Chapter 21
Green School Financing: Sustainability in a Time of Economic Challenge

Kenneth E. Lane
Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Suzanne Harris
Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Evan G. Mense
Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

ABSTRACT

The authors advocate that understanding the relationship between culture, policy, and funding can help the school leader interested in pursuing funds for a new school building or building retrofitting. Integral to this process is the development of school design policy that encourages and supports the concept of the green school as well as securing funding from federal, state, and local sources to sustain the green school in both design and operation. To facilitate the development of policies regarding green schools, agencies, governments, and countries are identified who have developed and implemented policies regarding the construction of green schools. Finally, funding efforts are identified including federal government, state government, non-profit, and business sources. It is imperative throughout the process of developing and constructing green schools that there is a consistent focus on the ability to sustain the green school in concept, design, and funding.

GREEN SCHOOL FINANCING: FUNDING SUSTAINABILITY

Locating funding for green schools can be challenging for school leaders particularly since the available sources and amounts required are constantly changing. Understanding the relationship between culture, policy, and funding can help the school leader interested in pursuing funds for a new school building or building retrofitting. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1. The culture a school leader establishes in regard to sustainability efforts in everyday practices both within the community and within the school can...
help a school leader position the school as a good candidate to receive funding. The culture of the community in which the school resides will have an impact on the policies set with a particular community. The policies established within a community toward sustainability practices help a school leader justify his or her efforts in seeking the funding. The funds available for sustainable school building projects or remodeling projects are a reflection of the policies and culture with which the school resides. An explanation of each of these components and how they intersect will be presented in the following sections.

CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Because no school exists in isolation, the culture of a school reflects the surrounding community’s values. The value a community places on sustainability efforts is increasing and reflected on websites operated by government agencies and non-profit groups that provide information about green practices and sustainability issues. For instance, the United States Green Building Council [USGBC], a non-profit organization, created a new website called the Center for Green Schools dedicated to promoting action and raising money to convert all schools into Green Schools. The website describes the parameters of a green school and outlines the benefits of green construction (Center for Green Schools, n.d.). FedCenter.gov, a government website, has information about federal mandates and best practices regarding sustainability. Regarding schools specifically, links to school construction training, incentives for actively reducing impact on the environment, and success stories are available (Fed Center, n.d.). While providing helpful information for readers, these websites reflect an attempt to influence the general public’s opinion towards sustainability practices and issues.

Some groups host events that inform the public and encourage individuals to take action, further creating a culture of sustainability awareness. For instance, Keep America Beautiful hosts a national recycling completion for schools to increase the use of recycling efforts within schools and raise awareness (Overview, n.d.). Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education [AASHE], an organization focused on voluntary participation of sustainability practices in higher education, hosts webinars and conferences to educate higher education faculty and administrative leaders (AASHE, n.d.).

Even more than creating awareness, some groups have developed standards to which contractors and school leaders adhere to reduce the impact of the school on the environment. For instance, since USGBC’s establishment of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design [LEED] standards, college and university participation in voluntary compliance and reporting has increased significantly. Better clarification of the definitions, an increase in available green products, and improved green construction practices contributed to increase ratings of the schools who report (Chance, 2012). Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education’s [AASHE] establishment of Sustainability Tracking, As-
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