

# ILLINOIS GREEN RIBBON SCHOOLS APPLICATION



## Background

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Thank you for your interest in completing the Illinois State Board of Education's application for nomination to U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS) or District Sustainability Award. ED-GRS recognizes schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions taking a comprehensive approach to sustainability, incorporating environmental learning with improving environmental and health impacts.

Becoming a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School, District Sustainability Awardee, or Postsecondary Sustainability Awardee is a multi-step process. The first step is to complete and submit this form to be selected as a nominee by your state education agency or equivalent.

Once selected as a nominee by your state education authorities, the second step of the process requires signatures certifying compliance with all applicable civil rights, Federal Student Aid, health, safety, and environmental statutory and regulatory requirements. You may view the certifications that you will be asked to make in the Nominee Presentation Forms [here](#).

Finally, your nomination materials, including the signed Nominee Presentation Form, documentation of progress in all areas of the award, and several photographs, will be sent to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). ED notifies national selectees in the spring, inviting them to send representatives to attend a ceremony in Washington, D.C. in the fall. Selection is based on documentation of the nominee's progress in the three ED-GRS Pillars:

Pillar I: Reducing environmental impact and costs;

Pillar II: Improving the health and wellness of students and staff; and

Pillar III: Offering effective environmental and sustainability education.

Schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions demonstrating progress in every area will receive highest scores. It may help to assemble a team with expertise across these areas to complete the application. You may also wish to consult [Green Strides](#) for programs related to each Pillar.

Please reach out to [greenribbon@isbe.net](mailto:greenribbon@isbe.net) if you have any questions or need an accommodation to complete this application.

***Applications may not exceed 18 pages in length.***

***Applications are due by 5:00 PM on December 20, 2024.***

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## School/District Applicant Information

1. School Name (or District Name if submitting a district nomination):  
Kildeer Countryside School District 96  
  
Street Address: 1050 Ivy Hall Lane  
City: Buffalo Grove; County: Lake  
Zip: 60089  
District Name/Number: Kildeer Countryside School District 96
2. School or District Website: <https://www.kcsd96.org/>
3. Principal Name: Katie Sheridan, Superintendent  
Principal Email Address: [ksheridan@kcsd96.org](mailto:ksheridan@kcsd96.org)  
Phone Number: 847-459-4260
4. Lead Applicant Name (if different): Jocelyn McGillian  
Lead Applicant Email: [jmcgillian@kcsd96.org](mailto:jmcgillian@kcsd96.org)  
Phone Number: 847-459-4260
5. Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/kcsd96>  
Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/kcsd96>  
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kcsd96>  
X: <https://x.com/KCSD96>

<b>Level</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Early Learning Center <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary (PK - 5 or 6) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> K - 8 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle (6 - 8 or 9) <input type="checkbox"/> High (9 or 10 - 12) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School District	<b>School Type</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private/Independent <input type="checkbox"/> Charter <input type="checkbox"/> Magnet	<b>How would you describe your school?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input type="checkbox"/> Rural	<b>Is your school in one of the largest 50 districts in the nation?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
			<b>Total Enrolled: 3,542</b>
<b>Does your school serve 40% or more students from disadvantaged households?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<b>% receiving FRPL: 7.3%</b> <b>% limited English proficient: 21.8%</b> <b>Other measures:</b> <a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>		<b>Graduation rate: 100%</b> <b>Attendance rate: 94.5%</b>

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## School Summary and Highlights:

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Use 1 to 2 pages to **provide a summary narrative** describing your school's efforts to reduce environmental impact and costs; improve student and staff health and wellness; and provide effective environmental and sustainability education. This overarching summary should highlight the best of your work in every ED-GRS Pillar and Element.

You can view examples of summary narratives in past [Highlights Reports](#). The summary that you submit should be what you would like to see appear in a future Highlights Report, if your institution is selected. Be sure to include concrete sustainability achievements, supporting data, unique partnerships, program participation, awards, and certifications. It may be helpful to pull from your application materials to write the summary.

Kildeer Countryside School District 96 has taken significant strides to reduce environmental impact and operational costs, enhance student and staff health and wellness, and integrate sustainability into its vision. Through innovative practices and strong community partnerships, the district has established itself as a leader in sustainability across the region, and we believe, across the country. It's not just what we do. It's who we are.

Nature and the environment are deeply ingrained in the identity and branding of KCSD96. Our seven schools are nestled within the picturesque and natural landscapes of Lake County, Illinois, renowned for its wetlands and stunning parks. Some of our schools are even situated adjacent to these wetlands, which are protected natural areas. Sometimes, it's hard to believe that we're less than 30 miles away from the sprawling metropolis of Chicago. One of the first things that greets our families is our district logo—reflecting our commitment to nature, incorporating various shades of green and brown and creatively using two leaves to form the number "96." Our district name, and even one of our schools, are named after the native bird called a Kildeer. Our schools are also named after our beautiful native landscapes, including Willow Grove, Country Meadows, Prairie, Ivy Hall, Kildeer, Twin Groves, and Woodlawn.



The district has made a bold commitment to renewable energy, particularly through its solar energy initiatives. Back in 2016, the KCSD96 Board of Education decided to pursue solar panels, reflecting a long-term investment in clean energy that will continue to benefit our community in the coming years. Those panels were energized in 2020. The Woodlawn and Country Meadows campuses stand as highlights of this effort, with 80-85% of their energy needs met through on-site solar generation. Across the district, solar power supplies approximately 25-30% of total energy consumption, with additional energy procured from renewable sources through cooperative agreements.

The solar project required significant perseverance and innovation, including 30+ meetings over four years to secure village approval and finalize plans. This is also a testament to our strong community partnerships. The district utilizes its [solar tracking dashboard](#) to monitor energy production and consumption, showcasing real-time data on energy savings and environmental impact. Students, staff, families, and our greater community can receive real-time information about our district's commitment to renewable energy, energy efficiency, and the role of solar power in combating climate change.

The solar panels have also fostered cross-curricular learning opportunities. For instance, middle school students observe and analyze solar energy data to understand the practical applications of clean energy, while art classes utilize the panels as a canvas for creative projects featuring local flora and fauna. This integration of sustainability into both STEM and the arts highlights KCSD96's innovative approach to environmental education.

KCSD96 has made significant strides in reducing its carbon footprint and operational costs, positioning itself as a leader in environmental stewardship. Beyond its solar field, the district is committed to fostering a healthy and sustainable environment both indoors and outdoors through a variety of initiatives.

To improve energy efficiency, KCSD96 has upgraded heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), and lighting systems throughout the district with high-efficiency models, including LED lighting. Automated systems, such as motion-sensitive lights and toilet flushers, further optimize energy and water usage by minimizing waste. Additionally,

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the district participates in the Constellation Energy Cooperative, securing competitive energy rates and achieving significant cost savings.

Water conservation is another key focus for the district. Toilets have been updated to reduce water usage from 5 gallons per flush to 2.5 gallons. KCSD96 also avoids irrigation altogether, relying instead on native plants and trees that are well-adapted to the region's climate and natural rainfall patterns.

The district employs eco-friendly practices by refraining from the use of harmful pesticides and implementing natural methods to reduce weeds and the need for fertilizers, such as cutting grass to longer lengths. Recycling is also a priority, with efforts focused on the safe and responsible disposal of paper, light bulb and battery materials. Since the early 2000s, KCSD96 has further demonstrated its commitment to sustainability by adopting "paperless" communication practices across teachers, principals, and district operations.

