

Ozark Schools Lead the Way in Sustainability



See how the Ozark School District leveraged a clean energy tax credit and smart upgrades to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and create a more sustainable learning environment.

Quick Facts

Location: Ozark, MO

Industry: Education (K-12)

Products: Building Controls | Lighting | Solar Panels

Results

\$14.8M

in comprehensive, energy-efficient upgrades

\$98K

in annual savings from solar panels at one elementary school



Highlights

- Ozark Schools modernized infrastructure with sustainable, cost-effective improvements designed to deliver long-term savings.
- District-wide updates including lighting, building controls, and solar panels, have elevated the learning experience and improved efficiency.
- The district leveraged a clean energy tax credit and performance contracting to fund these critical upgrades.

Challenge

Nestled in the scenic Ozark Mountains, the city of Ozark, Missouri, has grown from its 1841 roots as an agricultural trade center into a thriving community of over 20,000 residents¹. Today, the area is known for its friendly small-town atmosphere, excellent schools, and thriving economy.

At the heart of this community stands the Ozark School District, which serves nearly 6,000 students and achieves a 97% graduation rate². However, even in this forward-thinking district, challenges unfolded that required innovative solutions.

Energy is the second highest cost for public school districts after teachers³, and Ozark was no exception. The district faced significant issues with their 20-year-old high school building. The school's HVAC system had never functioned correctly, preventing simultaneous use of the gym and auditorium. Frequent breakdowns and limited funding for replacements led to continuous complaints about uncomfortable temperatures and humidity levels. Plus, maintenance costs were adding up to \$153,000 annually.

Solution

Seeking a solution, Ozark Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Curtis Chesick, and Director of Grounds and Facilities, Mark Fraught, attended a presentation at a district conference where Trane experts shared details on [Joplin Schools'](#) successful Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) and data analytics project. Inspired by the results, Chesick and Fraught saw the potential for similar improvements in their school system.

Trane introduced the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to address the high school's HVAC issues, initially proposing a \$6.5 million solution. However, further discussions and a detailed Investment Grade Audit (IGA) offered a more thorough and comprehensive view of the district's energy usage and identified additional areas for ongoing improvement. The data led Trane, an accredited Energy Services Company (ESCO), to present three more expansive solutions, each leveraging IRA funding and performance contracting. Performance contracting allows building owners to pay for infrastructure upgrades through energy savings realized by the improvements and requires no upfront capital investment.

Trane presented a range of solutions, which ranged from a \$10.4 million investment focused solely on HVAC and lighting upgrades to a more comprehensive \$14.8 million option that included solar panels and district-wide building controls, ensuring significant long-term savings and enhanced energy management. The more robust solution also triggered an Investment Tax Credit (ITC) via the IRA. This clean energy tax credit helped to make the updates much more financially attainable.

The district followed a standard Request for Proposal (RFP) process when evaluating the options. However, one unique aspect of the project was the requirement for in-person professional development and educational programming to create more opportunities for staff and students at Ozark Schools. The selection committee noted that Trane was the only organization that could meet this requirement. This factored into their unanimous decision to move forward with Trane and select the most comprehensive option they had presented.



**Innovation is
essential as we
continue to enhance
our facilities.**

Dr. Curtis Chesick
Ozark School District
Assistant Superintendent of Operations

Results

The upgrades, which are ongoing, began with lighting improvements, and most building controls were updated in early 2024. Ozark is already seeing the benefits, including reduced energy bills, improved indoor air quality, and a more comfortable learning environment. Notably, the elementary school, which previously had the highest per-square-foot energy usage, saw its annual electric bill decrease from \$148,000 to about \$50,000 due to the new solar panels. Additionally, the Ozark Innovation Center, formerly a vacant commercial building, serves as a second campus for Ozark High School, with state-of-the-art facilities for students to learn about everything from the culinary arts to health science. The new center gives the high school much-needed, energy-efficient space but also offers students many new opportunities to learn from community and industry leaders.

The collaboration with Trane proved game-changing for the district. By combining visionary solutions with innovative funding strategies, such as the energy credit for schools, Ozark leadership effectively tackled a variety of challenges. "Innovation is essential as we continue to enhance our facilities, ensuring they are not only efficient but also conducive to an optimal learning environment. The collaboration with Trane is a cornerstone of our ongoing commitment to sustainability and innovation, paving the way for our students' success in the years ahead," said Dr. Curtis Chesick, Ozark School District Assistant Superintendent of Operations.

With these improvements, the Ozark School District is ensuring that its facilities are as trailblazing as the community they serve. The project stands as a testament to the area's enduring spirit of innovation and commitment to education, creating an environment where learning can flourish for years to come.

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1. <https://ozarkmissouri.com/634/History-of-Ozark>
2. <https://www.ozarktigers.org/about-us/about-ozark-schools>
3. <https://centerforgreenschools.org/about/green-school-buildings-better-for-budgets>



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