Director's Corner: Where We Learn Matters

Published on **6 Aug 2012** | Written by **Rachel Gutter** | Posted in **Center for Green Schools**

Following a recent speaking engagement, I was approached by a young teacher who asked me how she could convince her school to go green. She told me that her classroom has one broken window that was positioned directly above the dumpster, her ceiling tiles are covered in mold, there's a funky smell that she can never seem to find the source of and there is a flimsy partition that separates her class from the next, creating a noisy and chaotic learning environment and not nearly enough space for the 55 students crammed into her classroom.

She confessed to me that spending every day trying to teach in these conditions had led her to question whether she wanted to continue to teach at all. She had tried numerous times without success to raise these issues with her principal. In her annual evaluation, he told her that she was a great teacher but also a whiner

With the launch of our new 'We Learn Here' photo campaign to raise awareness about the importance of where our children learn, I'm coming to understand that the condition of so many schools across the country is in many respects a closely guarded dirty little secret. No principal wants to be known for running the worst-performing school in the district, even if that's only in reference to energy and water. No parent wants to be told that their child's school is unhealthy, and come to find that there are no immediate plans to fix it.

In a recent episode of Sanjay Gupta's "Toxic Schools," an acting superintendent admitted that he wouldn't send his own children to the school in his district where water poured from the classroom ceiling when it rained or mold covered the walls. He was immediately fired after that interview. It shouldn't take CNN to bring to light some of the issues that so many of our schools face on a daily basis. Through our campaign, we want to give the millions of parents, teachers and students across the country and around the world an opportunity to share with us the places they learn.

When we first started this campaign, we were a bit nervous about being able to get into some of these outdated schools in various states of disrepair. We were keenly aware that school administrators might fear for repercussions, either from their leadership or from parents in the community – people who don't want their school to be showcased as an example of a school in need of fixing.

But the schools that we visited welcomed us with open arms. For them, they saw it as their opportunity to make a visual and compelling call for help. One school that we visited is hoping that the timeline for renovation will be accelerated and are able to use the images that we have captured to be able to tell their story, and shine a light on what's really a rather dark challenge.

Through this entire process, I've realized that the upcoming launch of Green Apple and the photo and video campaign is giving a voice, and in some cases an image, to the millions of teachers and students who spent their days in sub-standard learning environments. Now let's work together to raise the volume on this important issue. Submit your photos and videos today. Because where we learn matters.

Rachel Gutter
Director, Center for Green Schools
U.S. Green Building Council

Member employees, USGBC staff

0 comments

Leave a comment

Leave a comment

Don't have an account? Create one

You must be signed in to leave a comment.

Email

Password

SIGN IN