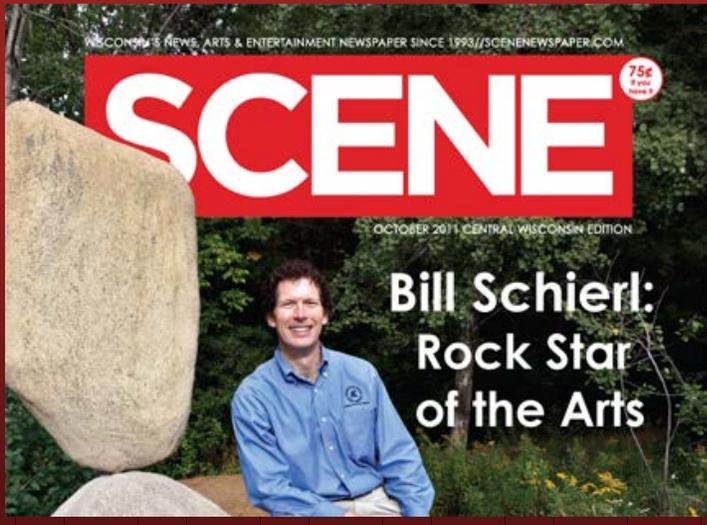


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KEEP program promotes wise energy use

By Sara Windjue

It's in the news: Energy shortages, energy crises, increased energy prices. What can be done? A key step is to learn to use energy more efficiently. Fortunately, there is a program in Wisconsin that is working to help teachers spark student interest in energy; students who will generate new ideas for fueling the future. Teacher education is imperative to student learning. Generating a spark of interest about energy in students brings forth new ideas for fueling the future.

The Wisconsin K-12 Energy Education Program (KEEP) housed within the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education (WCEE) in the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point (UWSP), is celebrating 15 years of improving and increasing energy education in Wisconsin's K-12 schools. There have been many accomplishments within those 15 years including reaching thousands of teachers and their students through professional development experiences, support materials, and networking opportunities. With over 5,000 course participants having completed at least one energy-related graduate level course offered through KEEP for UWSP credit and, therefore, teaching an improved energy curriculum to their students each year, imagine how many students will graduate with increased energy literacy!

Why is energy literacy important?

The need for energy education is clear when we understand that some households spend more than 20 percent of their budget on heating their homes and fueling their cars. Energy issues in the news emphasize the importance of energy education. With nearly all environmental problems being tied directly or indirectly to energy consumption, it is important that students understand what energy is, where it comes from, the effects of its use, and how it can be managed sustainably. Our society needs individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them to use energy resources wisely. Energy literacy is critical to Wisconsin's economic and environmental future.

Empowering Teachers



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With 15 years of experience, KEEP is constantly adapting the Program to fit the needs of teachers. Empowering teachers through education is the number one priority for KEEP. If teachers get excited about energy and value its importance in their teaching, their students will get excited and want to learn more and get involved. One way KEEP empowers teachers is through the professional development courses that are offered for graduate credit. Through scholarships from Focus on Energy, teachers pay a reduced fee for one graduate credit. This incentive is enough to get teachers participating in hands-on energy education and finding a way to fit it into their lesson plans. Betsy Ippolito, Physical Science teacher from Waunakee High School, has participated in three KEEP courses. "I knew it would provide me with easy to implement, hands-on activities that would help me prepare my class groundwork as a new teacher," Ippolito explained regarding her first KEEP course. "The information I have learned through all of the KEEP courses has helped me understand good ways to reduce my energy consumption by replacing all of the incandescent light bulbs in my house with CFLs, investing in an ultra-low emissions vehicle, realizing that most of the places in my community are within an easy biking distance (good for me AND the environment!), and has helped me learn to keep sustainable living at the forefront of my mind as I make new lifestyle choices," continues Ippolito.

KEEP's energy education curriculum can be infused into any K-12 curriculum to teach about energy, making energy not only a part of science and technology classes, but also family and consumer science, math, art, and language classes. Donna Haese, Special Education teacher from Brillion High School, incorporates important energy concepts into summer school transition classes for incoming freshmen by using energy as the tool to teach students technology and study skills they'll need in high school. KEEP's curriculum includes various activity guides focusing on basic energy education and energy efficiency, renewable energy, biomass energy, and school building energy efficiency. Sample activities teachers can incorporate into their curriculums include performing classroom energy audits, demonstrating how electricity flows from the power plant to appliances in the classroom, exploring graphing techniques, and investigating energy-related careers through research, interviews and job shadowing.

Several opportunities are available through KEEP for teachers to get their students more involved in energy activities and projects. For example, each year KEEP offers a bookmark and video contest focused on a different theme. Bookmarks are designed by students in grades 5-7 and videos are developed by high school students. Bookmarks and videos are submitted to KEEP and judged and winning entries are invited to an annual energy awards ceremony where they are recognized for their contributions. Another activity KEEP coordinates is the Wisconsin Electrathon Program where students build one-person electric vehicles and then compete at statewide competitions against their peers. KEEP also encourages teachers to build energy-efficient homes with their students and help connect instructors to consultants who will guide them through the energy-efficient building and certification process.

Many times, because of limited school budgets, teachers need access to resources or funding to be able to incorporate hands-on lessons and field trips into their curriculum. Through the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education, KEEP offers hands-on and legs-on resources for teachers to demonstrate energy concepts in their classrooms. Resources include a Hand-Crank Generator that powers incandescent and compact fluorescent light bulbs, Pedal Power that allows students to pedal a bike to power small common household appliances, including a flat-screen television, and an Energy Education Trunk filled with everything teachers need to complete five energy activities with their students.

Energy Education Partners

Numerous partners have contributed to KEEP's success and the creation of a more energy literate public. Partners within the energy community include the Energy Center of Wisconsin, Focus on Energy, the Midwest Renewable Energy Association, and Wisconsin's utilities. Other partners include educational institutions such as UWSP's College of Natural Resources, the Wisconsin Technical College System, UW-Continuing Education and Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA). In addition, as KEEP branches out to assist in preparing students for energy-related careers, partners in the business industry will be integral to offering successful training opportunities for teachers and students.

Fueling the Future

KEEP utilizes the "teacher empowerment" approach to promoting energy literacy in Wisconsin because it is the most effective approach to help students learn about energy and manage energy use. Teachers work daily with students, reach thousands of students annually, and understand how energy topics and concepts best tie into their curriculum. Students who experience energy education will gain knowledge and skills to make wise decisions about their energy use. Promoting energy literacy among students will generate problem solvers and innovators who will help fuel the future and ensure energy resources will be available for generations to come. Ippolito knows her efforts to increase student energy literacy have been effective when she sees the initiatives her students are taking to educate each other and the public about energy issues such as when students remind each other to "power down" or turn off the lights. "I absolutely love when I hear from parents about how their children are making energy-wise changes in their family home and encouraging their parents to become more energy conscious."

Sara Windjue has been the Energy Education Specialist with the Wisconsin K-12 Energy Education Program (KEEP) since January 2005. KEEP is the result of a collaborative effort between the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education (WCEE) and the Focus on Energy program, Wisconsin utilities' statewide program for energy efficiency and renewable energy. The goals of this program are to encourage energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, enhance the environment, and ensure the

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Local Weather for Appleton, WI



APPLETON, WI
 Cloudy
 Humidity: 87%
 Wind: N at 0 mph

°F | °C

Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
			
47	74	75	74

47 | 74 49 | 76 54 | 74 56 | 76

future supply of energy for Wisconsin. The WCEE is a nonprofit organization, located in the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, which works to improve environmental education throughout Wisconsin.



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