

Our district has a strong record of continually evaluating its energy use and reducing the costs. These investments in time and equipment have allowed us to direct those savings to our primary business: educating students. But the improvements also have been good for the planet and, in the current global energy crisis, have meant we have built-in strategies to mitigate the price hikes.

I attribute our successful track record primarily to three groups of people:

- The Building & Grounds staff. The department leaders have assembled a team that is open to new technologies and that seeks ways to improve efficiency.
- The Red Wing School Board. Various members have come and gone, but the board remains committed to maintaining our buildings and improving their energy efficiency. Visitors often tell me how beautiful our “new” schools look and are surprised to learn that the newest is actually more than 25 years old.
- The Red Wing community. Voters have said “yes” to many improvements to our infrastructure, some of which I will highlight here.

Energy efficient buildings

Every Red Wing Public Schools K-12 building meets ENERGY STAR criteria and we hope to recertify each of them again in 2022 or 2023. This is true even with our having increased airflow during the pandemic to reduce the spread of COVID-19, influenza and other airborne viruses. Our ratings range from 77 at Sunnyside to 94 at Twin Bluff. (Note that 50 is average compared to Energy Star buildings nationwide. A building must be 75 to achieve ENERGY STAR status.) Let's use Red Wing High School as an example. RWHS in 2019 became the district's last building to earn ENERGY STAR status.

From 2008 through 2021, energy use for the high school is down 28%, according to B3 Benchmarking, the state's energy logging website for public buildings. Approximately 18% of this is thanks to a new building automation system and Energy Valves made possible by the 2018 referendum. Again, thank you for the support!

Compared to the year 2000, districtwide we annually save \$365,845 in energy (gas, electric, oil) bills. Our emissions avoidance is 2,422 metric tons of CO2 per year.

Solar garden

We also have subscribed to several solar gardens to reduce reliance on fossil fuels as well as save money. We started adding solar garden subscriptions in 2017. The final section came online in February 2020.

Districtwide, we have saved \$316,000 in costs through December 2021 thanks to solar.

School buses

Every person who fills up their car or truck right now feels the pain of record-high gasoline and diesel prices. A few people have asked how this is hurting the district.

While we don't own any buses, transportation partner First Student thankfully had the foresight several years ago to begin shifting its fleet to more energy efficient power sources even before electric school buses became feasible. Today, 60% of buses carrying local students to and from Red Wing schools use propane rather than diesel. As a result, the district is paying a much lower fuel service charge than other districts are this spring.

Potential project

Up next, the Building & Grounds Department hopes to switch from fluorescent to LED lighting in the near future. The School Board and the community will learn about the proposal at the March 21 board workshop meeting.

Red Wing Public Schools continues to focus on finding ways to minimize operational costs so more money is allocated to educate students and our promises to the community are fulfilled. Please contact Kevin Johnson at 651-385-4507 or kjohnson@rwps if you have any questions about energy-related projects within the school district.