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

Official School Name: Mill Hill Elementary School
(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.

Kevin Chase
Digitally signed by Kevin Chase
Date: 2023.02.03 15:43:21 -06'00'
Date: 2/3/23
(Principal’s Signature)

Name of Superintendent: Mr. Michael J. Testani
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in official records)
Fairfield Public Schools

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

Michael J Testani  
Digitally signed by Michael J Testani  
Date: 2023.02.07 15:42:36 -05'00'  
(Superintendent’s Signature)

Date: 02/07/2023

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: CT Outdoor and Environmental Education Association (COEEA)

Name of Nominating Authority: Abby Peklo  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, 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.

Abby Peklo  
Digitally signed by Abby Peklo  
Date: 2023.02.14 12:39:14 -05'00'  
(Nominating Authority’s Signature)

Date: 02/14/23

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: December 31, 2023

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: An Overview of Our Work Encompassing All Three Pillars:

Mill Hill Elementary School, located in Fairfield, Connecticut, formed its Green Team in 2019, when we became a CT Green LEAF School. Completing the rigorous Self-Assessment as part of our CT Green LEAF Schools application gave us the opportunity to consider not only what we had accomplished in this arena, but also the many ways that we could further reduce our environmental impacts and costs. Our school Green Team is comprised of the school’s principal, Elementary Program Facilitator, STEAM teacher, student ambassadors, school custodian, parents, and a few community volunteers. As a team, we strategized and prioritized our tasks and goals. Our first three initiatives included Food Recovery, Trex Plastic Bag Recycling, and Carton Recycling. Since its inception, our Green Team has been actively engaged with the greater community to increase the impact of our efforts to go greener. Our first collaboration was with the Sustainable Fairfield Task Force (SFTF). Through this school-community partnership, in June 2022, we established a Coalition of Fairfield Public Schools (FPS) We have a unified logo and mission statement that is widely visible throughout both schools and community. This gives credence to this important initiative and serves as a visible, public reminder of our goals and objectives.

The Coalition includes Green Team members from each school in the district as well as from SFTF to ensure ongoing and sustainable townwide collaboration. As part of our district-wide commitment to reducing environmental impacts and costs, every school is working towards becoming a CT Green LEAF School. Mill Hill is proud to serve as both leader and mentor in this larger effort. As a Coalition, and as part of our CT Green LEAF work, schools and community are collaborating to drive district-wide green initiatives and share best practices to reduce environmental impact and costs. One major district-wide milestone this year was the launch of a cafeteria composting pilot program. Mill Hill will
fully implement its cafeteria composting program in August. The Coalition also helped each school to create an Instagram page to share Green successes, events, and sustainability tips. Mill Hill’s Instagram page is very active and well used (@MillHillGoesGreen). Our school also regularly shares sustainability tips and resources in the school’s weekly Mill Hill PTA newsletter.

