

# Central Regional schools plan \$9M, 1.5-megawatt solar array

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**BERKELEY** — The Central Regional School District plans to be "off the grid" by April 1 at the latest — and that's no April Fools' joke.

Through a power-purchase agreement, the district, which educates about 2,000 students in grades seven through 12, will construct a solar farm consisting of three solar panel arrays producing 1.5 megawatts, enough to power both the middle and high school buildings.

In the power-purchase agreement, solar panels would be installed at no cost by Wayne, Pa.-based Dobco, from which the school district would purchase electricity.

The total cost of the project is about \$9 million.

"We'll see savings of between 15 and 25 percent on our electric bill," said Triantafillos "Tommy" Parlapanides, superintendent of schools.

Currently, the district's electric bill runs about \$900,000 a year. Central Regional already is saving about \$217,000 through an energy-reduction program, with the solar-energy project coming as additional savings on top of that.

During the summer, when school is not in session, the Central Regional School District would be able to sell electricity back to the utility company.

Dobco, which also designs and builds other alternative-energy projects using wind, waste energy and hydro power, also would maintain the system.

After a period of time, usually 15 years, ownership would revert to the district.

Wall-based Innovative Engineering, which counts Ocean County and Toms River Township among its clients, will be the design engineer.

The Berkeley School District also is interested in a similar power-purchase arrangement for its own solar-energy initiative.

Central Regional's setup will be unusual; the three 500-kilowatt photovoltaic arrays will be mounted on the ground, owing primarily to the need to redo the school's roofs.

One of the arrays will be situated in back of the middle school. The remaining two will be on a hillside east of the high school. All will be surrounded by an eight-foot fence.

The cost to fix the roofs is estimated to be about \$2 million. Parlapanides said

the district will seek to fund those and other repairs through a referendum in January.

The superintendent added that the district is in a hurricane zone, and if the solar panels were mounted on the roofs, the school's insurance rates would rise.

Construction is scheduled to begin on Central Regional's solar-energy project at the end of October and is targeted for completion by mid-March, Parlapanides said. If work is completed by the end of the calendar year, Dobco will receive 30 percent of the cost, or \$3 million, from the federal government.

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