

Sachem District Building Upgrades Coming

Wind turbine scheduled to be placed at East to save energy.

By [Matt Calamia](#) | [Email the author](#) | March 20, 2010



The Sachem Central School District will be making energy efficient upgrades to all of its 18 schools. All of which is at no cost to tax payers.

The upgrades include an 80-foot wind turbine at Sachem High School East, solar panels at six other schools, lighting and control system upgrades, and new boilers, all of which aimed to make the district more energy efficient.

"Whenever we saw things like boilers or lighting that was less efficient technology, we're recommending that we upgrade it to save energy," said Kendra McQuilton, Director of Business Development at ECG Engineering.

Sachem has partnered with ECG, a company that specializes in sustainable, and energy-efficient design of educational facilities and municipal buildings, and Johnson Controls, a building company that also specializes in energy efficiency, to bring \$16 million in upgrades to all schools in the district.

Sachem and Johnson Controls previously worked together in 1998 when the school received \$8 million in upgrades, many of which are being upgraded again.

That \$16 million is at no cost to tax payers, because the funds are being taken from future energy savings given to the school for upgrading in the first place. Johnson has guaranteed Sachem will save a certain amount of money each year, and if it falls short, Johnson will cover the difference, according to the contract.

"It wasn't just a home run," said Sachem Board of Education Vice President Robert Scavo, "it was a grand slam. The feedback we've gotten from the community is that people are excited."

Once the project is approved by the New York State Education Department, it will be the biggest energy performance project in a school in the state's history.

Being a part of that while working with one of the biggest schools in New York is great for Johnson Controls.

"It's nice to say you've worked with one of the biggest school districts on Long Island," said Danny Haffel, Director of Business Development at Johnson Controls.

One of the biggest highlights of this scope of work is a complete re-facing and insulation of the Gatelot Elementary School, which is one of the oldest buildings in the district.

"It has wood shingles that are chipped and it's a maintenance nightmare," said McQuilton.

Added Haffel, "It's not like being outside, but the wind does come through the brick and it freezes the building."

The wind turbine that will be built at Sachem High School East is essentially a windmill that will generate energy to be put back into the district. Although it won't be much - a couple of thousand dollars a year - every little bit helps to save money to be spent in other areas of the budget.

The wind turbine is not the only major upgrade for Sachem East. According to McQuilton, the school was not commissioned properly, and is being run like a hospital, with air conditioners and heaters running 24-hours a day.

"A school like East has constant over-heating, making it a tough place to teach and learn," said Haffel.

Ryan Connor, 21, who graduated from the school in 2006, said "everyday it was way too hot. When you walked into the building, it was like walking into a brick wall. The heat was so high, windows would have to be open in the classes and hallways. You'd wear a jacket outside, and then just go with a t-shirt once you got into the school."

Construction is set to begin in May, with groundbreaking set for late-April, and will take between 12 to 18 months to complete. All parties involved don't believe students and faculty members will be affected by the construction.

"Any classroom [construction] work at this point will be done and scheduled for after hours, Monday through Friday 3-11 p.m.," said Haffel.

If there is work to be done during school days, it will be in areas not occupied by students.

If the district would have passed up this opportunity to upgrade, Scavo said it would have been "irresponsible to the taxpayers, and certainly irresponsible to the community."

"These are capital improvements that are going to make the schools a better place and a better learning environment," Haffel said.