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For a brighter future

Yampah Mountain High School installs solar panels

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colo. — More sunlight will find its way into Yampah Mountain High School - in the form of electricity.

Workers climbed the roof of the school Wednesday and Thursday to install solar electric panels that should be online soon. The panels will provide about six to eight percent of the school's electricity, teacher Susy Ellison said. But YMHS hopes to increase that amount by promoting behavioral changes such as turning off lights and computers when they're not in use, and eventually engineering the infrastructure of the school to use less energy.

"Energy should be everyone's concern," Ellison said. "If we're using non-renewable resources, they're going to be gone eventually."

Ellison wrote a grant request for the project, which led to about \$60,000 from the Stepp Foundation.

"She's like the grant-master," a student named Noah said.

Energy education, the panels and an "energy audit" are three things the money goes towards. Solar Energy International of Carbondale donated partial scholarships for Ellison and two students to take energy education classes. Ellison said she's taught about climate change and energy sources throughout the school year.

These solar panels should provide about 6,000 kilowatt-hours of energy in a year, Ken Olson said, which is about the average consumption of a home in one year. Olson operates the Carbondale-based "Sol" company that installs solar panels. The panels at YMHS, if they weren't discounted, would normally cost around \$36,000.

Students worked on constructing a frame for walls to build an enclosure for an inverter. The inverter converts direct current to alternating current and connects the panels to the utility grid, Olson said.

There are financial incentives on top of the environmental incentives.

"Whenever this is producing more than the building is using, the meter runs backwards," which builds credit with energy

Yampah Mountain High School senior Kenna Crampton, 18, uses a drill to help build a wall where they will hang the inverter for the solar panels that Sol Energy employees Jim Olson, top left, and Kris Lathrop, top right, are installing Thursday at YMHS in Glenwood. Teacher Aaron Garland helps supervise the project.

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companies, he added.

Also, rebates are available for installing solar panels and other energy-efficient systems, and the federal government gives tax credits that amount to about a third of the cost of a solar panel system, Olson said. Credits are also available for energy efficiency improvements. Ellison said she received \$175 for installing a new washer in her home.

Promoting renewable energy sources and educating students about them is an added benefit the project has.

"I think it's great when you can give a kid one of those 'aha' experiences," Olson said.

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