

Children getting lessons on lessening energy use

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ELGIN — On Friday, a new educational program aimed at increasing children's awareness of energy efficiency began at Sheridan Elementary School.

Sheridan is the only school in Elgin Area School District U46 that has the pilot program.

"Our kids, they're going to be the people who will be dealing with energy in the future — we will be running low on fossil fuels," said Rachel Nalepa, project manager for the Student Energy Actions Program. "They will shape our future energy" situation.

"We're trying to make them environmental stewards ... We want to prompt them to take what they learn in class and apply it at home."

This comprehensive environmental education program — in the second of three years of secured funding — adheres to the states' standards in science and math for pupils in third through eighth grades, Nalepa said.

Sheridan officials did not immediately return phone calls requesting comment.

Children will participate in hands-on, energy-related projects, such as constructing light bulbs and electrical circuits, to enhance their understanding of the importance of energy efficiency.

Through this program, the children also will take home compact fluorescent light bulbs — which are more energy-efficient than incandescent light bulbs — and they will embark on energy patrols through the school to see how the school can conserve energy.

"We're trying to make these behavioral changes into second nature," Nalepa said. "It's hard to change habits in adults. When you get them as children, it's easier."

The program is funded by a roughly \$16 million legal settlement in late 2003 with ComEd. The money was set aside for projects that spur more investment in energy efficiency, according to David Kolata, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board and president of the Northern Illinois energy project.

After those three years of funding, Nalepa said there is no certainty that the program will continue. However, those involved hope the state will expand it.

"Energy prices right now are on everybody's mind," Kolata said. "We need to start giving people tools to save money on their bills. We have to invest in energy efficiency."

Sheridan Elementary school was chosen to participate in the program partly because of its location in northern Illinois, but also because of the enthusiasm of its teachers, according to Kolata.

For more information on the Northern Illinois Energy Project, call (312) 263-4282 or visit www.citizensutilityboard.org/energysavings .

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