
Rewarding energy-efficient schools with solar

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ReNew Our Schools gives hands-on lessons in renewable energy

by Chelsea Long

ReNew Our Schools, a Center for ReSource Conservation program, is attempting to renew the way it inspires students to be environmentally conscious.

The program has given out six solar panel array systems to schools in the Boulder Valley School District. The arrays were distributed based on an application process. The applications were put together by faculty, and included how they'd use the panels for both student and community education.

For next year, though, the CRC hopes to have a new competition in place that inspires high school students to become energy-efficient on their own. Open to high schools in the BVSD, St. Vrain Valley School District and Denver Public Schools, the competition will allow groups of students to attempt to decrease their schools' consumption of energy.

"Before, it was predominantly driven by the faculty, by teachers saying this is how we're going to educate the kids. What we're asking for now is for students to get involved," says Brad Queen, energy division director at the CRC.

Though the program is still in development, Queen and Kathy Croasdale, the ReNew Our Schools program coordinator, are working to make it as effective as possible in reducing schools' energy use.

"I've seen contests that have an average of 7 percent to 10 percent [decrease in energy consumption]," Croasdale says. "So we're hoping for at least that."

Queen cites evidence that an independent student group at Ponderosa High School in Denver reduced both peak energy demand and energy consumption by 30 percent. They changed standard light bulbs to CFLs, and turned off computers and air conditioning when they weren't using them. Because schools use so much energy, there are more opportunities for bigger cuts with smaller changes.

"Some schools could use as much energy as all the households of all the kids attending the school," Queen says. "They're used in the course of 40 hours a week or more, and they have a lot of equipment. A lot of computers, ventilation, heating, air conditioning and lights on all the time."

The school that has the biggest decrease in consumption will win a solar array system like those that have already been given out, or if they already have an array, a credit for something else that would help with the energy-saving goals in place. Any of the schools competing, though, will likely see some kind of decrease in consumption, which would be a win in itself.

“This competition is intended to educate children and get them engaged in a competition where they’re going to need the knowledge if they intend to compete well. There’s nothing more motivating for a student than to need what they’re being taught. That’s what the merit is with this program,” Queen says.

The current program requires that at least 20 percent of the student body is provided with an energy curriculum, and that at least 200 community members are reached with some kind of energy conservation plan. This one will be phased out this fall, and there may be changes to the competition style before then as details are figured out. Queen and Croasdale hope to see even more response than they have in the past two years of ReNew Our Schools.

“The schools are so excited to have the panels that they’ve gone way above and beyond what they’ve been asked to do,” Croasdale says.

The CRC hopes that continues to be the case with the competition, an aspect that gives more students a chance to get involved.

“The message is to get students thinking about how much energy they use, how they can affect that, and make it relevant to how they spend their day,” Queen says. “It’s something people usually only monitor at home. They don’t think they can have an impact in their workplace or in their school.”

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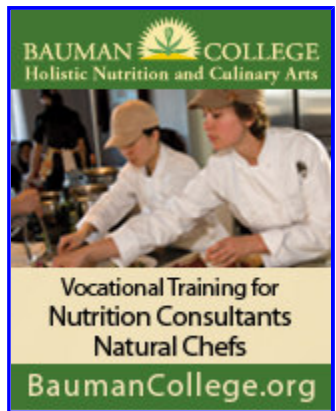
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