Our environmentally-conscious practices don't stop there. To support wellness, students enjoy daily physical education classes and outdoor recess (weather permitting), promoting fitness, teamwork, and unstructured play. State-of-the-art fitness centers at middle schools, coupled with programs like heart rate monitoring and nutrition education, help students build lifelong healthy habits. Additionally, we partner with a food service provider for school meals to not only nourish the body, but also include eco-friendly packaging with the goal of minimizing food waste. For staff, wellness programs encourage physical and mental well-being, creating a healthier school community overall.

KCSD96 weaves sustainability into its curriculum at all grade levels. Students engage in outdoor learning through dedicated spaces like Prairie School's outdoor classroom and visits to the district's solar field, where they learn about renewable energy firsthand. These hands-on learning experiences cultivate environmental literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, preparing students to address real-world sustainability challenges. The district has also made a significant push in its STEM-curriculum efforts, and opened its new Collaboratory learning space at Twin Groves Middle School in the fall of 2024. This space offers a unique area for students to engage in STEM-related projects in its makerspace, noisy lab, and recording studios. So far this year, students have designed efficient bridges and created organic art projects using this area.

Through its comprehensive efforts, KCSD96 not only reduces its environmental footprint but also inspires students and staff to embrace sustainability, health, and wellness as core values. By preparing responsible global citizens, KCSD96 is creating a greener, healthier future for its community.

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## Pillar I: Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs

### A. Energy

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1. **Do you track energy use in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager®, or another way in your district?**

☒ Yes ☐ No

2. **If so, how have you tracked your resource usage, for how long, and how has your usage dropped over that time? (Data or graphs can be submitted as a separate supportive document if desired.)** KCSD96 is a proud member of the Constellation Energy Co-op, a member-owned cooperative that offers electricity and energy services with a strong emphasis on renewable energy solutions. Through our participation in this cooperative, we gain access to decision-making processes, shared energy resources, and the benefits of lower rates and sustainability initiatives. Constellation also provides detailed energy usage reports to the district, helping us monitor our consumption.

In addition, our Country Meadows/Woodlawn campus in Long Grove is home to the District's solar array powered by 3,068 ground-mounted solar panels. A [publicly accessible dashboard](#) tracks and showcases the clean, renewable energy generated and its positive environmental impact. Beyond these initiatives, District 96

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has invested in high-efficiency systems, such as motion-sensored lighting, automated TVs, and LED fixtures in each school, further optimizing energy use and reducing the need for intensive monitoring.

3. **Please describe the strategies you have implemented or planned to reduce your energy consumption.** For the past 15 years, District 96 has prioritized significant high-efficiency upgrades across all district buildings, integrating these improvements with essential maintenance and renovations to maximize cost-effectiveness. These initiatives encompass a range of improvements, including the installation of high-efficiency HVAC systems, energy-saving LED lighting upgrades (both indoors and in parking lots), automation of electronic systems, and comprehensive upgrades to windows and doors across all buildings.

In 2016, District 96's Board of Education committed to the vision of bringing solar power to the district, and after years of persistence and hard work, that vision was realized nearly four years later. Today, the solar panels supply 92% of the electrical demand at the Country Meadows/Woodlawn Campus. Beyond demonstrating energy stewardship and reducing carbon emissions, the solar array offers financial benefits by locking in energy rates, aiding in accurate financial planning, and increasing operational funds. Over the next 16 years, the \$3.7 million investment in the system will fully pay for itself.

In 2020, District 96 joined the NRG Energy Reduction Program, an initiative designed to help organizations lower energy consumption and costs through the implementation of energy-saving technologies. Additionally, the District has made a strong commitment to incorporating high-efficiency systems in all its buildings, further enhancing sustainability and cost savings.

4. **What percentage of your school's energy is obtained from:**

- a. **On-site renewable energy generation:** Approximately 28% of the district's total energy usage is generated by the district's solar array, which provides 92% of the energy needed for Country Meadows Elementary School and Woodlawn Middle School in Long Grove.  
**Type:** Solar
- b. **Purchased renewable energy:** Approximately 72% of the district's total energy usage from renewable energy purchased from Comed through the Constellation Energy Co-op.  
**Type:** Energy Co-op
- c. **Participation in an energy cooperative, DOE Wind for Schools or other school energy program:** KCSD96 is a proud member of the Constellation Energy Co-op, a member-owned cooperative that offers electricity and energy services with a strong emphasis on renewable energy solutions from which we derive our remaining energy needs.

5. **In what year was your school originally built?** District 96 has a total of 7 (seven) school buildings and 1 (one) administrative building, built in the following years:

Willow Grove Early Learning Center: 1969  
Prairie Elementary School: 1979  
Kildeer Countryside Elementary School: 1948  
Ivy Hall Elementary School: 1972  
Country Meadows Elementary School: 1999  
Twin Groves Middle School: 1992  
Woodlawn Middle School: 1999  
Willard Administrative Center: 1989

While the buildings in KCSD96 were constructed over a span of decades, the district takes pride in ensuring that all systems are high-efficiency. Extensive thought and planning have gone into each renovation or addition, with a strong focus on integrating sustainability initiatives that enhance both environmental responsibility and cost-effectiveness.

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6. **What is the total building area of your school?** The district's approximate footprint is 600,000 square feet which spans 7 school buildings and one administrative building.
7. **Please describe any new construction or major renovations at your school in the past ten years, including the date, and the percentage of area renovated. Describe how you achieved green building or similar standards and any certifications earned.** Over the past two decades, KCSD96 has dedicated considerable resources to updating and renovating its school facilities to address evolving needs and accommodate growing enrollment. These efforts have included expanding classroom spaces, upgrading HVAC systems to more energy-efficient models, transitioning to LED lighting for enhanced energy savings, implementing advanced safety features, and more. These projects demonstrate the district's commitment to maintaining modern, efficient, and safe learning environments that meet the needs of its students and staff. The most notable projects are:
- Solar array – In the fall of 2020, District 96 completed a solar energy project on the shared campus of Woodlawn Middle School and Country Meadows Elementary School. The project features a fully energized solar array consisting of 3,068 ground-mounted solar panels spread across three acres. This solar array generates enough energy to meet 92% of the campus's electrical demand and contributes to approximately 28% of the district's total electricity costs. A unique aspect of the project is the incorporation of student artwork: 100 of the solar panels are adorned with images of Illinois prairie wildlife, created by elementary and middle school students. This integration highlights the district's commitment to sustainability while fostering student engagement and creativity.
  - Twin Groves Collaboratory – This past fall, the district unveiled the Collaboratory at Twin Groves Middle School, a cutting-edge, multi-functional space designed to encourage creativity, collaboration, and hands-on learning. The Collaboratory includes a Makerspace for innovative projects, a Noisy Lab equipped with advanced tools like 3D printers for design and fabrication, and a state-of-the-art Sound and Video Lab for audio and video production. This modern facility reflects the district's dedication to fostering 21st-century skills and providing students with access to advanced resources and technologies. Construction will begin this summer at Woodlawn Middle School for a similar Collaboratory and will be open for student learning in the Fall of 2025.
8. **Please describe your sustainability policy and practice for new or renovated construction materials and building maintenance.** In addition to adhering to all relevant policies, KCSD96 is committed to exceeding compliance with EPA, state, and village ordinances. The district prioritizes working with vendors who share its dedication to sustainability and green practices. For instance, the district partners with Gilbane Building Company on most construction projects due to their strong commitment to waste reduction, pollution prevention, recycling, using repurposed materials, and enhancing energy efficiency to minimize their carbon footprint. Furthermore, the district regularly consults with experts and sustainability professionals to ensure its environmental impact is as positive as possible.
- KCSD96 follows many policies that pertain to the environment and sustainability. The two policies listed below are policies followed most closely when working with renovated construction materials and building maintenance:
- [4:150 Facility Management and Building Programs](#): Standards for managing buildings and grounds, standards for Green Cleaning, and standards for facility construction and building programs
- [4:160 Environmental Quality of Buildings and Grounds](#): Protecting the safety of District personnel, students, and visitors on District premises from risks associated with hazardous materials and the environmental quality of the District's buildings and grounds.

