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Survey: 70% of Building Execs Say Green Schools Enhance Student Performance  
[GreenBiz.com](#)

NEW YORK, Oct. 27, 2005 - Turner Construction Company has announced the findings of its annual survey of building owners, developers, architects, engineers, corporate owner-occupants, consultants, and educational institutions on green building issues. This year's survey placed a special focus on green educational facilities -- both K-12 and higher educational facilities.

### Greater Benefits for K-12 and Higher Education Students and Faculty

More K-12 school districts and higher educational institutions are recognizing that green facilities provide a more effective learning environment. The interest in green educational facilities is part of a broader recognition of the critical importance of the physical environment to the health and performance of students and teachers. Large percentages of executives at organizations involved with green K-12 facilities rated them more highly than traditional facilities on a range of benefits:

- Ability to attract and retain teachers (74%)
- Reduced student absenteeism (72%)
- Improved student performance (71%)

Improved student performance was cited as an important benefit of green construction, especially for K-12 facilities. Among executives involved with green K-12 facilities, 71% said that student performance was better than in typical K-12 facilities, including 24% saying that it was much better. These ratings are consistent with a number of studies that have found improved student test scores and other outcomes in facilities that incorporate green features. Additionally, the ability to attract a strong teacher base is looked at as a benefit directly related to green building. Seventy-four percent of executives involved with green K-12 facilities said that they made it easier to attract and retain teachers.

Executives were asked which green features of K-12 facilities were most important to providing benefits to students and teachers. Forty-nine percent of executives involved with K-12 facilities cited improved indoor air quality as the most important factor to their improved health and well-being, while 37% named increased natural lighting.

Executives reported that green higher educational facilities performed much better than traditional facilities on a range of potential benefits. Most of the executives at organizations involved with green college and university facilities also reported that the facilities generated more benefits relevant to higher education:

- Ability to attract and retain faculty (71%)
- Ability to attract students (70%)
- Student performance (59%)
- Ability to secure research funding (59%)

### Educational Institutions Misperceive Total Cost

Executives remain concerned about the higher construction costs of green schools, often due to inaccurate estimates of the costs required to incorporate green features. The survey revealed that most educational institutions either don't consider total long-term costs at all or

else are much more heavily focused on initial construction costs. Only half the executives involved with K-12 facilities said that school districts typically considered total costs over the lifecycle of a new construction project. Similarly, 73% of executives involved with higher education facilities said they typically consider long term costs. Even when these costs are considered, school districts and higher educational institutions usually give them less weight than they give to initial costs.

### **Cost of K-12 and Higher Education Institutions Less Than Many Anticipate**

Most executives believed that green educational facilities have lower total long-term costs since they benefit from significantly reduced energy and other operating expenses. Seventy-three percent of executives who had been involved with green K-12 facilities expected their total costs over 20 years to be lower than for traditional facilities. Among executives who said that K-12 school districts typically considered total lifecycle costs, only 7% said that more emphasis was placed on total costs; 51% said that more emphasis was still placed on initial costs.

Similar to the results revealed by the K-12 executives, 80% percent of the executives involved with green higher educational facilities also said that their total 20-year costs would be lower. Even executives who had not been involved with green educational facilities agreed -- 65% said that 20-year costs would be lower for green facilities for colleges and universities.

Despite the fact that almost three-quarters of executives said that colleges and universities typically considered total lifecycle costs when constructing new facilities, only 5% of these executives said that total lifecycle costs were seen as most important, while 57% said the greatest emphasis was still placed on initial costs.

"The overall message of these findings is that far more education and information are still required about the experience with green construction. Although most executives believed that green facilities generate a host of benefits to their occupants and also are less expensive over time, executives appeared to lack confidence that they can achieve these outcomes. Many executives don't yet recognize the proven track record that exists for sustainable construction and the growing acceptance of green construction standards provided by the LEED green building standards," said Rod Wille, senior vice president of sustainable construction at Turner Construction.

### **Promoting Green Policy**

When asked to rate the importance of groups in making the decision to build a green facility, executives said that the superintendent and the board of education were the most important groups for K-12 facilities. While many executives did not think parents and local residents had a major influence on the decision to build green K-12 facilities, 75% believed these groups should have a voice in whether environmental impacts were considered when a school district was designing or constructing a new facility. Fifty-nine percent of executives who worked directly for K-12 school districts said that their school district had a policy encouraging green school construction.

With college and university facilities, the board of directors and the administration were seen as the most important groups influencing the decision to build green. Executives were much less positive about students playing a similar role. In fact, when determining the decision to build green higher education facilities, only 34% of executives stated that current and prospective students only influenced their decision. Sixty-six percent of college and university executives said that their institution had a green construction policy.

### **Greening Schools into the Future**

With the special focus of this year's survey on green educational facilities, Turner is leading the way by educating the educators. Turner's 2004 green survey did not examine green school construction; however, this year's survey did. Overall, the findings of the 2005 survey concluded that there is an emerging trend of green building in education.

The survey again found that green activity was increasing and that executives had extremely positive views of the benefits of green construction -- both on the health and productivity of school and building occupants and also on reducing long-term costs through achieving lower operating costs. However, concerns still remained over the perceived higher construction costs

of building green.

Providing accurate information to school administrators, educational planners and decision-makers is essential to encourage more people -- both in the private sector and the public sector -- to reap the substantial benefits that green schools provide in improved student performance, increased worker productivity, and lower ongoing operating costs. With institutions working to raise educational standards in a time of budget constraints, the potential of green facilities to boost student performance while saving money should be irresistible, the survey concluded.

The self-administered survey was conducted over the Internet by Bayer Consulting from Aug. 12-26, 2005. For the purposes of the survey, green buildings were defined as buildings which use design and construction practices to significantly reduce or eliminate negative effects on the environment and building occupants.

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