Pillar 1: Reduce Environmental Impact and Costs

Mill Hill Elementary School’s first major initiative as a CT Green LEAF school was the implementation of the schoolwide Trex Plastic Bag and Film Recycling Program (Trex). Through this program we are raising awareness of the critical need to recycle plastic bags and keep plastic bags out of trash and single stream recycle bins. Our school’s Trex Program includes a community-wide awareness campaign, thereby further reducing environmental impact beyond school walls. At school, students, families, teachers, and other school staff are reminded and encouraged to drop off clean, residue-free plastic bags and film at one of the three Trex bins strategically located throughout the school building. The custodians monitor the bins and collect and store the filled bags in a closet. At the end of each month, our 5th grade ambassadors weigh and document results of that month’s collection. This action is powerful because it demonstrates to Curriculum Supervisors that Sustainability Education supports academic standards. And it helps bridge the critical step of environmental awareness to action that will help reduce environmental impacts and costs. This monthly collection is then placed in the lobby where a parent volunteer picks it up and drops it off at our town’s Whole Foods Grocery Store for further processing. The Trex program has been quite popular, and Mill Hill entered into a friendly competition with other schools in the district. The competition cycle goes from National Recycling Day to Earth Day. However, we do
Mill Hill has made tremendous strides to reduce environmental impact and costs within our school lunch program. In 2019, we wrote and received a grant from RecycleCT in 2019 to purchase refrigerators and a Milk Carton Recycling station. This enabled us to quickly implement a Food Recovery Program. Undistributed cafeteria food – primarily milk, cheese sticks, apples, and bananas – were collected during each lunch wave, safely stored in the refrigerators, and donated to a local food pantry at the end of each week. We launched our Cafeteria Milk Carton Recycling Program in Fall 2021. We attended webinars facilitated by CT Green LEAF Schools to learn how to implement and manage this. We partnered with Carton Council to purchase a Recycling Station and train our students. Rather than continue to have empty milk cartons go into single stream recycling, our FPS Greeen Team is working with the district to identify a hauler to take empty milk cartons to Kelly Green Products, a local company that recycles milk cartons to make commercial building materials. As a result of our efforts to reduce environmental impact and costs in the cafeteria, the waste stream here is currently limited to cafeteria food packaging and food waste. The food waste will be further reduced next year when the district implements the next phase of the cafeteria composting pilot at Mill Hill. We have created a school-wide culture of eliminating single use disposable water bottles. It is the norm for students to bring reusable bottles from home. The school has installed an easily accessible water bottle refill station.
The school provides an attractive and youth-friendly receptacle to make sorting lunch trash fun. Teachers and cafeteria staff assist students to ensure proper disposal of assorted lunch trash.

In further efforts to reduce waste, we continually look for opportunities to raise awareness around unnecessary waste production and identify alternative green solutions, such as reusing and upcycling. This past fall, Mill Hill initiated multiple strategies to celebrate the season while educating our community about reducing environmental impacts and costs. In October, we held our first Annual Halloween Costume Exchange. Students were encouraged to drop off their gently used Halloween costumes and gear, and we set up an afterschool event for families to come and select “new” costumes as a fun and effective way to re-use to reduce waste. In late fall, the FPS Green Team, in collaboration with SFTF, implemented a town-wide Pumpkin Composting Program, utilizing Fairfield Public Schools as drop-off sites.

The schools participated in a friendly Pumpkin Composting Collection Competition to encourage participation, and Mill Hill took second place! Collectively, we diverted nearly 6 tons of food waste from the landfill.
We wrapped up our Fall Season by setting up a Rubicon Trick or Trash program. We placed a special Halloween Candy wrapper recycling bin at school for a candy wrapper collection, which was sent off for recycling.

Throughout the year, we implement several other initiatives to support a school culture of reducing environmental impacts and costs. Every student and teacher at Mill Hill knows about our popular campaign to keep crayons and Legos out of the waste stream. We have collection bins for old and broken crayons and Legos. At the end of each school year, we send the crayons to The Crayon Initiative that remanufactures old crayons into new crayons that are donated to children’s hospitals. Legos are collected for the Lego RePlay program that cleans and sorts the unwanted Lego pieces and donates them to organizations serving children in need.

The Town of Fairfield recently started a new food waste drop-off program. Food waste that is placed in a BPI-certified compostable bag can be dropped off at the Town Transfer Station at no charge. The Town contracts with Curbside Compost, who collects the material and processes it into fresh compost. Mill Hill has leveraged this program to embed composting into school events. The school’s Multicultural Team recently celebrated Winter Solstice Around the World by offering foods from different countries. The Green Team pitched in and provided BPI-certified compostable plates and utensils as well as a composting station. At the end of the event, Green Team volunteers collected the bins and dropped them off the at the town’s transfer station. Most recently, we were pleased to install a composting station in the Teachers’ Lounge. In collaboration with school custodians, we set up 2 tabletop bins, lined with BPI-certified compostable bags and a 5-gallon bucket. Our custodians provide oversight and monitoring, ensuring that the bags are placed in the sealed 5-gallon bucket at the end of each day. At the end of the week, or sooner if needed, a Green Team parent volunteer picks up the 5-gallon bucket, replaces it with a new one, and drops it off at the town’s transfer station. The purpose of this initiative is to engage and educate teachers and other staff about the importance of diverting food scraps from landfills.

