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New Report Finds a Tripling of K-12 Schools in Virginia Adopting Solar Power Since 2017

Significant Cost Savings, Educational and Climate Benefits Boost Schools' Solar Uptake

Charlottesville, VA – The number of K-12 schools in Virginia that have embraced solar power tripled from 29 to 86 since 2017, according to a new statewide report on schools' adoption of solar published by Generation180, a national non-profit focused on equipping individuals and communities to take action on clean energy.

Report authors say more schools across the country are switching to solar because of significant cost savings, the opportunity for students to learn about renewable energy, and positive environmental impacts. Middlesex County Public Schools and Arlington Public Schools each expect to reduce their electricity bill by over \$4 million during the next 25 years. By installing solar panels on ten school rooftops, Richmond Public Schools anticipates energy cost savings of \$2 million over the next 20 years.

“The big opportunity for us was that solar was a win, win, win—for our district’s budget, our students’ education, and our community’s transition to clean energy,” said Liz Doerr, school board member of Richmond Public Schools.

The report is the latest resource to come out of Generation180’s Solar Schools program, a nationwide effort to inspire and equip the people that can make solar happen at schools. The program develops resources, shares success stories, and convenes decision-makers and community advocates—individuals that often play a crucial role in driving adoption of solar at the school district-level.

The report also finds that Virginia schools saw a ten-fold growth in total installed solar capacity since 2017 (from 1.9 MW to 20.1 MW), underscoring how solar installations at schools are, on average, getting much larger.

Purchase power agreements open the door

Because of the opportunity for immediate cost savings, 90% of the solar capacity installed at Virginia’s schools during the past two years was financed by purchase power agreements (PPAs), a method in which a third party purchases, owns, and maintains the solar panels while the school district purchases only the electricity generated by the system. This financing method enables schools to power themselves with solar with little-to-no upfront cost while typically paying a lower electricity rate than it would have paid the utility.

In Virginia, PPAs are available to customers of Dominion Energy under the terms of a renewable energy pilot program. Largely because of the rapid adoption of solar by public school districts, the program’s 50-megawatt cap is likely to be met soon. According to report authors, expanding access to more Virginia schools will require legislative action by the General Assembly, including a lifting of Dominion’s current PPA cap. In Appalachian Power territory, public schools are denied the opportunity to utilize PPAs and receive the same access to the benefits of clean energy.

“More and more schools in Virginia are now reaping the financial and educational benefits of solar. We want to ensure all schools have access by removing restrictive policy barriers as soon as possible,” said Tish Tablan, Generation180’s Program Director for their Solar Schools program.

Students, parents, and teachers are excited to be part of solar school communities. Solar on schools offers opportunities to enhance STEM learning with hands-on, real world tools that can help prepare students for one of the fastest-growing jobs in the nation. “I can’t tell you how proud my kid and I felt once we stood on the roof and saw what we had done,” said Ruth McElroy Amundsen, a parent at Norfolk Academy who led the charge to fund the school’s 646 kW solar system. As visible examples of solar in their communities, schools have the potential to drive awareness and interest in solar power far beyond their campus walls.

This first-ever report on solar uptake by Virginia schools follows a national report from Generation180, SEIA, and The Solar Foundation released in 2017 detailing the growth and trends in U.S. K-12 schools that have embraced solar power.

For a copy of the Virginia Solar Schools report, please contact Nate McFarland at nate@generation180.org.

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About Generation180

[Generation180](http://Generation180.org) is a non-profit committed to inspiring and equipping individuals to take action on clean energy in their homes and communities. Generation180 is working toward a future in which all of our schools are completely powered by clean energy. Our Solar Schools Campaign – GoSolarSchools.org – provides school decision makers and community members with resources to reduce barriers and support the transition to solar energy.

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