



MID and County Office of Education Unveil New School with Modern Solar Technology

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MERCED, CA – The Merced County Office of Education and Merced Irrigation District jointly announced the opening of Valley Community School in Atwater. The school’s modern technology makes it the most eco-friendly school campus in Merced County and will be powered by an on-site 26 kilowatt solar system.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the public and a tour will be held at 5 p.m. on Monday. The School is located at 1800 Matthew Drive in Atwater. The address does not appear on Google Maps. From Merced, take Highway 99 north, take the Applegate Road exit, go south on Applegate Road and turn right on Sunset Avenue.

The new green campus will save the school district \$5,800 per year in energy costs. Additionally, MID is providing a \$70,000 rebate for installation of the solar project.

“This is so exciting for our students and staff considering the school was housed in the old Castle base hospital. We were able to function, but it was not the best place for learning,” said Principal Carrie Harkreader.

The campus has a variety of other eco-friendly enhancements. The Gen 7 modular buildings, constructed by American Modular Systems and installed by Seward L. Schreder Construction, are 60 percent more energy efficient, and 30 percent quieter, than a traditional classroom. Energy for the classrooms is provided by solar panels lining the awnings.

In addition to the four-wing classroom building, the new campus has administrative offices, art and science labs, a full gymnasium and shop area. The School spans 42,500 feet and will be able to serve up to 500 students.

“As MID continues to work toward California’s goals of increasing residents’ use of wind and solar energy, we are pleased to see this technology being put to work at a local school,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard. “MID is excited to participate in this renewable public energy project which will provide significant bottom line cost savings to the Merced County Office of Education.”

In addition to the new Atwater Community School, MID has helped install 13 solar projects locally since 2004. MID’s Solar Rebate program is part of a statewide solar mandate that aims to greatly improve and expand the use of solar energy in California. For its part, MID maintains an annual \$450,000 solar rebate program. It provides up to \$70,000 for single commercial installations and \$8,400 for single residential installations.

In 2011, MID funded 11 solar customers for the entire year. In 2012, MID received 10 applications within the first quarter.

“This new school is a win-win for the students, community, and environment,” said Steven E. Gomes, Merced County Superintendent of Schools. “Research shows that greater learning takes place when students are in an environment that is conducive to teaching. This new campus provides that environment. The community now has access to a recreational space and gym for activities after school and weekends. Harnessing the sun’s energy to power the campus will not only be an ongoing cost-saving for the taxpayer but serves as a model of how schools can become more green and environmentally friendly.”

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