



Case Study by Colorado State: Learning Gate Community School

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Photo by Debbie Smith

Miss Patti stood on the porch of the administration building for the small charter school. For nearly 20 years she had worked hard to bring environmental education to the children in west central Florida, and this ten building school was one large step in that mission. Every day 200 children attend classes taught by passionate instructors in old ranch-home style buildings at [Learning Gate Community School](#). It had taken a lot of hard work and dedication, but the students, parents, and staff were all fully vested in the school's mission: to prepare students to successfully participate in their family, school and community, through an educational program that promotes academic excellence, community service and environmental responsibility. Drawing in a deep breath and holding it for an extra moment, Miss Patti allowed herself a rare moment of satisfaction. She had done well for the students here.

Moving to the porch's rocking chair, Miss Patti began musing on the factors leading to her decision to expand the school's capacity. Foremost on the list was the number of students waiting to get into the school; perennially more were on the waiting list than were enrolled even though state funding for the charter school was only 80% of what was offered to traditional public schools meaning fund-raising efforts must go beyond those employed by traditional schools. Additionally, parents were required to spend at least 30 hours of volunteer time and 10 hours of educational time with the school every year to further promote school involvement. As a dedicated educator, it was difficult to tell parents they may never reach the top of the long waiting list and Miss Patti hoped adding buildings would help her further fill the need in her community.

Adding buildings would also allow for restructuring the delivered curriculum to a project-based-learning model, a vision Miss Patti had always had for the school. With more space, teachers could employ active learning techniques, use classroom computers more effectively, and provide space for children to truly explore and learn.

But there were more concerns than Miss Patti had imagined. With residential neighbors already complaining about the light pollution at night and the heavy traffic before and after school, to say nothing of during special events, she knew these were issues she would have to address if she wanted to keep peace among the trees, wet lands, ponds, and the community. She truly believed in the ideals of a community school and did not want to further alienate the neighbors.

Next on the list of concerns was her vision for LEED certification for the new buildings at the platinum level. Many people had suggested she back off and strive for gold certification, but how could she expect the students to perform to their highest level in the classroom if the school's leaders weren't also challenging themselves to achieve the highest levels of building performance? The cost and process for building LEED certified schools was higher, but she knew the costs would be far outweighed by the benefits of teachable buildings, performance benchmarking, healthier spaces, higher performing students, and lower utility costs. The problem, of course, was selling the vision to everyone concerned: parents who would have to help fund-raise, students who would have to wait for the process to be completed, contractors who would have to know or learn the LEED rating system, teachers who would have to use the buildings in their instruction, and local and state officials who ultimately hold the power of veto over her plans.

As children began arriving for the fast approaching school day, Miss Patti shook herself out of her reverie. The moment of satisfaction was over: no time to dwell as her mother used to say. There were plans to make, problems to address, and people to consult. It was time to once again move forward.

This case study was adapted from the work of Rebecca Wentworth in collaboration with Colorado State University through the [Research to Practice program](#).

Learn more about the LEED platinum Learning Gate Community School by reading their full [LEED project profile](#). Want to share your green building story? [Learn more](#).

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David Marcus

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USGBC staff

2 comments

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Brian Dunbar

Director, Institute for the Built Environment, Colorado State University - Fort Collins

2 days 3 hours ago

Great question, David. Knowing Miss Patti as a charismatic, visionary, and demanding leader, she is likely putting together a good, integrated project team and will assign a staff member to work closely with the project team to assure that the high sustainable building goals are set, understood, and carried out.



tmissioui

Super article, génial !

3 days 2 hours ago

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