



## Early Learning Center Nominee Presentation Form

### ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATIONS

#### Early Learning Center Certifications

The signatures of the early learning center director (or equivalent) on the next page certify that each of the statements below concerning the center'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 early learning center 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.
2. The nominated early learning center is providing 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 compliance review. The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) is not subject to the jurisdiction of OCR. The nominated DoDEA early learning centers, however, are subject to and in compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements to comply with Federal civil rights laws.
3. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to early learning center concluding that the center 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.
4. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the early learning center has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
5. 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 early learning center in question; or if there are such findings, the state or early learning center has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.
6. The center 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.
7. The early learning center 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 Director or Principal:

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

Official Early Learning Center Name:

(As it should appear on an award)

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

Date:

(Director's or Principal's Signature)



### Nominating Authority's Certifications

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

1. The early learning center 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.
2. The early learning center 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 early learning center meets the provisions above.

(Nominating Authority's Signature)

Date:

### **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](mailto: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.



## Creative Learning Preschool and Child Care Center

Creative Learning Preschool and Child Care Center (CLP) believes environmental stewardship begins in childhood and is woven throughout the curriculum and practices. Project-based learning, community partnerships, parent outreach, clubs, and field trips nurture this learning for children ages six weeks to 5 years of age. This 501(c)(3) non-profit center also serves as a contracted 4K community site for the Madison Metropolitan School District. CLP has reduced environmental impacts and lowered energy use by conducting an energy assessment and implementing prioritized recommendations within the budget, installing four rain barrels, offering TerraCycling to reduce waste, investigating composting options, promoting alternative transportation, seeking to support green energy and buy solar shares from MG&E's SolarShare program, and using our outdoor spaces to create food and native gardens. CLP's efforts were recognized by the Dane County Office of Energy and Climate Change with a 2023 Climate Champion Award. Health and wellness of students and staff is supported by using commercial cleaning and natural cleaning products, increasing ventilation and air filtration, chemical-free pest control, supporting nutrition, offering outdoor experiences, promoting sun safety, offering behavioral health services, partnering with community organizations and seeking input from child care specialists, health care, and public health professionals to inform health and safety policies.

### **Pillar 1: Reducing Environmental Impacts & Costs**

CLP has made strides to reduce our environmental impact and costs. Initiatives include conducting an energy assessment and implementing prioritized recommendations within our budget, installing four rain barrels, reducing waste for our school community by offering TerraCycling, investigating composting options, promoting alternative transportation, seeking to buy solar shares from MG&E's SolarShare program, and using our outdoor spaces to create food and native gardens.

The state's energy efficiency program, Focus on Energy, sent a representative to CLP to help focus our energy efficiency efforts on the highest priority items. Since the evaluation, CLP has made an effort to reprogram thermostats to reduce our energy use during nights and weekends when classrooms are empty, as well as continuing to replace existing lightbulbs with LED lighting, which produces energy 90% more efficiently than incandescent bulbs. CLP also replaces appliances with ENERGY STAR rated appliances when replacement is needed. These efforts have led to noticeable reductions in CLP's electric and gas usage.

To support gardening efforts around CLP, we are seeking to ensure access to water around the building, including hard-to-reach areas around the front of the building. We invested in

four rain barrels offered at a discount through Dane County to help capture rainwater that will help water our learning gardens throughout the summer.

CLP participates in the TerraCycle program making it easy for families to recycle squeezable plastic snack pouches and lids. Approximately 60 pounds of pouches are recycled annually.

CLP hosts clothing, book, and toy swaps throughout the year to encourage reuse. We also have a permanent swap cabinet where community members can donate or shop for items as needed. Swap items that are not claimed are donated to a local organization.

For over 25 years, CLP has used Mother Nature's Diaper Service to provide cloth diapers for our children ages infant through potty training age. According to the American Pediatrics Association, the average child uses over 8,000 diapers before potty training. We are proud to offer a service that positively benefits families financially and lessens waste.

