

**From:** Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council, Green Building committee

**To:** Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee (ETIC)

**Re:** Public comment on green schools policies

ETIC committee,

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council would like to express its support for developing a green schools policy in the state of Montana.

Previous legislation in Montana such as the Quality Schools Grant program recognized the cost-saving benefits to public school districts when they make energy efficiency improvements. The benefits don't stop there. As shown in the research from the US Green Building Council, green schools contribute to students' health, productivity, and performance as well as teacher retention. What a triple bottom line!

This has been proven through the example of Billings Public Schools District. A recent Billings Gazette editorial cited that the district has avoided **\$3.4 million** in utility costs, from July 2008 when their program launched to January 2014. Part of the conservation success is in building improvements, such as better insulation, new roofs, windows and doors and more efficient heating and ventilation systems. But people account for much of the savings. Staff members have been educated about turning off lights when leaving a room, powering down computers and unplugging appliances at the end of the day. This has resulted in 28 of the 30 schools in the District receiving Energy Star certification, with an average rating of 88 out of 100.

Imagine what 3.4 million dollars can provide in textbooks, technology, and teaching staff? And the savings continue to roll in; in the month of December 2013 alone, the district saved \$102,205 in electricity and heating expenses as Billings shivered through below-zero temperatures. It is clear that green schools achieve **both comfort and cost savings**.

Congratulations to the Billings Public School District. Keep up the good work and we hope more school districts join you!

Let us highlight two programs that you could focus on moving forward:

- **Energy Star Performance Manager benchmarking**—We believe that “you can’t improve what you don’t measure.” Benchmarking a building is the first step towards understanding its energy usage. And best of all—it’s free! ESPM is a free online software.

Moreover, requiring schools to benchmark their buildings and publicly disclose the information is important for transparency, so that taxpayers know how their money is being spent.

- **Green building policy for new school construction**— The real question here is, why not? Green buildings are no more expensive than traditional buildings if the green aspects are included from the moment you go to the drawing board. This is something the State of Montana has already recognized for its state buildings.

In late 2013, the Department of Administration established a **High-Performance Building Standard** for the construction, renovation, and maintenance of public buildings in Montana as well as all new state-leased buildings in 17-7-202 MCA. These standards have been developed to improve the capacity of the state to design, build, and operate high-performance and resilient buildings. An integrated design process to optimize energy performance, enhance indoor environmental quality and conserve natural resources are encouraged for all projects.

If it should be done for state buildings and state workers, why not for schools and our children?

Even closer to home, YVCC has experienced the benefits of a green building first-hand at the office of its parent organization, Northern Plains Resource Council. The Home on the Range building, completed in 2006, achieved the highest level of LEED certification in 2007, becoming the first LEED Platinum building in Montana.

Striving for LEED provided the process that ensured we got the energy efficient building that we wanted, and daylit spaces with good air quality for our staff and our meetings. Staff productivity and retention are excellent. We’ve been tracking the cost savings, and they are considerable. We think all school districts would benefit from the LEED process; we think it would be great for student performance, teacher retention, and using taxpayer resources wisely.