

Testimony - Bill 18-564, the "Healthy Schools Act of 2009"

District of Columbia City Council
Committee on Government Operations
and the Environment
and Committee of The Whole
Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC

March 26, 2010

Dear Councilmember Cheh and Committee Members,
Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your leadership on this important issue – the health and education of our city’s schoolchildren. My perspective is probably different from most folks today – my background is in residential renovation; my organization, DC Smart Schools, has advocated for ten years for green schools and environmental education for DC Public Schools, in particular the recent modernization of H.D. Cooke Elementary School in Adams Morgan.

Understandably many people feel that healthy, sustainably-designed ‘green’ schools and healthy food are great ideas but just not affordable in the current economic situation, but it’s important to consider the long-term benefits - financial, educational, health-related and environmental.

The guiding principle of green building design and operation is that all parts and systems in buildings are interrelated and can affect each other, and by designing to take advantage of these relationships, substantial savings in the operating budget as well as improved learning and health can be realized.

For example, if daylight is maximized, the amount of lighting can be reduced, lowering the electric bill and also lowering the air conditioning expense, because less heat is generated from light fixtures. Ultimately, green buildings can reduce the operating/maintenance budget by 20-30% or more, and over the minimum 20-year life of a school building, will repay the minimal up-front expense many times over, saving money for staff and programs.

In the same way, the initiatives of the Healthy Schools Act reinforce each other, producing greater benefit to the building occupants, the environment and the budget. If you look at the attached ‘Wheel of Health’, you can start to see synergies.

For example:

- **Recycling** reduces our waste disposal expense – the industry needs to reach economy of scale but ultimately we will save money, in addition to the larger societal benefit of reduced raw material consumption, carbon production and manufacturing expense.
- **Energy conservation** saves serious money - Montgomery County's School Eco-Response Teams save enough to cover the up-front premium for new green schools, which then save more money!
- **Alternative Energy** - If The Powers That Be allow it, we can pre-heat Cooke's hot water with solar energy, clean and reuse our food trays, further reducing our landfill contribution.
- **Composting** our food waste reduces waste disposal, and we know what's in the compost which feeds our gardens!
- **Reduced water consumption and Stormwater Management** reduce our water bill and ultimately will help to restore our waterways. Cooke School also filters its stormwater, which then can be used to drip-irrigate the gardens, with a solar-powered pump – no electricity expense!
- **Healthy Food** - The greatest impact of the Healthy Schools Act will be the health benefits of nutrition education and healthy, fresh-cooked food. If we've learned anything watching the recent health care battle it's that NOW is the time to start eating things that are good for us, not just for corporate profits.
- **Healthy Schools** - Equally important is improved indoor environmental quality(IEQ), as a result of better air filtration, less-toxic building materials, reduced chemicals using Integrated Pest Management and Green Cleaning, optimized lighting, acoustics and temperature, all of which have been shown to improve learning and our precious test scores.¹

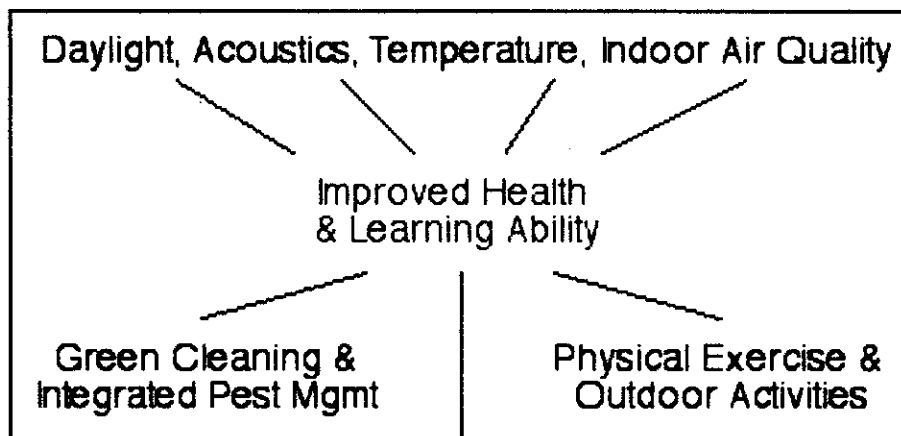
Cooke School is the first LEED-Certified 'green' public elementary school in the city – it saves more than 30% over typical schools in its energy and water consumption, and provides a healthy, learning-friendly environment. Ultimately we'd like to make it a demonstration facility for all the components of the Healthy Schools Act, with bilingual signage and interactive Learning Stations that demonstrate the multiple benefits of healthy, environmentally-friendly school environments.

I encourage you to pass the Healthy Schools Act, make sure these initiatives are adequately funded, implemented and integrated into the curriculum, ASAP!

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¹ Greg Kats, Greening Our Built World, 2010, pp 50-51.

Healthy Schools, Healthy Futures: DC Public Schools



Healthy Food