## B. Water and Grounds

9. **Can you demonstrate a reduction in your school's total water consumption from an initial baseline or describe your best practices to limit water usage? For example, calculate your change in water usage (in gallons per occupant) over a specified period of time, or a**

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**reduction in water used for irrigation.** KCSD96 is dedicated to high-efficiency water usage across its buildings, implementing measures such as retrofitting sinks with aerators, automating faucets and toilet flushers, and replacing all toilets with low-flow models that use only 2.5 gallons per flush, down from 5 gallons. Furthermore, each district building relies on high-efficiency water heaters helping to reduce water usage and reducing energy consumption.

In addition, the district collaborates closely with its contracted landscaping company to minimize water usage, relying solely on natural rainfall and the local climate to meet all landscaping needs, effectively eliminating the need for irrigation.

**10. What percentage of your landscaping is considered water-efficient and/or dedicated to ecological or instructional use? Describe the kinds of plants used and locations:**

As referenced above, 100% of KCSD96's landscaping is considered water-efficient, as the district has eliminated the need for irrigation. Additionally, the district prioritizes the use of self-sustaining plants that minimize water usage, reduce energy consumption, promote soil health, and help prevent pollution. By selecting native and drought-tolerant plants, the district enhances the resilience of its landscapes, ensuring they remain low-maintenance while contributing to overall water conservation efforts.

The district's property also includes two wetlands, which are carefully protected through the expertise of a contracted civil engineer. One of these wetlands is located on the Prairie Elementary School campus, which houses an outdoor classroom that enhances students' environmental learning and connection to nature.

**11. Describe the water sources used for irrigation, including any cisterns or rain barrels.** As mentioned earlier, KCSD96 has successfully eliminated the need for irrigation. Additionally, the district uses Yellowstone Landscaping which offers various environmentally conscious services, such as drought-tolerant plantings, organic solutions, and efficient water management systems.

**12. Describe any efforts to reduce stormwater runoff (e.g., rain gardens) and/or reduce impermeable surfaces.** KCSD96 collaborates closely with the communities it serves—Kildeer, Long Grove, Buffalo Grove, Lake Zurich, Hawthorn Woods, and Vernon Hills—and their local leaders to ensure full compliance with all stormwater management practices. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the district partners with a contracted civil engineer to maintain its wetlands, which are vital for managing and reducing stormwater runoff. These wetlands act as natural buffers, mitigating flooding, enhancing water quality, and supporting local ecosystems.

## C. Waste and Chemicals Management

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**13. Describe the strategies you use to divert solid waste (e.g., trash, cafeteria waste, paper, or landscape waste) from landfills due to reduction, recycling and/or composting. Complete the calculations below or provide reduction rates:** KCSD96 implements the following policy pertaining to resource conservation:

[4:70 Resource Conservation](#): Management of a program of energy and resource conservation for the District.

The district is committed to sustainability and recycling, actively participating in various recycling initiatives to minimize environmental impact. Collaborations with partners such as Waste Management for battery and bulb recycling, E-Works for electronics recycling, and local reclaim sites for metal recycling ensure comprehensive waste management. Additionally, partnerships with Mahoney Environmental for kitchen waste recycling, Sharps Medical Waste Services for hazardous waste disposal, and Elemental Solutions for chemical waste removal highlight the district's dedication to safe and eco-friendly practices.

Since the early 2000s, KCSD96 has adhered to a strict paperless communication strategy with families. Since 2015, the district has reduced paper usage significantly through its 1:1 digital learning initiative, providing every student with a digital device. As mentioned above, the IT department works closely with E-Works to recycle electronics, utilizing a collection system for efficient disposal. Moreover, collaboration with ProvenIT has



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optimized printer usage by replacing inefficient models, reducing the number of printers by 20%, and implementing toner recycling programs, further aligning with the district's sustainability goals.

**14. What percentage of your school's total office and classroom paper content is post-consumer material, fiber from forests certified as responsibly managed and/or chlorine-free?**

All paper purchased by KCSD96 is recycled multipurpose paper, reflecting the district's commitment to sustainability. To further reduce paper usage and associated costs, the IT department implemented a 20% reduction in the number of printers across the district. Additionally, stricter guidelines have been put in place for parent and extracurricular organizations, eliminating paper-based communications with families and students.

In our classrooms, we have made significant strides in transitioning to digital resources. Most middle school and some elementary classes now use online textbooks, and all report cards and parent communications have been fully transitioned to digital formats, minimizing paper consumption and supporting more efficient, eco-friendly communication.

Additionally, all paper towels and toilet paper purchased by KCSD96 are made from recycled paper. The district has centralized and closely monitored the ordering process for these products, and through this, the district saw a significant reduction in usage over the past few years. This reduction has allowed the district to allocate savings towards higher-quality, more sustainable products, while using them in more efficient quantities.

**15. List the types and estimated quantities of chemicals (e.g., laboratory materials, cleaning products, pesticides) managed at your school, and how they are stored, disposed of, and minimized:**

KCSD96 takes pride in maintaining a pesticide-free environment through a carefully managed program with Schopen Pest Services. All cleaning products used throughout the district are Green Seal certified, ensuring they meet high environmental standards, while the district's self-rinsing bottles help minimize chemical waste. In compliance with state regulations, all chemicals are stored in locked, temperature-controlled facilities for safety and proper handling. Additionally, the district partners with a certified contractor to responsibly dispose of any expired or unused chemicals, further reinforcing its commitment to environmental stewardship and safety.

**16. Describe how your school purchases environmentally preferable products for use by students and staff:**

As mentioned above, all paper towels and toilet paper purchased by KCSD96 are made from recycled paper. The district has centralized and closely monitored the ordering process for these products, and through this, the district saw a significant reduction in usage over the past few years.

## D. Alternative Transportation

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**17. What percentages of your students walk, bike, bus, or carpool (2 or more students in the car) to and from school? Please explain how these numbers are obtained and calculated, and describe any improvement in this area over time.**

Approximately 77% of KCSD96 students rely on school buses for transportation. Most of the district's schools are located in residential neighborhoods, allowing a significant number of students to safely walk or bike to and from school. To support this, bike racks are conveniently located near the entrances of each school, encouraging students to bike. Based on observations of car lines at each school, it is estimated that 10-15% of students are driven to and from school daily.

**18. Describe the plans or strategies to increase the number of students walking and biking to school.**

To encourage more students to walk or bike to school, KCSD96 has introduced an "opt-in" program during the registration process, allowing families to choose bus transportation if needed. Additionally, bus transportation is provided at no cost only for students who live more than 1.5 miles from school or for those who have an IDOT-designated hazardous route that prevents safe access to school. This approach promotes alternative, eco-friendly transportation options while ensuring safety and accessibility for those who need it.

