

what makes green schools

Better?

Schools have the opportunity to be leaders in modeling energy use.

Begin the process by following these tips and taking advantage of The Energy Initiative, co-sponsored by ACSA.

America can no longer use energy today and pay for it tomorrow. This approach worked in the past, mostly because the United States had a leg up on world competition. Today, as a result of technology, the world is small and the U.S. role less dominant. In an increasingly flat world, the need for energy will be competitive and the price costly.

Think for a moment: If you did not have an energy source to access technology, would you be able to collaborate globally? As an energy-dependent country we are required to compete for innovative ideas in a world that uses energy.

Some of you will remember the national effort to fight polio in the 1950s. It was the schools that led the effort with information and vaccinations. In the 1960s, the space race was not just to beat the Russians, it was to stimulate the American economy, with creation of new ideas.

So, in 2011 it will be the schools that have the opportunity to lead again. Not only to provide education and information to the

next generation, but to model energy use and alternative power sources in an environment where most of our citizens will grow up.

Many school districts have already taken the initiative during the past five years to implement energy projects, whether for the educational or economic opportunities or both. Districts throughout the state are coming into contact with various vendors sharing information and proposals to develop energy initiatives, including solar photovoltaics (PV).

Solar PV panels have captured the lion's share of the marketplace and media attention for many reasons. Federal leaders tout solar as a critical step in reducing our reliance on foreign oil, and posit that "green" energy will create the jobs that will help repair the slumping economy. To underscore their confidence in green, the federal and state governments are providing tax incen-

By Barry Schimmel

tives to companies and investors that assist agencies in implementing PV projects.

School conferences and vendor shows are full of smart energy companies offering their services and products. Pressure is mounting for school board members to ask the administrative staff how they will be taking advantage of these opportunities.

While more and more districts are taking steps to implement energy conservation projects, it seems that most of California's 1,000 public school districts are not sure of how to begin this process.

Questions that come to mind

Savings can be long term, in five- to 30-year ranges, and are based on assumptions of future energy costs that are, at best, guesses. Is this a risk that a current school board member should place on future boards? Is analysis of the data by staff or vendors accurate? Will the projected savings be realized?

Board members are being asked to sign multi-page documents that have been drawn up by the vendor's legal staff. Is that wise? Will a project that worked in one district be applicable to another district? What are the assumptions in the proposal that may not materialize? School board members and administrators are asking: Am I embarking on the cutting edge of future technology or going down a Fools Road?

One district's story

"We made a decision to move forward with a district-wide solar energy program for two key reasons," said Gwen Gross, superintendent of the Irvine Unified School District. "First, as fiduciaries, our board members are vigilantly focused on drawing down energy costs through solar energy and redirecting these funds to student programs. Second, by exploring renewable, clean energy, we are modeling for our students the nonnegotiable wave of the future.

"Our Board of Education had the courage and wisdom to say that solar energy cannot be ignored," Gross continued. "It is abundantly clear that solar energy, like all areas of technology, will continue to improve. But waiting for the 'perfect' solar panel is like avoiding classroom computers while waiting for the perfect laptop. We made a deci-

sion to move forward with solar energy because there is clear cost savings now. There are, however, some lessons learned that we are pleased to share with our colleagues throughout the state and nation."

According to Gross, there are three key areas of expertise that you should engage to assist your district with alternative energy options, including technology, financing and legal expertise.

"My advice to district leaders is to engage these resources, especially if you have a lean staff and lack the time to address steep



learning curves. In our district, Mark Sonntag, a former science and math teacher, took on the task of stewarding the solar rollout. But most districts do not have the necessary expertise in place to oversee projects of this magnitude, so I strongly recommend engaging the right experts.

"I also recommend that you not go it alone. There is a lot of information out there that can be shared, and districts can minimize duplicative costs by sharing the process of collecting and reviewing solar and alternative energy proposals," Gross said."

Here are some concepts and questions for you to consider before accepting a proposal:

- Has the district's staff appointed a knowledgeable lead person(s) to review the proposal?
- Did you collect and review numerous proposals? While energy projects are not required to observe the formal bid process, it is strongly recommended that districts collect and compare several proposals. This ensures that you will find the best fit for your needs

Understanding California's new green building code

This year, Jan. 1 not only rang in a new year, it also introduced to California the new Green Building Code (often referred to as "CalGreen") – regulations that affect all new construction projects throughout the state in 2011 and will ultimately affect all construction, including modernization.

As you move forward with other green construction projects, you will deal with the new CalGreen requirements. To assist districts with CalGreen compliance, Fagen Friedman & Fulfroft LLP created a Green Building Code Tip Sheet by combing through the lengthy document and distilling it into a one-page, two-sided handy reference sheet.

Copies can be downloaded at fagenfriedman.com by clicking on Resources, or contact Brian Padgett at (310) 323-6339 for copies.

and the board and district are insulated from accusations of back-room deals.

- Find out what similar size and location districts have done.
- Invest in an analysis before making decisions – a penny spent in planning may save millions later.
- Decide whether your district wants to manage energy or outsource this task to the experts.
- Should you lease or buy the equipment? Prepare a life cycle cost analysis.
- Know what your current energy needs are and what the projected needs are for the next five to 10 years.
- How will you implement energy concepts into the classroom?
- Are student interaction and lifestyle awareness part of your plan?
- In the context of budget cuts and increasing academic demands, how can you incorporate the concepts of energy management into a complex curriculum?

Work through your ACSA network to increase purchasing power



Save time and increase your cost savings by sharing the process of examining and implementing alternative energy projects. Contact ACSA to see if districts in your region are examining energy conservation and alternative energy projects, and explore sharing the cost of RFP creation, review and presentations to boards and district staffs.

Effective alternative energy projects, including solar, can be too costly for some districts. By working through your ACSA network, you can examine the possibility of increasing your purchasing power and drawing down costs for technical and legal services. Combining your solar efforts with another district will allow you to share valuable pricing information and creates the possibility of discounts through a larger project.

For more information about the ACSA network and The Energy Initiative, contact Laura Preston, lpreston@acsa.org.

and be partnered, where appropriate, with neighboring districts so they can share the process, information and costs for examining alternative energy.

A new way of powering our schools

Red, white, blue and green: these colors represent changing how we in the U.S. generate energy, work to achieve energy cost savings and help protect the earth. Green energy represents a new way of powering our schools, and a wonderful way to empower our students by demonstrating creative problem-solving with an eye on protecting precious resources, both capital and natural. ■

Where to turn for expert assistance

ACSA is working with Total School Solutions to offer The Energy Initiative, which provides the three specified areas of expertise, including technical, financial and legal. Together, these experts can assist districts

with RFP creation, evaluation and recommendations.

As a former superintendent, I know firsthand the complexities and challenges of exploring new territories. The Energy Initiative will allow districts to contact ACSA

Barry Schimmel is a director of District Support Services at the educational consulting firm Total School Solutions. More information is available at www.totalschoolsolutions.net/Energy_Initiative/index.html.

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