

New Schools – Can They Be Anything But Green?

Sustainable buildings are great for everyone, with the possible exception of the short term investor. A well designed building with sustainability as one of the top priorities will result in a less expensive building to own and operate over the life of the building, but there is usually additional upfront construction costs. And, if you are going to sell your building within 3 years of building it, you probably aren't thrilled about additional upfront cost. The best candidate, therefore, for a sustainable, or "green" building is a facility with the same owner over a long period of time. One of the best owners that fits this profile is government. Schools fall under this umbrella. Most school buildings remain schools for many, many years. A well designed and well built sustainable school will use less infrastructure and require less maintenance, and thus need less money to operate for a long time. This is not only good for the taxpayer, but the studies prove again and again that a well designed school offers a better learning environment: a win/win scenario.

All this being said, would any school system want to build a new school that is not "Green"? Of course not. But the real key here is education. Educate the taxpayer. Educate the teachers and administrators. Educate the school boards. And educate the contractor. A contractor must realize that cheaper is not always better. Sometimes more expensive is actually cheaper! We as a society

have to begin looking at the Total Cost of Ownership. We used to build buildings which would last hundreds of years, but that no longer seems to be the case. The Total Cost of Ownership can be very high for a facility which had inexpensive construction cost.

There are systems in a building which cost more to install, but which will pay for themselves with energy savings in two years or less. Two years! Lighting is a great example. I can pay more upfront during construction, install a more expensive, yet more efficient light fixture, and the pay-back for the fixture is two years. That is over a 40% guaranteed return on your investment! If I told everyone reading this that I could guarantee a 40% return on their money in the stock market each year for the next two years, you would be borrowing money to give to me to invest! Who wouldn't? Yet, we can be so shortsighted when we build a building that we forget it costs money to maintain and operate a building. Guaranteed 40% return! Warren Buffet would be proud!

One of my favorite comments was from a school facility manager for a large private school. After trying to get her to see the common sense of spending a little more money up front, but saving a lot of money forever, she first asked me what I got out of it (nothing but heartburn by trying to educate her – she confused salesman with design engineer) and then she finally said that the utility money came out

of a different budget than her construction budget and she really didn't care if the school saved money out of the utility budget! As I said, it is an education process.

LEED has been a buzzword for the past several years. The best thing about LEED and it's impact on society is that more and more people are becoming aware that our planet does not have limitless resources. Yet we can live, work, and be educated in wonderful buildings which have a minimal impact on the environment, but we have to make the conscious effort to do so. It is a major paradigm shift. Education is the key. What better way to educate the next generation in the wise use of our planet's resources than by educating them in a facility that does just that! We can design and build great educational facilities that cost less to own and operate than traditional schools, and we can show our children how they do not have to suffer and sacrifice to keep living in the standard of living that our country now knows. In fact, the buildings can be better than they have been and actually improve our quality of life, while at the same time costing less to own and operate as well as reducing their impact on the environment. Talk about Win/Win! As I stated earlier, when one takes the time to thoroughly analyze the school building options, Green is the only way to go!

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