Additionally, several schools in the district participate annually in National Walk, Bike, and Roll to School Day, an initiative that encourages students to walk or bike to school. This event promotes independence, physical



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activity, and a significant reduction in vehicle emissions, helping to create a healthier environment for the community.

## 19. Has your school implemented any of the following? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Designated carpool parking stalls.
- ☐ A well-publicized no idling policy that applies to all vehicles (including school buses).
- ☒ Vehicle loading/unloading areas are at least 25 feet from building air intakes, doors, and windows.
- ☒ Safe Pedestrian Routes to school or Safe Routes to School.

Describe activities in your safe routes program: The district uses buses that run on regular fuel, not diesel. This helps lower emissions of harmful pollutants, quieter operation, lower fuel costs, and easier maintenance.

## 20. Describe how your school transportation is efficient and has reduced its environmental impact:

KCSD96 is committed to prioritizing public health, environmental sustainability, and cost efficiency by utilizing gasoline-powered buses and vehicles instead of traditional diesel models. This choice helps reduce harmful emissions, minimizes noise pollution, lowers fuel costs, and simplifies maintenance.

We also collaborate with a contractor who employs advanced routing software to identify the safest and most efficient routes for all students. Additionally, efforts are made to maximize bus capacity, reducing the number of buses needed and further optimizing operational efficiency.

A key aspect of the district's transportation strategy is its commitment to maintaining a five-year average age on all buses, ensuring the use of newer, more efficient vehicles that comply with stringent emissions regulations.

## 21. Describe any other efforts toward reducing environmental impact, focusing on innovative or unique practices and partnerships:

The district's IT department is continuously exploring innovative ways to reduce energy consumption. Currently, they are working to consolidate three wiring closets into a single, more efficient space at one of the district's schools. Additionally, staff are encouraged to print on larger, more energy-efficient copiers rather than smaller office machines. The district exclusively uses Apple products, which are manufactured with renewable energy, made from recycled materials, and designed for energy efficiency. We fully support Apple's commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

Furthermore, KCSD96 takes an environmentally responsible approach to managing unused or old textbooks and paper resources, partnering with local organizations and libraries to donate these materials rather than discarding them.

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## Pillar 2: Improve the health and wellness of students and staff

### A. Environmental Health

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1. **Describe your school's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, including any certifications earned, routine inspections, pest identification, monitoring, record-keeping, and pest prevention activities.** KCSD96 follows a state-implemented program addressing the application of pesticides and herbicides in school buildings and on school grounds. The program includes administrative controls and nontoxic bait traps and requires notification of applications.

KCSD96 partners with Schopen Pest Services (now OPC Pest Services) for proactive pest management solutions. Schopen employs advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies, offering the district flexibility in selecting methods and techniques that align with their safety and environmental priorities. This

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collaboration ensures the implementation of the safest, most eco-friendly practices. Schopen also maintains meticulous records of services performed and products applied, fostering transparency and accountability.

Additionally, the district collaborates with Yellowstone Landscaping, which embeds IPM principles into its landscape management practices. Yellowstone's approach includes precise pest identification and a combination of biological, cultural, mechanical, and chemical controls. Their emphasis on sustainable, long-term solutions reduces risks to people and the environment, reinforcing IPM as a cornerstone of their operations. This partnership enhances the district's commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship.

**2. Describe the efforts or practices you have in place to minimize or eliminate the use of pesticides, both indoors and outdoors.**

The district is committed to minimizing pesticide use and has implemented sustainable practices to support this goal. One key strategy is maintaining grass at a height of 4.5 to 5 inches, significantly taller than the typical 3.5 inches. This taller mowing height promotes a healthier lawn by shading the soil, reducing weed germination, and eliminating the need for chemical weed killers. It also decreases reliance on fertilizers by fostering stronger root systems and natural nutrient cycles.

Additionally, the district opts for pellet treatments instead of traditional sprays. Pellets offer environmental advantages due to their slow-release properties, which minimize runoff and leaching into surrounding ecosystems. This targeted approach ensures effective pest or nutrient management while prioritizing sustainability and environmental health.

**3. Describe the actions taken or the practices your school employs to minimize or eliminate exposure to the following specific hazardous contaminants (if applicable):**

- a. Elemental Mercury:** The district does not handle elemental mercury and has proactively taken steps to reduce the use of other mercury-containing products, such as those found in lightbulbs. All classroom light bulbs have been upgraded from T12s to T8s, which contain less mercury and are more energy-efficient. Additionally, the district has transitioned to LED lighting in its buildings, effectively eliminating mercury use altogether within these spaces. This approach reflects the district's commitment to minimizing environmental impact and promoting safer, more sustainable practices.
- b. Carbon Monoxide from fuel burning equipment or appliances:** All equipment used across the district is selected for its high-efficiency performance, and features advanced filters designed to reduce emissions. These measures reflect the district's commitment to sustainability and minimizing its environmental footprint. By prioritizing energy-efficient and eco-friendly equipment, the district contributes to a cleaner, healthier environment while improving operational effectiveness.
- c. Radon:** In response to the Federal warnings regarding radon gas, all KCSD96 schools have been tested. Tests were conducted using the Radtrak Radon Gas Detector system for a 90-day period. The results of the monitoring showed that all District facilities are well below the EPA minimum guidelines. This successful outcome highlights the district's dedication to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for its students and staff.
- d. Chromated Copper Arsenate in wooden playground equipment:** The district does not use wooden playground equipment. Instead, all playground structures are constructed from durable, recycled metal. Additionally, the district exclusively uses recycled rubber for playground surfaces, enhancing both safety and sustainability.
- e. Others (e.g., Lead, Asbestos or PCBs):** In response to the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) of 1987, Kildeer Countryside School District 96 has complied with all inspection provisions of that Act. As required, each building has been inspected for friable and non-friable asbestos-containing materials (ACMs). Appropriate school employees, current and future, receive certified training to prevent damage to and subsequent release of fibers from ACMs.

The district is actively working to eliminate all asbestos, with Ivy Hall Elementary School recently becoming asbestos-free, followed by Prairie Elementary School. Additionally, the district collaborates closely with JMS

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Environmental to ensure compliance with regulations related to indoor air quality (IAQ), asbestos, radon, and other environmental concerns, prioritizing safety and adherence to all standards across its facilities.

4. **Describe policies and practices in place to promote security and life safety.** The district is dedicated to fostering a safe and secure environment for students and staff. We are fully compliant with the *School Safety Drill Act* (105 ILCS 128/1) in the State of Illinois. As such, comprehensive emergency response plans are developed and regularly practiced for situations such as fires, severe weather, or intruders. Recent security enhancements include upgrading all manual door locks to an access control system and implementing a closed-and-locked classroom door policy to prevent unauthorized access.

The district partners with the Buffalo Grove Police Department to assign a School Resource Officer (SRO) who oversees drills, disciplinary matters, and emergency protocols. Even though our school buildings span many different communities, having one SRO to work with all schools is the most efficient in terms of communication, especially in emergency matters. Staff also complete extensive training in emergency response and student safety matters.

5. **Describe actions your school takes to prevent exposure to asthma triggers in and around the school, such as animals in the classroom, sanitation, or other airborne contaminants.**

KCSD96 ensures optimal indoor air quality by closely monitoring carbon dioxide levels through recently upgraded HVAC systems. These systems feature sensors that regulate air exchange and alert staff when additional outside air is required. To further enhance air quality, the district has implemented a strict ban on candles, air fresheners, diffusers, and similar items in all buildings. Additionally, the district collaborates extensively with food vendors to minimize exposure to allergens and has adopted an approved snack list focused on the elimination of the 8 most common allergens in our classrooms to support allergy-safe practices across all schools.

