



School Nominee Presentation Form

ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATIONS

School and District's Certifications

The signatures of the school principal and district superintendent (or equivalents) on the next page certify that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with the following requirements is true and correct to the best of their knowledge. *In no case is a private school required to make any certification with regard to the public school district in which it is located.*

1. The school has some configuration that includes grades early learning to 12.
2. The school has been evaluated and selected from among schools within the Nominating Authority's jurisdiction, based on high achievement in the three ED-GRS Pillars: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education.
3. Neither the nominated public school nor its public school district is refusing the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district wide compliance review. The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) is not subject to the jurisdiction of OCR. The nominated DoDEA schools, however, are subject to and in compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements to comply with Federal civil rights laws.
4. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the public school district concluding that the nominated public school or the public school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan to remedy the violation.
5. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the public school or the public school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
6. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the public school or public school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or public school district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.
7. The school meets all applicable federal, state, local and tribal health, environmental and safety requirements in law, regulations and policy and is willing to undergo EPA on-site verification.
8. The school or its district has in place and is willing to provide a link to or a copy of a non-discrimination policy, upon request. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a nomination and/or rescind an award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools

Name of Principal:

(Specify: Ms., Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name:

(As it should appear on an award)

**Private Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space*

I have reviewed the information in this application and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

Ben Bustos

(Principal's Signature)

Date:

Name of Superintendent:

(Specify: Ms., Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in official records)



District Name:

I have reviewed the information in this application and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

[Signature] Date:
(Superintendent's Signature)

Nominating Authority's Certifications

The signature by the Nominating Authority on this page certifies that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with the following requirements is true and correct to the best of the Authority's knowledge.

1. The school has some configuration that includes grades Pre-K-12.
2. The school is one of those overseen by the Nominating Authority which is highest achieving in the three ED-GRS Pillars: 1) reduced environmental impact and costs; 2) improved health and wellness; and 3) effective environmental and sustainability education.
3. The school meets all applicable federal civil rights and federal, state, local and tribal health, environmental and safety requirements in law, regulations and policy and is willing to undergo EPA on-site verification.

Name of Nominating Agency: New Mexico Public Education Department

Name of Nominating Authority: Patricia Gharrity
(Specify: Ms., Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application and certify to the best of my knowledge that the school meets the provisions above.

Patricia Gharrity Date: 02/09/2024
(Nominating Authority's Signature)

SUBMISSION

The nomination package, including the signed certifications, narrative summary, documentation of evaluation in the three Pillars, and photos should be submitted online according to the instructions in the Nominee Submission Procedure.

OMB Control Number: 1860-0509
Expiration Date: October 31, 2026

Public Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless such collection displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1860-0509. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 37 hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The obligation to respond to this collection is required to obtain or retain benefit P.L. 107-110, Sec. 501, Innovative Programs and Parental Choice Provisions. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20202-4536 or email ICDocketMgr@ed.gov and reference the OMB Control Number 1860-0509. Note: Please do not return the completed ED-Green Ribbon Schools application to this address.



New Mexico

Polk Middle School

Location: Albuquerque, New Mexico

Type and School Level: Public, Middle, High School

Demographic: 89% Hispanic, 36% ELL, 100% Free and Reduced Lunch, 35% Special Education

Enrollment: 265

Part I: Summary Narrative

Polk Middle School was built in 1968 and is located less than one mile away from the Rio Grande River in the communities of Pajarito and Los Padillas, Valle de Atrisco on the historic Camino Real.

The school is designated as a Dual Language school and provides instruction in most disciplines in both English and Spanish in alignment with its host communities. Polk Middle School is a champion for environmental and agricultural education. A large school farm works to provide fresh produce to students and families who experience food insecurity. The school farm is used for cross-curricular learning projects as well as a meeting space for school and community events. In partnership with the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District,

