

EDUCATION

'Green team' saves money

C.R. school district program involves students and teachers

By Andrew Phillips, The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — The Cedar Rapids Community School District's "green team" initiative, now in its second year, is saving energy and money, administrators said.

The program includes teams of teachers at each school, who help students track recycling and energy use in their buildings. The district spends about \$500,000 in utility costs at each of its high schools, said buildings and grounds manager Rob Kleinsmith, and the program saved the district more than \$200,000 last year.

That is significant, said business services executive director Steve Graham, in a district with tight funding.

"Savings from energy are redirected back into our instructional programs," Graham said. "This saves jobs. Bottom line — savings of energy saves jobs."

The challenge for the district, Graham said, is turning that idea into results.

"Most people can agree that we want to conserve energy," Graham said. "The real work is going to be on our advocacy," which includes "getting the kids behind these kinds of things."

At Hoover Elementary School, those efforts have been successful, Principal Clint Stone



Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette

Students (from left) Jasmine Mallory, Cam' Ron Wells, Jacob Vanderhorn and Ja' Mario Heil put recyclable bottles and cans into a plastic bag as they collect fundraising items from classrooms Dec. 18 at Hoover Elementary School in northwest Cedar Rapids. The students are part of the Green Team that goes around the school collecting recyclable cans and bottles, as well as can pull tabs, Hy-Vee receipts and Box Tops for Education tabs from classrooms.

said.

Hoover students collect and measure recycling twice each week with the help of a teacher, Stone said.

At a district awards ceremony for the program last school year, Stone said, Hoover won two of the four awards.

In addition to recycling, some Hoover students help save energy by becoming student "ambassadors" for conservation in their classrooms — checking for leaky faucets and unnecessary light use.

"Having ambassadors

in each classroom has really made a difference as well, because it wasn't just an adult initiative," Stone said. "Without (students') enthusiasm and ownership, this really wouldn't be successful."

Stone said saving energy can be difficult in a building like Hoover, which is 60 years old.

"We have to work sometimes even harder to make sure we're doing that," he said.

He credited Kelly Trachta, the school's green team leader, with implementing those

efforts.

In addition to monitoring recycling, water and light use, Stone said, the building plans to begin recycling milk cartons and add an outdoor classroom.

Hoover's students have held him accountable, too, Stone said.

"Kids have come in and say, 'Mr. Stone, some things here really should have been commingled or recycled,'" he said.

"I need to continue to learn as well."

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