

Installing LED lights in gyms saves NC schools thousands of dollars

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Orrum Middle School in Robeson County was one of 60 schools to receive funding to upgrade its gym with new LED lighting.

Union Chapel Elementary in Robeson County was one of 60 schools across North Carolina that received new LED lighting in its school gym this year.

“The kids noticed right away,” said P.E. teacher Jonah Doeller. “We all love and enjoy them.”

The new lighting is equipped with motion sensors to turn on when people enter the gym and then dim and power off when not in use. The Lumbee River Electric Membership Corporation estimates each of the four schools in Robeson County that received the lights will save up to \$1,740 in electricity from the upgrade.

The Department of Environmental Quality awarded the nonprofit NC GreenPower nearly \$800,000 from federal COVID relief funding to coordinate the installation of high-efficiency lighting in schools.

Katie Lebrato is a spokeswoman for [NC GreenPower](#), a statewide nonprofit that supports local renewable energy and carbon offsets and provides grants to schools for solar installations.

She says the Department of Environmental Quality prioritized schools with high energy consumption that are also located in economically disadvantaged counties for the lighting upgrades.

“DEQ was able to find data on what schools were using the most energy, and we really zeroed in on those schools,” Lebrato said.

NC GreenPower’s engineers estimate the 60 schools will collectively save up to \$85,000 on their electrical bills annually, but Lebrato says that’s not the only benefit to the community.

“Energy savings is more than just a dollar value, right? It’s also about a healthier environment,” Lebrato said. “Less electricity has to be produced, and in a lot of these areas, coal could be the main source of power.”



Courtesy Of NC GreenPower /

Photo of Oxendine Elementary School gym in Robeson County before its upgrade.

Some of the gymnasiums were in dire need of new lighting. Before-and-after pictures of the installations show that some of the gyms were missing lights before the upgrade.

“They were burned out and not replaced, so we were able to help these schools provide a better environment for the students using the gymnasium,” Lebrato said.

Many more schools applied for the upgrades than were able to be funded this year. NC GreenPower is continuing to raise funds to install high-efficiency lighting and solar panels in more schools across the state, beginning with replacing the entire lighting systems in nine schools next year.

“We estimate that those nine schools collectively will save about \$180,000 annually by having all of their lights changed over to LEDs,” Lebrato said.

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