

Daily Chronicle Article

Hinckley-Big Rock Middle School to dedicate wind turbine

By DANA HERRA dherra@daily-chronicle.com



[Comments](#) (No comments posted)



Hinckley-Big Rock Middle School has constructed a wind turbine.
(Rob Winner – rwinner@daily-chronicle.com)

[Buy Daily Chronicle Photos »](#)

BIG ROCK – When Matt Olson teaches his middle school science students about alternative energy sources, he wants them to have more than a chapter in a book – he wants them to see energy production in action. Two years ago, Olson obtained a grant to install solar panels at Hinckley-Big Rock Middle School, which include data collection capability so students can see how much energy the panels produce.

This year, Olson used another grant to install a 2.2-kilowatt wind turbine at the school.

“It’s a tremendous opportunity,” Olson said. “Instead of reading about alternative energy, we have examples of it the kids can look at. The kids are excited. The educational value, in my opinion, is quite high.”

The turbine sits atop a 45-foot tower and, like the solar panels, generates electricity and feeds into the school’s grid. Whatever energy is produced by the two alternative energy sources is that much less the school has to buy from the utility company, Olson said. In theory, he said, if everything in the school that draws electricity were turned off, the electric meter would run backward.

Principal Jeff Strauss said he was on board from the time Olson approached him with the idea of applying for a new grant to fund the turbine. Strauss lives near a commercial wind farm in

Mendota, he said, and he was interested in how a smaller-scale turbine could teach children about electricity.

He noted that Olson has been the driving force behind several environmental initiatives at the school, starting a recycling program as well as having the alternate energy sources installed.

“I think it’s really neat,” Strauss said. “Matt’s really teaching the children about environmentalism by example.”

As well as being used in the science curriculum, data from both the solar panels and wind turbine will be available to the public on the school’s website, Olson said. It will also be available on the website of Illinois Solar Schools, a consortium of schools using solar panels. The group, of which H-BR is a part, plans to add wind energy in the near future, Olson said.

Getting the turbine involved a lengthy process, Olson said, including wind studies, writing the grant and asking the village of Big Rock for a waiver of the zoning ordinance to allow construction of the tower.

As the data begins to come in, Strauss thinks the school may be about to start a local trend. Several people attended the public hearing for the zoning change and expressed interest in putting small turbines on their own properties, he said.

“I think they kind of wanted us to be the guinea pigs, and then they might consider getting one of their own,” he said.