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Florida Schools Gain Solar Power, Get Cash

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Here's a concept for you: a system that allows private investors to own the [solar power](#) systems installed at public schools while still receiving substantial associated tax benefits. That concept is swiftly becoming a reality in Gainesville, Fla., where [Gainesville Regional Utility's](#) (GRU) feed-in tariff system will be instrumental in bringing [renewable energy](#) to eight Alachua County schools.

Under the terms of this program, 725 kilowatts of roof-mounted solar power will be installed at zero cost to the school district, and the district will receive annual payments of \$72,500 for 20 years. This money will be used (appropriately enough) to implement a K-12 renewable energy curriculum and fund further energy improvement at the schools. According to [Solar Impact](#), the installer behind this project, this payment is more than double what was being offered to Gainesville businesses on similar terms.



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In order to create a win-win-win situation for all parties involved, Solar Impact shifted the normal terms of this roof-rental agreement, giving investors the opportunity to help public schools, improve the environment and create local jobs - all while receiving a monthly payment equal to a 10-12 percent annual return for 20 years. (This cash comes courtesy of GRU, which will purchase the electricity at \$0.29/kilowatt-hour under the 20-year feed-in-tariff contract.) Investors simply make lease payments to the school in return for the use of roof-space during the contract period.

Barry Jacobson, president of Gainesville-based Solar Impact, helped to draft these terms, which are designed to maximize funds for the public schools. "Our children received an excellent education while attending Alachua County public schools," he said in a [statement](#). He went on to note that he and his wife saw this project as a chance to bring solar to the public schools while creating a much needed revenue stream for the district.