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State schools take the green test

By [DIPIKA KOHLI](#)
Journal Staff Reporter

Public schools in Washington built after 2007 will be greener in some ways than buildings certified under LEED.

Good acoustics and plenty of daylighting will earn more points under a sustainable design standard created recently that is tailor-written for schools.

Kids need to be able to see and hear well in order to learn, said Stuart Simpson, the Washington Department of General Administration's sustainable building advisor. Each year about 45 to 60 remodels and new construction projects related to schools happen around the state, of which about 60 percent is new construction.

Simpson was one of about two dozen school officials, architects, engineers, and energy efficiency experts who collaborated to write the Washington Sustainable Schools protocol, which was part of legislation signed earlier this year.



Photo courtesy Bassetti Architects
Daylighting and natural ventilation are green features of Cottage Lake elementary school in the Northshore school district.

That legislation requires all state buildings bigger than 5,000 square feet to meet LEED-silver standards, though non-occupied buildings, hospitals and research labs would be exempt. Schools need to pass the Sustainable Schools test.

The 73-page document is partly based on a California set of standards for high-performance schools, but about 70 percent of it is patterned after LEED.

Like LEED, green features for schools will earn points on a scorecard. But instead of ranking buildings based on how many points they earn as silver or gold, for example, the Sustainable Schools test is pass/fail. Public K-12 schools would have to earn at least 38 out of a total 88 points to pass.

Schools won't be required to be built to these new standards right away. Urban schools will need to phase them in starting in 2007, with rural schools allowed to wait until 2008.

That doesn't mean schools can't start using the protocol.

Next year, those opting to volunteer to apply green standards could be eligible for grants to help with extra costs, according to Kathleen O'Brien of O'Brien & Associates. Her company managed a pilot program to test the sustainable strategies on five schools around the state. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction would administer the grants, she said, which would add up to \$6.26 million.

The Washington state legislature set aside \$1.5 million to run the pilot program. O'Brien said of that, \$1.25 million went directly to the schools so architects could do extra modeling and data collection. The rest went to administering the program and for consultants, which also included Seattle-based Olympic Associates and the Miller/Hull Partnership. Paladino & Co. did a separate study, called the Bridges study, to compare the collected data with national figures, she said.

"The bottom line is that we found that the protocol is very do-able," said O'Brien, though minor parts of it still "need some tweaking." A short data collection window and trying to compare apples and oranges — study results were specific to each of the projects — were some of the project limitations.

"The schools are very cautious, and justifiably so, in moving forward with applying the protocol," she said. "But in general they're going to find the Washington Sustainable Schools protocol is a much better fit than say, the LEED rating system, which is being applied to other buildings."

A few examples

Here's what's happening on several projects, which are in different stages of applying and testing the Sustainable Schools protocol:

Construction wraps up next month at Cottage Lake elementary school in the Northshore district, which features natural ventilation and daylighting.

Ground broke earlier this summer in Spokane on Lincoln Heights, an elementary school Integrus Architecture is designing.

Teams compared long-term costs for installing different heating systems at Bethel and Olympia school districts.

Tacoma school district looked at ways to sustainably renovate Tacoma's historic Lincoln High School.

Find out more

School officials are still working out just how to ensure schools follow the protocol once it goes into effect.

U.S. Green Building Council spokesperson Gwyn Jones said there are no school-specific LEED standards, but the council is creating a guide to help people who build K-12 schools apply LEED standards.

More information on the pilot studies, the Sustainable Schools protocol, and a planning workbook for High Performance School Facilities are posted at www.k12.wa.us/schfacilities/sustainableschools.aspx.

Workshop next week

Next week in Everett experts will give a workshop on planning and financing high-performance K-12 schools. It will be Aug. 1 at Snohomish County PUD, 2320 California St., and is targeted to



Greg Hepp of Bassetti Architects will speak at a green schools workshop.

architects, engineers, and school district officials.

Greg Hepp of Bassetti Architects will present a case study of one of the green schools in a pilot project, Northshore school district's Cottage Lake elementary school. Carter Bagg of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction will talk about new green building requirements for K-12 Schools in Washington and the status of the Washington Sustainable Schools Protocol. Richard Bauscher, a bond campaign planner and Superintendent of Middleton School District, Idaho, will cover ways to prepare an effective bond campaign. Speaker Kathleen O'Brien managed a \$1.5 million pilot project to test sustainable strategies for K-12 public school construction in Washington state.

Sponsors include the Cascadia Region Green Building Council and the Sustainable Development Training Institute.

For more information, call Kollin Min at (206) 850-2232.