6. **Describe actions your school takes to control and prevent leaks, moisture, condensation, and excess humidity; and to promptly clean up mold or remove moldy materials when it is found.** The district prioritizes maintaining a safe and healthy environment by regularly inspecting all buildings and collaborating with Ramboll Associates, a leading environmental consulting firm. This partnership ensures proactive measures are in place to prevent mold and other environmental hazards. Recent maintenance efforts, including repairs to windows across all buildings, have enhanced temperature and humidity control, complemented by upgraded HVAC systems designed to regulate humidity levels effectively.

In the event of water infiltration, the district partners with SERVPRO due to its specialized expertise in water damage restoration and rapid response capabilities. Equipped with advanced tools and IICRC-certified technicians, SERVPRO efficiently restores affected areas, minimizing downtime and ensuring a safe, clean environment for students and staff.

7. **Our school has installed local exhaust systems for major airborne contaminant sources.**

☒ Yes ☐ No

*If Yes, list the rooms with these features and their uses:* All KCSD96 facilities are equipped with general exhaust systems in all rooms where airborne contaminants are most likely such as art rooms, science rooms, kitchens, and nurses' offices.

8. **Describe your school's preventive maintenance program for the building's ventilation system, including unit ventilators to ensure it is clean and operating properly:** KCSD96 partners with Althoff Industries to handle inspections, cleaning, and servicing of ventilation systems, ensuring optimal performance and indoor air quality. Althoff's maintenance practices focus on reducing energy costs, preventing equipment malfunctions, and improving air quality by controlling pollutants and regulating humidity levels. As an industry leader, Althoff emphasizes sustainability by promoting energy-efficient systems and reducing environmental impact. Their work includes upgrading HVAC systems to improve efficiency, lowering

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greenhouse gas emissions, and supporting clients' sustainability objectives through advanced control technologies and eco-friendly equipment.

9. **Describe actions your school takes to ensure that all classrooms and other spaces are adequately ventilated with outside air, consistent with state or local codes, or national ventilation standards, including any periodic measurements and record keeping:** The district upgraded its HVAC systems to enhance air circulation and ensure better indoor air quality. These systems are equipped with advanced filtration and sensors to monitor and adjust air changes as needed, which helps reduce airborne contaminants, including viruses. The district's focus on proactive ventilation improvements aligns with public health recommendations for reducing the spread of airborne illnesses.
10. **Describe other steps your school takes to protect indoor environmental quality such as implementing EPA IAQ Tools for Schools and/or conducting other periodic, comprehensive inspections of the school facility to identify environmental health and safety issues and take corrective action:**

As previously noted, one of the most significant actions taken by KCSD96 to protect indoor environmental quality was the comprehensive upgrade of all HVAC systems. These improvements have led to a reduction in energy consumption, fewer IAQ-related complaints, and a decrease in equipment failures. In addition, the district's maintenance team conducts regular inspections of all systems and is trained to address work orders promptly and efficiently.

The district also collaborates with several trusted environmental consultants, including Ramboll Associates, JMS Environmental, and Althoff Industries, to ensure the ongoing health and safety of the school environments. Their expertise and guidance play a key role in maintaining optimal environmental conditions across district facilities.

11. **Describe your green cleaning policies, equipment, products and practices, and green cleaning certifications or awards:** KCSD96 partners with Spartan Chemical for all cleaning products and equipment, prioritizing sustainability and safety. Spartan Chemical is recognized as a pioneer in sustainable practices, consistently advancing environmentally friendly products and operations to minimize their carbon footprint. Beyond providing sustainable cleaning solutions, Spartan Chemical supports the district through staff training programs. These training tools, endorsed by ISSA's Cleaning Industry Training Standard (CITS) as advanced certification programs, are accessible in both English and Spanish under the Training Made Simple™ initiative. KCSD96 custodial staff undergo extensive training to ensure the safe and effective use of all products and equipment.

In 2019, the KCSD96 custodial team received an Award of Meritorious through the IASB's "Those Who Excel" awards. This honor, presented by the Illinois State Board of Education, recognized their exceptional efforts in maintaining a clean, safe, and healthy environment for students and staff.

## B. Nutrition and Fitness

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12. **Does your school employ the programs below to promote nutrition, physical activity, and overall school health?**

- ☐ Participates in a Farm to School program or similar local food program.
- ☐ Our school has an on-site garden.
- ☒ Our cafeteria provides fresh meals daily with healthy choices for students.
- ☒ At least 50% of our students' annual physical education takes place outdoors.
- ☒ Health measures are integrated into assessments.

Give details about programs and successes: Specifics are detailed through the next series of questions.

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**13. Provide specific examples of actions taken which are innovative or unique practices and partnerships:** KCSD96 partners with OrganicLife, a leader in sustainable dining solutions, to provide nutritious, high-quality meals for students. OrganicLife is dedicated to serving traditional, kid-friendly favorites made from scratch using fresh, locally sourced ingredients whenever possible. Beyond delivering delicious and balanced meals, OrganicLife is committed to sustainability at every step. They use eco-friendly packaging to reduce plastic waste and implement practices to minimize food waste, ensuring their operations have a positive impact on both people and the planet. By prioritizing local products, OrganicLife not only supports regional farmers but also reduces the carbon footprint associated with food transportation. Through this partnership, KCSD96 provides students with meals that nourish their bodies while fostering awareness of the importance of sustainable practices. During lunch time, we also promote the usage of “sporks” in order to reduce waste that ends up in landfills.

**14. Describe how outdoor education, exercise and recreation are promoted within the curriculum and outside the classroom.** KCSD96 values outdoor education, exercise, and recreation as integral to students' physical, social, and emotional well-being. These activities are thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum and extended beyond the classroom to encourage healthy habits and a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors.

- Physical Education: Elementary students participate in daily 30-minute physical education classes, while middle school students engage in 43 minutes of PE daily. The curriculum is designed to teach physical fitness, teamwork, and lifelong wellness skills, often incorporating outdoor activities to promote movement in natural settings when weather permits.
- Recess: Elementary students enjoy daily outdoor recess, providing unstructured playtime to foster creativity, social connections, and a mental reset that helps them return to the classroom refreshed and ready to learn.
- Fitness Centers: The district's middle schools feature state-of-the-art fitness centers equipped with strength resistance and cardiovascular equipment, offering students additional opportunities for physical activity.
- Outdoor Learning Opportunities: Teachers utilize outdoor spaces for hands-on, experiential learning in various subjects. For instance, students may explore ecosystems during science lessons or engage in content-specific activities while enjoying the outdoors. Prairie Elementary School boasts a dedicated outdoor classroom, allowing students to participate in unique, nature-based learning experiences.
- Community Connections and Extracurricular Activities: Beyond the school day, students can participate in district-sponsored athletic and outdoor clubs (elementary) and sports teams (middle school), or take part in field trips that emphasize outdoor exploration and physical activity.

By emphasizing outdoor education, exercise, and recreation, KCSD96 is committed to nurturing the whole child, ensuring students are active, engaged, and connected to the world around them.

**15. Describe efforts to improve nutrition, health, fitness of students and staff, highlighting innovative practices and partnerships:** In addition to the efforts addressed above, the district is deeply committed to promoting the health, nutrition, and fitness of both students and staff through curriculum-based initiatives, wellness programs, and strategic partnerships, fostering a comprehensive approach to well-being.

