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Energy report highlights Greenville County Schools' conservation efforts

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A new report on America's energy future describes how the Greenville County Schools' decades of energy-savings efforts have significantly cut power bills and freed up money to benefit students.

Two congressmen are leading a bipartisan discussion set Wednesday in Washington, D.C., on the report, entitled: Powering Up America: The Revolution Began Yesterday.

As South Carolina's largest school system and the nation's 47th largest with more than 71,000 students and growing, the number of Greenville County schools that have earned the Energy Star rating from the Environmental Protection Agency has more than tripled in the last year, from 13 to 41. That is saving the district about \$2.5 million per year in energy costs, according to the district website.

The Energy Star label is awarded when a building has documented superior energy performance with measurable results on the amount of energy consumed.

Greenville County Schools spokesman Oby Lyles said the focus on energy savings has been part of district construction projects for decades, with high-tech energy-tracking innovations, automated lighting, and heating and air conditioning controls in about 11.9 million square feet at more than 100 sites.

"We were able to address needs all across the district," he said.

Lyles said the school system brought in staff to work specifically on energy management and conservation.

He said the per-square-foot expenditure for energy in 2012 was \$1.26, compared with \$1.50 in 2008, a 16% reduction despite two rate increases and adding 300,000 square feet. Lyles said the power cost was just under \$15 million in 2012, compared with \$17.3 million in 2008.

"We have addressed it from the mechanical side and from the people side," he said.

Lyles said lights turn off automatically when rooms are empty and for a few days each year power is adjusted when buildings are unoccupied, saving up to \$50,000 a day.

"For every dollar saved we are able to

put those dollars back in the classroom," he said. "When you look at potential savings of about \$2 million a year, you're looking at about 35 teaching positions."

Dean Hybl, executive director of Ten at the Top, said the Greenville County Schools' energy program "is an example of how being strategic and thoughtful in identifying and attacking an opportunity can pay huge dividends in multiple ways. Not only is the program financially ensuring that resources are available for other needs, but the very nature of the program promotes sustainability and being environmentally conscientious."

Ten at the Top is a group of public, private and civic leaders who work to address key issues facing the region and build regional trust for the 10 Upstate counties.

The Wednesday discussion, to be led by U.S. Reps. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., and Peter Welch, D-Vt., in conjunction with the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation, will focus on the report that describes the Greenville County Schools' energy-savings success along with other programs in South Carolina, Pennsylvania and Connecticut.