

# 'Flip The Switch' events occurring in three Boulder Schools to celebrate the schools' going solar.

By The Center for ReSource Conservation

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It appeared to be a normal school assembly in the cafeteria at Flatirons Elementary. However, upon closer look, one could see a student with soybeans pinned on her shirt, or another who donned an aluminum foil hat. Some students wore suns, another carried a bag of water in her hand. Dressed as their favorite type of renewable energy, their enthusiasm was apparent. Despite the fact that some of these students had the sun in their eyes in the newly designed cafeteria, they had smiles on their faces. The sun is what it was all about-for this assembly was celebrating that their school had gone solar. This was Flatirons Elementary's 'Flip The Switch' event held on January 19: an event signifying the day that their new photovoltaic, or PV system would be turned on.

Flatirons Elementary is one of three schools chosen to receive solar panels, or a solar array through a program called ReNew Our Schools run by the Center For Resource Conservation (CRC). The CRC is a non-profit organization based in Boulder that provides education resources to help

the community conserve natural resources. The schools receive these solar arrays free of charge, thanks to a charitable donation from a Boulder-based family foundation which is administered through the CRC. The program was created with the intent of educating the local community about renewable energy.

The ReNew Our Schools program has four primary objectives:

1. Provide local school facilities with solar PV equipment to lower the schools' operating costs and environmental impacts.
2. Establish a model for community-based conservation projects around energy efficiency and renewable energy.
3. Create long-term learning opportunities for teachers and students with new, creative, interactive curriculum.
4. Develop educational materials (on how solar electricity works and benefits from clean, renewable energy) for distribution in the community.

Now in its second year, the *ReNew Our Schools* program is designed so that local schools submit Action Plans to the CRC describing how they would



*Above: Center for Resource Conservation ReNew Our Schools Coordinator Kathy Croasdale teaches Flatirons Elementary students about the solar grant program.*

meet the main goal of the program- to educate the students and community about renewable energy. Suitably, the schools with the best plans receive a 10 kilowatt solar array for their community and student education. Flatirons Elementary, Monarch K-8 and Fireside Elementary were chosen for the 2010-2011 school year, joining the first year's winners, High Peaks/BCSIS and Arapahoe Ridge High School.

Once the schools are chosen, local solar installation contractors bid to serve these schools with photovoltaic solar systems. The solar companies install the systems as well as help with the education for the program. Those attending Flatirons' Flip the Switch saw Alison Hyde of Bella Energy, the company that installed the PV system at Flatirons, guiding students through the basics of solar energy. Many hands are in the air when Alison asks the students why Colorado is such an ideal place for solar. "Yes", Alison says, confirming a student's response, "Colorado gets over 300 days of sunshine a year". Bella Energy has enjoyed being involved in the school. "Bella Energy is proud to have been a part of the ReNew Our Schools program," says Dana Mosman, Project Manager of the installation. "Our solar installation at Flatirons Elementary is a great example of how solar can serve as an educational tool and financial asset

for school districts."

The schools also receive a very important educational tool as part of the grant: an energy monitoring system from eGauge, another Boulder based company. This monitoring system displays the energy produced by the panels, in addition to showing the energy consumption of the school. "We hope this will not only be an educational tool in the classroom, but that the students and staff will use the data to change the energy consumption of their school," says Kathy Croasdale, ReNew Our Schools Program Coordinator for the CRC. With the eGauge monitors, each school can see real time data of their energy consumption and production. If the students turn off all of the lights in the school, they will be able to see this change immediately on the graph. "This could be an excellent tool to change energy behavior in the school and to get kids to realize that every thing they do takes energy," continues Croasdale. This data is also available on the CRC website.

When a school's system has been installed, a 'Flip the Switch' event is held to celebrate the school's new solar system. The event includes speeches and a tour of the system, and is open to the students, staff, and community of the school. The public is also invited to attend, giving them an opportunity to learn first hand about renewable energy. Flatirons held their Flip the Switch event on January 19. As exciting as it was for the students to see the energy production in action, Michael Strife, the project champion for solar at Flatirons, reminded the students, "This event was not just about turning the solar on, but also about flipping the switch off, as conserving energy is as or more important than creating energy from renewable resources."

"BVSD is grateful to the Center for ReSource Conservation for their generous grants to help our schools become more energy efficient," said Dr. Ghita Carroll, Sustainability Coordinator for BVSD. "We hope this will be a program and partnership that continues year after year."

## More Info:

### Sustainability Efforts at Boulder Valley School District

BVSD developed a Sustainability Management System (SMS), along with many other "green BVSD" initiatives launched in the past year. The SMS defines a vision, goals and strategies for achieving district-wide environmental sustainability, and will serve as a roadmap for integrating these concepts into the curriculum and operations.

For more information about BVSD's green initiatives, please visit [bvsd.org/green/Pages/default.aspx](http://bvsd.org/green/Pages/default.aspx) or contact [Ghita.Carroll@bvsd.org](mailto:Ghita.Carroll@bvsd.org).

### The Center for ReSource Conservation

Founded in 1976, the Center for ReSource Conservation (CRC) is a Boulder-based 501(c)3 non-profit organization which empowers the local community to conserve natural resources. Each year, the CRC provides direct services to over 20,000 Front Range residents through its energy, water, and waste programs. CRC's Energy Division coordinates Boulder County Solar Week, along with managing REAP (Residential Energy Action Program), Insulate Colorado, and ReNew Our Schools.

For more information about The Center for ReSource Conservation, visit [ConservationCenter.org](http://ConservationCenter.org).

## Upcoming 'Flip the Switch' events:

### Fireside Elementary

845 West Dahlia Street, Louisville  
March 11, 1:00 p.m.

### Monarch K-8 School

263 Campus Drive, Louisville  
March 16, 2:45 p.m.

*Below: 10 kilowatt photovoltaic system donated to Flatirons Elementary by ReNew Our Schools program and installed by Bella Energy.*