- Nutrition Education: Students participate in age-appropriate lessons on nutrition and healthy eating, empowering them to make informed dietary choices. School meal programs offer balanced, nutritious options that support physical growth and cognitive development, while cafeteria spaces feature educational materials to reinforce nutrition education.
- Physical Fitness and Wellness: Daily physical education for all students, paired with outdoor recess for elementary learners, ensures regular opportunities for movement and exercise. Unique experiences, such as team-building challenges and obstacle courses provided by Hot Ground Gym, promote strength, coordination, and resilience. Additionally, state-of-the-art fitness centers at each middle school offer students enhanced opportunities to engage in physical activity and build healthy habits.

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- Staff Wellness Initiatives: Recognizing the importance of staff health, the district provides wellness programs and resources to support physical activity, mindfulness, and stress management. Initiatives such as wellness challenges, access to fitness facilities, and fitness classes foster a culture of health among educators and staff. Through its partnership with an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the district offers confidential support services, including counseling, wellness resources, and guidance on personal and professional challenges, promoting overall well-being and work-life balance.

### C. Coordinated School Health, Mental Health, School Climate, and Safety

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**16. Does your school use a Coordinated School Health approach or other health-related initiatives to address overall school health issues?**

☒ Yes ☐ No

If yes, describe the health-related initiatives or approaches used by the school: KCSD96 takes a holistic approach to fostering the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of its students. Central to this effort is our strong health curriculum in which students in all grade levels work towards maintaining healthy lifestyles. Additionally, the Wayfinder resource for grades EC-8, a key part of the district's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework. Our social emotional learning standards enable students to learn to build essential life skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, resilience, and relationship management, fostering a supportive school climate and preparing them to navigate challenges confidently.

At the middle school level, the district implements Signs of Suicide (SOS), an evidence-based suicide prevention program delivered by mental health professionals and health teachers. Students also participate in a drug prevention and awareness day and the CHOICES program, led by the School Resource Officer and teachers, which reinforces positive decision-making.

To support these initiatives, the district facilitates monthly professional learning groups for staff such as social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses, enabling collaboration, case consultation, and resource sharing.

Through these programs and collaborative efforts, KCSD96 creates a supportive environment that prioritizes student wellness and prepares them for success in all areas of life.

**17. Does your school partner with any outside institutions, businesses, clubs, nonprofit organizations, or community groups to support student health and safety?**

☒ Yes ☐ No

If yes, describe these partnerships: KCSD96 partners with external organizations to enhance student health and safety through comprehensive wellness education for grades EC-8. Collaborating with Candor Health Education and Be Seen and Be Heard, the district offers specialized programs that align with its wellness goals. These partnerships provide expert-led sessions on important topics such as mental health, personal safety, and overall wellness, tailored to meet the developmental needs of students across all grade levels.

**18. Describe your school's curriculum content for student health and fitness as well as its applied learning:** At KCSD96, we are committed to supporting the physical and mental well-being of our students through a wide range of programs and activities.

- Physical Education: Students participate in daily PE classes that emphasize fitness, motor skills, and teamwork. Activities such as sports, fitness challenges, and cooperative games help students develop healthy habits and physical skills that they can carry with them throughout their lives.
- Mental Health Programs: The district incorporates mental health education alongside traditional curricula, with programs like Wayfinder, which builds social-emotional skills, emotional regulation, and coping strategies. Mindfulness practices and group discussions further support students in managing stress, building resilience, and fostering emotional well-being.

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- Applied Learning Experiences: Students also engage in hands-on learning that reinforces health and fitness principles. Projects on nutrition and physical fitness challenges allow students to apply what they have learned in real-world settings. The district also utilizes health and fitness equipment, such as heart monitors and Blazepods, to track progress and support fitness goals.

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## Pillar 3: Effective Environmental Literacy

### A. School Culture of Sustainability

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**1. Describe what *sustainability* means to your school or district in particular. How is sustainability included in your mission to educate students?**

In KCSD96, sustainability is about creating lasting, positive impacts on students, staff, and the broader community. It involves fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment, nurturing responsible global citizens, and making thoughtful choices to preserve resources for future generations.

- Sustainability is an integral part of the district's mission to prepare students for success in a dynamic, ever-changing world. By focusing on critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving, the district empowers students to tackle real-world challenges, including environmental stewardship and social responsibility. This commitment comes to life through:
- Curriculum Integration: Embedding lessons on environmental responsibility, global citizenship, and community engagement into daily instruction, ensuring students connect classroom learning to meaningful, real-world issues.
- Equity and Inclusion: Providing all students, regardless of background, with access to high-quality resources and opportunities to thrive—building a sustainable and supportive culture where everyone can succeed.
- Professional Learning: Equipping educators with the tools and training needed to model and teach sustainable practices effectively, fostering a shared commitment to environmental awareness.

KCSD96's ultimate goal is to inspire students to become stewards of their communities and the planet, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and values needed to drive positive change today and for generations to come.

**2. What role has the administration played in the culture of sustainability at your school?**

The KCSD96 administration plays a pivotal role in cultivating a culture of sustainability, ensuring that high standards are upheld across the district. From the Board of Education to the superintendent, district office leaders, and school leaders, every level of administration is actively engaged in promoting and supporting sustainable practices both inside and outside the classroom.

By integrating sustainability as a core value in the district's mission and goals, the administration sets a clear tone of leadership. Through strategic planning and open communication, they emphasize the importance of sustainability in both academic programming and operational practices.

At the district level, the superintendent and leadership team provide the resources and support needed to drive sustainability initiatives. This includes funding and building our STEAM programs, maker spaces, and professional development opportunities that empower staff to integrate environmental education effectively. Facility management also reflects this commitment, with a focus on implementing energy-efficient systems and environmentally responsible practices.

School leaders—principals, instructional coaches, and team leaders—ensure that sustainability is seamlessly woven into the curriculum. By fostering cross-curricular connections, they support teachers in embedding environmental themes into daily lessons. Additionally, they cultivate an environment where students are encouraged to think critically about environmental challenges and their role as responsible stewards of the planet.



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This unified approach has established a strong culture of sustainability in KCSD96—one that empowers students and staff to take action, innovate, and develop solutions for a greener, more sustainable future.

**3. What practices, working groups, or committees does your school employ to help ensure effective environmental and sustainability education? Provide specific examples of actions taken.**

One of KCSD96's greatest strengths is its commitment to working with industry experts to ensure that all sustainability efforts are as effective and eco-friendly as possible. The district consistently partners with top-tier consultants and specialists to guide their initiatives and achieve the highest standards in energy efficiency, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. This collaborative approach, highlighted throughout this application, ensures that the district's sustainability goals are met with both innovation and expertise.

A key partnership is with Performance Services, a leading provider of energy management and facility optimization solutions. Performance Services works closely with the district to identify and implement strategies that drive both financial savings and environmental benefits. Through their expertise in energy efficiency, renewable energy solutions, and sustainable building practices, Performance Services helps District 96 achieve its sustainability and cost-saving objectives while enhancing the performance and efficiency of its buildings.

By relying on these specialized partnerships, KCSD96 continues to make significant strides in sustainability, ensuring that every project, from energy-efficient HVAC systems to solar panel installations, is strategically planned and executed for long-term success and environmental impact.

