



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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ashley Dikmas".

Date:

(Principal's Signature)

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.

Brian P. Smith

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:

Name of Nominating Authority:

(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.

Walter M. Burkert

Date:

(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.

Summary Narrative

Robert D. Johnson Elementary (Johnson) is a community school serving over 430 students from kindergarten through fifth grade. Johnson is committed to providing project-based learning opportunities focused on environmental education for students at every grade level. Projects include motivating and educating the school population about recycling and composting in our cafeteria, using biomimicry to solve environmental problems, and creating structures that provide shade for animals. As a result of project-based learning experiences, a group of Johnson Elementary students initiated and spearheaded a school-wide recycling program. They were disappointed to find litter on the school grounds during outdoor learning opportunities. This inspired them to take action by creating the Eco Club to increase environmental awareness for positive change in our school, community, and world. Teachers, administrators, parents, community organizations, and even professional athletes supported student's passions and efforts. Through this initiative, Johnson keeps 75% of our waste out of landfills by sending it to multiple organizations to be recycled. The Eco Club monitors cafeteria recycling and composting while inviting community members to drop off their hard-to-recycle materials and promoting increased recycling at home. The recycling program was featured on our local news and in a variety of online and print publications. The club also organizes presentations for Johnson Elementary community nights focused on educating students, families, and community members about sustainability. The work of Johnson Elementary students, staff, and community was recognized by the Kentucky Association for Environmental Education as PreK- 12 Kentucky School of the Year in 2023. The school also received recognition as a Kentucky Green and Healthy School by earning three different certifications. In addition to our commitment to environmental education in the classroom, our building was designed with efficiency in mind. During our recent building construction in 2021, Johnson was designed to be an energy-efficient facility that has a plethora of effective architectural components. These include skylights and large windows to allow natural light throughout the building, sensors that turn off lights in empty classrooms and offices, automatic sinks and water efficient toilets in every bathroom, an energy-efficient HVAC system and air filtration system, and energy efficient and water reducing appliances in our cafeteria. The exterior of the school features two nature-themed playgrounds, native plant landscapes, a pumpkin patch, an outdoor garden, an environmental education center, a composting station, hiking trails, and a variety of fruit-producing native trees. The environmental education center, which students call the "outdoor classroom", was designed over a three-year period by Johnson Elementary students in collaboration with our high school landscape architecture class, teachers, community mentors, and local architectural firms. This outdoor classroom will be fertilized by our cafeteria composting, is a certified Monarch Waystation, and contains native plant species that promote the survival of native pollinators and animal species. For students of all ages, this space serves as a location to conduct experiments, make environmental observations, and meet the social/ emotional needs of students through meditation and sensory breaks. In conclusion, the comprehensive dedication of Johnson Elementary to environmental education not only transformed the school's landscape but also empowered students to become passionate leaders in sustainability.

Narrative for Pillar I: Efforts to reduce environmental impact and costs

Johnson Elementary has made substantial strides in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, employing a multi-faceted approach that combines energy management and technological enhancements. Our building construction was completed in 2021. Energy conservation was pivotal in its design. Our HVAC system was chosen specifically for its efficiency. Integration of energy-efficient lighting, including skylights and large windows, has optimized natural light usage, reducing our reliance on artificial sources. Complementing this, smart lighting systems were installed, automatically shutting down in unoccupied spaces, decreasing energy consumption. Our commitment to energy efficiency extends to the cafeteria, where the adoption of energy-efficient appliances has culminated in tangible reductions in energy usage. Additionally, the installation of an advanced air filtration system has significantly improved indoor air quality while contributing to our emissions reduction strategy.

In tandem with mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, our school has prioritized enhancing water quality, efficiency, and conservation measures. Automatic sinks and toilets have been seamlessly integrated to decrease water consumption. Equipping appliances with water filters ensures the delivery of clean water while optimizing usage. Furthermore, the implementation of water bottle filling stations across the school encourages the use of reusable water bottles, significantly reducing plastic waste. Our Eco Club is also actively working on a campaign to reduce water pollution in our local watershed by labeling storm drains in the community. These initiatives collectively exemplify our commitment to sustainable water management and conservation efforts.

Johnson Elementary has made significant progress in waste reduction and management, employing a multi-faceted approach to minimize solid and hazardous waste. This initiative encompasses increased recycling and composting efforts, consumption reduction strategies, and improved waste management practices. Beyond conventional paper recycling in classrooms, the school has embraced a holistic recycling approach, extending it to various materials within the school and cafeteria.

