

After calculating the financial payback of solar for over two decades, it's exciting we have now determined a project to be financially beneficial to the school district. Of course this is due to a significant amount of grant funding and Focus on Energy incentives; otherwise it still would be a long way from a good investment. I define a good investment as one that has a payback of less than 10 years, but preferably 7 years. We are estimating the larger MS/HS project at 7.6 years and the smaller Elementary project at 11 years for a combined estimate of 9.1 years. Of course these are just estimates as none of us know for sure how much the sun will shine!!

As a school district, there is another advantage of having some solar power. The savings from solar power will decrease our annual operating expenses. This is important since we have revenue caps in place based on enrollment, and like many schools, our enrollment continues to decline. So even when the state may allow a revenue limit increase per student, our overall funding may be less due to having fewer students. Our expenses do not typically decrease until there is a large enough drop in enrollment to be able to justify staffing reductions. The problem that we are quickly approaching now is that our grade level numbers are small enough to where we are down to one section of a class. We can't cut a final section of a required class, so in many cases there are no more cuts that can be made.

By the time this article is printed, some of the solar panels may already be installed. The most easily seen panels will be south of the baseball field while others will be on the 5th street garage and the south metal roof of the elementary. Let's hope for bright sunny days!! 😊