Polk was awarded nearly \$600,000 from the EPA's Recycling Education and Outreach (REO) Grant Program, titled "Educating the Next Generation: Place-based Food Waste Reduction and Compositing Recycling Initiative." Polk staff will be designing and implementing PreK-12 composting programs and curricula over three years. Polk Middle School was also awarded a Magnet Schools of America Assistance Program (MSAP) Grant and will become a STEM Magnet School focused on environmental sustainability and agriculture, as part of a four-school PreK-12 pathway, *Sustaining the Future*, over the next five years. Polk is a Community School, designated as such by the Albuquerque Public Schools District and the New Mexico Public Education Department, and employs a full-time Community School Coordinator who works with the school administration and staff to develop pathways towards implementation of the key practices of Community Schools, which include:

- Rigorous community-connected classroom instruction;
- Powerful student and family engagement;
- Expanded and enriched learning opportunities;
- Collaborative leadership and shared power and voice;
- Integrated systems of support for students, and;
- Culture of belonging, safety and care that values each person in the school community.



Part II: Documentation of State Evaluation of District Nominee

Pillar I: Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs

Element IA: Energy

- Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) operates and monitors all utilities for all campuses in the district. This means that site administrators do not have access to control or monitor utility usage on campus.
- The district is actively working towards a more efficient and cost-effective system - conducting audits, improvements, and other measures throughout the district. The Water and Energy Conservation Committee (WECC) was formed and is a standing committee that includes representatives from all three utility providers (gas, water, electric), APS Executive Leadership and Department Managers, other school districts and municipal entities, community leaders from private industry and trade associations, and the State of NM's Energy Conservation & Management Office.
- The APS energy team monitors energy usage and building performance. The APS Board of Education approved a policy stating that APS shall reduce net energy and water consumption by 20% (compared to 13/14 SY) each by the end of the 23/24 school year.
- As of the 2020-21 school year, and since the 13/14 school year \$5,815,217 has been avoided in utility expenditures due to school closures, ECMs, rebates, and facility rentals. As compared to the 13/14 SY, by 22/23, APS had reduced electricity usage by 6 kBTU/sqft, natural gas by 6.9k BTU/sqft, and water by 1,371 gallons/occupant. APS Energy Team has also launched a water leak detection app, increased solar production across the district to nearly 400,000 kWh since 2016 across 24 district campuses and sites, and has implemented the Energy Wise Building Buddies educational outreach program. Next steps for WECC and the APS Energy team include utility partnerships, additional solar projects and battery storage, electric vehicles, LED retrofits, and more net-zero (off the grid) sites like the Sandia Mountain Natural History Center .

Element IB: Water and Grounds

- The farm is presently watered by a well which is the source of school water. In the past, the school had *acequia* rights (ditch water rights), but over time the water was diverted from the school and the head gate that opens the ditch water access deteriorated.
- The school administrative team has been working with a graduate student from the University of New Mexico (UNM) who has determined that based on the school location and public domain the school can have all water rights reinstated.



- The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy is in agreement and there is a parent who is willing to repair the headgate.
- The school has a goal to water with sustainable practices using the traditional acequias and create a drought-tolerant community orchard and outdoor learning space.
- Community events are held at the school's *Resolana* space. This is an outdoor learning, meeting and collaboration space. There is a traditionally built and functional adobe *horno* (outdoor oven) which has cooked food for community events and has been used to dry *chicos* for families to take home and cook.
- There is a designated space that is planned for a STEM lab that will include aquaponic and hydroponic systems. New Mexico Game and Fish will support the aquaponics systems. All classes will use the STEM lab for cross-curricular learning and experiments.
- Additionally, the school farm is used for academic enrichment. There is a half-time garden resource teacher who works with teachers from all other departments to use outdoor learning to support all curricular areas. Some examples are social studies units focused on environmental advocacy, math lessons that support content standards in geometry and measurement and data, and science classes that have Farm Fridays and apply the science they learn in the classroom in the field.
- The school provides services for students in the Intensive Global Support (IGS) program. These students have learning disabilities that create the need for intensive support in all areas of the school. Students in the IGS program participate in the garden with planting and growing lessons in an inclusive learning setting. Much of the growing space is ADA-compliant so that students with mobility issues can access the space.

