

# The Moorestown Patch

## Creating Sustainable Schools That Practice What They Preach

By John Shields

Would you trust a plumber if you visited his workshop and found leaks sprouting everywhere? You shouldn't. In the same way, should we trust our educators to proselytize the importance of transitioning to sustainability if the school itself wasn't an example of its own teachings?

Fortunately, we're beginning to see positive progress in educating green, inside of school buildings that embody the very same principles.

Holy Cross High School in Delran is one in particular that took major steps to cut energy consumption in 2007. They focused on lighting retrofits and contracted with Maple Shade-based GreenTech Energy Services.

At the time, the mission was more financial in nature. As Principal Dennis Guida said, "We originally launched ... the retrofit to help shrink the school's carbon footprint and reduce our energy costs, but we did not anticipate how dramatically it would change the appearance of the school itself. The whole place is brighter."

Guida reported anecdotal evidence of boosts in teacher and student morale, and an overall more conducive learning environment.

Oh, not to mention the \$40,000 a year in savings, nor the 18 tons in carbon dioxide reductions. All that on a project that cost \$160,000 (of which \$27,000 was rebated through state programs—the facilitation of said rebates being one of GreenTech Energy's unique services). The brighter, more learning-friendly setting was just an unintended consequence of updating an aging system.

That lighting retrofit—in which gymnasiums and auditoriums saw old metal halide fixtures replaced with high-efficiency T5 lighting, as well as hallway and classroom upgrades—is just one way a school can make a statement about committing to a sustainable future.

You can't drive past Harford School in Mount Laurel without being taken aback by a substantial photovoltaic installation on the roof, with still more out of sight behind the building. The 1,330 solar panels there are joined by another 713 panels at Harrington Middle School. Together, the systems equate to half a megawatt of electrical production.

The Mount Laurel schools take it one step further, by installing kiosks that allow students to monitor exactly how much power is being produced, and understand the environmental benefits of clean power versus today's more prevalent sources of fuel.

But why stop there? Educating students about sustainability should continue right into the classroom. Not as an additional piece of subject matter, but as a layer embedded on top of all the lesson plans currently in place. So says Jaimie Cloud, founder of the New York City-based Cloud Institute of Sustainable Education, who visited the Cherry Hill Library last Thursday and Friday for a two-day workshop.

The students for this workshop? About 65 teachers across the Cherry Hill School District, most in the middle school system. The purpose of the event was to introduce participants to "systems thinking," a mindset that serves as a prerequisite to understanding sustainability—and ultimately integrating its principles into the daily classroom.

Sponsored in a partnership through Sustainable Cherry Hill, the workshop took teachers who didn't necessarily specialize in the sciences and asked them to acknowledge that the environment in which we live permeates every class, and equipped them with a new realm of thought that helps them convey that reality to their students.

In the same way "school" is a multi-faceted word—meaning so much more than just a structure for learning—so too must we approach the coming decades with a diverse arsenal of tactics. Reduce energy consumption—check. Mitigate climate-endangering emissions—check. Disseminate knowledge to the emerging generation? You better believe it.

And the same way Holy Cross had the accidental perk of a brighter school, bringing sustainability education into the classroom will make for a brighter future.