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CHPS off the old school block

Jasmine Y. Azima, President
Jasmine Engineering
San Antonio, TX

The Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) is a green building rating program for K-12 schools, incorporating elements of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED).

The list of CHPS standards incorporates details such as comfort, energy and material efficiency, easy maintenance and operation, adaptability and architecturally stimulating design.

"When you do CHPS, it has to meet the requirement of the state for bringing the energy down, so your utility cost goes down," explains Jasmine Azima, president of Jasmine Engineering in San Antonio.

Some CHPS requirements address issues that LEED does not, such as acoustics and low-emitting materials.

"The key elements are what is your mission and what is the goal for the client?" Azima says. "High-quality, low energy costs, and make sure that the projects are under budget and ahead of schedule."

Azima believes that these projects have inherent added value. Her experience has taught her that while building a top quality facility without cutting corners, it is still possible to ensure that building has maintainable energy conservation with more than 50 years of longevity to its systems and efficiency.

She emphasizes that high maintenance and high energy costs turn clients off because, "People nowadays are not really interested in anything that is fluff and all aesthetic. They are more practical. They want to have things that really work and it also saves them time and money – and time is money."

Azima says this doesn't mean the K-12 school needs to look and function like a university. "But for that school, you use everything that is energy conversation."

Jasmine has acted as an owner representative in commissioning services on the development of CHPS projects in Harlandale Independent School District (ISD) as well as some in San Antonio's Northside ISD and Northeast ISD.

CHPS designed school projects also exist in Dallas, Fort Worth, Klein, Katy, Round Rock, Pflugerville, and Houston.

Azima mentions that one project her company was working on, the Harlandale ISD Band Hall and Field House, is an example of a CHPS-designed school project, and outlined some features of the building.

An integrated energy management system will control lighting, HVAC, and hot water storage. A minimum of half the wood-based products used in the build will be certified in accordance with the Forest Stewardship Council or Sustainable Forestry Initiative. The facility will use enhanced air filtration, high performance EnergyStar appliances, and cool roof systems that reduce heat islands, and water efficient toilet and urinal fixtures. The buildings will be located within 1/8 of a mile from public transportation or high efficiency school buses. Also, 75 percent of construction waste will be recycled.

Despite the extra requirements, Azima said successful completion of projects within the tight timeline was achievable and worth it, due to the high quality of materials used.

"Given the fact that everything in these projects is Class A quality from floors to roofs to walls to mechanical systems, electrical systems, to lighting," states Azima, "Everything – name it – is quality Class A, and they're still finished in less than one year." –mp