Element IC: Waste

- There is a compost pile for solid waste. The next steps for composting is to collect compostable scraps from the cafeteria that can be used in the current bin or a vermicomposting system.
- An annual fall "Pumpkin Smashing Festival" event where old jack-o-lanterns are collected and used for composting.
- A small grant was written for each classroom to have recycling bins and one large compost bin will be placed in the cafeteria for food waste. The school is planning a "share table" for food that has not been contaminated for students to offer to one another and a bin for the scraps of food that cannot be shared. A goal of the school is to create a zero-waste cafeteria.



Element ID: Alternative Transportation

- Polk MS is a pilot school for Albuquerque Public Schools’ Vision Zero program. In addition to reducing pedestrian-related fatalities, the initiative has the following goals:
 - “Strategize equitable intervention, particularly in highly impacted and vulnerable communities, which utilize public transit, walking, and biking as primary means of transportation.
 - Improve student and community health through the use of active transportation and lowering carbon emissions,” (www.aps.edu, 2022).
- A Traffic Safety/Walk to School Survey is available to students and the data is used to
- continually inform and advise the VisionZero initiative.
- Polk MS students and staff participated in a Walk to School event where students walked or rode their bikes to school and then evaluated their experience.
- The Community School Coordinator conducted a needs assessment, which included a question about how students get to school. Students who skateboard to school have the added benefit of utilizing the campus’s skatepark before school, during lunch/recess, and after school. Polk is the only middle school in APS that has a skatepark.
- The administration advocated for the skatepark, providing data to facilities and risk management that playground equipment was more dangerous than the skatepark. The skatepark was built in 2008 and is still utilized by students daily.

Pillar II: Improve the health and wellness of students and staff

Polk Middle School supports student and staff health and wellness through agriculture community partners, outdoor learning and movement, and *community school* support and staffing.

Element IIA: Environmental Health

- Several years ago, a toxic weed killer was used around the school farm area. Raised beds were designed and built over the area where the soil tested positive for pollutants. Over time, the soil has been amended and now tests safe for growing.
- In the summer of 2020, the newly hired garden resource teacher partnered with a local soil scientist and had the campus’s farm soil tested. To maintain a healthy and organic environment, the site



administration requested that district maintenance and operations stop using herbicides and pesticides in the farm area.

- The farm is not organic certified, however, the students and teachers working on the farm utilized healthy organic agricultural practices and the crops produced are all organic.
- APS Risk Management visits the campus annually for safety inspections, evaluating environmental hazards, soil testing, and water testing. The school uses well water, and the water is tested monthly by an independent agency in Santa Fe, NM.
- Results of these tests are available to the public on a website. Any time there is a work order, it is submitted to maintenance and operations. When a leak appears, the environmental department comes out to repair it and also tests for mold and mildew.
- Prior to students returning to school in the 2020/2021 school year, every classroom was equipped with an independently controlled HVAC filtration system.
- The school has an environmental health and safety committee (composed of administrators, dean of students, custodial staff, school nurse, school resource officer, health teacher, and other teacher volunteers) that looks for safety and environmental hazards on campus, ADA compliance, and safety compliance. Everyone on the committee is made aware of emergency shut-off valves for various utilities and are required to complete non-violent crisis intervention training.
- Management meeting: safety team, inspections team, work orders follow-up (monthly)
- Inspection/maintenance team (daily/as needed, comprised of the site administrator and head custodian) and admin.

Element IIB: Nutrition and Fitness

- Polk Middle School is very proud of the 30,000-square-foot garden and growing space located on campus used by all students. In fact, the area has been referred to as a school farm as it consists of 17 growing rows, 2 hoop houses for large-scale cultivation and one smaller sensory hoop house/outdoor classroom.
- In the large field our garden rows have over 20 types of crops. In the winter this space is used to plant garlic, winter wheat, and cover crops. Students spend time in the crop field with classroom projects or with the garden resource teacher, as well as during elective classes or for restorative practices.
- There are 11 ADA-accessible raised beds that grow a variety of greens, herbs and flowers. One of these beds is dedicated as *Elijah's Bed*, dedicated to a staff's son who was killed in an act of gun violence. Elijah's Bed grows perennial flowers from which students harvest seeds from



every year and make seed packets to give to other families who have experienced a loss due to gun violence. The garden beds were painted by students across grade levels and departments that included classes in Social Studies, Science, Art, Math, and ELA. There are an additional 5 raised beds used for science experiments and as a pollinator and herb garden located closer to the science lab classrooms. Students were part of building the garden beds and integrated concepts of math, science and art with the development of plans for the space and construction/painting of the beds.