CLP has an onsite cook who prepares meals for 150 students and staff three times a day. We conducted a food waste audit and sought quotes from local composting businesses, unfortunately, our budget does not allow for us to begin commercial composting this school year. Instead, we purchased a compost tumbler to pilot composting on a smaller scale until our budget allows for commercial composting.

CLP is located blocks from the Capitol in downtown Madison. Parking is limited and cost-prohibitive in our area. We promote alternative transportation such as walking, bus, and bike commuting to our families and staff as a healthy, environmentally friendly, and affordable options. We access public transportation for field trips, providing bus passes for teachers and students ages 5+.

CLP is looking to go solar. Our building and location were determined to be a poor fit for roof panels. Instead, our Board of Directors approved a budget for CLP to participate in Madison Gas and Electric's program SharedSolar. We are currently on the waitlist for the next available solar shares. When available, we will be able to initially purchase shares for up to 50% of our consumption.

CLP has used our limited land space to install seven gardens. They include sensory herb gardens, food gardens, and native gardens. Our sensory gardens are located in our outdoor classroom spaces where children have easy access to explore. Our food garden is located by our main entrance where families and community members are encouraged to take what they need for home use. Our cook also incorporates the produce our classrooms grow in our menu. We source plants for our food and herb gardens from starters from the Dane County Farmer's Market, seeds harvested from previous years, and donations from families. Students participate in trips to the market to meet the farmers and then help plant starters and seeds. Through the Dane County Land and Resources Department program called Free Native

Plants for Schools and Community Projects, we were able to increase our native gardens on the parkway outside our building. We have plans to add a monarch garden in the Spring of 2024.

### **Survey Responses:**

The school district abides by all the following laws & regulations governing Wisconsin schools, including:

- Provide safe and healthful facilities – Statute 121.02(1)(i)
- Testing for Lead and Asbestos – Statute 254
- Mercury Ban – 2009 Wisconsin Act 44
- Indoor Air Quality – 2009 Wisconsin Act 96

The following policies exist in the school or district:

- School board approved energy policy, sustainability policy or resolution, or similar.
- Well-publicized no-idling policy that applies to all motorized vehicles (including school buses and parent drop-off/pick-up).
- Food procurement from local and "environmentally preferable" sources.
- Providing healthy classroom snacks.

The following audits have been conducted:

- Energy

Energy efficiency or conservation measures that have been implemented include:

- LED lighting installation.

The conservation practices used at the school include:

- Thermostat temperature setback for unoccupied building times.
- Monitor energy costs by tracking monthly energy consumption and costs.

The school practices "ecologically-friendly" landscaping methods on school grounds, including:

- Do not irrigate OR Grey water or rain water used for irrigation.
- Water efficient, or native plant landscaping.

The school has green infrastructure on the grounds. (i.e.: rain garden, green roof, bioswale, porous pavement)

Additional evidence of reducing environmental impacts:

1. Established a Green Team of parents and staff members to increase our sustainability practices.

2. Increased our Farm-to-Table efforts with an expanded food garden and weekly trips to the Farmer's Market with our students.
3. Installed 2 more rain barrels, for a total of 4.
4. Applied to receive native plants from Dane County and expanded our native pollinator gardens.
5. Introduced a Grow at Home, Eat at School effort to connect family gardens and CLP's kitchen
6. Worked with Focus on Energy to evaluate our energy use, including thermostat reprogramming and LED lighting replacements to promote energy efficiency and reduce electric bills.
7. Use cloth diapers with our infants and toddlers until they are toilet trained.
8. Implemented hands-on sustainability projects for children.
9. Created a guide for CLP families about how to participate in sustainability efforts at home.
10. Hosted swaps to encourage reuse and establish a program for families to donate used toys, books, and clothes for CLP classroom use.
11. Promoted our status as a TerraCycle recycling hub, offering bins for parents to deposit used items from home.
12. Applied for solar shares through MG&E and are waitlisted for an upcoming project.
13. Received a Climate Champion Award from Dane County.

