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FIRST PHASE OF GREEN AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAM COMPLETED IN DODGEVILLE

The fifth grade students in the classrooms of Mandy Pederson, Natalie Hanke, Jill Fuerstenberg and T. A. Fink at Ridgeway Elementary School know how energy and water are used in their school buildings and how waste is removed. They've surveyed the grounds, interviewed knowledgeable staff and created experiments to test their ideas, then written up reports on their findings.

In fact, students throughout Dodgeville have gotten into the act. At Dodgeville High School, teachers and students completed the first phase of their building inspection by the end of the first semester while at Dodgeville Middle School the work will be completed during second semester. These "authentic learning" projects, with students learning real-world skills by working on real-world programs, are part of the two-year Green and Healthy Schools initiative which the Dodgeville School Board authorized in August, 2008.

"Students learn and retain more when they are engaged in real-life, authentic learning. This initiative provides students opportunities to study relevant issues that impact our health, safety and general well being," said Diane Messer, Dodgeville superintendent.

The "Green and Healthy Schools" certification program is a statewide initiative sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR.) In the first year of the program, teachers, students and staff members assess existing energy and water usage and waste management and transportation policies. In the following year they figure out how to implement improvements to cut costs and improve the environment.

According to the program's coordinator, Chuck Tennesen, "Schools that attain the 'Green and Healthy' certification find that their students perform better because the improved quality of their surroundings has made learning more accessible. In addition, as future decision makers, they develop a solid understanding of energy and resource management by participating in both the assessment and implementation phases."

Mandy Pederson hopes the Green and Health Schools project will help her fifth graders "gain a greater understanding of the world around them and that they'll make smarter, greener choices in the future and empower others to do the same."

The Green and Healthy Schools program is one of several initiatives currently in progress under the umbrella of the Eco-County Steering Committee, which is a public-private partnership. The Steering Committee was formed as a result of the Iowa County Board passing a resolution in October, 2008 designating the county as one of the state's first eco-counties.

According to the resolution, "The willingness of Iowa County to move in the direction of eco-county designation can serve as a model for our residents, encouraging economic development and industrial initiatives while protecting the ecosystems in which they raise their families." For more information about the Eco-County Steering Committee, contact Scott Godfrey at scott.godfrey@iowacounty.org. To learn more about Dodgeville's Green and Healthy Schools program, contact Chuck Tennesen at ctennesen@dsd.k12.wi.us.

PHOTO CAPTION

Mandy Pederson's 5th graders at Ridgeway Elementary School develop their plan for surveying the buildings' energy and water use and waste disposal as part of the Green and Healthy Schools program. The are (left to right) Dani B., Morgan M., Jorie D., Logan M., Alyssa O and Brittany R (back to camera)