- Currently, produce is harvested for students, staff and families and is used for school and community events held at the school. Food grown at Polk is also sent home for families that experience food insecurity. In the future, the farm hopes to support students' business plans at local produce stands, farmer's markets and stores, as well as providing a fresh food bar in the school cafeteria.
- Student and staff physical health and exercise is supported in several ways on campus. A teacher offers skateboarding lessons after school. There are options for students to play basketball, volleyball, soccer, and run track as organized team sports.
- Many staff and students use the garden space and track for walking and outdoor activities.
- Additionally, an activities cart that has sports equipment is brought out during lunch to increase physical activity. There is a large size Jenga and Cornhole game that allows students with physical limitations to participate in outdoor games with peers.
- Polk Middle School hosts family and community events like the Turkey Trot, which is a fun run/walk that raises funds to offer families facing food insecurity with food around the holidays.
- The produce from the school farm directly supports students and families and is used for community events. During the fall festival corn was harvested and roasted in the *horno*. Students take produce home and eventually the garden will support a fresh produce space in the cafeteria for students and staff.

Element IIB (cont.): Coordinated School Health, Mental Health, School Climate, and Safety

- Student well-being and social-emotional learning is addressed with a full-time counselor and Dean of students.
- The school uses restorative practices when students need time to work through behavior infractions.
- The staff has been very intentional about limited cell phone use during school hours, even during lunchtime. It is a goal to promote social interaction and physical activity while on campus rather



than allowing students to use cell phones. This is a schoolwide goal that teachers and support staff reinforce.

- The garden teacher works with students on the school farm to talk about making positive choices.
- Students are supported in academic growth with opportunities built around agriculture, science and sustainability.
- Students in the business/technology elective who also work in the garden had a presentation accepted for the American Planning Association, New Mexico Chapter conference in October of 2023. A small group of students will travel to Roswell, New Mexico with the garden teacher to present about how agriculture can help mitigate our climate crisis and how their sustainable practices support them in all subject areas and prepare them for college and career.
- Polk Middle School recognizes the importance of culture, student self-concept, and well-being. Murals on campus, completed by students with support from local muralists, highlight the unique culture and weave art and agricultural traditions into public and accessible works of art.
- The principal sends out a weekly newsletter to staff that includes safety notices, meetings, management and safety committee updates, and employee wellness updates. Albuquerque Public School provides employees with an employee wellness program and incentives, including an Employees Assistance Program, which offers free, confidential short-term professional counseling for employees and immediate family members. There are a variety of teams and committees at Polk Middle School that focus on the various needs of staff and students:
 - Early Warning/Health And Wellness Team/Restorative Practices Team (bimonthly)
 - Safety team meeting (monthly, but also daily at the beginning of the school year to review and update the campus safety plan)
 - Instructional Council (bimonthly)
 - Community Schools Council (bimonthly)
 - Educators' Union (monthly)
 - Garden team (weekly)

Pillar III: Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education

Polk Middle School is committed to environmental STEM education and sustainability. The school has been awarded multiple grants to fund relevant and timely professional development and program implementation.



