



The Super Star energy conservation program that began at Park Elementary in Cross Plains a year ago is going strong.

Under the direction of kindergarten teacher Amy Callies and custodian Rodney "Peanuts" Esser, students and staff came up with five initiatives that save energy, money and time last fall. While stars aren't being handed out like they were a year ago for keeping classroom doors closed or turning off lights when you leave a classroom, that doesn't mean those things aren't still happening.

"We're training them for life," Callies said. "They watch what we do."

Callies and Esser spoke passionately about their program during a 30-minute interview on Sept. 30 during Callies' lunch hour. She said they wanted to start with something simple and create awareness, which would lead to a change in behaviors.

"I'm passionate about environmental education," said Callies, who joined the district in 1991 and has always worked at Park. "I'm trying to save the earth one project at a time."

They decided to use stars, which at first began appearing on the doors of classrooms where teachers were already practicing energy efficient behaviors.

A short time later, students and teachers were told about the program. Classrooms could receive stars for keeping classroom doors closed, using one bank of lights, turning off lights when not in a classroom, turning off anything (such as computers) that are not in use, and following the 30-second rule, which includes picking up trash and putting chairs on tables at the end of the day.

The goal this school year is to get everyone involved with recycling.

She also didn't want to add to teachers' workloads. "The teachers don't have enough time to teach energy curriculum," said Callies, who has worked on the district's Sustainability Committee and has written a number of environmental grants.

Esser said the school has had savings as high as 50 percent in some months and has saved nearly 40 percent in energy costs over the past year. He also was amazed at how excited everyone was about the program.

"There were some rooms where the stars went up one side of the door and down the other," he said.

Since the district instituted an Energy Management program in 2004, Park has saved more than \$164,000 in electricity and natural gas than it would have without the program, MCPASD Energy Manager Neal Bickler said. Without the cost avoidance program, Park would have spent more than \$70,000 in energy costs in 2010-11. Instead, the school spent \$43,471, a savings of more than 38 percent, Bickler said.

The Energy Star program is a joint program of the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. Over the past seven years, MCPASD has avoided paying an additional \$1.75 million in energy costs.

As a result, the district's building have received numerous Energy Star Awards. The award reflects a district's level of achievement when compared to similar districts across the nation.

A building's energy rating must reach 75 or above in order to qualify. MCPASD has consistently been in the 86-89 range since 2003. Also, last year MCPASD had a 21.8 percent savings in energy costs. All 10 MCPASD schools qualified for the award last year. All 10 district schools have had a rating of 75 or above for three straight years -- only nine other school districts in the state can make the same claim.

Callies and Esser said it was an easy sell to get the staff and students onboard.

"When you have folks who buy in, you don't have to convince them it's a good idea," Callies said.

