

[Back](#)

Article published - Nov 18, 2005

Analy High leads the solar way

By **ROBERT DIGITALE**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

SEBASTOPOL - When the sun rises this morning, Analy High School will begin producing electricity from its new solar system.

The 178 dark blue panels on the arts and woodshop building will save the campus about \$15,000 a year on its energy bill.

And during summer when school is out, "our energy will go into the grid for other people to use," said Principal Martin Webb.

Analy is one of a handful of schools in Sonoma and Mendocino counties that won state grants last year to install the systems and use them to teach students about the benefits of alternative energy.

Petaluma's McDowell Elementary has a system in operation. Willits High has installed a system but not yet begun producing electricity. And Occidental's Harmony School will soon install its system.

"We'll have the power metered in a way the students can see," said Alexis Persinger, the Harmony project's architect. "So it becomes an educational tool."

The schools were among 30 statewide to receive \$4.5 million in grants from the California Energy Commission.

Not all schools found it easy to add solar. Petaluma High won a grant but failed to find a suitable place on any existing roof to install the solar panels, said Petaluma deputy superintendent Steve Bolman.

And the K-8 Woodland Star Charter School in Sonoma also lacked a suitable roof site, so it plans to add a metal shade structure on which to mount the panels. The school also needs the state architect's approval before it can begin installing the 30-kilowatt system.

Originally, educators thought they would need to spend \$70,000 in order to obtain the \$192,000 grant, said Woodland Star Administrator Chip Romer. But the school's share now exceeds \$120,000 and likely will go higher because of an expected jump in the price of solar panels in January.

Analy, in contrast, was able to build its 28-kilowatt system with \$54,000 from the district's construction bond fund. The state provided \$172,000.

On Thursday, PG&E approved the system and installed a meter to measure how much energy the school sells back to the utility.

Analy's installation drew the attention and praise of alternative energy backers whose Solar Sebastopol program has a goal of encouraging a megawatt worth of new solar power by 2006. A megawatt is equal to 1 million watts.

Since 2003, the Sebastopol program has logged 260 kilowatts' worth of new systems, including at the fire station and city pool.

A kilowatt is equal to 1,000 watts.

But Analy became the city's first school to install a solar electric system.

"This is a milestone," said Pete Blair of Cooperative Community Energy. The not-for-profit group designed and managed Analy's project, and Solaris Solar installed the system.

Many students Thursday had yet to notice the new solar panels, but they supported their school's finding renewable ways of producing power.

"I think that's good so other schools will start thinking about it," said freshman Sierra Niblett.

El Molino High School in Forestville may install a solar system, said Keller McDonald, superintendent of the West Sonoma County Union High School District, to which both Analy and El Molino belong. The school board has about \$250,000 in remaining bond funds that it might use for a project.

© The Press Democrat. For copyright information view our [User Agreement](#)