## **Pillar 2: Improving Health & Wellness**

CLP seeks to improve the health and wellness of our students and staff by using commercial cleaning and natural cleaning products, increasing ventilation and air filtration, chemical-free pest control, supporting nutrition, offering outdoor experiences, promoting sun safety, offering behavioral health services, partnering with community organizations and seeking input from child care specialists, health care, and public health professionals to inform health and safety policies.

CLP contracts with Coverall, a commercial cleaner, who uses EPA registered products that are built on CDC guidelines for school. Additionally, we use vinegar, baking soda, and food-grade sanitizer throughout the day on high-touch surfaces and materials. CLP has monthly pest control assessments and uses preventive measures such as peppermint oil and ant traps, as opposed to chemical insecticides. Classrooms have access to adult and child-sized sinks with steps for proper hand washing posted. CLP complies with the Department of Children and Families licensing requirements for cleaning protocols and health and safety maintenance.

CLP installed and maintains 8 rooftop GPS Auto-Cleaning Needlepoint Bipolar Ionization Systems to increase air quality, remove allergens, and protect against viruses. Additionally, in 2023 CLP received a grant from the City of Madison Child Care Department to install windows that open in each of our 12 classrooms and 2 offices to increase ventilation across

the building.

CLP provides a healthy and home-cooked breakfast, lunch, and snack. We participate in DPI's Community Nutrition Program, meeting required nutritional standards. We provide information to families about state-led food and nutrition programs like WIC and FoodShare. Creative Learning also promotes Farm-to-Table practices with our onsite food garden and with weekly trips to the Dane County Farmer's Market with our students. Our cook also shops at the Farmer's Market to supplement our menu with in-season fruits and vegetables. Our food gardens offer free produce to our community members for at-home use, as well as for school menu items.

CLP has two outdoor classrooms with play equipment, sensory experiences, and gardens. Each classroom has two scheduled times on the playground per day. Additionally, CLP's location in the heart of downtown Madison allows us to use the surrounding community as an extension of our campus. We prioritize outside time with regular outings to walkable parks, green spaces, and lakes. We use a play-based curriculum that lends itself to outdoor experiences.

CLP has a COVID Committee comprised of parents who work in health care and public health, administrative and BOD members, and staff. The committee informs our health and wellness policies to ensure the safety of all participants.

CLP promotes sun safety by providing a school sunscreen program. We ensure our students ages 6 months or older use sunscreen when the UV index is 5 or above. Children also wear sun protection hats.

CLP partners with the Rainbow Project, City of Madison Child Care Department, and UW Madison to support children's behavioral health. The Rainbow Project offers staff professional development, child and classroom observations, and facilitates classroom programming to support social and emotional development. The City of Madison's Child Care Department's Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant helps our staff with creating environments to support child and family well-being. As a UW Madison Affiliated Center, we are able to share informational resources and trainings that are free to low-cost with our families and staff.

CLP supports the health and well-being of staff members by offering health benefits including complimentary therapeutic services, and sick leave pay. We understand that working in a field with low pay and higher illness rates means teachers need quality and affordable health care, therefore, our organization contributes 80-90% toward premiums. We offer information about access to seasonal vaccines with bonuses for those who participate. Additionally, we participate in the Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network where teachers and staff have access to free on-demand behavioral health services.

CLP's BOD approved 4 additional school closure days for the 23-24 school year as a staff well-being initiative.

### **Survey Responses:**

Our school, or district, has a wellness committee.

Students and staff spend a minimum of 2 hours, beyond recess and organized sports, learning outside.

The types of outdoor education, physical activity, and nature-based recreation opportunities available for staff and/or students include: Our downtown location means access to city parks, gardens, and greenspaces. Our play-based curriculum places an emphasis on nature-based materials, experiences, and learning.

Our school implemented, or continued, improved environmental health practices and procedures to improve indoor air quality in the last 12 months:

- Ground contact classrooms tested for radon.
- Monthly inspection of school structures for mold, moisture, and water leakage.
- Installed energy recovery ventilation systems to bring in fresh air for use in the HVAC system.
- Improved indoor air quality to prevent exposure to asthma triggers.

