

Big Steps at Glacial Drumlin School

By Amelia Speight, 8th-grader at Glacial Drumlin School

In our world today, we hear a lot about little steps we can take to help the environment. But some of us wonder; what big steps are we taking in our community? Many big steps have been taken out at Glacial Drumlin School.

The lights, for example, turn off automatically when no one in the room. One of those rooms is the gym. “The gym is set up in quadrants so that each area will turn on if someone is in that area of the gym,” says Mark D. Scullion, Director of Facilities and Safety for the Monona Grove School District. This seems small, but in a school with so many rooms, this feature will reduce the electricity bill, saving money and helping our earth.

Not only are the lights energy efficient, but on a regular school day, only half of them are turned on due to natural light from the sun. The many windows in the building are not only helpful, but they add another level of beauty to our school as well.

Our new school is equipped with a geothermal heating and cooling system. This is one of the coolest (pun intended) and most energy efficient features around. “I will say that the biggest energy saver of the new building is the geothermal heat pump heating/cooling system,” says Peter Sobol, member of the Monona Grove School Board. “This system pumps water through a series of vertical tubes buried under the athletic fields. In winter the water is cooler than the underground temperature so the water is warmed by the earth; in summer the water is hotter than the underground temperature so it is cooled. Heat pumps then use the water to heat or cool the building depending on the season. A geothermal system does use electricity to operate the heat pumps, but it can be thirty to forty percent more efficient than alternatives.”

This system will not only help the earth, it will also help our budget!

Phil McDade, member of the Monona Grove school board, adds, “The cost estimates on the savings vary, depending on the current price of energy. When we first decided to go ahead and build the geothermal system, we estimated the payback to be in the range of ten to fifteen years. The geothermal system cost more to install than a traditional heating/cooling system, but we expect to recover, or ‘pay back,’ that additional cost through future energy savings.” Given the recent increases in the costs of energy and fuel McDade thinks we will now shorten that payback to ten years or less. “But it largely depends on current and future energy prices, which are tough to predict.”

As you see, many large steps were taken in our community while considering the planning and mechanics of Glacial Drumlin School. As part of the first eighth-grade class to enter Glacial Drumlin School, I am ecstatic to see that helping the earth has become a priority in our community. I’m thrilled that as a community we take such big steps to making our lives more eco-friendly and that they are saving us money. I hope we can continue to take steps, large and small, to make our world – in both the *eco-* and *economic* senses of the word – more green.

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