

# ENERGY EFFICIENCY

## IN MONTANA'S SCHOOLS



**Funding sources  
create jobs, improve  
classrooms, save  
taxpayers money**

**D**uring the 2009 legislative session, Northern Plains Resource Council worked on a bill to create an energy efficiency program for Montana K-12 schools (HB 646, Rep. Wanda Grinde). That bill failed to pass, but pieces of that bill were incorporated into the bill to appropriate the federal stimulus funds (HB 645, Rep. Jon Sesso).

Electricity rates for most of Montana are the highest in the region. Other sources of energy also have seen wild fluctuations in price. An assessment of Montana schools found that \$27 million was spent on energy in 2007. An energy efficiency program that leads to a 30% reduction in energy use would save the state's school districts over \$8 million annually.

Fortunately, energy costs are one of the few expenses schools can reduce without sacrificing the quality of education. Below is a summary of where things stand, including a third bill that creates an ongoing fund for general school facility improvements.

### **Schools Can Get Money for Energy Improvements**

There are, in essence, three possible sources of funding, all administered by the state Department of Commerce.

■ **\$15 million of stimulus money for Quick Start Energy Grants:** This money will go out as competitive grants, so the best projects will get funding. Schools can receive money for 1) energy efficiency improvements based on an energy audit or 2) to pay for an energy audit. The Department of Environmental Quality will be consulted by Commerce in determining which projects receive funding as well as providing schools with lists of qualified energy auditors. (The grants must be spent by September 30, 2009, or they revert to the quality schools facility grant program.)

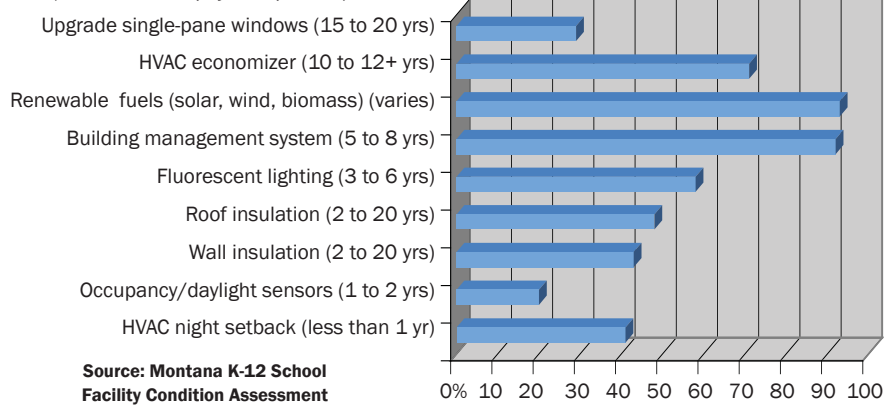
■ **\$20 million of stimulus money for deferred maintenance and energy improvements:** This money came from the original \$35 million for Quick Start. It will go out to schools based on the quality educator formula. This way, every school gets its share of the stimulus money. It is important to keep in mind that this money can be used for efficiency, and citizens, parents, and legislators should encourage their school districts to do so. (This money must be spent by September 30, 2010, or it reverts to the general fund).

■ **\$13 million of state revenue for quality schools facility grant program:** This program came from the governor and was established by House Bill 152. It is to be used to cover all aspects of infrastructure needs and will be run as a competitive grant program. The rules for how Commerce will run this program are to be determined. This is an opportunity to get good rules in place that will result in better energy-efficiency projects. This program is estimated to have \$12 million-\$13 million per biennium, ongoing.

That means \$48 million over the next year-and-a-half and a total of over \$100 million over the next 10 years. Some schools (particularly smaller schools) complain that they won't be able to compete for the Quick Start money, they haven't done an audit yet, etc. Since Quick Start money can be used to pay for an audit, there is really no excuse. Every school (as long as there are enough auditors available) should get an energy audit done. That does a few things: allows them to tap into the Quick Start money, sets them up to use their share of the \$20 million wisely, and positions them to put together a good grant application for the quality school facility money.

## % of Montana Schools Needing Improvement

(with estimated payback periods)



Source: Montana K-12 School Facility Condition Assessment

## One Small School's Success Story

Our number one mission at Independent School is to provide students with a quality education and a healthy, safe and supportive environment. Every dime spent on wasteful energy systems is a dime taken away from that mission. The more money we can save by upgrading the energy efficiency of our schools, the more we can invest in our students.

Last winter, we experienced several weeks of below-zero temperatures. Our old boiler was working around the clock to battle Old Man Winter, driving up our energy bills. Thanks to

the new high efficiency boilers, this winter we will use half of the energy to keep our school warm and students comfortable.

With the cold and flu season quickly approaching and a new strain of flu hitting our state, it is more important than ever to protect students from getting sick. Our new heating upgrade includes a new air intake system that will circulate fresh air, which will help keep students healthier and reduce teacher absenteeism.

Independent is a small school district that would have never been able to afford these energy upgrades without the Quick Start grant. This grant program and others coming down the pike are helping schools across Montana make critical infrastructure improvements, save taxpayers money and put local people to work.

Montana leaders are wise to focus stimulus spending on energy efficiency in schools. The Quick Start program is helping schools across Montana save money on energy bills and improve learning environments for students. Of all the ways we can spend federal stimulus dollars, spending it on energy efficiency rises above the rest, as it is the one investment that actually pays itself back in energy savings year after year.

– Principal Bill Laurent, Independent School, near Billings

## Future Holds Promise

These Quick Start grants are just the beginning. Several new funding sources are on the way that can be used to improve the energy efficiency of schools and other public buildings. Plus, additional stimulus dollars are headed to many of our cities and counties for local energy-saving projects, and new federal tax incentives make it easier for homeowners to make energy-saving improvements. Never before has there been such great opportunity for each and every one of us to create better living and working environments, save money on energy bills, and explore new careers helping others conserve energy.

– State Rep. Wanda Grinde

## Program Creates Jobs

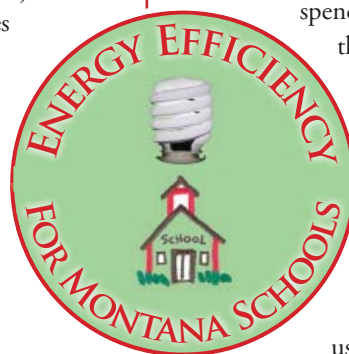
It's been a rough summer for many of our friends and colleagues in the building design and construction trades. This is normally the boom season. But the Quick Start program has been a much-needed boost, helping many local contractors, builders, engineers and other tradesman find work, keep doors open, and in some cases, grow during this tough economic time.

The Quick Start grant to Independent School kept half a dozen people from local companies employed this summer. Cat's Paw Electric in Billings was able to put two people to work for three weeks upgrading lights throughout the school. With so many schools and other buildings across Montana in need of energy-saving upgrades, focusing state and federal resources on improving building energy efficiency can boost jobs and bring greater prosperity to local businesses and communities.

Energy efficiency jobs are real people jobs, many with no special training needed. As federal stimulus dollars for energy efficiency reach the pipeline over the next year we'll need more insulators, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and all around handy men and women to get the work done.

More than half of all schools, homes and other buildings in Montana are more than 20 years old. Some are a lot older than that, like Independent School. By improving the energy efficiency of these buildings, the state and taxpayers could be saving money on energy bills while putting people to work.

– Ed Gulick, architect and green building expert



**Northern Plains Resource Council** is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montana citizens to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and our unique way of life.

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