**4. Does your school have a green team, garden club, or a community green committee on sustainability? Who participates? What kinds of projects or activities do they undertake? What roles do they play in the school?**

KCSD96 schools offer a wide range of clubs and extracurricular activities focused on environmental awareness and sustainability. For example, Ivy Hall Elementary has historically hosted an Environmental Club which welcomes students from all grades who are passionate about making a positive impact on the planet. Club members actively contribute to the school's recycling efforts and have beautified the campus by planting flower bulbs. Their dedication to preserving the environment extends beyond the classroom, fostering a strong culture of stewardship.

As a second example, Twin Groves Middle School offers a Meteorology, Weather, and Astronomy Club, where students explore weather patterns, the science of severe weather, and its global impacts. Additionally, many schools in the district host various science clubs, encouraging students to investigate the natural world and engage in hands-on environmental projects.

The district also enjoys a close partnership with the Village of Buffalo Grove's Environmental Action Team (EAT), a group dedicated to promoting environmental awareness, enhancing the community's natural spaces, and advocating for sustainable practices that will benefit both current and future generations.

**5. Describe other ways your school integrates sustainability into daily habits and culture of the school's staff, volunteers, students and community (e.g., recycling days, no bottled water, murals, themed events, virtual backpacks, etc):**

KCSD96 actively integrates sustainability into the daily practices and culture of its school communities. One key initiative in this effort is the use of a virtual backpack and electronic communication, which significantly reduces paper waste by providing families with important updates, newsletters, report cards, assessments, and other communications electronically. This not only streamlines communication but also aligns with the district's broader commitment to sustainability by minimizing paper usage and reducing the environmental impact of printed materials.

In addition to this, the district promotes eco-friendly habits across all schools through several initiatives:

- **Recycling Programs:** Recycling stations are strategically placed throughout the schools to encourage proper disposal of paper, plastic, and other recyclables. These stations engage students, staff, and volunteers in responsible waste management, fostering a culture of sustainability. The district also participates in electronics recycling, ensuring that electronic waste is properly managed and recycled.

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- Bottled Water Alternatives: To reduce single-use plastic waste, the district encourages students and staff to bring reusable water bottles. Water refill stations are available at schools, making it easy for everyone to hydrate while minimizing plastic consumption.
  - Sustainability-Themed Events: All schools host events focused on raising environmental awareness, such as Earth Day activities, which promote sustainability through hands-on classroom experiences. These events provide students with opportunities to learn about environmental challenges and engage in projects that contribute to a greener future.
  - Community Engagement: The district extends its sustainability efforts beyond the classroom by engaging with the broader community. This includes hosting awareness campaigns, partnering with local organizations, and participating in initiatives through local organizations to promote environmental stewardship and sustainable practices within the local community.
6. **Any other school practices, visions, projects, plans or information you want to include to showcase the environmental work your school has achieved?** KCSD96 has significantly reduced waste within the cafeterias and food services. Most notably, the district eliminated its use of styrofoam products and replaced it with more reusable and sustainable products such as Cyclone baskets and sporks, which eliminates 50% of utensil waste. Working with OrganicLife, the district continues to explore new ways to reduce waste.

Additionally, the Board of Education continues to promote researching alternative energy methods and how to expand upon the work that's already been accomplished with the installation of the solar panels. For example, the district is researching the process of installing solar panels on the roofs of each school.

Finally, as mentioned above, construction will begin this summer at Woodlawn Middle School for a Collaboratory similar to Twin Groves Middle School and will be open for student learning in the Fall of 2025.

## B. Curriculum and Pedagogy

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7. **Does your school have a written definition and requirement for environmental literacy? Is there an assessment required?** In 2014, KCSD96 adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) which laid the groundwork for more hands-on science learning experiences for students K-12. Within the NGSS Standards, there is a requirement for performance assessments. Additionally, environmental concepts are also embedded across subjects, encouraging students to explore and engage with real-world environmental issues.

K-5: Students participate in interdisciplinary, hands-on projects that connect environmental science with other subjects. For example, in 4th grade, students explore natural disasters, researching Earth's processes and studying disaster preparedness. In 5th grade, students focus on water resource stewardship, investigating the impact of human activities on water quality and the importance of sustainable water management. They also examine the effects of ecosystem changes, learning how human actions influence the natural world.

6th Grade: The curriculum shifts to a focus on human impact on Earth's systems. Students examine the depletion of natural resources, environmental challenges such as climate change, and explore ways to design solutions that mitigate these impacts. This grade level fosters an understanding of the interconnectedness of human activity and the environment, encouraging students to think critically about sustainability.

7th Grade: Environmental literacy continues with a deeper exploration of resource availability, biodiversity, and ecosystem dynamics. Students engage in data analysis, using scientific methods to understand environmental changes. They construct evidence-based arguments to propose solutions for protecting natural resources and conserving biodiversity, emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices.

Environmental literacy is woven throughout projects and assessments at all grade levels, promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of environmental concepts in real-world contexts.

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- 8. How does your school use sustainability and the environment as a context for learning STEM? How is sustainability and the environment incorporated into the curriculum in all areas?** At KCSD96, sustainability and the environment are central themes in the district's approach to STEM education, providing students with engaging, real-world contexts that foster a deeper understanding of environmental issues and sustainable practices.

Middle schools are equipped with newly designed learning centers that support STEM activities and hands-on exploration. These spaces encourage students to collaborate on projects that integrate sustainability concepts, such as designing renewable energy models or studying the environmental impacts of human activity. This approach allows students to apply their learning in ways that directly address pressing environmental challenges.

At the elementary level, students participate in 30-minute Exploration Lab classes that focus on STEAM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics). In these sessions, students explore sustainability through age-appropriate, hands-on activities, such as designing solutions to reduce waste, studying ecosystems, and creating environmentally conscious prototypes. These experiences nurture creativity and problem-solving skills, all while instilling a deep respect for the environment.

To further enhance these initiatives, the district utilizes Title IV funds to procure resources such as 3D printers, STEAM materials, and maker's space equipment. These tools allow students to bring their innovative ideas to life, empowering them to tackle environmental challenges through design thinking and collaborative problem-solving.

Sustainability is also woven into other areas of the curriculum, from science lessons aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards to literacy and social studies units that examine global environmental issues.

- 9. How does your school use sustainability as a context for learning green technologies and/or career pathways?** Elementary and middle school students at KCSD96 engage in sustainability-focused units that promote critical thinking, research, and problem-solving. These units are designed to empower students to explore and create innovative solutions for a more sustainable future.

For example, middle school students participate in a project where they design technologies aimed at mitigating the impacts of natural disasters and reducing the environmental footprint of human activities. This hands-on, project-based learning approach not only fosters creativity but also provides students with a deeper understanding of the complex environmental challenges facing our world.

Through these projects, students learn to apply scientific principles and engineering solutions to real-world problems, encouraging them to think critically about sustainability. They are also inspired to take an active role in supporting sustainability by developing practical, future-oriented solutions that can make a lasting impact on the environment.

- 10. Describe students' outdoor learning experiences at multiple grade levels. How do they support curriculum content?** Outdoor learning experiences at KCSD96 include visits to the Botanic Gardens, Brookfield Zoo, Raupp Museum, Wagner Farm, Naper Settlement, and Garoon Gateway to Science Park, all strategically designed to align with curriculum goals across grade levels.

- Kindergarten through 2nd grade: Programs like "Surprising Seeds" at the Botanic Gardens introduce students to botany, plant life cycles, and ecosystems, reinforcing science standards.
- 3rd and 4th grade: Visits to the Raupp Museum provide hands-on activities tied to social studies standards, such as pioneer life and local history.
- 5th grade: Students explore agricultural science and rural history during their time at Wagner Farm.
- 6th grade: Interactive lessons at Garoon Gateway to Science Park focus on STEM concepts, including physics and engineering.
- 7th and 8th grade: Field trips to the Brookfield Zoo and Naper Settlement deepen students' understanding of biology, conservation, and historical inquiry.

