

Testimony by Congresswoman Darlene Hooley
House Committee on Education and Labor
Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Thank you for inviting me here today to testify before the Education and Labor Committee on the topic of green schools and the recent creation of the Congressional Green Schools Caucus.

I am here today on behalf of my two co-chairs, Congressmen McCaul of Texas and Matheson of Utah and the over 20 members of the Caucus, including Congressmen Loeb sack, Chandler, and Holt, to discuss several reasons we have joined together to form the Green Schools Caucus.

Our vision is for this Caucus to educate its members and the Congress at large on the many benefits of Green Schools and work to impact the role the Federal government has in green school construction and renovation.

Across the country, the green schools movement is growing and our nation's students, parents, and teachers are demanding change. This is not surprising when one considers that 20% of America goes to school every day. That is 55 million students and more than 6 million faculty and staff.

Too many of our nation's schools are falling into disrepair and are potentially dangerous for both students and faculty. I remember visiting a school in my district a few years ago where there were holes in the ceiling, water damage on the walls, and mold growing in the corners.

Green schools create a healthy environment that is conducive to learning while saving energy, resources, and money. Let me repeat this important point: when done correctly, green schools provide a healthy environment AND save money.

Green Schools have plenty of natural light, high quality acoustics, and air that is safe to breathe. According to Capital E's Greening America's Schools, which I would like to include in the record, green schools save money – on average \$100,000/year.

In school terms, that's enough to hire 2 new teachers, buy 200 new computers, or purchase 5,000 new textbooks. Statistics and facts about the benefits of green schools speak for themselves.

Greening our schools will reduce US CO₂ emissions by 33.2 million metric tons while saving schools and universities \$30 billion in energy costs over 10 years.

Greening schools teaches the next generation about sustainability and climate change through their school experience.

An example of this are schools that have installed green roofs that serve as a filter for storm water run-off while providing a natural habitat for birds and butterflies and an interactive learning environment for students.

They also dramatically improve the health and productivity of students and teachers by reducing the incidence of asthma, colds, and flu among children while improving student learning and performance by a documented 7% - 18% according to the 1999 Heschong Mahone study.

The green schools movement is taking off all across the country. LEED for Schools, a market specific Rating System for construction and major renovation of green schools, launched in April 2007. Since its inception, an average of one new school per day has registered for certification under LEED for Schools.

I recently had a chance to visit Bush Elementary School in Salem, Oregon which has incorporated many green building design features. The school was designed so that its gym, cafeteria and stage space can be closed off from the rest of the school building when the space is being used for community events, conserving both electricity and heat. The school also uses only no-VOC paint and carpet to protect indoor air quality.

The green building marketplace is expected to be worth \$60 billion by 2010 according to the McGraw Hill 2007 Green Building Smart Market Report on Education, which I'd like to also include for the record. This Study also predicts that green schools will make up more than 27% of the commercial green building market.

School districts all over the country have made the commitment to green their schools, saving money while promoting student health and performance. The US Green Building Council has certified or registered 629 K-12 schools under the LEED rating system, spanning 47 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

It is clear to me that this issue is so important it deserves a dedicated group in Congress to promote and facilitate the adoption of green schools across the country. One of the challenges to green school growth is bringing together experts from many disciplines to give us a fuller picture about its overall benefit compared to conventional construction.

With green schools popping up throughout the country, we now have the opportunity to quantify the benefits of green schools as it relates to improved test scores, increased teacher retention, decreased absenteeism, and decreased incidence of environmental illnesses like allergies and asthma.

While research has been conducted, there is a gap in federally supported research on the direct benefits to students. That is why I, along with Congressmen Matheson and McCaul, introduced an amendment to the Energy Independence and Security Act authorizing a study by the EPA of how sustainable building features affect student performance in K-12 schools.

We established the Green Schools Caucus to continue this vital work. Through briefings and school tours, we can learn first hand what it means to go green and how these practices improve our students' health and performances while saving money for our local governments.

I invite every member of this panel to join us on this educational venture and to work with us to find appropriate ways for the Federal government to support decisions by our local school administrators, parents, teachers, and elected officials to green America's schools.