

Report on Act 200 of 2008: Section 8(3)
An Act Relating to Capital Construction and
State Bonding: Establishment of a School
Energy Grant Program

Report to the House and Senate Committees on Institutions

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Submitted by:



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Introduction

A pilot School Energy Opportunity Grant Program (SEOG) was established by the 2008 Capital Appropriations Bill (Act 200). In implementing this program, it was the goal of the commissioner of education to identify five or more school districts to receive funding necessary **to evaluate and define specific opportunities** for cost-effective building retrofits to save energy dollars while improving occupant comfort and health.

Section 8 (3) of Act 200: Establishment of a school energy grant program to pay the costs of conducting comprehensive energy engineering analyses of school buildings by qualified engineers. Under this pilot program, the department of education shall award grants to Vermont public schools for an amount equal to 100 percent of the cost to conduct an energy engineering analysis. Grant awards shall not exceed \$10,000 per application; however, school districts retain the right to spend more than \$10,000 on the energy engineering analysis, but shall in this instance be solely responsible for the additional costs incurred. The commissioner of education shall develop guidelines and selection criteria necessary to implement the pilot program, and shall report to the senate committee on institutions and the house committee on corrections and institutions on or before January 15, 2009 and again on or before January 15, 2010 on the status of the pilot project, including the total number of grants awarded, the dollar amount of each grant awarded, and the outcome of each grant recipient's energy engineering analysis: 50,000.

Process

School districts were invited to send a representative to a training session held in September 2008, and districts were invited to submit applications by October 31, 2008 for the grants. The department gathered specific information related to each applicant's building, its maintenance history, and energy use in order to calculate an Energy Use Index. Applicants using the most BTUs per square foot were given serious consideration, and other mitigating factors, such as low energy use indices due to failed or missing heating and ventilation systems, were considered.

Five \$10,000 grants were awarded:

Bellows Falls Middle School
Bingham Memorial School (Cornwall)
Hazen Union High School

Ludlow Elementary School
Waits River Valley Union School

Applications were also received from:

Beeman Elementary School
Craftsbury Academy
E. Taylor Hatton School (Morgan)
Lowell School
Orange Center School
Rumney Memorial School
Shrewsbury Elementary School

South Burlington High School
South Royalton School
Stowe Middle High School
The Newton School (Strafford)
Thetford Academy
Tunbridge Central School

Activities Report

The five grant recipients were required to contract with an energy engineer to complete a defined scope of work by January 31, 2009, and the comprehensive energy analyses funded by this grant program were to be completed by June 30, 2009. For the most part, deadlines were met.

Outcomes

The reports which resulted from these contracts were presented to school boards over the summer 2009. In some cases, immediate steps were taken to implement operational and maintenance changes recommended in the reports.

In the case of one school, Waits River Valley School, the energy analysis was used to inform the planning of a large renovation project which was subsequently approved by voters for construction in 2010 and 2011.

The Rockingham School Board has been studying the fate of the Bellows Falls Middle School for some time. The old historic building has many deficiencies impacting operating costs and educational delivery. The report funded by this grant has become one more piece of information in that school board's discussions related to renovation versus new construction.

Most of the energy-saving measures identified in these reports have not been acted upon. While this outcome is disappointing in light of the operating costs that could be saved, fiscal circumstances in school districts statewide, including the recipients of these grants, have created challenging conditions in which to implement facility improvements. While we know that spending one dollar today to save three dollars tomorrow is a good investment, many school boards find it difficult to spend that one extra dollar today on facility projects that will yield future benefits.