The implementation of comprehensive cafeteria recycling programs has yielded a remarkable 300% increase in recycled materials diverted from landfills. Through strategic partnerships with community organizations such as Rumpke Recycling, Cincinnati Recycle and Reuse Hub, and the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension office, the school has maximized recycling efforts without incurring additional costs. The student-created Eco Club played a pivotal role in championing this initiative by conducting a thorough trash analysis in the school cafeteria.

Upon realizing the limitations of the existing recycling program, the Eco Club proactively engaged with Rumpke Recycling representatives to understand their recycling components and identify recyclable materials. Subsequently, after collaborating with the Cincinnati Recycle and Reuse Hub, a plan was established to expand the recycling of various materials. A diligent assessment revealed that the cafeteria was generating four 55-gallon cans of trash daily, resulting in 220 gallons of landfill waste. Collaborating with external agencies, the Eco Club, cafeteria and custodian staff, and administrators, a 10-step recycling line was developed to efficiently manage different materials.

Stations were designated for various items, such as plastics, flexible film, pouches, granola bar wrappers, plastic baggies, straws, plastic silverware, liquids, Rumpke mixed material recycling, landfill, and reusable materials. The collaboration between the 4th-grade Project-Based Learning (PBL) initiatives and the Eco Club led to the creation of a comprehensive school-wide education plan. This plan educated students of all grade levels, K-5, on the importance of recycling, recyclable materials, and how to use the recycling line. Students actively participated in teaching classes, leading assemblies, creating songs, and developing motivational awards to encourage correct recycling practices.

The involvement of three parent volunteers daily for two weeks further ensured students were recycling correctly. Eco Club members received regular reports from custodial staff on the number of 55-gallon trash cans sent to the dumpster after each lunch period, reinforcing motivation to reduce landfill contributions. The success of these efforts was evident as Johnson Elementary achieved an average 300% reduction in landfill contributions. Students became adept at independent recycling within three weeks, and Eco Club campaigns sustained motivation and education during breaks and at the start of the school year.

A noteworthy aspect of our waste reduction strategy involves cafeteria-specific measures aimed at mitigating the use of non-recyclable materials. Efforts to minimize Styrofoam and hard-to-recycle plastics have been instrumental, resulting in a 75% reduction in their usage. The adoption of reusable silverware, bowls, and easily recyclable plastic containers has not only significantly decreased single-use plastic waste but has also fostered a culture of sustainability among students and staff.

Recognition for Johnson Elementary's outstanding recycling efforts came from the Kentucky Environmental Education Association, which honored the school as the Kentucky PreK-12 School of the Year. The school's achievements were also featured on a local news channel and in various online and magazine publications. The optimization of waste management practices through collaborative efforts between students, custodial, and cafeteria staff has streamlined the recycling process, resulting in a more efficient and effective waste diversion system at Johnson Elementary.

Additionally, the introduction of composting in the cafeteria has played a pivotal role in minimizing organic waste, contributing to an estimated 10% reduction in overall waste production. The Fort Thomas Education Foundation awarded a \$1,800 grant to purchase compost bins and materials for maintaining the compost. These bins were placed near the cafeteria and gardens for easy access. The composting program is monitored by 4th and 5th-grade students through their classroom instruction as well as the Eco club. Along with instruction from composting professionals like DJ Scully from the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension and Laurie Nichols from Green Acres, 4th and 5th-grade students researched what is compostable in our cafeteria. They created posters to educate their classmates about what they learned. We also toured the cafeteria to discuss what we could compost, focusing a lot of attention on leaving out fats, oils, meats, and dairy. Then, they established a system for collecting compost, transporting it to the outside bins, watering the compost, and turning the compost. In the next few months, 4th and 5th-grade students will educate and motivate the third-grade students to also participate. Our two-year goal is to include the entire school in the composting process. Additionally, the cafeteria staff have committed to composting their unused organic material as well. At Johnson Elementary, we are committed to sustainability.

Moreover, Johnson has undertaken initiatives to handle hazardous waste responsibly. Unused medicines are collected by our district nurse and safely disposed of through a partnership with the Fort Thomas Police Department, ensuring proper disposal procedures and minimizing potential environmental risks. An innovative step has been the introduction of a specialized recycling program for disinfectant wipe bags. This initiative has effectively reduced the amount of hazardous waste generated by such materials, demonstrating our commitment to seeking eco-friendly disposal methods even for non-traditional waste items. These collective efforts in waste reduction and management showcase our dedication to minimizing environmental impact, promoting sustainable practices, and fostering a community committed to responsible waste disposal and conservation.

