

When green is all there is to be

With all due respect to Kermit the Frog, it's not that hard being green. His melancholy made for memorable Muppet music but when it comes to conservation and preserving the environment, green is the shade every ecology-minded organization and citizen aspires to be these days. As the song says, green is "the color of spring; and green can be cool and friendly-like." For Barrington 220 schools, however, the analogy is more than lyrical. Being "green" implies a dedication to creating healthier, more energy efficient, and fiscally responsible learning environments.

We know from research that high performing schools provide better instructional surroundings while prudently using natural resources and money. Barrington 220 students, staff, and taxpayers should expect nothing less in our efforts to be instructionally progressive, environmentally friendly, and financially attentive. The new Early Learning Center, under construction adjacent to Prairie Middle School, to open in 2010, is a good example.

The improved Early Learning Center, which will relocate our government-mandated early childhood special education programs from the aging Woodland School in Carpentersville, will include many eco-friendly and resourceful features. These include natural and LED (Light-Emitting-Diode) lighting; local and renewable materials; improved water conservation; energy-efficient insulation; nontoxic, low, or no VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) paints or adhesives; and the use of healthy "green-clean" amenities and practices. Architects and construction managers for the Early Learning Center are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) accredited, meaning they bring a detailed understanding of green building practices and principles and are experienced in the requirements and processes of the LEED Green Building Rating System™.

These aspects of the new Early Learning Center demonstrate there is a different way to build a school so it creates a healthy, environmentally responsible atmosphere that inspires learning but also respects natural and fiscal resources. While the Early Learning Center will exemplify sustainable, high-performance design and construction concepts, Barrington 220 wants to ensure its 11 other schools also reduce their carbon footprint.

With our school buildings ranging in age from 55 years (Grove Avenue School) to 6 years (Countryside and Roslyn Road schools), creating a cohesive "green" plan is not easy (OK, Kermit was partially correct). In the case of existing schools, most of which opened before ecological practices were valued, an integrated approach and teamwork is necessary to produce efficiencies that protect health, boost achievement, and save fossil fuel costs.

In Barrington 220, rising student performance is attributed to wonderful staff and community support, but it is well documented that a classroom's indoor ambiance — including lighting, temperature, humidity, and noise levels — has significant impact on instructional quality. Because students and staff spend more time in schools than in any indoor setting except their homes, we have a responsibility to ensure there are no adverse biological effects such as mildew, lack of fresh air, or ceiling and flooring materials that may emit pollutants.

Tantamount to safeguarding the learning environment is our obligation to manage the funds taxpayers provide to operate these buildings. While working with staff, even simple strategies can refine the balance between conserving energy costs and maintaining a comfortable classroom. These include shutting doors and windows during heating and cooling seasons; closing window treatments on sunny days; turning off lights when leaving an area; and keeping vents clear of



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clutter or dust. Other strategies are unplugging electrical equipment and appliances when not in use and turning them off at end of each day; regulating thermostat controls for heat and air conditioning; removing unnecessary light bulbs; and incorporating energy conservation into the curriculum where applicable. These collective efforts have saved 1.14 million kilowatt hours of electricity and \$73,672 in energy costs since July 2006. Not only are we optimizing our HVAC systems but our schools also receive 15 percent of these savings to reinvest in student instruction and staff development.

From constructing a new school to enhancing the ones we have, Barrington 220 — like the community it serves — understands the value of clean air, natural light, recycling, renewable power, and other ways to lessen our impact on the environment. Doing so enables our schools to offer measurable health, educational, and financial benefits for students and staff as well as residents and families living within our boundaries.

As the frog finally understood by the end of his song — "I am green, and it'll do fine; it's beautiful, and I think it's what I want to be" — we feel the same way about the importance of providing "green schools" for Barrington 220 students and stakeholders. Like Kermit, we realize "green is all there is to be." U