We are also proud of the Mill Hill informal policy that all school events include a collaboration with the Green Team to promote waste reduction at school events. The PTA encourages low waste decorations that are re-usable or recyclable. We have invested PTA funds to purchase sustainable and reusable items, such as cloth tablecloths to avoid single use plastic tablecloths. We encourage students to make eco-friendly decorations, such as scrap paper chains rather than purchasing
balloons. By encouraging behavioral changes among students and parents, Mill Hill extends the environment impact beyond classroom walls.

As of 2022, Mill Hill is in compliance with all required local, state, and federal environmental and testing reports. The school uses acceptable Green Cleaning products, which are listed on the FPS website. Pesticides are not used on school grounds. The entire school was renovated two years ago, with a critical eye towards Green and Sustainable practices. The school now includes solar panels and an upgraded HVAC system that utilizes MERV 13 filters to drive optimal air quality. The school has low flush toilets and auto-shut lighting. Mill Hill ensures minimizing emissions from idling vehicles, and school administration recognizes that exhaust is not only environmentally damaging, but it can aggravate asthma, allergies, and cardiovascular disease. We have trained school bus drivers to turn off their engines while waiting to load and unload students at school. The Green Team is actively engaged in the school’s “No-Idling Awareness campaign,” collaborating with the Department of Environmental Medicine at Mt. Sinai to identify opportunities to drive behavior change and eliminate unnecessary idling.

**Pillar 2: Improving Health and Wellness of Students and Staff**

Mill Hill continues to develop a school-wide culture that values both the physical and mental health and wellness of its school community. To support improving health and wellness, Mill Hill maintains a full-time school nurse, social worker, and school psychologist. Students have access to physical and mental health services any time, any day that they are at school. Over the last several years, the school and its Green Team have implemented different initiatives to encourage this. Most prominently, the school’s Outdoor Ecological Learning Environment (OELE) serves as a natural place of respite for students, teachers, and other school staff. Individuals can and do utilize this special space to reconnect with nature throughout the day, in all seasons. OELE includes a school garden, and students can volunteer to tend the garden as a school-sanctioned afterschool activity, supervised by a teacher advisor. Teachers often use OELE space to conduct classroom lessons outdoors.

Regarding Social Emotional Health, Mill Hill employs multiple levels of screening, instruction, and skill-building tools to support SEL (Social Emotional Learning). Students’ social, emotional,
and behavioral needs are assessed at the beginning of each school year through the administration of the DESSA Universal Screener, with a full DESSA intervention plan as needed. (*DESSA is used throughout the district.*) DESSA is a research-based nationally recognized model for SEL, designed by Aperture Education. The eight skills measured by the DESSA Screener can be readily implemented by teachers for students. These eight social and emotional skills include taking responsibility for one’s actions and working well with others. As a Green LEAF School, we use the measurements, guidance, strategies, and suggestions from DESSA to connect with nature-based and low environmental impact practices, such as allowing plenty of opportunity for fresh air, growing plants indoors, leisure and learning time outdoors, mindfulness, and yoga. Additionally, the DESSA guides *instruction*, utilizes common strengths-based language, and counters implicit bias. These critical skills are focused and aligned with the eight CASEL (*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*) Social and Emotional competencies. Skill competencies include Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Goal-Directed Behavior, Personal Responsibility, Decision Making, and Optimistic Thinking. The school intervenes with students in multiple ways, based on their scores, to ensure that all students have equitable access to improving their health and wellness.

Mill Hill’s *health curriculum* provides students with instruction from *Second Step*, a nationally recognized research-based holistic approach to SEL curriculum for K-5 students. The school also implements the *MindUp* curriculum, designed to help young students manage stress and build resiliency. Mill Hill teachers are encouraged to create and share extended MindUp lessons to further support students’ improving health and wellness.

In addition, and as required by the State of Connecticut, Mill Hill provides Tiered Interventions known as SRBI for students who are demonstrating social, emotional, and/or behavioral challenges that might not have been identified by DESSA or addressed through classroom instruction. The SRBI team meets regularly to make suggestions for classroom interventions and other next steps to support these students.