Finally, Johnson Elementary has taken proactive steps to promote alternative transportation methods, fostering a culture that prioritizes eco-friendly commuting options. Initiatives such as the annual "Walk to School Week" have been pivotal in encouraging students and families to embrace walking as a viable transportation choice. Students can participate in games and exercise stations before school begins and in gift card raffle rewards. As a

result, Johnson has cultivated a vibrant walk and bike to school culture. This cultural shift has resulted in a sustained increase in students choosing to walk or bike, further reducing our carbon footprint and promoting a healthy lifestyle among our student body. The installation of bike racks across the campus has provided essential infrastructure to support and encourage cycling as a mode of transportation. Families have partnered together to walk larger groups of students to school and afternoon playgroups use our school lawn for extra play time after school. This strengthened community bonds but also encouraged families to adopt alternative transportation methods.

These concerted efforts in promoting alternative transportation methods, recycling, composting, and reducing our energy use reflect Johnson's dedication to reducing environmental impacts. By fostering a culture that values and actively participates in energy conservation, we are driving positive change toward a more sustainable future.

Narrative for Pillar 2: Efforts to improve the health and wellness of students and staff

Johnson Elementary champions a holistic approach to health and wellness. Our commitment extends to fostering a culture where health, nutrition, outdoor physical education, and emotional well-being intertwine seamlessly. Initiatives like our garden-to-table cafeteria, offering nutritious, locally sourced vegetables, promote healthier eating habits among students. Certified staff donate organic food grown in their garden that our chef uses to create appetizing sides for students to try. Zucchini, squash, tomatoes, and garlic have been donated by the cafeteria and teaching staff for our students to enjoy. We hope to continue to expand this initiative in the upcoming year. Events such as Walk to School Week promote physical activity that also works to reduce our community's carbon footprint. Parent volunteers set up daily stations in front of the school for students to exercise and try new physical challenges. They also reward students for walking to school through raffles with donated prizes. This event not only encourages physical activity but also provides educational opportunities focused on wellness. Johnson Elementary PTO also sponsors Nutrition Week, promoting healthy choices. Community volunteers provide daily samples of unique fruits, vegetables, and healthy foods for students to try during their lunchtime while discussing the importance of a well-rounded diet. Vibrant engagements like the Color Run also reinforce the school's commitment to healthy choices and physical activity through this 1-mile run where students are splashed with colorful powder. Johnson Elementary also offers co-ed sports leagues spanning basketball, soccer, volleyball, and cross country that not only cultivate physical fitness but also instill teamwork skills. Partnerships with the professional soccer team FC Cincinnati motivate and inspire students to maintain lifelong physical activity and healthy lifestyles and pursue their dreams.

Our dedication to mental health is evident through monthly counseling sessions facilitated by our school counselor, Mrs. McKay. These sessions serve as pillars of support, nurturing emotional well-being among our students by teaching them to identify and manage emotions. Mrs. McKay visits all classrooms for 45 minutes twice a week each month. She designs her lessons based on many curriculums including Second Steps, Kelso's Choice, Kentucky Department of Education resources, Zones of Regulation, Mindset Matters, Mind-up, and Everyday Speech. Additionally, events like the Chorus Concert for Veterans and the Winter Concert provide platforms for emotional expression and community bonding, fostering a sense of belonging. This year, our school has established a program titled, Johnson Families. Every person in our school fits into a heterogeneous family including all grade levels and two or three adults. Each family is represented with a color, and has their flag, and wave to use when passing each other in the hallway. Our families meet once a month at our Jaguar Jamboree where everyone wears their family t-shirts that correlate in color. This year, during our family meetings we played team-building games, made cards for Veterans on Veteran's Day, made holiday cards for each other, and designed a family flag. These families provide students with another opportunity to grow relationships with students who are not necessarily in their class and build lasting relationships with adults outside of their classroom teacher.

The engagement of families and the wider community is a cornerstone of our approach. Programs such as the Lego Robots League promote STEM education and critical thinking, while our Christmas donation drive for the Veteran's Home instills empathy and community involvement. Collaborating with the YMCA for after-school activities extends our commitment beyond school hours, encouraging families to embrace a healthy lifestyle collectively. Finally, the Johnson Elementary PTO promotes monthly community and family nights throughout the area that foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie amongst students and parents.

At Johnson Elementary, these varied initiatives are woven into our fabric, creating an environment where every facet of wellness, be it physical, mental, or emotional, is nurtured. By integrating diverse programs and services, we pave the way for a community that thrives in holistic well-being.

