

## PRAIRIE HILLS LEARNING CENTER GROWS GREEN

### Outline of Need:

Rural Roca is home to the Prairie Hills Learning Center, a Montessori school that was operating out of a 25 year old building located on a 12 acre parcel of land. Gage, Saline and the southern part of Lancaster counties or approximately 117,000 residents are served by the school. Programs offered are for children 18 months-13 years of age along with summer camps that serve up to 200 children on average.

This Center reached their limit of 28 elementary students and lacked the necessary space to accommodate the needs of its' existing students and the communities' demand for such education. Many students left the school while others were denied enrollment due to the space limitations.

Recognizing their challenges on space and demand, along with their desire to teach the benefits of energy alternatives to students; Prairie Hills sought their financing options to expand and "go green".

### How Rural Development Helped:

USDA Rural Development assisted Prairie Hills Learning Center with a \$488,000 community facility direct loan that was leveraged with \$149,700 from Prairie Hills. These funds constructed the 2,940 square foot green building, refinanced \$179,000 of existing debt incurred when Prairie Hill's acquired its' existing facilities and \$100,000 went towards electric wind generation equipment.

### The Results:

Prairie Hills Learning Center's 'gone green' facility, nestled adjacent to the existing Prairie Hills' building, features solar day lighting and heating, photo voltaic panels, wind energy generation, rain water collective from the roof, a 'cool roof' energy saving construction including straw bales, and an energy efficient heat pump system. The temperature remains constant at a comfortable 65 degrees in the building, eliminating the need for air conditioning and minimal use of the heat pump. The 10 kilowatt wind turbine brings the facility to 'Net Zero' on electricity thereby limiting the need for outside energy sources.



*"Working with USDA Rural Development was a great experience. It not only made our dream of a Green Building to serve and expand our Elementary program into a reality but it also provided us with the opportunity to get more people involved and educated about wind and solar power. The process of the loan application was rigorous but also very educational for our board because it forced us to think long term as well as short term."*

*--Susan Zink, Executive Board Member and Treasurer  
PRAIRIE HILL Learning Center*



Prairie Hills' green Learning Center can accommodate 50 students, features 2 connecting classrooms for upper and lower elementary children, a shared science and food preparation area, community room, restrooms and also a storm shelter. An additional teacher was hired, for a total of three with one part time assistant. At full capacity the student ratio is 12:5:1. A Parent Infant program is being added that educates parents on the care and development of newborn children and a second 3-6 classroom is being considered for the space that use to house the elementary. An Adolescence program that allows students to continue their Montessori education through grades 9-12 has been desired and now the extra space will allow for this. Both programs, as well as the expanded summer camp programs, have facilitated the recruitment and retention of the student population base. Rental of the community room to the public brings revenue and increases the public's awareness of the facilities and educational services offered. Tours and education classes on the new wind and solar powered education center are held resulting in the recruitment of more students.

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