Additional evidence of supporting health and wellness of students and staff:

1. We offer high-quality, well-balanced, home-cooked meals for students and staff.
2. Staff are provided health benefits, including free behavioral health consultations through our shared services network.
3. We partner with Rainbow Project, as a benefit of city accreditation, to access classroom, family, and teacher support with behavioral health.
4. We utilize support from the infant mental health specialist from the City of Madison.
5. We offer multiple gross motor spaces both indoors and out for use throughout the day.
6. Approved 5 extra school closure days for staff professional development and self-care.

### **Pillar 3: Increasing Environmental Literacy**

At CLP we believe environmental stewardship begins in childhood. We provide environmental and sustainability education and experiences through our curriculum and project-based, learning, partnerships with community organizations, parent outreach, clubs, and field trips.

CLP uses the HighScope Approach. At the center of this approach is active learning which



lends itself to a curriculum that explores environmental and sustainability education. HighScope's curriculum includes standards in STEM and understanding the natural and physical world. Children use a hands-on learning approach with natural materials, and explore science and nature concepts. Teachers use upcycled materials for open-ended projects.

CLP is helping educate other early learning centers by participating this Fall in an educational video series, ECE Gardening Video Project, sponsored by the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association and Healthy Early. The videos highlighted seed-saving and CLP's Farm-to-School efforts.

CLP is expanding on our environmental work with two clubs. In 2022 CLP established a Green Team to prioritize and implement green goals. One of the goals is parent outreach with Green newsletters that include information about school initiatives and resources for families who are interested in learning more about sustainability at home. The second club is a garden club. The garden club is comprised of teachers and staff who create garden plans, maintain the gardens, work with teaching teams to create gardening lessons, and involve children in the growing cycle. Teachers weave growing cycle themes into the curriculum with books about gardening, art activities, and hands-on growing experiences. This winter our classrooms upcycled plastic milk jugs to sow seeds outdoors in mini greenhouses. In the Spring we will use these starters for food our gardens. We also partnered with a local farmer to incubate and hatch chicken eggs. The incubator is located in one of our three-year-old classrooms. The children created a calendar with visuals for an approximate hatching date. They are exploring books and materials to support this learning. Once the eggs hatch, families will have the opportunity to adopt the chickens to continue their learning at home.

CLP takes advantage of our downtown location to maximize field trip opportunities. Our children, ages infant through school age, are fortunate to attend weekly Farmer's Markets, community gardens, and the Madison Children's Museum's rooftop garden and animal habitats.

### **Survey Responses:**

Our school has a green team or equivalent. The children are ages 0-5 years old and participate in green activities. Our Green Team is made up of parents and staff members.

Staff (teaching or non-teaching) have participated in professional development or training related to green & healthy concepts: Required health and safety PD including CPR, AED, AHT, SBS. Additional trainings at WECA and UW Whitewater conferences focused on behavioral health and nature-based learning. Resources and materials are used to develop a green curriculum that supports project-based learning.

Green and healthy concepts are included in the curriculum at every grade level: Children learn about concepts like recycling, sustainability, and conservation through children's books, activities, and observation of adult practices.

Students and staff utilize the school building and outdoor spaces as extensions of classroom learning.

Types of areas available for outdoor learning include:

- Food, herb, or vegetable garden
- Habitat, pollinator, or native plants garden space
- Outdoor classroom

Students participate in farm-to-school programming.

Staff and students connected to Building or outdoor spaces upgrades, renovations, or new construction in the following ways: Children were involved in the expansion of our food and pollinator gardens.

Our school provides regular communication to staff, students, and families about green & healthy practices and accomplishments: Through newsletter updates.

**Additional evidence for increasing environmental literacy:**

Our Green Team sends communication to families with opportunities for them to get involved in our sustainability efforts as well as including resources for families to use at home.

**Future plans and goals related to school sustainability:**

1. Investigate commercial composting programs with local companies
2. Create a handbook for CLP families about how to participate in Green Team efforts, which could include Zoom presentations with additional information about sustainability at home.
3. Investigate community solar purchases with MGE, potentially investing in a smaller share to start and increasing as the total energy footprint is better established.
4. Look into ideas for water conservation