

South Colonie schools get final approval for solar power

More than 5,700 panels will be installed at schools, offices and athletic fields

By Tim O'Brien

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South Colonie Central School District cleared the final hurdle to begin installing the largest solar array of any school district in the state.

The state [Education Department](#) has approved the project to install more than 5,700 solar panels at the district's eight schools and at the administrative building, transportation department offices and athletic fields at [Colonie Central High School](#), the district said Wednesday.

The [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority](#) had previously approved \$1.8 million toward the system's \$5.5 million cost.

When installed, school officials expect to save \$1.7 million over the next 20 years, with the system providing almost all its power.

The system would be put in place at no direct cost to South Colonie taxpayers.

The district has a contract with [Monolith Solar Associates of Rensselaer](#).

That company would own the system, and the district would pay Monolith a fixed rate for electricity over 20 years of about 3.5 cents per kilowatt hour.

That is half what the district now pays, a figure that would normally be expected to rise in coming years. The district expects to save \$64,000 the first year.

The Rensselaer firm would install the system free of charge, would maintain it and recoup some of its costs through tax incentives.

[Tim Carr](#), strategic accounts manager for Monolith, said the firm will meet with school officials soon to begin mapping out the plan for installing the panels.

"It's a very sizable project," he said. "We're just going to do it a step at a time until it's done."

Installation at each building will be completed in turn, but the district wants to start with the athletic fields at Colonie Central High School.

There, a fenced-in ground system would power the lighting of the athletic field, press box and scoreboards.

"That's going to be highly visible," Carr said. "They want to showcase what they have done, that they are a sustainable school."

Once that is done, the next step will be one of the district's elementary schools, district spokesman [John Noetzel](#) said.

Each of the district's schools will have a monitor displaying real-time information on energy consumption, which will be used to teach students.

At a total of 1.6 megawatts, the system would be the largest for a school district in New York state.

The next largest is the 1.2 megawatt system in the Queensbury Union Free School District.

The district expects to save \$90,000 to \$100,000 a year in expenses.

The district budgeted a third of that savings this school year to give time for the system to be installed.

A timeline for construction has not yet been set, but Carr said he expects the work to be finished in 2015.

<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/South-Colonie-schools-get-final-approval-for-5840732.php>