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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The article titled “Learn how Spangdahlem Middle School earned its Green Ribbon” was shared on DoDEA Connects — the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)’s internal news source and Intranet.

# Learn how Spangdahlem Middle School earned its Green Ribbon

By Wendy Liu  
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The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Program recognizes innovative schools for environmental and sustainable practices and education. Spangdahlem Middle School in Germany received this distinction in 2018. Learn about its environmental initiatives and how they may be applied at your school.

“The Rheinland-Pfalz region of Germany boasts a high level of sustainability and served as an ideal model for our teachers in promoting green ribbon goals and education,” said Gregory Bull, chief of staff for the Americas Southeast District who served as the principal of Spangdahlem Middle at the time of the award. “Partnering with, and learning from, our host nation of Germany allowed our students and faculty opportunities to be influencers and change agents in our community, in the United States, and the world at large.”

- Spangdahlem MS implemented a “Flip the Switch” initiative focused on reducing the use of electricity. They hosted a schoolwide contest where students used their creativity to develop switch plates designs to remind everyone to turn off the lights when available lighting was sufficient. Usage data before and after the initiative reflected a notable reduction in cost and electricity usage over time. The switch plates continue to have an impact on calling attention to energy conservation to this day.

- With the help of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Sustainment Services, Spangdahlem MS replaced the use of plasticware in the cafeteria with washable and reusable utensils in order to reduce waste and the schools' environmental impact. Due to this transition, 195 students using two plastic utensils per day for 175 instructional days eliminates 68,250 single-use plastics.



*Spangdahlem Middle School students count the new reusable forks for the cafeteria.*

- Bus drivers at Spangdahlem MS turn off the engines when waiting at the schools for students to arrive and board the bus. This not only helps the environment as a whole, but directly limits the health impact of students and personnel exposed to hazardous pollution while in close proximity to the buses.
- Teachers provide assignments using technology such as Google Apps for Education and Schoology, when possible, in an effort to reduce paper usage.

- Spangdahlem Middle School students participate in activities promoting health and wellness. The staff and faculty at Spangdahlem MS serve as role models and encouragers on health and wellness for each other and the student body. They are notably present at school and community health activities and events such as local marathons and base-sponsored 5Ks. School dances, fun runs, after school fitness clubs, and a comprehensive physical education program are just a few ways the positive health culture has been set at Spangdahlem MS.



*Spangdahlem Middle School students participate in activities promoting health and wellness.*

- In collaboration with the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and the 52<sup>nd</sup> Medical Group Health Promotions Team, Spangdahlem MS organized a 'More Matters' Run to promote more fruits and veggies, more environmental awareness, and more physical activity. Over 70 participants enjoyed the event, to include parents, students, teachers, and community members. Students created posters illustrating key elements for healthy living and participants learned about them at the teaching stations that were part of the run route.
- The needs of the whole child are also met through activities such as Fraction Boot Camp, Brain Bowl, Math Counts, Spelling Bee, Drama Club, Chorus, and Band. The clubs at Spangdahlem MS often promote physical activity and healthy habits with the

academic challenge at hand. For example, students attending Fraction Boot Camp were tasked with solving math problems and completing sets of burpees, jumping jacks, and sprints. They were then rewarded with healthy snacks.

- Spangdahlem MS sponsored a districtwide STEMposium providing incredible STEM projects and learning opportunities as they were “Marooned on Mars.” The Mars lander was built by reusing materials such as cereal boxes and cardboard. The STEMposium focused heavily on renewable resources.

- Students were challenged to show how humans interact with their environments through various civic responsibilities. An upcycling contest was promoted in conjunction with the Creative Thinking classes to foster creativity and critical thinking on ways to reuse even the most unexpected items. At a schoolwide Conservation Convention event, students presented fresh ideas on reusing, recycling, reducing waste, and upcycling with local base leaders as judges. The goal of the event was to increase students’ awareness of climate change and their personal involvement and responsibility for the future.



*Spangdahlem Middle School's  
Conservation Convention*

- Spangdahlem MS shares daily health and wellness tips and promotion of Meatless Monday are read to the students in the morning announcements, shared with parents in the Bulldog Byte newsletter, and promoted through social media.

“We are raising a problem-solving generation with the necessary skills to control and affect change for a sustainable future. It is through critical thinking and personal decision making that students are able to put into practice skills that will bring this to fruition,” said Bull. “That’s really the desired long term and lasting affect for the initiatives at Spangdahlem Middle and all schools employing sound sustainability practices. Further, the staff at Spangdahlem Middle was committed, engrossed, and lived the changes we were teaching our students. It was their efforts that made this award a reality.”