

Customer Views

An interview with Don Tregenza

Controller, Facility Services, Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

What motivated you to initiate your renewal project?

Ten years ago we needed to do something to reduce our utility consumption. As we moved forward, we required facility maintenance but had no funding to do it. We collectively came up with the strategy to utilize utility savings and revenue to improve the teaching and learning environment. We created a renewal program with the help of Ameresco to present to the Board, along with a financial strategy. We realized that this approach was better than doing it on our own — we couldn't have done this without them. Ameresco helped us put a plan together and we formed a partnership. We needed resources, expertise and the ability to deliver it on time and they helped us to do that.



What is your working philosophy?

We are here to provide service to students, employees and school communities. We know that anything we can do to improve the learning environment will help students to achieve success.

What issues/barriers do you encounter when commencing renewal projects?

We were fortunate that the Board recognized the need for this project

and that they were very supportive. We reported the facts and needs and they immediately understood the benefits and supported the program. Although there were some initial concerns about how we were going to complete the project, staff were generally supportive once the program was started, and all were very pleased when we achieved our anticipated results.

What was the added value in working in a partnership?

Ameresco is a general contractor and so there is less impact on our day-to-day operations. Ameresco provides a turnkey solution with project management, research, communications and events. This is all very good value that we would not necessarily have the funds or time to do ourselves. It gives me time to concentrate on other activities.

What other people or factors influence your decisions and your success?

People working together i.e., we work collaboratively with principals to keep them informed of what we are doing and why. They then promote our work to teachers, parents and students. In addition Ameresco collaboratively shares the good news with the community and other staff.

What are the key results you have experienced to date?

We have finished all lighting projects; all boilers will be completed shortly; installed web based state of the art temperature control systems; put water conservation methods in place; completed roofing projects; window replacements; and new washrooms in many schools. In total we have invested \$50 million in renewing our schools. And now with students taking a leader-

ship role in conservation, they actively save the board \$250,000/yr in energy by shutting computers and lights off and reducing their garbage output.

We are near completion of our latest phase of work with Ameresco. Coupled with our renewal work with Ameresco Better Schools and EarthCARE we reduced our utility costs by \$500,000 just this past year. We are predicting \$600,000 in reduced utility costs this year, which is in addition to a \$1,000,000 savings achieved after the first phase of the project.



Our youth engagement program, EarthCARE, has had a 100% participation rate, which is amazing compared to other programs. It is incredible to see the EarthCare name and exciting environmental activities happening as we walk into each of our schools. You can't go into an HPEDBS school without seeing the EarthCARE name or environmental activities. The results have been incredible! Students are involved with everything from energy audits to recycling, composting, community partnerships and clean ups, replacing LED Christmas lights and compact fluorescents to anti idling and lights off campaigns.

Why partner versus "Do It Yourself"?

Everyone has their own views on how to renew schools. If you have the resources all the power to you — if you don't, then expertise partnering is the

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answer. We needed help and so we engaged Ameresco and turned our relationship into a strong partnership.

You have to ask yourself: how much personal time do I have to put into it? I believe in mental well-being for my staff and even for myself. I am motivated to get things done the best way possible. We have managed to complete things which we could not have done without Ameresco. This summer alone we completed a \$2.5 million project in two months that traditionally would have taken six.



Partnering is also about relationships. We need mutual respect with principals and teachers in order for them to understand why we are there making improvements and we must communicate to them regularly. For example, Greg MacDonald, our project manager from Ameresco, worked with the principal from Prince Edward Collegiate Institute during the last few weeks of the project ensuring that the school was open for registration during the construction phase. He worked with the principal and the custodial staff in collaboration to clean it up and get the job done in time.

People may believe that an external partner such as Ameresco is expensive; however, we believe you get what you pay for. You can do it yourself or pay and receive the service and expertise you need to get the project done on time.

What would you change, knowing what you know now?

I would keep on top of things by assigning different people internally to different roles.

What would you recommend to someone new to the process?

Be open minded. Accept that you can't know everything or do everything. Ameresco is not a threat. They are there to help you. I have experienced this with my own staff. At the beginning they may have initially perceived Ameresco to be a threat but once they worked with them and saw the end product they felt better — they understood the benefit.

How do you see the results of the Principals Assessment of Schools Survey (PASS) enhancing your connection with the academic side of the house?

PASS helps us to understand the needs of the principals and their schools. It takes their views into consideration on the whole. Some of the comments that came back in relation to facilities were very positive regarding facilities work. We felt appreciated and assured that the work that we do is helping. The challenge is to respond to some of the data that does not relate to facilities like staff and student morale. We will continue to make the link between facilities and quality teaching and learning environments as a forerunner in Ontario.

Do you think the PASS survey results will enhance your decision-making process? Explain why or why not.

I believe it was a useful exercise. I just need to add a few more dimensions to it and run it through its course to fully assess it.

Would you work with Ameresco again?

Yes, we sure would work with Ameresco again — there's no question about it. As long as we continue to benefit from the partnership. We will consider Ameresco for future projects as the opportunities arise.



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