

Finding Common Ground on Green Schools in Paradise

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Photo credit: Center for Green Schools, Andy Shelter

Last week, state legislators, educators and USGBC chapter members from Pennsylvania and the surrounding region gathered at the [LEED Gold-certified Paradise Elementary School](#) outside Lancaster for a summit to discuss the successes of the green schools movement and to share ways to promote healthy, high-performing schools in their local communities.

The summit, part of USGBC's [Common Ground on Green Schools Campaign](#), was the third such event hosted nationally by USGBC, the [Center for Green Schools](#) and USGBC's chapter network. (Read more about the other Common Ground events, in [Kentucky](#) and [South Carolina](#).) The objective of these summits was to bring together elected officials from both sides of the aisle to identify policy approaches that encourage the growth of green schools.

The event kicked off with a welcome song from the school's fifth-grade class and remarks from Pennsylvania state Sen. Mike Brubaker, the event's host. Next, attendees were given an in-depth tour of the school, which was built to optimize energy performance, reduce energy and water consumption and costs, support the local economy by utilizing regional materials, and provide a great atmosphere for learning. The morning wrapped up with presentations from Rachel Gutter of USGBC's Center for Green Schools and Pequea Valley School District officials, who spoke about why it was important that Paradise be LEED certified and why advocacy around green schools matters.

But the day's highlight came at the end of the summit, with a conversation among legislators from Maine, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. It was amazing to hear the passion and excitement in their voices as they shared their individual experiences, swapped ideas and offered strategies on their efforts to promote green schools. Kentucky state Reps. Jim Decesare and Mary Lou Marzian showcased their efforts to pass a [green schools resolution](#) in the Bluegrass State, where the [bipartisan Green Schools Caucus](#) serves as a forum to advance additional green schools policies. The conversation concluded with each participant sharing a key takeaway and a commitment to continue the conversation back in his or her state capital.

A special thanks needs to go out to the three Pennsylvania USGBC chapters that helped make this event possible. The [USGBC Central Pennsylvania Chapter](#) played an especially pivotal role in organizing the summit and bringing everyone to Paradise Elementary.

As a new year approaches, I hope more chapters look to the example of what took place in Lancaster. Bringing elected leaders together to talk about generating movement behind green schools can serve as a catalyst for other green building policy initiatives. USGBC has resources and tools available through our [seven advocacy campaigns](#) to support your efforts.

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