



SCHOOL ENERGY COALITION

February 21, 2013

The Honorable Alex Padilla
Chair, Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4038
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Padilla:

On behalf of the School Energy Coalition (SEC), a statewide organization made up of school districts, county offices of education, community colleges, and school construction consultants focused on efficiency and renewable facility projects for California's students, I am writing to express our appreciation for the interest shown by the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications (EUC) Committee in energy efficiency measures and schools.

In particular, this letter is in follow-up to issues raised at the Committee's February 19, 2013 informational hearing on this issue entitled: "Energy Efficiency and Schools: Are the Light Bulbs On or Off?" In short, SEC believes that for schools the light bulbs are most definitely *on*.

Over the past five years, we have witnessed a significant uptick in interest from California's schools in the utility savings that may come from energy retrofits and generation projects as consecutive years of budget cuts have forced schools to meet the challenge of doing more with less funding. The electricity bill savings that result from retrofits and other energy savings measures mean that more money is available for school needs through their general fund.

California's schools have already increased class sizes, taken days off their school year, foregone routine facility maintenance, and let teachers go. We see school energy measures as a win-win for schools and students and we know they are already generating savings in schools, large and small, throughout the state. Therefore, we strongly believe that the focus of Proposition 39 funding is appropriately placed with K-14 school projects.

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In addition, state investment in school energy projects makes sense because their energy load is predictable; therefore, progress and efficiencies can be easily tracked. School projects can also be found in almost every community throughout the state and are sustainable beyond the initial capital investment through the ongoing savings they bring to a school's general fund.

We wholeheartedly agree with the Chair's remark that schools are now used well past the time classes end for the day with facilities housing for after school care and activities such as sports, clubs, and community events. Schools do not shut their doors at 3:00 p.m., nor do schools close down all summer. Agreements schools make for "joint-use" with public and private organizations are one of the ways that schools are able to cobble together funding for facilities and make ends meet.

These longer hours mean more wear and tear on a school facility and you can imagine that even more electricity is needed for lighting, technology, and equipment used during these after school activities.

New technology and safety issues have also more recently been demanded of California schools. Californians want students and the workforce of tomorrow learning with state-of-the-art equipment. Sandy Hook Elementary has caused the nation to pause and review its safety measures and many ideas are being floated that could make additional demands on a school's electricity use.

Technology and safety issues may mean more lighting and automatic doors, along with computer tablets and on-line learning make this an important time to take stock of where schools are in their baseline use and address energy efficiency and beyond.

Other issues we would raise in follow-up to the Senate hearing:

- School facility professionals have been putting together teams to build and renovate schools for decades and more recently have been doing so with consultants and the trade unions on energy projects. Provide options for them to access technical assistance as needed, not burdensome regulatory requirements for energy projects or retrofits.
- Utility programs should be revamped to address the needs of schools with regard to design and technical assistance, and review program deadlines taking into account school timelines, budget processes and classroom schedules. The CPUC should address the issues involved with their comment that utility programs provide funding only if the results are "above code" – perhaps that practice should be reviewed with respect to Assembly Member Fuller's concerns about older school buildings.

- With regard to school maintenance and the “broken window” comment. Issues were raised about how we can do energy efficiency or generation if our windows are broken – we agree it doesn’t make much sense. Consecutive years of state budget cuts and the “flexibility” that allows maintenance funds to be used for other purposes have impacted facility upkeep as schools make tough decisions about every aspect of their budgets. Funding for maintenance should be restored in some meaningful way. Although we know this is not under the purview of the Senate EUC Committee.
- In a similar category, our state school facility bond dollars for classroom facilities are running out, as well as that of high performing school funds. Representatives from the Office of Public School Construction (OPSC) correctly articulated that funds were available under the state school bond’s high performing account. We believe this is due to the fact that accessing these funds is a multi-step process and tied to other features such as acoustics and recycled products. The energy efficiency grants OPSC discussed are no longer funded and we have not seen those for a while. Perhaps a more direct retrofit program that provides a return on investment focused on energy and perhaps water use may result in more interest.

Additional SEC recommendations:

- Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach
- Look at existing programs that work and add funding to California Solar Initiative (CSI), Energy Conservation Assistance Act (ECAA) and California Energy Commission’s (CEC) Bright Schools Program
- Consider a base grant for state modernization that is expanded to account for energy efficiency retrofits for schools.
- Future funding, potentially through Proposition 39 or a future statewide school bond should go primarily to projects.
- Simplicity in any new program application process and flexibility for schools to assemble their project teams is imperative to seeing that more of these successful and sustainable projects move forward. Attached is a document on Proposition 39 implementation by SEC.
- Another excellent resource for schools and energy projects are the recommendations in the CDE Schools of the Future Report.

We know there are almost 10,000 K-12 school facilities in California. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), over 70 percent of schools are over 25 years old and 30 percent are over 50 years old.

By focusing on energy projects we have a tremendous opportunity to imbed energy efficiency and renewable components in communities throughout the state and in every community.

We appreciate the attention of the Committee and are ready to work with you to address these issues for schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Ferrera". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anna Ferrera
Executive Director