

STUDENTS PITCH

BRIGHT FUTURE

SCHOOLS

FOR DOWNERS GROVE SOUTH

Earth Action Club seeks grant to bring solar panels, sustainable curriculum to school

A group of Downers Grove South students took their concerns about the environment to the District 99 Board of Education earlier this month and proposed a plan to make their school slightly more energy independent.

Several members of the school's Earth Action Club gave a presentation at the board of education's Oct. 5 workshop.

SEE THE FULL STORY
ON PAGE 2



PHOTO COURTESY OF DISTRICT 99

Earth Action Club members Lauren Gleason, Leanna Ivanova, Shana Johnson, Bobby Major, Max O'Meara and Swathi Pillalamarri present their plan at the District 99 Board of Education workshop on Oct. 5.

COVER STORY | DISTRICT 99

Students pitch bright future for Downers Grove South

Earth Action Club seeks grant for solar panels, sustainable curriculum

BY JONATHAN SAMPLES

MANAGING EDITOR

nweditor@buglenewspapers.com

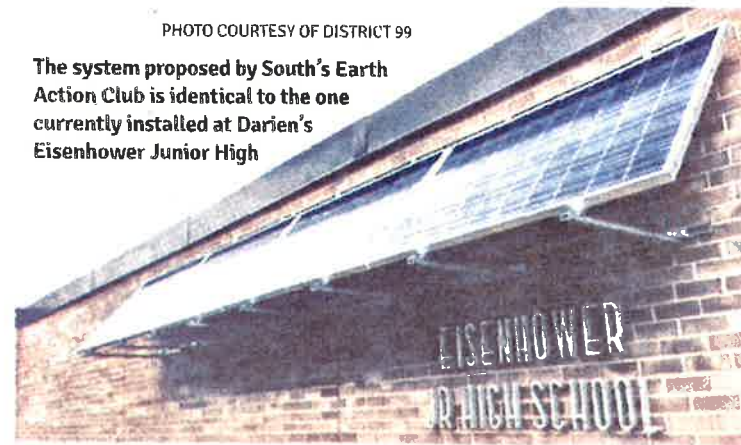
[@DownersGrovBugle](https://twitter.com/DownersGrovBugle)

A group of Downers Grove South students took their concerns about the environment to the District 99 Board of Education earlier this

month and proposed a plan to make their school slightly more energy independent. Several members of the school's Earth Action Club gave a presentation at the board of education's Oct. 5 workshop. The students worked out a plan to bring a solar power system to the school that would not only

PHOTO COURTESY OF DISTRICT 99

The system proposed by South's Earth Action Club is identical to the one currently installed at Darien's Eisenhower Junior High



help lower energy bills, but also place solar energy at the center of Downers Grove South's identity and curriculum.

"In order to do our part to find a solution to the energy crisis, we want to install solar panels," senior Swathi Pillalamarri told the board. "Not only is this beneficial to our planet, but it will also help us in educating our school and our community on environmental sustainability."

The proposed system is identical to a system installed at Eisenhower Junior High School in Darien, which consists of four 250-watt polycrystalline panels and produces 93.03 kilowatt-hours per month. Other solar schools in the area include El Sierra Elementary School, Henry Puffer Elementary School and O'Neill Middle School, all of which are in Downers Grove Grade School District 58.

The system would cost \$8,000. But for their part, the club is already pursuing a grant that would help cover the majority of the costs. Junior Shana Johnson said the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation offers a grant that would cover 90 percent of the proposed system.

"We will turn in our grant in February and learn the results within two months of turning in the grant," she said during the presentation.

In order to receive the grant, Downers Grove South has to meet several qualifications.

Senior Bobby Major said the school has already met the grant's first major criteria: making an effort to become more energy efficient. He described the school's use of motion-sensor lights in the hallways, as well as transitioning to energy-efficient lighting in the main gym and auditorium, as examples.

The grant also requires the school to make an effort to educate its students and the community about renewable energy. The Earth Action

Club held an event in March on Earth Day that not only helped the school meet this requirement, but also introduced Major to the group.

"I joined after the Energy Slam because I was intrigued by the energy crisis and what I could do to make a difference," he said.

Additionally, the panels would have to be installed on the south side of the school and be in a "highly visible" area in order to promote solar energy. If the school received the grant, it would also be required to hold a solar celebration to unveil the solar panels, according to Major. The students added that the installation of solar panels would benefit science curriculum at South.

Physics teacher Stephen Zownorega spoke on behalf of the school's science department and agreed with the students. In addition to the department currently looking at ways to revamp its curriculum to include more engineering aspects, Zownorega said students at South have already seen educational benefits from clean-energy events such as Energy Slam.

"I would like to spend a lot more of my time in my classroom with something like this," he said. "This panel also presented to our science department, and the excitement that came out of our biology, chemistry and physics classes also showed something that can be included in the classroom if we get these panels installed."

Following the presentation, board of education members voiced their support of the project and urged the students to consider seeking the additional required funds from the district's education foundation.

"This is a great presentation, and we're very excited," Board President Nancy Kupka said. "We'd like to ask you to come back to either celebrate your grant or commiserate, but there's always money somewhere else."