

Funding Strategies

SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS

Why Green Schools?

20% of America goes to school every day. More than a quarter of these students and teachers attend schools that are considered substandard or dangerous to occupant health.

Public and private schools alike are realizing that going green is a no-brainer. On average, green schools save \$100,000 per year – enough to hire two new teachers, buy 200 new computers or purchase 5,000 new textbooks.

If all new school construction and school renovations went green starting today, energy savings alone would total more than \$20 billion over the next 10 years.

By promoting the design and construction of green schools, we can make a tremendous impact on student health, test scores, teacher retention, school operational costs and the environment.

Benefits of Green Schools

- A healthy, productive learning environment
- Improved teacher retention
- Financial savings
- Hands-on learning
- Environmentally friendly

(Excerpted from the US Green Building Council (USGBC) "Build Green Schools" website: <http://www.buildgreenschools.org>)



Green School

n. a school building or facility that creates a healthy environment that is conducive to learning while saving energy, resources and money

LOCAL DISTRICTS LEAD THE WAY

When Edmonds School District's new Lynnwood High School opens in 2009, it will be a model of energy efficiency featuring a natural ventilation system, high efficiency boilers controlled by unique computer programming, and automatic dimming lighting tied to energy efficient light fixtures. By employing these and other green school design and construction techniques, the new school is projected to save the district about 50% in electricity costs.

McMinnville School District has begun construction on what will be the first LEED® certified school in the district. The 600-student, 80,000 square foot Sue Buel Elementary School is targeted for a LEED Silver rating, but officials are hopeful it might have enough sustainable features for a LEED Gold. The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system, sponsored by the USGBC, is a nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings.

We asked Ed Peters, Director of Capital Projects for the Edmonds School District, and Maryalice Russell, Superintendent of the McMinnville School District, a few questions to understand their motivation to move forward with sustainable design and construction initiatives.



WHAT LED YOUR DISTRICT TO MOVE TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE, GREEN SCHOOL FACILITIES?

Ed Peters: For 15 years, we have been emphasizing durable buildings that last and make wise use of tax money. Sustainability is the latest evolution of that – but it is a continuing development of a larger message that we will be prudent and wise about designing buildings that are not the cheapest possible, but will in the long run be a better use of public funds. Another big reason for sustainability is the chance to save general fund dollars to use them directly for education. If by saving energy we can reduce our utility bills, that money can be spent on teacher salaries and textbooks. Our district spends nearly \$4 million per year on natural gas and electricity. If we can save even 10% on overall energy costs, that equates to several teaching positions. There is a significant incentive for our district to save energy costs and use the money directly to affect learning.

Maryalice Russell: Sustainability was not something we imposed upon our community. A strong interest in green design in general, and more specifically in energy efficiency, surfaced among our community members during the planning process. When we initially convened a community task force to look at facilities needs, we anticipated that the conversation would be mostly about demographics and classrooms. We were pleased to learn that the community was interested in sustainable strategies on several levels. They wanted new construction to reflect a high level of green building, they wanted to use sustainable practices to upgrade and maintain existing facilities, and they were convinced it was important to reduce the district's energy consumption and costs going forward. As an outcome of the planning process, we became increasingly attentive to how the bond projects could result in our schools becoming as sustainable as possible.

WAS THE SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS MESSAGE AN ASSET IN GENERATING VOTER SUPPORT?

Ed Peters: During our 2006 bond campaign, sustainability was less in the public spotlight than it is today. It was not a primary or determining issue for the bond measure we ran, although it occasionally came up in public discussions. In the last 6 months to a year, there has been heightened public awareness of green building and high performance schools. I'm hearing many more inquiries from parents and community members on the topic. Before, people wanted to know, "What is a sustainable building?" Now people are coming to us and asking, "What are you doing to make our buildings green?" The fact that we have a demonstrated track record will be more important towards maintaining our overall credibility with the community.

Maryalice Russell: Our bond measure didn't pass on the first try, but failed by a small margin—we needed 151 more YES votes. We consulted with the community and scaled back to a \$62 million bond proposal. In the second round of talking with voters about the bond projects, there was a significant difference related to sustainability. Instead of responding to questions from the community about green schools and energy efficiency buildings, we incorporated strategies for sustainability as part of our presentation. Our informational materials and conversations with constituents conveyed a strong message that energy efficiency and green schools would be a priority. This new message obviously resonated with voters, as the second time we were on the ballot, we passed the bond package.



HOW MUCH GRANT MONEY WERE YOU ABLE TO LEVERAGE TO HELP BUILD YOUR GREEN SCHOOLS?

Ed Peters: The State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) had a competitive grant program for districts willing to comply a year in advance to the state's adopted sustainable schools protocol, Washington Sustainable Schools. Through OSPI, we were able to get \$500,000 for the Lynnwood project. We also have been working for nearly 4 years with our electricity provider, Snohomish PUD #1, to create an incentive program for schools to reduce energy usage. We are their flagship project for the new program and they are giving us \$300,000 based on monitoring our ability to exceed the Washington State energy code requirements. We developed a design predicted to be 50% better than code, so we got the maximum incentive. In addition, Puget Sound Energy, our natural gas provider, had some more traditional subsidies for energy efficient boilers and retrofits to increase efficiency.

Maryalice Russell: Mahlum Architects hosted an eco-charrette and they brought in experts in the field to help us learn more about sustainability. Based on our community's strong interest in green schools, we decided that our new elementary school would apply for LEED certification through the USGBC. The Oregon Department of Energy and our supporting utility, McMinnville Water and Light, awarded us a \$50,000 grant to help with the cost of LEED certification. We are tracking other incentives from McMinnville Water & Light, the Energy Trust of Oregon, and Bonneville Power to offset the new school's sustainable features. In addition, we are working in a partnership with Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Yamhill County to reclaim adjacent property that was formerly the site of an asphalt plant. Once the contaminated site has been cleaned up, we will use it for additional elementary school parking. The new elementary school will not only be LEED-certified, it will also serve as the district's model for other capital improvements going forward. While our future projects may not seek LEED certification, they will replicate the sustainable strategies and successes from Sue Buel Elementary School.

DO YOU ANTICIPATE SUSTAINABILITY WILL PLAY A PART IN YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY FOR FUTURE BOND/LEVY CAMPAIGNS?

Ed Peters: We promote the fact that we are constructing energy efficient, durable and sustainable buildings. It is also important to have healthy, attractive learning environments. We will continue to communicate that to our community. As part of our message, we will emphasize being good stewards of public money and we will certainly talk about sustainability.

Maryalice Russell: We learned from our last campaign that it would have been helpful to put more dollars up front into having design concepts prior to going to the public for the bond. That level of specificity helps people to understand what the school will look like and what it will deliver. We're also going to work to make the sustainable components of our schools more evident to the community. While LEED certification is very good for operations costs, a lot of it isn't obvious to the general public or to students. We would like to add some learning components that the community and our kids can actually see or monitor. For example, we are discussing adding a solar panel to the new elementary school as an education piece so that students can watch the difference in how the meter is running.



*The purpose of
Funding Strategies
is to explore how school
districts secure funding
for projects. Please contact
Mahlum Architects for
more information, or if your
district would like to be
featured.*

SEATTLE
206.441.4151

PORTLAND
503.224.4032

WWW.MAHLUM.COM
INFO@MAHLUM.COM