

# CANYON COURIER

## West Jeff students learn energy conservation during competition

By Corinne Westeman

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West Jefferson Middle School has won the first round of ReNew Our School, an energy competition among several Jeffco schools, and will receive LED light fixtures in its cafeteria as the prize.

The middle school started the second round of competition Jan. 1, which will run until May 12, said digital teacher-librarian Amy Baker, who is helping to coordinate the school's efforts. If the school wins round two, it could receive new lights in either the gym or library.

During the first round, West Jeff competed against Carmody and Creighton middle schools, as well as Chatfield, Ralston Valley and Wheat Ridge high schools. Despite being one of the older schools "and competing against a school that uses solar panels," Baker said, efforts by West Jeff's students and staff earned first place.

Throughout the fall semester, students and staff alike worked to use less energy by turning off lights in empty classrooms, unplugging unused electronics, and other small changes, Baker continued.

The competition was incorporated into the science curriculum, as students used eGauges and light meters to conduct an "energy audit" and measure the amount of light and electricity the school uses in a day — finding that "many of the rooms were over-lighted," Baker said

For instance, the students measured exactly how much energy is used to light the gym by momentarily turning the lights off and seeing how much the eGauge changed.



*Chancey Bush*

From the left, top row: Nicholas, 6<sup>th</sup>; Ashlyn, 7<sup>th</sup>; Allie, 7<sup>th</sup>; Skye, 7<sup>th</sup>; Parker, 7<sup>th</sup>; Elijah, 8<sup>th</sup>; Waylon, 8<sup>th</sup>; Charley, 8<sup>th</sup>. Bottom row: Amy Baker, librarian; Janice Jones, para; Joseph, 6<sup>th</sup>; Avery, 6<sup>th</sup>; Alex, 6<sup>th</sup>; Logan, 6<sup>th</sup>; Navin, 6<sup>th</sup>; Matthew, 6<sup>th</sup>; Shilah, 6<sup>th</sup>; Steven, 6<sup>th</sup>; Jack, 6<sup>th</sup>; Kim Halingstad, assistant principal; Alex Buffington, 6<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher.

According to Baker, the school also completed more than 100 home energy action plans, which help students and their parents become more aware of energy use in their homes. It also formed a Green Team of about 20 students who meet during lunch to talk about school energy savings.

“We also gave the seventh- and eighth-graders writing prompts about ideas for alternative energy sources,” Baker said. “They talked about wind, solar and biomass. And that’s not really applicable to us right now, but it’s great to see the kids excited about energy conservation and want to do those really big changes.”

Baker said that, even after the first round of competition ended in October, the school continued to save energy. It was 9.95 percent below baseline usage before Thanksgiving break, she said.

In the spring semester, Baker said the Green Team will continue meeting to brainstorm ideas, as well as putting up reminders and posters and sending home letters.

Students on the Green Team said they enjoyed ensuring that lights and electronics were off when no one was in the room.

They have been “grading” teachers by leaving color-coded hangers on the doors. Green hangers mean the teachers are doing well at turning off their lights and electronics; yellow or red “tickets” means a teacher needs to improve, the students said.

“We got to interact and save energy for our school,” said seventh-grader Skye, a Green Team member. “It’s cool to say that I helped my school win \$18,000 (for new lights).”

The Green Team said the cafeteria desperately needs LED lights, as the current halogen ones “don’t make the room all that bright, and they’re very expensive,” as seventh-grader Allie remarked.

Sixth-grade teacher Alex Buffington, who helps supervise the Green Team, said the competition will have long-lasting impacts not only on the school, but for the students.

“They’ve gained an awareness of energy usage,” Buffington said. “They learned a lot about energy via the tools, and it was good for them to see the actual impacts.”