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By Paul Hewins: Green Elementary Schools

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At Skanska, we frequently argue that no one needs to start from scratch to reap the benefits of green buildings. With this in mind, the Mass. School Building Authority (MSBA) launched its Green Repair Program last year, a funding initiative to help otherwise viable public schools fix roofs, windows and/or boilers that are in need of renovation or repair.

These kinds of upgrades pay significant dividends as the 186 schools that are participating in the program will soon learn. Even simple upgrades to outdated systems can make a huge difference. According to the USGBC, buildings featuring high-performance systems can cut energy use in half. The money saved on energy costs can go back to the school district for other much-needed items for the students, like books, music classes and school supplies.

Some public schools are receiving extensive green upgrades. In 2010, Skanska won a contract to rebuild the Wellington Elementary School in Belmont. That project included the demolition of an existing two and three-story structure, and the construction of a new building configured into two buildings connected by a one-story core that houses the administrative offices, media center and music rooms.

The school, which opened for class this fall, attained certification through the Mass. Collaborative for High Performance Schools (MA-CHPS), which is comparable to LEED Silver. The redesigned school incorporates numerous innovative and sustainable concepts including the use of geothermal wells for heating and cooling, high-efficiency mechanical systems, and significant window areas to increase daylighting. These green components provide an enhanced environment for students and staff, decrease operating costs and reduce the school's impact on the natural environment. These elements provide an active learning environment where students have the opportunity to engage with the building's energy-saving resources. The schools are expected to save significant amounts of energy as a result, and of all the building's benefits, this may prove to be the most valuable. Paul Hewins is a general manager and executive vice president for Skanska USA's New England region.

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