

Every Community Needs a Healthy, High Performance School

By Michele Curreri, Sarat Pratapchandran

Wouldn't you call it an achievement if all children in every community in America could go to a healthy, high performance school? We believe every occupant in the physical space we call school deserves the best possible environment. With this core concept in mind, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) and the US EPA Indoor Environments Division presented the first Healthy Schools Summit in San Diego on September 29, 2008. Here is an abstract of the discussions that occurred at the summit.

Executive Summary

The Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) and the US EPA Indoor Environments Division presented the first Healthy Schools Summit in San Diego on September 29, 2008. The summit grew out of a renewed interest, passion and commitment from industry leaders to build healthy schools in communities across America.

The summit provided a venue for individuals to communicate, collaborate and put initiatives to build healthy, high performance schools into action. Fifty national experts, whose sphere of influence encompassed the operational, environmental and societal commitments to building healthy, high performance schools, were selected. They represented educational facility planning, architecture, engineering, unions, industry, governmental and non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations and the media. The summit was made possible through a cooperative grant awarded by the US EPA Indoor Environments Division to CEFPI.



Merle Kirkley, CEFPI and Deborah Moore, School Planning & Management Magazine

Participants addressed the following questions:

- What is already working well in the realm of healthy high performance schools?
- What are some examples of successful programs that are effectively designing, building, operating and maintaining healthy, high performance schools?
- What can each participant do to learn from, adapt and apply these lessons at work?
- What commitments can attendees make to advance the movement?

A pre-summit questionnaire identified several opportunities in the realm of building healthy, high performance schools. This included

legislative policies, advocacy, cost issues and a host of other factors.

During the summit, participants described their vision with regard to building healthy, high performance schools. Of great import, the group concluded that steps to advance the movement should include developing better performance indicators for these types of schools, engaging children in climate change and helping to make communities recognize the full spectrum of education including student performance and student's interaction with the community and environment. They also discussed challenges like cost issues, lack of knowledge among constituents, lack of incentives, lack of schools not being early adopters to this change and ultimately lack of leadership.

They identified the top five major challenges they faced in building healthy, high performance schools:

1. Community connection/ awareness
2. Lack of knowledge
3. Limited research/data/metrics
4. Cost issues/lack of incentives/competing priorities
5. Lack of leadership



Robert Kobet, AIA, Sustainable International gave the opening address

Working in small groups, the participants identified solutions to these challenges. Most importantly, they also made strong commitments to return to their communities and share this knowledge with constituents. The following report offers an abstract of what was discussed at the summit. The US EPA and CEFPI strongly believe that interactive discussions among professionals in this area will help in developing a uniform, baseline definition for a healthy, high performance school.

One important lesson learned from this exercise was that our joint efforts to bring people together to work for a common cause yielded results beyond our expectations. As you read the following report you will gain an understanding of the knowledge developed by the group, the methods they used to tackle challenges and the energy they created to put their commitments to action.

Opportunities in Building Healthy, High Performance Schools

A pre-summit poll revealed that schools across the country have the following opportunities to build healthy, high performance schools:

- HR 3021 - 21st Century Green High-Performance Public School Facilities Act
- Rating Standards: LEED, CHPS, Green Globes
- Trickle down effect from municipal efforts in sustainability
- Greater interest from students in the environment
- Better understanding of cost issues
- More advocacy for green schools
- Positive media coverage
- Increase in states with green and healthy schools Web sites



Michael Hall, Fanning Howey

- Healthy and high performance schools are becoming part of the vernacular
- Resources from the US EPA like Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Program and ENERGY STAR are helping schools manage their environment
- Greater involvement from school-based organizations
- The escalation of energy prices has led people to think of new and alternative ways
- Availability of grants and other resources
- Research showing that a better physical environment aids in improving test scores
- Green schools caucuses are being formed
- Several State laws provide incentives and certification mandates
- Costs and benefits are now being documented

Our Common Challenges

There are numerous challenges we face as we strive to have healthy, high performance schools in every community in America. Our common challenges are:

- Money
- Limited budgets limit change efforts
- Initial cost versus long-term costs
- Lack of knowledge/ignorance
- Influence not coming from the right sectors
- Limited hard research
- Lack of incentives
- Availability of experienced designers
- Lack of a belief in “green”
- Lack of criteria for evaluating impact on performance and health
- Fear - will this make our other schools look bad?
- Availability of cheap energy
- Lack of familiarity with design tools
- Schools are not early adopters
- Competing priorities
- Lack of leadership
- Status quo mentality
- Low bid
- Tendency to avert risks
- No clarity on what constitutes a “healthy school”
- International life cycle impact assessments need to be studied

- Absence of key performance indicators that does not allow schools to communicate better with others involved in building and designing healthy, high performance schools
- Lack of connection and strong involvement of the community
- A highly balkanized issue in which we need more federal leadership. Key performance indicators are coming from the federal government. States should take leadership in this
- Cross agency efforts among federal entities must grow
- Grassroots efforts are needed
- There is lack of clarity in communicating this issue to the outer world
- A silo mentality should change; barriers should be broken down among institutions that serve communities

The Top Five Challenges

We zeroed in on the top five challenges:

1. Community connection/awareness
2. Lack of knowledge
3. Limited research/data/metrics
4. Cost issues/lack of incentives/competing priorities
5. Lack of leadership

Solutions to the Top Five Challenges

1. *Community connection/awareness*

As we branch out to communities where we have to “sell” the idea of building healthy, high perform-



Darryl Alexander, American Federation of Teachers

ance schools, there are several strategies we need to adopt:

We have to involve the following groups in all our discussions:

- Students/teachers/principals
- Parents/ PTAs
- Business community
- School board, superintendent, school business officials/facility director
- Community institutions (local government, civic organizations, other educational organizations, NGO’s)

Participants should be involved in a transparent process and efforts must be taken to create public/private partnerships. They should have a shared vision and strive to break down barriers. Besides, participants should engage in sharing best practices, establish peer to peer networks and school districts should make efforts to find a champion in their districts.

2. *Lack of knowledge*

Where does it exist? The lack of



Katy Hatcher, US EPA ENERGY STAR

knowledge exists in the community, teachers, school district leaders, maintenance and operations personnel, and governing agencies (such as the governor, state representatives, building departments, Department of Education, and state energy offices). This is pretty daunting and those engage in building schools must come up with ways to educate the public. A few solutions are:

- Emphasize that the lifecycle cost is more important than initial costs
- Research is available; not being disseminated to public
- Adults need to be educated more than kids
- Target policymakers in states



Christina Lighthall, Wake County Public School System

3. *Limited research/data/metrics*

Areas we need to concentrate on are:

- Energy
- Acoustics
- Indoor Environmental Quality – what you measure and what impact it has
- Student attendance
- Occupant health
- Achievement – how are students performing in better, healthier learning environments?

4. *Cost issues/lack of incentives/competing priorities*

Schools should look at debt service, alternate sources of financing including short-term bonds, performance contracts or tax exempt lease purchase programs.

5. *Lack of leadership*

Several strategies were discussed including advocacy, federal legislature initiatives and other areas. ■

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**Pictures courtesy:
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