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2 R.I. schools named Green Ribbon Schools by U.S. Department of Education

Paul W. Crowley East Bay Met School and Ponaganset High School are among 58 schools and 14 districts honored for efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, promote better health, and ensure effective environmental education.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced Wednesday that two Rhode Island schools, the Paul W. Crowley East Bay Met School and Ponaganset High School, are winners of 2015 Green Ribbon School awards.

"These honorees are compelling examples of the ways schools can help children build real-world skillsets, cut school costs, and provide healthy learning environments," Duncan said. "U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools are an inspiration and deserve the spotlight for embodying strong examples of innovative learning and civic engagement."

"This afternoon, the U.S. Department of Education honored two Rhode Island schools not only as shining examples of energy efficiency but also as places where students learn to be stewards of our environment," said Governor Raimondo on Wednesday. "It's important that we continue to invest in improving the quality of the school buildings across Rhode Island, as these investments will pay many dividends - saving funds for local communities through greater energy efficiencies, providing jobs for Rhode Islanders, and creating attractive, healthy, and welcoming environments for learning."

"In Rhode Island, we are committed to making sure that our schools are safe and healthy places for teaching and learning," said Barbara Cottam, chairwoman of the Board of Education. "I am pleased that the U.S. Department of Education has recognized some of the important initiatives under way to make our schools more environmentally friendly"

"With [Wednesday's] announcement from the U.S. Department of Education, we now have eight Rhode Island public schools that have received Green Ribbon awards," said Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist. "These awards are a tribute to the students and teachers who are committed to hands-on learning about environmental issues as well as to the school and community leaders who have been willing to invest in improving the quality of our school facilities. Congratulations to the students, teachers, and school leaders at this year's winning schools: The Paul Crowley campus of the Met School and Ponaganset High School."

The Paul W. Crowley East Bay Met School, a campus of the state-operated Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met), moved into its new facility in Newport a year ago. The school has geothermal, solar thermal and photovoltaic systems and is designed to reduce water use by 20 percent.

Students at the Crowley Met School participate in many fitness-related internships, such as at Sail Newport, Newport Equestrian, and Bike Newport, and the school employs a school-based chef (rather than a food service) to prepare healthy meals and to teach students how to do so at home. Through real-world learning and internships, students participate in environmental activities, such as clearing invasive species from the Norman Bird Sanctuary, participating in the water testing with the Aquidneck Watershed Council, and participating in the annual Rhode Island Envirothon competition.

Ponaganset High School, part of the Foster-Gloucester school district, was one of the first schools to participate in the Rhode Island Solar on Schools program, and the 20 photovoltaic panels at the school have been generating electricity for more than a decade. The biomass heating system at the school uses waste wood chips from the local lumber industry to heat the entire school. The school has established an indoor air-quality plan and uses natural daylighting installations and energy-efficient windows and lighting.

Ponaganset students have demonstrated renewable energy technologies through innovative projects, including a fuel-cell powered rock band, an electric fuel-cell vehicle, a vehicle that made a 7,000-mile road trip using biodiesel, and a street-legal, zero-emission EV-fuel cell Model T.

In total, the U.S. Department of Education honored 58 schools and 14 districts this year for their exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, promote better health, and ensure effective environmental education, including civics and green career pathways.

The U.S. Department of Education evaluated the schools that applied for Green Ribbon awards on three criteria: reducing environmental impact and costs, improving the health and wellness of students and staff, and providing effective environmental and sustainability education incorporating STEM, civic skills, and green career pathways.

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The new Paul W. Crowley MET School has been designed and built to embody "green" building principles, maximizing energy efficiency and using renewable power to minimize its carbon footprint.