In recognition of the critical importance of improving mental health and wellness among students and staff, Mill Hill responds throughout each year to Social Emotional needs through other various initiatives. **SOAR** (safety, organization, achievement, and respect), a school-wide positive
reinforcement program, is promoted throughout each day via teacher language, visuals, and modeling positive behaviors. Quarterly SOAR Assemblies, facilitated by the school psychologist and social worker, are designed to reinforce a kind, caring community of learners and educators. There is a robust SOAR Ambassador Program, where grade five students serve as role models, student leaders, hallway monitors, bus buddies, tech crew leaders, and SOAR assembly presenters. The Green Team actively works with SOAR Ambassadors who take leadership responsibility as Recycling Assistants and Food Recovery Monitors.

Other efforts that address improving the health and wellness of students and staff include:

- The school psychologist creates a monthly staff support letter that she sends out with self-care tips and thoughtful messages to the entire staff. The staff has responded positively to this and has benefitted from learning new self-care strategies such as deep breathing techniques and different ways to look at problems.
- The school psychologist sends a monthly letter home to parents with similar information to help them implement self-care and support their children.
- The school social worker holds monthly parent meetings open to all parents on a variety of helpful topics, such as how to help your child cope with anxiety or how to help your child resolve conflicts.

The Mill Hill Pride Ticket Program is an initiative that encourages students and staff to submit an entry outlining a proud moment that they experienced themselves or witnessed in others. The Pride Tickets are submitted to the main office, and several are read over the intercom each morning to recognize student accomplishments, both big and small. The Pride Tickets are also posted on the Mill Hill Wall of Pride bulletin board in the cafeteria for all to see. The Pride Ticket Program is an important way for students and staff to improve their school culture of kindness, thoughtfulness, and respect for others – all effective and consistent ways tied to helping students and staff improve their health and wellness.

School Climate meetings are held monthly with PTA /parent leadership, administrators, school social worker and psychologist to drive and coordinate equity and inclusion efforts and community-building opportunities for all. School Climate leads to a variety of schoolwide SEL initiatives throughout each school year, intended to promote inclusion and kindness, ensure a
welcoming community, and celebrate diversity. These school-wide initiatives include, for example:

- SEL Day, held the day before Thanksgiving Weekend. Students can wear pajamas to school, participate in mixed-grade social learning activities, such as board games from home to encourage social interaction and a sense of community.

- Book Buddies reading program pairs older students with younger students to build a sense of connection across grade levels. This provides older students with a leadership role and helps build empathy and collaboration among students of different ages.

- Weekly rotating teacher-choice SEL instruction provided by the school social worker. Customized lesson plans, as requested, are delivered in different classrooms.

- December Daily Snowman Riddles are read over the intercom each morning, with answers read at the end of each day. Using humor as a power health and wellness tool, students and teachers enjoy spontaneous conversations trying to solve the daily riddle.

- In Honor of Black History Month and aligned with daily announcement outlining the accomplishments and milestones of black role models of the past and present, we celebrate a full month of Random Acts of Kindness. Each day during morning announcements, students are presented with an act of kindness challenge that they are encouraged to carry out throughout the day, such as holding the door for someone or saying hello to a new friend. In addition, students are provided with a kindness heart (a pink paper heart) to write about an act of kindness that they have performed. The kindness hearts are hung in hallways throughout the month. The Green Team works with the PTA to re-purpose the pink paper hearts as decorations for the student-parent Sweetheart Dance.

