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Piscataway schools to install solar panels in April

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The township's three public middle schools soon will generate some of their own electricity when the district installs solar panels on the schools' roofs.

The district plans to install approximately 800 solar panels on its three middle schools, Conackamack, Quibbltown and Schor, in April. The three schools would be the first schools in the district to have solar panels.

The change is expected to save the township school district \$66,748 in energy savings per year for the three buildings combined. In a statement, Superintendent Robert S. Copeland said the move also will reduce the district's carbon dioxide emissions by 45 tons per year, the equivalent of planting 13.5 acres of trees or not driving 125,000 miles per year.

"We knew it would save money and we also felt that environmentally it was the right thing to do," Copeland said.

The project will cost \$1.2 million. About one-third of that amount — \$430,906 — will come from a construction grant from the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities Clean Energy Program. The remaining funds had been previously set aside in the district's capital reserve budget.

Solar panels convert sunlight into energy. They are placed on the roofs of the buildings in order to attain maximum sunlight.

The panels will not completely power the schools. District Business Administrator and Board Secretary Brian DeLucia said officials expect about 20 percent to 25 percent of the buildings' power to come from the new panels. If excess power is generated, however, it could be sold back to the power company to generate additional revenues.

DeLucia said the panels have an expected useful life of 10 to 15 years, at which point they would need to be replaced. DeLucia said other schools are considering solar panels, but he said the township district had been considering the move for several years, and has long considered itself an environmentally conscious district.

The school district is not alone in its effort to go green. The township council in December ordered a feasibility study to see which, if any, township buildings might make good locations for solar panels.