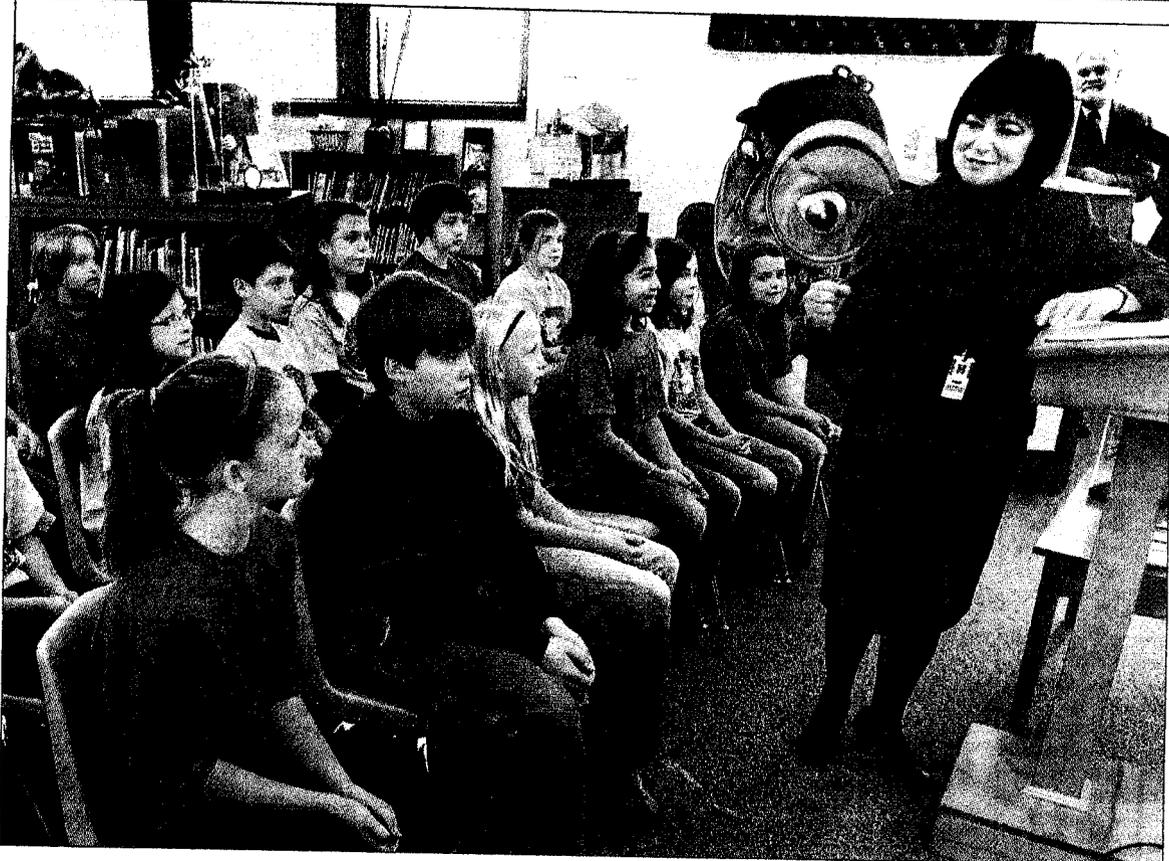


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Nebraska First Lady Sally Ganem encourages Prescott Elementary School fifth-graders as they start an Energy Detective program to help save in an energy and water use program Wednesday. Photos by ROBERT BECKER/Lincoln Journal Star

# Kids turn sleuths for energy savings

## Program gives kits to students to help them find home energy waste.

By MARGARET REIST  
Lincoln Journal Star

State and local dignitaries took turns at the microphone Tuesday at Prescott Elementary School, touting a new energy-savings program for fifth-graders that makes them "energy detectives."

But the real news conference started when the adults stepped away from the microphone and Zoya Bailey raised her hand.

"Why don't we use more solar panels and wind turbines instead of coal?" the fifth-grader asked.

But that was just the beginning. How much energy do they put out?

Does everyone get just a certain amount of energy or can they use as much as they want?

How does the electricity get from the power plant to people's homes?

And, from fifth-grader Max Postvanderburg, who recalled a three-month project he'd done: Electricity holds atoms together so without electricity, there would, technically speaking, be



Prescott Elementary fifth-graders will receive kits containing two compact fluorescent light bulbs, a kitchen faucet aerator and a furnace filter attachment that whistles when it needs to be changed.

nothing. At which point, as the questions kept coming, it seemed clear that local and state officials were onto something when they decided to focus their energy-saving efforts on fourth- and fifth-graders across the state.

The program, developed by a Nevada-based company, offers "detective kits" to students to deduce where their homes are wasting energy and to increase energy efficiency.

The Nebraska Energy Office set aside \$355,000 of federal stimulus money to be used over the next two years for the program. The utilities match whatever amount is used by schools in

their areas. There is no cost to the schools or families.

Teachers who sign up get a curriculum to teach energy issues in conjunction with the energy kit.

Dan Van Bibber, a fifth-grade teacher at Prescott, said he initially was worried the curriculum would be just one more thing he needed to teach, but it fits well with the LPS science curriculum and has lots of hands-on projects kids like.

The kit students will take home includes two compact fluorescent light bulbs (Van Bibber's students call them curly fry lightbulbs), a kitchen faucet aerator that reduces water flow, and a furnace filter attachment

that whistles when it needs to be changed.

Students will "solve the mystery" of wasted energy in their homes by taking the kit home and recording the energy savings.

So far, 11 Lincoln Public Schools and seven Lincoln parochial schools have signed up, said Marc Shkolnick, LPS manager of energy savings.

Statewide, 78 utilities in addition to LES are participating in the program and teachers have ordered more than 8,300 student kits.

Kevin Wailes, LES administrator and CEO, said the program highlights the importance of energy savings, helps teach future users and decision-makers and allows students to teach what they've learned to their parents.

LES' Shkolnick, who fielded many of the students' questions, told them the future appeared to be in good hands.

Case in point: Emmy Fiedler, who asked whether electricity could travel by satellite.

Not yet, said the adults, but it sure would solve a lot of problems.

"Ma' be if you go into science," said Wailes. "That would be a good project."

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