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Rise in Solar Schools Unlocks More Local Funding for Education

Solar Capacity at K-12 Schools Nearly Doubles in Three Years, Diverting Energy Costs to Fund More Teachers and Educational Resources

Washington, D.C., November 29, 2017 — With installation costs plummeting, American schools are switching to solar energy at a rapid pace, reducing their electricity bills and freeing up resources to invest in education. **There are now 5,489 K-12 schools in the United States that use solar energy, nearly double the total solar capacity that was installed at schools in 2014**, according to [a major new report](#) by [The Solar Foundation](#), [Generation 180](#), and the [Solar Energy Industries Association \(SEIA\)](#).

The dramatic growth in solar school adoption has been driven by rapidly declining installation costs. The average price of a solar school installation has dropped 67 percent in the last 10 years, and 19 percent in 2016 alone, this report found.

Nearly 4 million students in the U.S. attend schools with solar power, with a combined capacity of 910 megawatts (MW), an increase of 86 percent over 2014. The amount of electricity these schools produce annually, at 1.4 million megawatt-hours, is enough to power over 190,000 homes.

The report, [Brighter Future: A Study on Solar in U.S. Schools, 2nd Edition](#), is the most comprehensive study to date on solar at K-12 schools nationwide. As a follow-up to the first study released in 2014, this report captures the accelerating trends of solar adoption in U.S. schools.

California leads the nation in the number of solar schools by state, with 1,946 solar schools and a 489 MW capacity, followed by New Jersey, Arizona, Massachusetts, and New York. Nevada has the highest adoption rate, with 23 percent of schools using solar energy statewide. Arizona has the most solar school capacity on a per capita basis, at 86 watts per student.

Complete data on solar schools nationwide and in all 50 states and the District of Columbia is available in [the full report](#). An interactive map of solar schools across the United States and resources to help schools go solar are available at gosolarschools.org.

“Solar can help school districts save millions on electricity bills, freeing up funds for additional teachers, improved facilities, and enhanced academic and extracurricular programs,” said **Andrea Luecke, president and executive director of The Solar Foundation**. “In addition to cost savings, solar energy

installations can serve as hands-on STEM laboratories for students to learn about clean energy from the sun.”

At the same time that costs are going down, schools have more financing options that minimize up-front investment. In recent years, most schools have financed their solar installations through power purchase agreements (PPAs), in which a third-party finances, builds, owns, and maintains the system. This allows schools and districts to purchase solar with very little initial cost. Within the last three years, nearly 90 percent of the schools for which data is available used a PPA to install solar.

“There’s a reason solar is spreading so quickly across America’s school districts, and it’s pretty simple — when schools go solar, the entire community benefits,” said **Abigail Ross Hopper, SEIA’s president and CEO**. “By switching to solar energy, schools immediately see their electric bills go down, leaving more money for learning. Plus, what teacher wouldn’t want a life lesson in science and conservation right there on school grounds? It’s a win all the way around.”

Solar Schools Campaign

In conjunction with this report, clean energy nonprofit Generation 180 is launching a national [Solar Schools Campaign](#) to mobilize parents, students, school districts, and local leaders to support the transition to solar energy in their communities. The campaign is creating volunteer teams and will leverage a detailed “how-to-guide” in the report that provides advice on how schools can muster support, assess economic feasibility, identify financing options, generate proposals, and select installers for solar energy systems.

“Many school districts need champions to help make stakeholders aware of the opportunities for going solar,” said **Tish Tablan, National Organizer for Generation 180**. “Our Solar Schools Campaign is designed to equip these champions with the information and tools they need. Once they see the financial, educational, and environmental benefits, we are confident that many schools will make the transition for a brighter future.”

Case Studies Capture Many Approaches to Going Solar

The *Brighter Future* report includes several in-depth case studies that demonstrate how schools across the United States have gone through the process of installing solar. These systems are going up on school rooftops, parking lot structures, and offsite. The report identifies numerous cases where schools expect to save millions of dollars in electricity bills over the next two to three decades, helping them balance the budget and pay for educational expenses. Some of the solar projects were initiated by students themselves, while others got started at the administrative level or were part of a school’s capital improvement campaign.

- In **Bozeman, Montana** at Sacajawea Middle school, an eighth grader led a successful campaign to raise \$115,000 to install solar. The funds are expected to be paid back through electricity bill savings within nine years.
- In **Reno, Nevada**, Washoe County School District meets 12 percent of its energy consumption from 4.2 MW of solar installations at 35 schools, which will help the district meet its 20 percent renewable energy goal by 2020.

- In **New York State**, Broadalbin-Perth Central School District is developing an 8,000-panel, 2 MW offsite solar array to help offset the costs of a capital improvement campaign. The installation is expected to save \$5.3 million on electricity bills over 25 years.
- In **Arlington, Virginia**, Discovery Elementary School uses solar as part of its net-zero design that is a large part of the school's interactive energy curriculum, saving \$100,000 annually on electricity bills.
- In **Bakersfield, California**, Kern High School District is installing 22 MW on 27 sites, saving an estimated \$80 million over 25 years.
- In **Illinois**, Grayslake Community High School District is meeting 36 percent of its energy consumption through rooftop solar on two high schools and a third, ground-mounted system, saving an estimated \$10 million over 25 years.

To read the full report and view an infographic of the major report findings, visit <http://www.thesolarfoundation.org/solar-schools>.

To view the interactive map and other resources for schools that seek to go solar, visit gosolarschools.org.

About The Solar Foundation®

The Solar Foundation® is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to accelerate adoption of the world's most abundant energy source. Through its leadership, research, and capacity building, The Solar Foundation creates transformative solutions to achieve a prosperous future in which solar and solar-compatible technologies are integrated into all aspects of our lives. Learn more at TheSolarFoundation.org.

About Generation 180

Generation 180 is a nonprofit organization committed to spreading energy awareness — the cultural shift driven by individuals embracing new energy choices for a healthier future. Generation 180's programs and growing network of volunteer teams advance the energy aware movement by encouraging individuals and communities to reduce energy consumption and adopt clean energy solutions. Through its Solar Schools campaign (gosolarschools.org), Generation 180 provides schools and their stakeholders with resources to reduce barriers and support the transition to solar energy. Learn about programs and volunteer teams at Generation180.org.

About SEIA®:

Celebrating its 43rd anniversary in 2017, the Solar Energy Industries Association® is the national trade association of the U.S. solar energy industry, which now employs more than 260,000 Americans. Through advocacy and education, SEIA® is building a strong solar industry to power America. SEIA works with its 1,000 member companies to build jobs and diversity, champion the use of cost-competitive solar in America, remove market barriers and educate the public on the benefits of solar energy. Visit SEIA online at www.seia.org.