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Homeroom: Mounds View schools do the math on energy savings

District cuts costs, saves \$557,000

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Updated: 02/21/2010 11:22:15 PM CST

A Mounds View schools effort to curb energy costs has saved the district \$557,000 in 15 months and given students a lesson in conservation.

The north suburban district has long strived to be eco-friendly, updating its mechanical systems since 1999, said Chris Paquette, the district's maintenance operations manager. Its more recent partnership with a local company's conservation program dubbed Schools for Energy Efficiency expands that effort.

The program, SEE for short, helps schools involve students in their energy-saving efforts. It's also developed a system that lets schools track the savings. Even SEE was surprised at the savings in Mounds View.

"They were just blown away," said district spokeswoman Rachel Gutierrez.

When SEE officials first approached Mounds View school leaders a few years ago, they preached the adage, "Many hands make for light work."

SEE was developed in 2002 by White Bear Lake-based Hallberg Engineering Inc. Hallberg, a

mechanical and electrical engineering firm, has more than 25 years of experience working with Minnesota school districts.

It created SEE to help its clients save energy — and money — by making immediate fixes for the short term and changing behavior for the long term. Some 600 schools have participated nationwide, including many in Minnesota.

Getting students involved is key to the program's success, said Mounds View district spokeswoman Rachel Gutierrez.

A SEE program manager arrives at a school armed with posters, Post-it Notes and brochures. The idea is to promote energy conservation and make it cool. There is even a mascot: a pig called Energy Hog.

"A big part of the decision (to use SEE) is because of its important lessons for kids," Gutierrez said. In fact, students will often take the lessons home, and with it, bring about some energy savings there.

Nine-year-old Jonah Roesler is one of several third-graders appointed to the SEE Squad in his elementary school. Their duty: keep an eye open for light switches and computer monitors left on unnecessarily. If Roesler finds one, he will flick it off, then leave a Post-it Note reminding its next user to be more diligent.

"The awareness campaign is one of the most impactful pieces of the program," said Christie Rosckes, a marketing and product specialist with SEE.

The program also helps schools track progress made with their energy-savings efforts. Mounds View monitors its savings in 14 buildings. Between

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July 2008 and September 2009, the district spent \$557,000 less than it would have if energy had been consumed at previous levels, a summary report said.

And the district's own building initiatives haven't slowed. The past few years the district has replaced lighting, windows and modified its temperature management systems, Paquette said.

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