the press to include articles about the events or putting information on social media.
- Write up descriptions of events while they are fresh!



# What to do, and how to do it

Guidelines on how to complete an action if it is a new initiative you are taking on.

## Community Education & Outreach

**10 Points** Priority School

Print Get PDF

- [Why is it important?](#)
- [Timeframe](#)
- [Project costs and resource needs](#)
- [What to do, and how to do it \("How to"\)](#)**
- [What to submit to earn points for this action](#)
- [Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing](#)
- [Resources](#)

### What to do, and how to do it ("How to")

This section provides guidance and recommendations for implementing the action.

The school or district should keep the following requirements in mind as it undertakes this action:

1. The school's community education and outreach activities must have been implemented within the current school year.
2. At least two sustainability-focused community education and outreach events or activities, must have been completed, and all events and activities must have been accessible to school families as well as to the general public.
3. Students must have been integrally involved in at least one of the events or activities.



# Check Out Examples: Action Spotlights

Exemplar submissions from certified schools are “spotlighted” in the action descriptions:

**Community Education & Outreach**

**10 Points** Priority School

Print Get PDF

Why is it important?

Timeframe

Project costs and resource needs

What to do, and how to do it ("How to")

What to submit to earn points for this action

**Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing**

Resources

**Spotlight: What New Jersey schools are doing**

**Black River Middle School, Chester School District**  
The Chester School District hosts one of the largest science fairs in New Jersey. The science fair is open to students in grades 1-8 in the Chester school district and allows them to create a project that encourages them to dig deeper into a specific area of science; including sustainability, energy, life science, and more. To view a description and advertisement of the the Chester School District Science Fair click [here](#).

**Ethel M. Burke Elementary School, Bellmawr Public School District**  
The Ethel M. Burke Elementary School implemented an innovative approach to civic engagement by having the 2016 Third Annual Multicultural Fair. One of the main goals for this event was to encourage cross-cultural connections amongst the Bellmawr community. To view a description and advertisement for the Multicultural Fair, click [here](#).

**Veterans Memorial Middle School, Brick Township School District**



# Find More Examples: Participants Map Search

Use the [Participating Districts & Schools](https://sustainablejerseyschools.com/certification/search-participating-districts-schools-approved-actions/) (*sustainablejerseyschools.com/certification/search-participating-districts-schools-approved-actions/*) page to find examples of documentation from certified schools and connect with school green teams

## Search by action

**By Certified Action**

**Board Leadership & Planning**

- District Sustainability Policy
- Professional Development for Sustainability
- Green Enhancement of District Strategic Plans
- Strategic Plan Implementation of Green Initiatives
- School Community Asset Mapping
- School District Foundation

## View certified schools approved for that action

APPLICANT	COUNTY	CERTIFICATION
<a href="#">Alexandria Middle School (Hunterdon)</a>	Hunterdon	BRONZE
<a href="#">Lester D. Wilson Elementary School (Hunterdon)</a>	Hunterdon	BRONZE
<a href="#">Florence M. Burd Elementary School (Sussex)</a>	Sussex	BRONZE
<a href="#">Long Pond School (Sussex)</a>	Sussex	BRONZE
<a href="#">Atlantic Highlands Elementary School (Monmouth)</a>	Monmouth	BRONZE
<a href="#">Bedminster Township Elementary School (Somerset)</a>	Somerset	BRONZE
<a href="#">Roy W. Brown Middle School (Bergen)</a>	Bergen	BRONZE
<a href="#">Berkeley Elementary School (Essex)</a>	Essex	BRONZE

## View certification report for example documentation

**East Brunswick Campus (Middlesex)**  
Certification Level: Bronze  
Certified On: August 25, 2021  
Total Points: 190  
Certification Report: [View Report](#)  
Applicant Profile: [View Profile](#)



# Why Actions are Not Approved

Action documentation completion date is outside the look-back period of the action

## What to submit to earn points for this action

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**3. Upload documentation** that describes student involvement in at least one of the activities. Copies of articles or reports that reference student participation and photographs are acceptable.

### Resubmission Requirements

To earn points again after an approval has expired, the complete submission requirements need to be met for the application year.

Review the “What to Submit” sections of the action to find the look-back period of eligible activity and documentation (i.e. how old can they be and still qualify to earn points). Only submit documentation that falls within this period.



# Why Actions are Not Approved

Proper documentation not submitted

## What to submit to earn points for this action

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### Resubmission Requirements

To earn points again after an approval has expired, the complete submission requirements need to be met for the application year.

Ensure that the documentation uploaded fulfills the requirements outlined in “What to submit”



# Why Actions are Not Approved

- **Misinterpretation of Action Goals**
  - Closely read the “What to Do” and “What to Submit” portion of the action to ensure that what you plan to submit is in line with the intent of the action
- **Seeking credit for the same initiative under two different actions**
  - Any initiative may only be submitted under one action, even if it fulfills the requirements of more than one action. Review the entire application to spot duplication.
- **Failure to conduct outreach/education component required for many actions**
  - Read beyond the action’s title, paying close attention to the “What to Do” and “What to Submit” sections



# District & School Collaboration



- Points from the District application **flow down to all** participating schools in the district
- Determine which actions the District will complete (If an action status is changed from “Unplanned” in the district application, then schools are blocked from doing that action in their applications)
- District application needs to be completed and submitted in the same time frame as school applications

**Districts can earn up to 620 points  
to support school certification**



# Partner With Your Municipal Green Team



Actions that earn points in both programs  
(**Collaboration** actions)

- Community Education & Outreach
- Green Fair
- Green Your Green Fair/School Event
- Civic & Stewardship Activities
- Recycling Non-Mandated Materials
- School Gardens
- Community Asset Mapping
- Safe Routes to School
- Waste Audit

**TIP:** Look up your town on the Sustainable Jersey Municipal Program homepage to get contact information: <https://www.sustainablejersey.com/certification/search-participating-municipalities-approved-actions/>



**Westfield  
2024 Green Team Collaboration Award**



# Green Team Resources

## Creating a Green Team

Learn what you need to know when establishing a green team.

