

Schools boast \$5 million savings by going LOCO

If Earth Hour participants are making a splash in the energy consumption pool today, local students have already been doing cannonballs.

EarthCARE teams in 150 schools in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board are way ahead of the conservation curve, having spearheaded localized energy saving efforts for nearly five years.

The LOCO (Lights Off, Computers Off) program already boasts nearly \$5 million in energy savings for the school board in its first four years of operation.

"That money has to go somewhere — whether it goes to Hydro Ottawa or whether it stays to be spent in the school," said EarthCARE Canada executive director Rose-Marie Batley. "We wanted this to be something that was part of the culture of the schools."

Audit for efficiency

Teams at individual schools perform audits each April to determine how many lights are on when they're not needed, and how many computers are running when not in use.

The information is compiled on an audit sheet and energy costs are calculated based on average price per kilowatt hour.

"While they're doing the audit, it's a learning experience as well," said Batley.

In the first year alone, EarthCARE calculated almost \$1 million in savings across

the board. Last year, that number approached \$1.7 million due to the rising cost of electricity.

"We encourage all students to participate because that's the one program that generates the largest cost avoidance," said Batley.

When the program started, students observed an average of 75% of lights and computers sucking power needlessly. Now that ratio is closer to 25%.

"The goal of EarthCARE is to develop environmental stewardship, and the students' passion and enthusiasm is infectious," said Batley. "We're not just interested in awareness, we're interested in action."

— Aedan Helmer