Health and Wellness services are also offered to school staff throughout the year. Our supportive administration ensures that staff have access to the school nurse, Central Office staff, and Pupil Personnel Staff (school social worker and school psychologist) whenever needed. The administration engages teachers and other staff in regular team building activities, such as a staff book club, monthly breakfasts sponsored by different teams or grade levels, and monthly after school get togethers. Teacher well-being was considered when the daily school schedule was created. Teachers have a consistent preparation period, providing grade-level partners with daily team time and collegial support. Teachers can also access support from science, math, and English
Language Arts interventionists, both weekly as structured build-in time as on an as-needed basis. Mill Hill PTA actively supports staff well-being in many ways. The PTA provides staff breakfasts, lunches, and snacks intermittently throughout the school year, which serve as mood boosters and demonstrations of appreciation. In the spirit of sustainability, the PTA has installed a coffee machine that uses compostable materials in the teacher’s lounge and maintains the compost bin for the teachers. The PTA has also organized a district-wide staff kickball league. Each school has its own kickball teams, with after school games scheduled throughout the spring.

**Pillar 3: Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education**

Mill Hill Elementary School is located along the Long Island Sound between Mill River and Sasco Brook. Our strategic natural location with its diverse and fragile ecosystem warrants elevating environmental and water literacy throughout our schools and community. In 2021, with grant support from the Connecticut Outdoor & Environmental Education Association (COEEA), The Pollination Project, and Sustainable CT, we created the **Outdoor Ecological Learning Environment** (OELE), an ecologically restorative space that includes an outdoor classroom with natural tree stump seating, native plant garden, organic vegetable garden, and thriving bird habitat. We have registered this natural space as an **Aspetuck Land Trust Green Corridor Partner** and it is a **Pollinator Pathway** designation, with an abundance of milkweed and other diverse pollinator-friendly native plants.
A toad can be found near the berry bushes. We planted several edible berry bushes to attract birds and other wildlife.

Teachers enjoy using OELE as an outdoor learning lab to support experiential learning about the natural environment. The school’s STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) teacher, for example, utilizes this space for her curricular unit on pollinators. She teaches winter sowing to first graders. Students create mini greenhouses for growing milkweed using upcycled milk jugs. Once the seedlings are mature enough, students transplant the milkweed to our native plant garden.

5th grade students go outside during class to observe the Native Plant Garden.
**Sustainability** is integrated throughout school curriculum and is cross-curricular. OELE serves as a valuable natural learning lab to teach sustainability topics within different academic areas. In science, second and fourth graders learn about soil erosion and how wind and water can change the shape of the earth’s surface. The fifth-grade science class creates and maintains terrariums using natural materials found school grounds, and they study the natural elements that support these mini ecosystems. Indoor classroom learning extends to art and math. The art teacher was inspired after attending a Green LEAF workshop on *Art through Recycling* and now integrates recycling into her curriculum and classroom activities. In art class, students also create plastic wrap body sculptures, egg carton alligators, and melted crayon collages. In math, for instance, fifth-grade students weigh the Trex plastic bags each month, documenting the data and assessing trends and outcomes of the program. In STEM class, Environmental and Sustainability Education is incorporated into different student competitions and contests throughout the year, including Invention Convention, Odyssey of the Mind, and Reflections.

Environmental and Sustainability Education extends to informal learning opportunities whenever the Outdoor Classroom serves as a meeting space for many afterschool events. It is a popular gathering spot for Green Team and PTA meetings. Mill Hill’s Multicultural Team recently celebrated the Indian Holiday of Holi, and they used the outdoor learning space for cross cultural celebrations.

3rd graders enjoy a warm sunny day learning in the Outdoor Classroom.
Mill Hill has an **organic vegetable garden** that is enjoyed by many and cared for by student, teacher, and parent volunteers. Although the vegetable garden endured a tough summer season last year due to drought and hungry critters, students persevered and prepped the garden this fall by planting garlic and laying down straw. Our vegetable garden is managed by the Afterschool Enrichment Gardening Class. It is led by one of our para educators, who is an active Green Team member and permaculture expert. Over the summer when school is not in session, the garden is managed and cared for by the school’s Green Team, including parent volunteers and students.

More opportunities for informal learning include the **Art and Nature** afterschool enrichment class. In Art and Nature, students explore topics in sustainability through art-based projects that use a variety of natural mediums and craft materials. For example, participants create native seed bombs and plant herb seeds indoors to transplant in late spring in the school **herb garden**.

Students plant garlic in the fall and learn how to protect them for the long, cold New England winter.