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## 11. If applicable, describe how the school grounds are devoted to environmental education

**uses:** Middle school students in KCSD96 have the unique opportunity to engage with real-world sustainability practices through their direct involvement with the on-site solar field. Students observe and analyze data from the solar panels, integrating this hands-on experience into their learning of renewable energy and environmental science. This integration of practical sustainability into the curriculum allows students to see firsthand how solar energy can positively impact their school and community.

Beyond the technical aspects, the solar panels also serve as a creative medium in the art classroom, where students submit designs inspired by local flora and fauna. These student-created designs are featured on the solar panels, merging art with sustainability and giving students a tangible way to contribute to the district's renewable energy infrastructure.

In addition to the solar field, the district offers outdoor learning spaces that support experiential learning across multiple disciplines. These spaces provide students with the opportunity to engage in hands-on, nature-based learning that complements their classroom education. Students also participate in environmental walks, where they explore the local ecosystem, observe native plants and wildlife, and deepen their understanding of environmental conservation. These walks not only enhance academic learning but also foster a strong sense of environmental stewardship and a deeper connection with their community.

## C. Community Involvement

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### 12. Describe how your school promotes student and teacher engagement with the community and civic involvement outside the school? Have there been green themes to their work?

KCSD96 takes pride in its staff and teachers, who actively attend and present at conferences on environmental and scientific themes to deepen their expertise and integrate sustainability into classroom instruction and district practices. Recent presentations and attendances include the Northern Illinois Science Educator (NISE) Conference, the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Conference, and the Baxter Symposium.

Through grant funding, the district also organized a weekend family field trip to the Museum of Science and Industry, offering over 100 community members—all of whom are recent immigrants—a meaningful opportunity to connect and explore educational resources. This initiative highlighted the district's commitment to science education and community engagement.

### 13. Describe your partnerships to help your school and other schools achieve in the 3 Pillars. Include both the scope and impact of these partnerships:

KCSD96 actively collaborates with other schools and districts to advance the 3 Pillars by sharing best practices through initiatives like PLC at Work (Professional Learning Communities at Work) visits. These visits, of which hundreds of visitors have attended from various states and countries, allow educators internationally to observe and learn from KCSD96's innovative approaches to sustainability, wellness, and curriculum integration, fostering shared growth and progress.

The district also works closely with the StevensonHigh School District and its six elementary feeder school districts, collaborating on all areas of curriculum to ensure alignment and excellence across instructional practices. Through these partnerships, KCSD96 not only strengthens its own programs but also contributes to the broader educational community by promoting sustainability and high-quality education.

### 14. Describe how your school shares environmental education or sustainability events with other schools or organizations?

KCSD96 shares its commitment to environmental education and sustainability through its strong participation in Science Olympiad, supported by over 40 parent volunteers and dedicated staff sponsors. The program engages students in hands-on exploration of environmental science, ecology, and sustainability, fostering collaboration with peers from other schools.

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Staff sponsors further enhance the program by attending Science Olympiad conferences, bringing back innovative ideas to enrich student experiences. This initiative reflects KCSD96's dedication to promoting environmental literacy, scientific inquiry, and meaningful connections with other schools and organizations.

## D. Professional Development

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**15. In your required staff professional development for all teachers, is sustainability education or environmental education training included? If so, please describe what this entails.** In KCSD96, sustainability education and environmental education are integral to our professional learning community and staff professional development.

Our science instructional coach, science content specialist, and all science educators work collaboratively within our professional learning community to address key areas of focus, including the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which incorporate Environmental and Earth Science Standards. Together, they ensure alignment and clarity in implementing these standards across grade levels.

Elementary educators also meet regularly with their grade-level teammates, special educators, and instructional coaches to review science standards, including those related to environmental and earth sciences. These collaborative sessions promote consistency, deepen understanding, and foster interdisciplinary connections that enhance instruction. Once a month one representative from each grade level team meets to discuss science and environmental content to ensure consistency across the system.

Through our professional development, educators engage in ongoing training designed to strengthen their capacity to teach sustainability concepts, integrate environmental education into the curriculum, and inspire students to think critically about their role in preserving the planet. These efforts reflect our commitment to equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to address environmental challenges and contribute to a sustainable future.

**16. What workshops or professional development events have your teachers attended themed around environmental topics?** As mentioned above, KCSD96 encourages its staff and teachers to attend and present at conferences on environmental and scientific themes to deepen their expertise and integrate sustainability into classroom instruction and district practices. Recent presentations and attendances include the Northern Illinois Science Educator (NISE) Conference, the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) Conference, and the Baxter Symposium.

**17. Have your teachers or staff earned any certifications in environmental education? What kind have they earned?** While KCSD96 teachers and staff have been recognized for their expertise and accomplishments in many fields, this Green Ribbon honor would represent the district's first formal recognition in the area of environmental education. The district is proud of its ongoing efforts to integrate sustainability into its practices and curriculum and views this recognition as a testament to its growing commitment to environmental stewardship.

**18. Have any of your teachers or staff received any awards related to environmental education?** In 2019, the KCSD96 custodial team received an Award of Meritorious through the IASB's "Those Who Excel" awards. This honor, presented by the Illinois State Board of Education, recognized their exceptional efforts in maintaining a clean, safe, and healthy environment for students and staff.

**19. Do any of your teachers or staff hold environmental education related volunteer positions or memberships?**

- ☐ Environmental Education Association of Illinois
- ☐ North American Association of Environmental Education
- ☐ Children and Nature Network
- ☐ Northern Illinois Nature Preschool Association

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- ☐ Chicago Wilderness
- ☐ Local environmental related clubs

KCSD96 has not traditionally collected this data from its teachers and staff; however, this question has prompted the district to adopt a more proactive approach in gathering and celebrating this information.

## Supporting Materials

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**Attach a minimum of three photos and a maximum of five photos with your application (photo size limit 5 MB).** Please save your photos using descriptive language. For example, “Students conduct water quality tests in outdoor classroom with science majors from nearby university x” would be more helpful than “Photo 1.” **Photos should be action shots, not posed.** By sending these photos, you are giving Illinois Green Alliance, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the U.S. Department of Education permission to use them.

**Please provide a brief description (300 characters) for each:**

**Image 1:** KCSD96 commits to move away from Styrofoam and use reusable cyclone baskets with a goal of minimizing waste.

**Image 2:** KCSD96 purchased 3,068 solar panels for clean and renewable energy. Student artwork depicting native wildlife is featured on rows of the solar panels

**Image 3:** Wetlands surround some of KCSD96 schools, incorporating natural beauty and an eco-friendly home to a variety of plants and animals.

**Image 4:** Outdoor physical education class on KCSD96’s beautiful grounds support student wellness.

**Image 5:** KCSD96’s commitment to environmental education can be shown through many hands-on learning experiences for students.

## Submit Your Application

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**Applications must be received by 5:00 PM on Friday, December 20, 2024.** Applications are being collected by the Illinois Green Alliance on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). *Applications should be no longer than 18 pages.*

For an application to be considered, it must be **submitted via email** to [greenribbon@isbe.net](mailto:greenribbon@isbe.net). Submittals via other methods will not be accepted.

**Questions?** Contact [greenribbon@isbe.net](mailto:greenribbon@isbe.net).