



Wendell School District, ID – 50001 READY

BACKGROUND

The Wendell School District provides educational services to approximately 1,100 students in Wendell Elementary School, Wendell Middle School, and Wendell High School. Collectively, the three school buildings, gymnasium, administrative offices, and vocational and maintenance shops cover more than 206,000 square feet. This small school district operates on a tight budget and employs about 160 people to support a student population that has been growing annually. Prior to 2017, the District and staff gave little thought to energy use except during promotional events and outreach by Idaho Power.

SOLUTION

In 2017, the Wendell School District was invited to join a group of neighboring school districts to pursue continuous energy improvement. The Superintendent quickly recognized the program as an opportunity to reduce energy costs, raise community awareness, and empower students to become smart consumers in the future.

The cohort of school representatives enjoyed working together to learn about energy use and easy ways to lower energy bills. The Strategic Energy Group (SEG) coached the cohort with support from Idaho Power, the school district’s electric utility. In 2019, SEG introduced the group to DOE’s 50001 Ready program and its Navigator tool. By January 2021, all schools in the Wendell School District had achieved 50001 Ready status. The key was fostering energy awareness and encouraging smart energy habits among teachers, students, and staff.

Implementing a 50001 Ready Energy Management System

► **Dollar and energy savings.** Based on the average electricity rate for schools, the Wendell School district has saved about \$205,580 off its power bill between January 2017 and May 2021. In essence, the District cut its power use by approximately 2,570,000 kWh during that period, or 32.8% overall. This reduction is especially noteworthy in that the District’s energy bill had previously trended upward.



HVAC timers in all buildings, especially the gymnasium, save energy for the district. *Photo credit: Wendell School District.*

- **Shrinking carbon footprint.** The District’s energy savings have avoided putting 990 cubic tons of carbon dioxide into the air, which can help slow disruptive climate impacts, including wildfire and severe weather events such as sustained drought.
- **Energy team.** The Maintenance Director makes the final recommendations on projects and the Business Manager arranges the funding.
- **Building good energy habits.** Getting the teachers involved helped make sure that at the end of each school day the lights are shut off.
- **Thermostat update.** The District took advantage of an Idaho Power incentive program to upgrade the high school’s mercury thermostats to a computerized system that allows scheduled run times of just 12 hours instead of 24/7. All but a few selected units can be shut off at once. The savings from this upgrade are magnified by the District’s four-day school week.



- ▶ **Maintenance-based upgrades.** As the old T12 or T8 ballasts burn out, the maintenance team replaces them with energy-efficient LED lamps. These newer lamps cost more initially but last longer and use far less power, paying for themselves within a couple of years. Similarly, the District is putting in newer and more efficient heat pumps only as required to replace the ones that fail, some of which are 20 years old.
- ▶ **Utility role.** Idaho Power put heat maps in the teachers' lounge at each school, helping raise teacher awareness and ownership of energy issues. The utility recognizes and rewards energy achievements by the schools, including about \$39,000 in incentives. One \$16,000 incentive check purchased a utility task vehicle that helps the maintenance team keep the buildings operating efficiently. Idaho Power also nominated Wendell's Maintenance Director for the 2019 Wrench of the Year Award, for which he was selected by the Association of Energy Engineers, Columbia River chapter.
- ▶ **Navigator tool.** Given the staff's existing workload and limited technical knowledge of energy systems, SEG provided significant assistance to the District in filling out the DOE 50001 Ready Navigator checklist. The District's Business Manager actively worked with SEG in completing the Navigator tasks.



Maintenance director, Troy Fletcher, recipient of energy efficiency award, Wrench of the Year.

Photo credit: Wendell School District.



Elementary principle and staff discuss energy management activities. Photo credit: Wendell School District.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Wendell School District's administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents are now accustomed to thinking about energy use and waste. The Continuous Improvement Program and 50001 Ready recognition have made a difference in the school system's budget and culture, and the monetary impacts of energy efficiency are likely to influence future behaviors and equipment purchases.

The District's key advice for other schools considering whether to pursue 50001 Ready: It may seem daunting at first, but don't be intimidated. It's the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do, and it will save you money.

"The Wendell School District is proud to be recognized as 50001 Ready. Boosting our energy efficiency has produced significant savings that show our commitment to using tax dollars wisely and preparing our students for a bright future."

*- Tim Perrigot, Superintendent
Wendell School District*