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St. Louis school built to be energy efficient

by By JANE COASTON St. Louis Post-Dispatch

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ST. LOUIS (AP) -- The roof of the school filters water and slopes down to a rain garden that will be used as an outdoor classroom near the front entrance.

Light fixtures dim based on the amount of natural light present, while special windows bring in as much daylight as possible. And each classroom has a carbon dioxide monitor that brings in more oxygen from outside when it senses that carbon dioxide levels are too high, making the school more airy and temperature-constant.

This is the eco-friendly school of the 21st century, as envisioned by Crossroads College Preparatory School on DeBaliviere Avenue.

The building, which opened recently, is LEED-certified, meaning that it met standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council for efficient use of water and electricity, sustainable construction methods and high indoor environmental quality. The school, which serves grades seven to 12, earned platinum-level certification, the highest level available, and is the first LEED-certified K-12 school in St. Louis and one of only 159 LEED-certified schools in the country.

Crossroads is part of a trend sweeping the private school industry toward greater emphasis on the environment and sustainability.

"School leaders see it as a vital component of a 21st century education," said Myra McGovern, director of public information for the National Association of Independent Schools. "It's something children need to know



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about." McGovern said many parents recognize environmental issues as ways of engaging students in many different subjects, including science and math.

Billy Handmaker, head of school at Crossroads, said LEED-certification was something that parents and students demanded. While building green carries additional costs, Handmaker said that with proper planning and vigilance over the building's budget, expenses can be held in check. He estimates that reaching LEED certification cost 5 to 7 percent more than traditional construction.

"It forced the architects, developers and contractors to be much more creative," he said. "A lot of things came together to make the building better than we imagined."

Materials from the old school were reused throughout the new building, including study carrels designed by students. The white boards in the classrooms are actually recycled glass on white walls, and teachers can put notes written on smart boards online so that students can access them that night.

Robin Woehr, a senior from St. Louis, said the renovation was incredible: "We were mostly excited about the gadgets, but everything they did was amazing."

Emma Silver, a senior from St. Louis, added that she appreciated that the school recycled most of the construction materials. "The school feels really professional," she said.

A number of local private schools are renovating structures or building new buildings to be more environmentally friendly.

John Burroughs School in Ladue has started using kitchen grease to create biodiesel fuel to power tractors used on campus. Head of School Andy Abbott said that the school has also restored a pond on campus with a bio-retention system to clean water runoff from the parking lot.

The New City School, on Waterman Boulevard, installed a green roof over its dining hall in April with special vegetation designed for a dry climate.

Tianay Pulphus, a recent graduate of Crossroads, was at the school Monday finishing a painting on a wall designated for graduating seniors. She said the transformation of the school has astounded her. "It's amazing, you go to a school and see it change before your eyes," she said.

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