

What Teaching Kids About Energy Efficiency Can Teach Us

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As crazy as it may seem to readers living in some parts of the country, kids start going back to school in a couple of weeks in much of the South. If you're a parent, the words "back to school" likely have triggered the "cha-ching" of your mental cash register as it totals the cost of new shoes, jeans, book bags and the long list of required school supplies so conveniently provided by your local big-box store.

But if you are a marketer, you also could be hearing a different kind of "cha-ching," because [kids are a powerful source of social influence](#), and one of the best ways to leverage that influence is through a classroom education program.

According to a past Green Living Pulse study (now part of our annual [Eco Pulse study](#)), just over one-third of Americans have been encouraged successfully by someone else to become more environmentally friendly or adopt a new sustainable habit. And the strongest social influence on sustainable behavior we found was "encouragement from children/grandchildren" (32 percent). In fact, kids had a stronger impact on respondents than "seeing others they admire making changes" or "getting encouragement from friends."

An in-school education program is nothing new. I began my career in banking many years ago, and one of my jobs as a young marketing communications director was to visit local elementary

schools and (try to) teach kids about saving money. I say "try" because the curriculum materials were borrowed from the state bankers' association and were not very engaging. In addition, I had no teaching experience. Needless to say, it got loud and my results were mixed.

So I thought that I would share a couple of good examples from companies who are doing it right.

Many utilities have an in-school education program, but one of the best I've seen is Georgia Power's [Learning Power](#) program. Elementary, middle school and high school teachers can schedule an age/curriculum-appropriate "In-Class Field Trip" with a GA Power Energy Efficiency Education Coordinator.

And they are GOOD. We invited a coordinator to present a lesson at Shelton's [Inner Circle](#) Symposium last year. We got to participate in a simple hands-on experiment and learned how heat transfers and how insulators work. Our conference attendees had a blast, and I was reminded of how much fun learning can be.

This is obviously a great program for teachers, because they get a little rest with part of their required science curriculum being taught by a very entertaining (and knowledgeable) guest teacher. It's great for the kids, because they're having fun learning about electricity generation and home energy efficiency, and it's great for their parents because the kids take home energy savings tips and a simple home energy audit homework assignment — which becomes a topic of conversation at the dinner table.

And that's critical, because our [Energy Pulse](#) 2011 study found that 71 percent of parents who said their children had initiated conversations or promoted changes on one or more environmental issues said that the discussions had resulted in changes in behavior or purchase patterns in their homes. That's some powerful impact. Earlier this month, [results were published](#) from a study that found educating children made a definite (and lasting) impact on household energy-saving behaviors.

Shelton has completed [testimonial video work](#) for another school education program sponsored by SunPower, a leading solar company based in San Jose, California. [SunPower Horizons](#) is a STEM education enrichment program designed to spark students' curiosity in science and technology.

The program, built to complement a school or school district's purchase of a solar energy system, trains educators and offers classroom instruction for K-12 and college-level students, giving them hands-on opportunities "to build problem-solving skills and connect the dots between difficult math and science concepts and real-world applications." This program is not only doing good, it's good marketing — they're creating their next generation of buyers and positively influencing parents who could become buyers today.

If you're not already running a program that teaches kids so they can teach the rest of us, get it started today.

This story first appeared on: [The Shelton Group](#)