Pillar IIIA: Interdisciplinary Learning

- Polk Middle School is one of four schools that was awarded \$12.8M as part of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program in 2023. The four schools are part of the ***Environmental STEM Pathway*** called ***Sustaining the Future (StF)***. Over five years, Polk staff will receive comprehensive professional development on inquiry-based learning and teaching (eMINTS), environmental STEM content, integration, and cross-curricular connections (iCEV), and engineering design and problem-solving through Project Lead The Way (PLTW).
- At Polk Middle School all students will be exposed to inquiry-based instruction. Teachers for all classrooms will implement the eMINTS (enhancing Missouri’s Instructional Networked Teaching Strategies), which will provide direct training for teachers in inquiry-based learning with technology integration.
- The school will focus on moving away from traditional teaching methods where students learn through memorization skills to modern education systems where students learn through human-environment interaction. Students will use digital tools to explore, discover, create, and engage in real-world issues and solve authentic problems.
- Students will be given the unique opportunity to participate in Project Lead The Way (PLTW), a specialized curriculum for science instruction. It focuses on Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), Common Core integration of math and literature and career/industry connections and current issues in environmental sustainability. PLTW Gateway units include:
 - 6th Grade: Science of Technology
 - 7th Grade: Energy and the Environment
 - 8th Grade: Green Architecture
- The school will also have access to curriculum, lessons, and activities from Environmental Education of NM, National Agriculture in the Classroom, and NM AG in the classroom, building upon the themes that align with common core standards in all academic areas and NGSS such as careers in science, cells and cell processes, genetics and DNA, ecosystems, microorganisms and utilizing the lesson plans in food science and nutrition. Polk teachers will integrate standards-aligned courses from iCEV such as Introduction to Agriscience which offers 36 lessons and 581 projects, activities and assessments which will be used across social studies, math, science, and English language arts classes to add inquiry experiences for students.

Element IIIB: STEM Content, Knowledge, and Skills

- In partnership with the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District, Polk was awarded just under \$600,000 over three years to design and implement a PreK-12 composting curriculum, titled “Educating the Next Generation: Place-Based Food Waste Reduction and Compost Recycling Initiative”.



- The grant, awarded by the Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery, will provide resources, community connects, and support, allowing Polk Middle School staff and local partners to create a composting curriculum that will be piloted on campus and then will implemented at Los Padillas Elementary in year 2 and then at Rio Grande High School in year 3.
- This curriculum will be utilized across the district, state, and country. Students will be able to take experiential field trips to learn about composting, organizations, and sustainable waste management systems. The program will showcase best composting practices and allow the schools to compost on and off-site. The compost will be used in the gardens, farm, and hoop houses.
- Lessons in the garden are developed between partner teachers in all academic departments. Math lessons are taught as soil is measured in volume for orders for garden boxes. Perimeter and measurement is used as plans are developed for extension of the school farm rows and planning the spring garden plans.
- Social studies is taught with cultural education and local issues around New Mexico history, water rights and land ownership. Polk Middle School offers dual language instruction so that students can take all course work in both languages: Spanish and English.
- Literature studies are developed with texts that are culturally relevant and related to environmental issues.
- The science department supports garden efforts with planting and seed sprouting. Other science concepts that are being planned for include hydroponics and aquaponics which will be housed in the STEM Lab.
- Professional development for all staff is focused on our theme of environmental STEM. In September of 2023 the entire staff boarded a bus and toured farms and partners in the area to find ways to enrich student knowledge and experiences through partnerships and field trips. Staff visited Los Jardines Institute, Los Padillas Outdoor Sanctuary, Los Padillas Community Center and The Gutierrez-Hubbell House Farm. These are some of our partners that we use for field trips and extension projects.
- Other partnerships that support academic development are partnerships with our pathway elementary schools and high schools, (which share our environmental sustainability theme), Agri-Cultura Network, the Southwest Organizing Project, UNM College of Population Health, UNM Chicano & Chicana Studies Program, Sandia Church of the Nazarene, South Valley Public Health Office of the New Mexico Department of Health, Albuquerque Public Schools Family Engagement, Explora Science Museum, Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge and other local farms.



- These partners will support lessons and community engagement efforts and events, assist in data collection and analysis, providing technical assistance, hosting field trips, and providing guest speakers who are experts in their field.
- Polk Middle School ensures that all students are included to the maximum extent possible. All learners benefit when they learn beside diverse peers. Our garden is ADA-compliant and every student participates in the planning, harvesting in the garden as well as attending field trips and community events.
- Polk students were invited to attend the National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Conference in October 2023. Students attended the 2023 state legislative session in Santa Fe, NM to learn about how laws are created and citizen advocacy. The school community is highly involved in local and state events focused on environmental sustainability and agriculture.