

Let's Save Energy



School Energy Managers Project



January 2014

“Cents and Centsability” to start the New Year

“A penny saved is a penny earned.”

Benjamin Franklin said it and many others quote it. Focusing on the small details is a good way to leverage greater success. School districts are focused on every penny as they strive to provide a path for a bright future for students through quality educational opportunities. In doing so, school boards and superintendents are challenged daily to find innovative solutions to real-time budgeting problems.

“Look after the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.”

This British proverb refers to being careful about small things, which typically results in the big things going according to plan.

In the world of energy management, a few of those “small things” relate to tracking, evaluating and communicating energy consumption. School districts are mandated to track consumption and communicate annually, but how many districts take the additional step to communicate the information monthly and educate others on how their personal behavior impacts usage? That small additional step leverages greater future successes. Another small step may be utility rebates awarded for installing energy-efficient lighting and equipment.

Over the past year, many districts have completed lighting upgrades or HVAC renovations, with rebates reducing capital expenditures. Of the 173 districts in Kentucky, with few exceptions, the only districts requesting rebates for those renovations are those with an energy manager. The application process is a “small thing,” but it has yielded nearly \$400,000 for districts. For many school buildings, renovations have been done and the “penny” is there for the taking, but the form must be completed to recapture it. Those pennies add up and can help fund the next series of energy improvements.

As school districts focus on student achievement, they also must focus on creating a culture that embraces prudent use of taxpayer funding through a focus on process efficiency (including energy utilization) and realize that the two are inextricably connected. When energy efficiency is not a priority, opportunities are lost. Those lost opportunities can reveal themselves in inefficient gym lighting that remains on constantly; in not hiring or training people for positions that require expertise in operating facilities with modern technologies; and in not having an adequate succession plan for staff to stay current with critical skills.

By not being efficient with our energy, we are continually paying for upgrades we should have made in the first place. We make what amounts to a monthly overpayment each month on our utility bills because we didn't invest in energy technologies that would have saved us money. Over time, we can pay for those needed upgrades with what we save by not wasting energy and dollars every month. It is important for you, as district leaders, to encourage your school system to focus on business processes to ensure spending “dollars for students, not energy.”



Woodford County's Simmons Elementary energy team, along with State Representative James Kay and Senator Julian Carroll recently celebrated becoming an ENERGY STAR Labeled Building. This means they are using energy efficiently and “dollars for students, not energy.”

"Rock Stars" of Energy

Lessons Learned and Changes Made

In 2008 state legislators took note of rising energy costs (see MUNIS chart below) and passed House Bill 2 (codified as KRS 160.325), and Governor Beshear initiated his state energy strategy, Intelligent Energy Choices for Kentucky's Future. These actions led to public school districts developing and implementing their own plans for energy efficiency, aided by the establishment of the KSBA School Energy Managers Project in 2010. As a result, Kentucky's public school districts are using less energy today per square foot and have flattened energy expenditures, even though the conditioned space in districts has increased over 5 million square feet. This is a noteworthy accomplishment for districts.

MUNIS K-12 Facility Energy Expenditures
FY2000 - FY2014



The districts listed below are the "rock stars" of energy in Kentucky as they have low Energy Utilization Indices (EUI) and have verified their efforts through a high percentage of their schools achieving the ENERGY STAR label.

Anderson County
Barren County
Bullitt County
Burgin Independent
Butler County
Casey County
Corbin Independent
Daviess County
Frankfort Independent
Gallatin County
Grayson County
Hardin County
Henry County
Jessamine County

Kenton County
Marion County
Meade County
Murray Independent
Oldham County
Owen County
Robertson County
Scott County
Shelby County
Southgate Ind
Trimble County
Walton-Verona Ind
Warren County



*"Few people know so clearly what they want.
Most people can't even think what to
wish for when they
throw a penny in a fountain."
- Barbara Kingsolver*

These districts know clearly what they wish for and have the daily resolve to achieve those ends. Most of these districts have older buildings, but still have been able to achieve "Dollars for students, not energy." Most have an energy manager who not only tracks and reports energy use, but also assesses, evaluates, communicates and engages with district staff and students to create a culture of efficient energy utilization. These districts stand out as they have made the commitment to foster wise energy choices and have made sound investments to save energy dollars. The challenges of reduced funding and rising utility costs are being mitigated by the implementation of an Energy Management Plan that reduces future spending and allows those dollars to stay in the classroom.

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