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Catoosa schools gain national acclaim for being green and clean

By [Mike O'Neal](#)

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The Catoosa County public school system is featured in the December issue of American School & University magazine because of its environmentally sound maintenance practices.

That recognition is because the local system earned an honorable mention in the K-12 category of the 2011 Green Cleaning Award program sponsored by the magazine, The Green Cleaning Network, and Healthy Schools Campaign. The award recognizes education institutions for sustainable approaches to cleaning to protect health without harming the environment.



Contributed Photo

From left, Gene Lesley, of Kelsan, Inc., visits Catoosa schools with school system staff members Paul Acuff, environmental services manager, Denia Reese, superintendent, and Damon Raines, director of operations.

“We began the green cleaning initiative in 2007 with a goal of protecting the health of our students, teachers and custodians,” Superintendent Denia Reese said. “We have accomplished this goal and our schools are cleaner than ever.”

The “green initiative” began with a two-school pilot program that was quickly expanded to include all of the system’s facilities, according to Damon Raines, director of operations for Catoosa’s schools.

“We started by setting a standard in each building and have progressively grown the program,” Raines said. “We are using Green Seal certified chemicals, products and operating procedures.”

School system environmental services manager Paul Acuff said custodial supply vendor Kelsan Inc. helps implement the proper use of products and procedures adopted for use in all the local schools.

Transitioning to “green” techniques and products has provided physical and financial benefits, both to those using the schools and to those paying for them.

Acuff said a parent called recently to say that since the shift to “green cleaning” took place, her child has had fewer allergy and respiratory problems.

Not only are “green” cleaning products healthier, they also are cost effective. The days when each school stocked 18-20 cleaning products is past, Acuff said.

“Basically, four products are used in our buildings on a daily basis by environmental service specialists,” he said. “The main product is a peroxide-based cleaner that we dilute to meet specific needs.”

In addition to reducing waste and expense in cleaning products, Raines and Acuff pointed out other ways that “going green” has led to cost savings.

The system also recycles paper, cardboard, plastic and aluminum cans in order to protect the environment, and after Christmas will partner with Allied Waste Services to implement a single stream recycling program, one that does not require separating recyclables.

Because of its winning an honorable mention, Raines said Catoosa’s program will be part of a nationwide webinar to promote being “clean and green” nationwide.

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