

# WHEN INITIATING A BUILDING PROJECT, ADD GREEN OR LEED TO YOUR VOCABULARY



Your school district has performed studies and made the commitment to renovate your district’s facilities or build new ones; but have you considered green or LEED design strategies? They can substantially reduce operating costs and in some states, including Pennsylvania, they enable districts to receive additional state reimbursement. They can also contribute significantly to student performance and learning.

Perhaps you’ve heard the buzzwords “green architecture” or “LEED certified” and wondered the difference between the two. Both green architecture and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) refer to design strategies based on environmental sustainability aimed at creating energy-efficient, environmentally friendly buildings. LEED certification takes the design process one step beyond green architecture by measuring and documenting the sustainable design strategies in a building. There are four progressive levels of certification: Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

Whether a school district chooses to structure its pursuit of a green building through LEED certification depends on two major factors — value to the school district and cost.

## VALUE TO THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The school district and the design team must determine which sustainability principles make sense for the project. If the project goals are green enough to qualify for certification, the LEED process can be a valuable tool in establishing expectations for all members of the project team, including contractors. Without the strict requirements of LEED, the project team and the contractor might stray from the intent of the design, or green strategies might be cut if the project becomes too expensive. LEED is a way of ensuring that sustainable design is not value engineered out of the building. LEED also signifies the school district’s and community’s commitment to sustainability.

Green / LEED design can have an educational value as well. A green / LEED certified

building can become an educational tool, e.g., showing how energy consumption in a classroom is reduced by daylighting or how much energy wind power can generate on a given day.

## COST

As designers and contractors become more familiar with green design strategies, the construction cost gap between green architecture and non-green architecture continues to shrink significantly. LEED certification will, however, add to the cost of a green project because of the extra documentation required. The benefit of this extra documentation is that the school district is ensured that the design intent that was so carefully planned is actually implemented during the construction process. In essence, it ensures corners are not cut during construction.

(Recent legislation in Pennsylvania allows districts to receive 10% in additional reimbursement for a project that is rated at the LEED Silver level or above.)

