



## LEED and K12 schools

### How is LEED used in schools?

The LEED Rating System recognizes the unique nature of the design, construction, and operation of K12 schools. Through specific adaptations of both the Building Design + Construction (BD+C) rating system and the Operations + Maintenance (O+M) rating system, LEED addresses issues such as classroom acoustics, master planning, children's health, and a school's relationship to its community. By addressing the uniqueness of school spaces and children's health, LEED provides a unique, comprehensive tool for schools that wish to build green and achieve measurable results. LEED is the globally recognized third-party benchmark for high-performance schools that are healthy for students and staff and cost-effective for operating budgets.

### What makes schools different from other building types?

- **Children's health:** School buildings play the crucial role of providing healthy, safe environments for children to learn. Children breathe more air in proportion to their bodies than adults, and their developing bodies are more susceptible to the effects of environmental toxins. Environments for children must be carefully designed to minimize indoor pollutants and maximize support for health and well-being.
- **Educational mission:** As learning environments, school buildings can demonstrate the importance of efficiency and conservation. LEED offers an opportunity to send a clear and positive message about what is possible when we apply knowledge to the benefit of our global environment, therefore allowing the built environment to become an interactive teaching tool.
- **Complex programmatic spaces:** Schools combine many functions into a relatively small space; from classrooms to gymnasiums, cafeterias to machine shops, the job of school designers is particularly complex. LEED gives project teams guidance on specific strategies for unique space types.

### How does LEED work?

LEED BD+C is intended for use in the design and construction phases of a building, and it facilitates and encourages project teams to use an integrated design approach from start to finish to bring down overall costs and deliver project goals. LEED O+M is intended for use in the everyday operation of a building, focusing on the outcome of sustainable practices and lowered environmental impact. The LEED rating system promotes improved practices in:

1. Location selection and transportation impacts
2. Land management practices
3. Energy efficiency and impact on global climate change
4. Water efficiency and conservation
5. Environmentally-conscious and healthy materials
6. Waste stream management
7. Indoor air quality, access to daylight, and occupant comfort

To become certified, projects must meet all prerequisites and a minimum number of points with the topic areas listed above. The number of points the project earns determines the level of LEED certification the project receives (certified, silver, gold, or platinum).

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### **Do I have to use the schools adaptation of LEED to certify my school project?**

If you are working on a K12 educational building, you will need to use the schools adaptations of LEED. This is required because the adaptations are most appropriate for the building's purpose, especially because of the emphasis on children's health. Other projects, such as K12 athletic facilities or interpretive centers, are also eligible to use the adaptation if it is deemed the most appropriate one to use by the project team.

### **How can I convince the school in my community to build for LEED certification?**

The U.S. Green Building Council has a number of resources to help you make the case to your school or school district. At [centerforgreenschools.org](http://centerforgreenschools.org), you can find articles detailing research and cases for green schools related to health, economics, community success, and student academic achievement. Our team is always available to answer questions that are more specific to your school or community; you can reach out to us at [schools@usgbc.org](mailto:schools@usgbc.org).

### **How do I register my project?**

Project registration is the first step toward earning LEED certification for your building and is best done at the project outset. Once you register, you will have access to LEED Online, a project management dashboard for the LEED certification process. Aggregate data for all registered projects is used to expand the growing knowledge base about green building costs, trends, and benefits.

### **How much does it cost to certify a project?**

The certification costs to register and certify a new facility with LEED BD+C vary based on square footage of the building. For a 100,000 square foot K-12 school, the cost would be approximately \$8,000. If services such as energy modelling and building commissioning are not already in the plan for the building's design and construction, your architect can obtain estimates for these necessary services.

### **Where can I see the full LEED rating system for review?**

The LEED rating system is available online at [usgbc.org/leed](http://usgbc.org/leed). A dynamic catalog of individual credits, their requirements, and additional project tools is available at [usgbc.org/credits](http://usgbc.org/credits), which you can navigate to from the LEED web page.

### **Where can I learn more?**

USGBC and the Center for Green Schools have a variety of resources to get you started:

- Visit [centerforgreenschools.org](http://centerforgreenschools.org): Learn more about the benefits of green schools, find project case studies of green schools, and take advantage of research and guidebooks for educating yourself and your community about health, sustainable, green schools.
- Visit [usgbc.org](http://usgbc.org): Learn more about the LEED rating system, professional and volunteer networks around the world, project profiles, and more.
- Take a course or two at [usgbc.org/education-at-usgbc/listing](http://usgbc.org/education-at-usgbc/listing). Search for K12 content on our online education platform, which hosts thousands of engaging and user-rated courses on green building and sustainable operations.
- Explore [learninglab.usgbc.org](http://learninglab.usgbc.org): Find over 500 high-quality lessons that are aligned to curriculum standards, intended to teach K12 students about all aspects of sustainability.
- Become a USGBC member ([learn more](#) about free membership for K12 schools and districts): K12 schools and districts get a first year of free membership to USGBC to encourage them to join and become part of USGBC's community, participate in the development of LEED, and contribute to the mission of the organization.

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