

EWS RELEASE

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***Editor's Note: UPDATED STORY

**GRANTS MAKES WAY FOR SOLAR
PANELS ON TWO LIBERTYVILLE SCHOOLS**

Butterfield and Highland Middle schools will be fitted for solar panels with the help of two \$900,000 grants – making Libertyville School District 70 the largest solar-run elementary school district in the state.

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, a private foundation, awarded District 70 a total of \$1.8 million in Illinois Clean Energy Solar Grants, said Dr. Kurt Valentin, District 70's assistant supt. of finance and operations. Under the plan with sole bidder C&E Solutions, District 70 will spend \$1.6 million per building to install solar power. That means the district will spend about \$720,000 of its own money on each school for the project. However, District 70 officials expect to have that covered with electrical savings over the years from using solar energy, as well as obtaining energy credit when District 70 passes unused solar energy to the electrical grid on sunny, no school days.

“The district would fund the cost by partial abolishment of the Working Cash Fund,” said Dr. Valentin. With interest rates at an all time low, the payback on the project exceeds the potential interest income lost.”

On sunny days, the schools' solar panels will generate electricity on site. Energy credit, generated on sunny days from closed schools that do not use the power, also may come into play. The schools will not be able to store solar power on site, so on cloudy days the district will have to buy electricity.

The district will pay for the project upfront, collecting the grants once the Foundation verifies the project's upon completion, Valentin said. The 40 X 65-inch solar panels are expected to be installed in August and be ready for the start of school for students

on Aug. 20. Each school will have about 40,000 square feet of panels for 140,000 square-foot Highland Middle School and 75,000 square-foot Butterfield School.

The solar power is expected to save the schools about \$45,000 a year, or about \$3,000-\$5,000 a month depending on the season.

Each school will get more than 30 percent of its energy from the systems but not make enough to power the school. Excess electricity production will be credited back to the school when it cannot make all of the electricity it needs.

In the letters awarding the grants, the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation noted that during their most recent competitive grant cycle, they had received more requests for solar photovoltaic projects than they could support. However, “the Foundation is pleased to see large-scale PV projects being installed at schools, where they will generate significant savings and allow students to learn first-hand about renewable energy,” according to Gabriela Martin, Program Officer for Renewable Energy at the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.

The Libertyville school district will have 900kW of photovoltaics installed once the Butterfield and Highland solar electric systems are up and running. This is expected to establish Libertyville School District 70 as having the largest amount of photovoltaic capacity installed in the state.

Both schools are prime for solar because they have relatively new roofs and Butterfield is completely electric, including heating.

“We are committed to going green and this is another path,” Supt. Dr. Guy Schumacher said after the board unanimously approved the projects. “This is very progressive and will add additional curricular opportunities as well as overall support of our eco system.”

Dr. Valentin said he opened bidding for the solar installation but the only other company to bid wanted to estimate the work without personally inspecting the sites. “I was very uncomfortable with that idea,” he said. “Their estimate could be too low, once

they visit the sites and do inspections for the projects and decide it will cost a lot more.”

District 70 is going with C&E Solutions, which is Libertyville based, and gave a preliminary presentation to the Board of Education’s Committee of the Whole earlier this year. The panels to be used are made in the United States.

Once the systems are working, they will be incorporated into classroom curriculum with all information on the project being web-based, Valentin said. “There is an educational outreach to this project.”

Dave Wilms, a Libertyville resident and the former sustainability coordinator at Stevenson High School, will help District 70 develop a renewable energy curriculum for students and staff.

“Renewable energy is really important to learn about today because of the harmful impacts that carbon dioxide is having on the planet,” Wilms said.

The photovoltaic systems to be used on both schools will help reduce the carbon footprints of District 70 by more than 50 million pounds of CO₂ if the electricity came from traditional coal plants, Wilms said.

“Each school will also save more than \$1 million in electricity costs over the life times of the systems,” he added. “Using renewable energy is the fiscally and ethically proper thing for schools to do as they help prepare students for the best possible futures by reducing both costs and carbon footprints.”

District 70 first ventured into solar power in 2009 when it applied for state grants and installed two 14-foot high solar panels that stand outside Butterfield and Highland Middle schools. The panels were a part of a re-roofing project at both schools.

On a good day, each panel will create enough energy to light one classroom. Each panel can produce about one kilowatt of energy when it’s sunny, which translates to powering about 10-12 75-watt bulbs. The main purpose of the panels, however, is that they are used as educational tools. Both panels are able to

communicate on a website so that students can study, graph and learn about the energy each produces.

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