Johnson Elementary prioritizes the safety and well-being of everyone within our premises through the design, construction, and operations of our building. Every aspect, from design to daily operations and maintenance, is meticulously considered to ensure a secure and healthy environment. Our commitment to safety is evident through measures like automatic lock doors, emergency buttons in classrooms linked directly to the office, and double entry doors at all entrances, enhancing security and enabling rapid responses in emergencies. Cameras are located throughout the interior and exterior of the school to provide additional safety. Accessibility is a cornerstone, facilitated by elevators, ramps, and specialized flooring to reduce impact injuries and ensure inclusivity.

Maintenance is paramount in upholding these standards. Mr. Bill, our dedicated head custodian, oversees grounds maintenance and classroom cleaning and promptly addresses maintenance issues. Classrooms are deep cleaned and disinfected bi-weekly, and high-touch surface areas are cleaned daily with a Lysol solution that reduces the use of hazardous chemicals and waste. The exterior of the building is vigorously maintained throughout each season to protect the safety of all students. Snow and ice are removed throughout the night by a team of district custodians to reduce the need for snow day cancellations. Our Eco club collaborates with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension office to maintain the outdoor classroom, fostering a safe and engaging learning space that grows food and herbs. To combat environmental contaminants and allergens, we've implemented a state-of-the-art air filtration system that prevents mold and moisture formation within the building and significantly reduces airborne allergens. Additionally, regular bi-monthly visits from exterminators ensure proactive pest control measures, maintaining a clean and safe environment free from pests and harmful pesticides. These integrated efforts accentuate our commitment to creating a secure, healthy, and conducive learning environment for everyone at our school.

In conclusion, Johnson Elementary stands as a beacon of holistic wellness, intertwining physical, mental, and emotional well-being within a supportive community framework. Through a diverse array of initiatives spanning nutrition, physical activity, mental health support, and community engagement, we've crafted an environment where every facet of wellness is nurtured. Our commitment extends beyond academic excellence, emphasizing safety, accessibility, and cleanliness through meticulous maintenance and innovative environmental health practices. By fostering a culture that prioritizes well-being at its core, Johnson Elementary remains dedicated to shaping not only knowledgeable minds but also healthy, empowered individuals ready to thrive in the ever-evolving world beyond our school gates.

Narrative for Pillar 3: Efforts to ensure effective environmental and sustainability education

At Johnson Elementary, our commitment to environmental and sustainability education permeates every facet of our curriculum through interdisciplinary learning, forging connections between dynamic environmental, energy, and human systems across various subjects. In Spanish class, students embark on a fascinating journey delving into the intricacies of Monarch butterfly migration, connecting language learning with environmental science. The music curriculum becomes a platform for fostering environmental consciousness, with students composing and teaching recycling songs to the entire school. Physical education (PE) extends this ethos as students craft games to practice recycling. Art class offers a space for exploring the intricate relationship between human anatomy and movement, studying bones, muscles, and locomotive body movements to capture human proportions and dynamics in artwork. Moreover, in music sessions, students ponder how the human body's systems work together to facilitate the playing of instruments and dance, seamlessly integrating science with creative expression. Literacy connections further reinforce these concepts, incorporating a rich array of books and passages about the environment, animals, and plants, nurturing a comprehensive understanding of the natural world. This interdisciplinary approach infuses our curriculum with a deep appreciation for environmental sustainability, fostering critical thinking and a holistic understanding of our interconnected world.

Our commitment to effective environmental and sustainability education resonates through an interdisciplinary approach that interconnects dynamic environmental concepts across diverse subjects. Science and math classes become platforms for hands-on learning, fostering critical thinking through data analysis, plant measurements, and comparing the mass of waste before and after recycling in our school cafeteria. Embracing environmentally focused Project-Based Learning (PBL) across all grade levels, students engage in real-world challenges that instill a deep understanding of environmental issues. Kindergarteners explore designing structures to shield animals from weather-related impacts, while first graders delve into how animal external parts could aid in solving environmental challenges faced by humans. Second graders embark on understanding ways to adapt the school environment to support Monarch butterfly migration, fostering a practical understanding of environmental conservation. Third graders explore courageous leadership in addressing environmental challenges, focusing on forest fires in regions like California and Hawaii. Fourth graders tackle the task of motivating peers to recycle in the cafeteria, enhancing environmental responsibility within the school community. Partnering with entities like Rumpke Recycling, The Cincinnati Recycle and Reuse Hub, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension, Campbell County Solid Waste Management, Sanitation District 1, and H2O for Life amplifies these learning experiences. Fifth graders engage in a broader perspective, addressing best management practices to curb water pollution in their community while raising awareness and funds to build and maintain wells in South Sudan, Africa. The teachers at Johnson Elementary do not follow a specific curriculum to plan their Project Based Learning Experiences. However, we have received many trainings on the design of PBL and have a curriculum coach, Ms. Heidi Neltner, who helps guide the planning and implementation process. This initiative started at Johnson Elementary in 2018 and continues to grow each year. These partnerships and immersive learning experiences exemplify our dedication to fostering environmental consciousness and active engagement in sustainable practices within our school and global communities. In a 4-year, collaborative project, Johnson Elementary students worked to design, fund, and maintain an outdoor learning space. Students worked with various community organizations to draw architectural plans that would promote a healthy native habitat for birds, butterflies, bees, and native mammals. The space has been designated as a certified Monarch Waystation and provides opportunities for all grade levels to immerse themselves in environmental education. Environmental and sustainability education resonates throughout all learning opportunities at Johnson Elementary.