[Read More](#)

## Working on Certification

View resources to help green teams achieve certification.

[Read More](#)

**TIP:** Download the Master Action Tracking Spreadsheet to survey actions and plan:

[https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/fileadmin/media/Grants\\_and\\_Resources/Green\\_Team\\_Resources/Certification/SJS\\_Master\\_Action\\_Tracking\\_Spreadsheet.xlsx](https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/fileadmin/media/Grants_and_Resources/Green_Team_Resources/Certification/SJS_Master_Action_Tracking_Spreadsheet.xlsx)

## Green Team Promotion

Read helpful tips on how to promote the work of your team.

[Read More](#)

## Apply for a Grant

Find out about Sustainable Jersey for Schools grants to help complete actions.

[Learn More](#)

**TIP:** Download the Application User Guide:

[https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/fileadmin/media/Actions\\_and\\_Certification/Dashboard/Online\\_Application\\_User\\_Guide\\_for\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/fileadmin/media/Actions_and_Certification/Dashboard/Online_Application_User_Guide_for_Schools.pdf)

<https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/resources/green-team-resources/>



# Help Sessions

An opportunity to get support at any step in the program.

Registration  
process

Organizing  
your team

Using the  
application

Discussing  
strategy

Application  
feedback

[Schedule a help  
session.](#)





# Strategy for moving forward!

## Make a plan!

- Focus on completing your Green Team Action
- Two Priority Actions
- Low-hanging fruit – Look for actions that your school/district is already doing.
- Then review remaining actions to determine which could be completed by the final deadline.
- Add additional contributors to your dashboard to help with the documentation



# Program Updates

## 2025-2026 New Actions

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### School Grounds

#### Tree Planting: 5-25 Points

This variable point action awards points to schools for planting and maintaining at least five trees on school grounds or on other public property used by students. Points awarded depend on the number of trees planted and whether pavement had to be cut to plant the trees. Additional points are available for demonstrating significant student involvement. Earning points for resubmission requires proof of the health of the trees planted in the prior certification cycle and may be augmented by planting new trees.

### 2025-2026 Temporarily Suspended Actions

The following actions are temporarily suspended pending updates to the action guidance and requirements:

- Authentic Application of Digital Learning Tools and Content
- Personalized Learning and Growing Independent Learners
- Behavior-Based Energy Conservation Programs
- Sustainable Fleets

## 2025-2026 Action Updates

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### Energy Efficiency

#### Energy Tracking & Management: 10, 15, 20 Points

This action has been revised to update the requirements and point structure. The base 10 points remain unchanged, while the additional 10 points have been divided into two levels: 5 points for submitting a benchmarking report (e.g., from EPA's ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager) and 5 points for demonstrating an active energy management process, such as having an energy management team or coordinator and proof of regular meetings. This revision recognizes schools and districts already managing their energy use and encourages others to establish a process for future certification cycles.

**October 1 Certification Webinar will go over the updates in more details.**



# Final Thoughts & Takeaways

- **Certification Cycle:** It is doable! Many schools achieve certification by the 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline. Additional schools continue to work on their applications throughout the application cycle up to the final deadline. *Some schools even take a two year approach.*
- **Open Source:** Once a school is certified, a report of its approved actions will be publicly available on our website. The goal is to share best practices. **Please do not include any sensitive/private information in your submissions.**



# SUSTAINABLE JERSEY GRANTS PROGRAM



## 2025-2026 Cycle Currently Open!

### FOR WHO?

New Jersey **public** school district or school affiliated with **NJEA** that is **participating** in Sustainable Jersey for Schools

### FOR WHAT?

**\$2,000** and **\$10,000** grants for sustainability projects

### FOR WHEN?

Grants will be awarded in **late March 2026** and have a **12-18 month** performance period to complete the project

### LEARN MORE

Visit our website at [bit.ly/SJSNJEAgrants](https://bit.ly/SJSNJEAgrants) to learn more and apply

## Online applications due by 11:59pm on October 31, 2025



2026

# SCHOOLS CERTIFICATION

FALL WEBINAR SERIES



SEP.24



OCT.1



DEC. 4

**Register: [bit.ly/SJSFallCertWebinars](https://bit.ly/SJSFallCertWebinars)**

# Are you signed up for the Sustainable Jersey for Schools mailing list?

**Bi-weekly emails with program updates, new funding opportunities, partner event information, and more!**



Join Sustainable Jersey For Schools  
Mailing List

**Join**

*Sign-up button located at the bottom of the Sustainable Jersey for Schools website homepage at [sustainablejerseyschools.com](https://sustainablejerseyschools.com)*



# Thank You

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## Program Underwriters



## Corporate Sponsors



\*Digital Schools Underwriters and Sponsors