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Learning's a breeze

## Casper elementary school dedicates wind turbine, awaits teaching tool

By **JACKIE BORCHARDT** Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, November 16, 2011 10:00 pm

The wind has blown for Summit Elementary School since ground was broken two years ago.

Summit sits atop a hill in the southeastern part of Casper, where the wind rarely dies completely. Visitors to the school, faces down to shield eyes from gusts, likely won't notice the new wind turbine built behind the school.

The 51-foot-tall turbine will help power the school and be a tool students and teachers can use in lessons and free time. A power and weather station will collect data from the turbine, solar panels and a geothermal heating system on school grounds and make it available for student experiments.

For example, students can see how much energy is produced at school and how many light bulbs the turbine powers. Older students might build vehicles and map travels across Wyoming based on the school's energy production.

Summit teachers and Principal Anne LaPlante asked the Natrona County school board to pay for the turbine and associated energy and weather station in January 2010 at a cost of about \$150,000. The board did not fund the projects and other enhancements, saying the pricey extras were not a responsible or equitable use of board money.

LaPlante and teachers then pursued several grants to fund the wind turbine and weather station. The \$22,052 turbine was provided by Rocky Mountain Power's Blue Sky program, which funded 24 similar projects around the country last year. A&P Wyoming donated the wiring and trenching work. Chevron Global paid for other electrical work and donated \$35,000 toward the power and weather station.

LaPlante planned to have the weather station installed for the turbine dedication at 2 p.m. today. But the specific software that allows students and teachers to access and manipulate data about the school's energy has not been completed.

LaPlante said Summit is the first elementary school to commission such a project, and the program will cost more than \$100,000, paid by Chevron and the Wyoming State Energy Office.

LaPlante said the experience will introduce students to renewable energy in a way they will understand.

"We hope as they grow into adulthood, they begin to understand the power of different types of energy and clean energy," LaPlante said. "They're using real technology. This is real to them."