Johnson Elementary's commitment to environmental sustainability fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and STEM skills to equip students for the technology-driven future. Through our "Pillars and Pathways" program, students engage in global understanding by exploring and brainstorming solutions to worldwide issues in group

settings. They also learn the holistic impact of healthy choices on their physical, emotional, and social well-being through social stories and teamwork exercises. Critical thinking is honed through hands-on activities like designing Rube Goldberg Machines and fostering creativity and problem-solving abilities. Students collaborate in identifying and resolving school-based issues, learning diverse social problem-solving techniques. These initiatives align with our district's "Portrait of a Graduate" initiative through creative problem-solving, curious critical thinking, and courageous leaders. Leveraging one-to-one technology connections with iPads, students immerse themselves in learning experiences, using webcams and live streams to observe local wildlife, reducing paper waste through digital interactive notebooks, and presenting their Project-Based Learning findings to the Fort Thomas Schools Board of Education biannually. Our Eco club's efforts are instrumental in creating Fort Thomas Earth Day posters and commercials to raise awareness and promote the event throughout our community. Through these multifaceted approaches, we not only educate about sustainability but also nurture the essential skills needed for success in the 21st-century economy, preparing our students to be adaptable, innovative leaders of tomorrow.

Another example of our commitment to environmental education is our Eco Club. A few students advocated for the formation of a club to address the litter and pollution that surrounded our school. Along with a teacher, students decided to meet on Mondays to address these issues, learn more about environmental sustainability, and work together to identify and solve other environmental problems happening in our school and community. The club agreed to use the Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools initiative as their guide for organizing the club. The first order of business was to address the amount of solid waste our school produced. Recycling became a school-wide initiative that continues to minimize the amount of solid waste our school produces each day. Also, the Eco Club maintains the upkeep of our environmental education center, which students call the "outdoor classroom". This outdoor learning space serves as a pillar for environmental education. The space was designed over three years by Johnson Elementary students in collaboration with our high school landscape architecture class, teachers, community mentors, and local architectural firms. The \$42,000 environmental education center was completely funded through grants from the Fort Thomas Education Foundation, the UK Cooperative Extension office, Campbell County Conservation District, and the Parent-Teacher Organization. This outdoor classroom offers spaces for planting experiments for each grade level, will be fertilized by our cafeteria composting, is a certified Monarch Waystation, and contains native plant species that promote the survival of native pollinators and animal species. For students of all ages, this space serves as a location to conduct experiments, make environmental observations, and meet the social/ emotional needs of students through meditation and sensory breaks.

At Johnson Elementary, cultivating civic engagement skills goes hand in hand with our commitment to sustainability, empowering students to actively address environmental issues in their community. We facilitate hands-on learning experiences through visits by notable community members such as Rumpke, The Cincinnati Recycle Reuse Hub, Brent Suter from the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team, DJ Scully, and Sarah Imbus from University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension, and Chuck Keller from the Fort Thomas Forest Conservancy. These visits not only educate but inspire students to take action. Our Eco Club takes the initiative by creating recycling commercials, encouraging families to embrace recycling practices. Collaborating with Sanitation District 1, we aim to reduce water pollution by labeling storm drains in our community and raising awareness about the impact of proper waste disposal on local waterways. Additionally, our fourth-grade classes engage in practical activities by picking up litter around the school while discussing the implications of water pollution. These hands-on experiences not only foster a deeper understanding of sustainability issues but also instill a sense of responsibility and active participation in preserving and enhancing the local environment. Through these initiatives, Johnson Elementary strives to nurture future citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also proactive in creating a sustainable and thriving community.